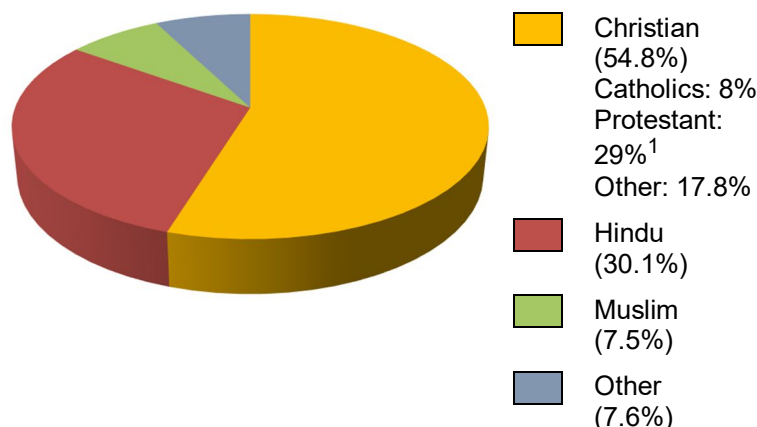


GUYANA



Area:	Population ² :	Political system:	Major Language(s):
214,969 km ²	758,000	Democracy ³	English

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution states that Guyana is a secular state (article 1). Individual freedoms include, inter alia, freedom of conscience, expression, assembly and association, without distinction of creed, subject to respect for the rights of others and the public interest (articles 40 and 149). No-one can be denied the right to enjoy freedom of conscience, which includes the freedom to change one's religion or belief, and to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief, either in public or in private, individually or collectively. No-one can be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to their religion or belief, or in a manner contrary to their religion. Article 140 acknowledges the right of conscientious objection to military service.

Religious communities cannot be denied the right to offer religious instruction to their members. No-one attending a school can be compelled to receive religious instruction, or take part in a religious ceremony other than their own. The Ethnic Relations Commission is tasked, inter alia, with encouraging and generating respect for religious, cultural and other forms of diversity in a plural society (article 212D).⁴

Religious and faith-based groups must register and provide information about their places of worship. Once places of worship are officially recognised by the Interior Ministry as non-profit organisations, they can engage in financing activities.

Foreign missionaries require an authorisation from the Foreign Affairs Ministry. Foreign religious groups also require an authorisation from the local village council. Religious education is not compulsory. Most religious schools are Anglican or Methodist. The rights of parents take precedence in children's education.

The law punishes blasphemy by up to one year in jail. The government has been criticised for allegedly trying to dissuade religious groups from speaking out on social issues, especially when they take a critical stance against government actions or the police.⁵ Religious groups say that they continue to feel the adverse effects after the government took over the administration of some 600 private schools and hospitals in 1976, many of which were run by religious organisations. The government pays a yearly rent to religious groups, which some view as a form of control that should end.⁶

Incidents

In an interview in July 2014, the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana said that the shortage of full-time pastors was a challenge for proclaiming the Gospel, and keeping young people in the Church.⁷

In November 2014, the Catholic Church issued a statement in response to the suspension of Parliament by the President of Guyana on 10th November. In it, the Church called on people to examine their own beliefs, and their practice of the faith in everyday life, so as to enable them to face intimidation and corruption.⁸

At present, the Catholic Church is influential in public life and works on solving social conflicts within its sphere of influence.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Although Guyana has a high crime rate, no violent incidents with obvious religious overtones have been reported. The reason for this lies in the country's ethnic diversity, something that was already discernable in the 2014 Report. Hence, in relation to religious freedom, nothing has changed. Given the lack of cases of intolerance or discrimination, one may deduce that the prospects for religious freedom are good. Occasionally, racially-charged statements have been made, but these have been broadly rejected by all societal groups.⁹

According to some reports, complaints have been made against the government for trying to dissuade and control some religious groups involved in the country's social problems. Hence, Guyana's top challenge in the coming years will be to enhance religious groups' real autonomy, by differentiating their purposes and goals from those of other non-religious, non-governmental organisations involved in conflicting social issues. Moreover, the promotion of strong political leadership has the effect of restricting the scope for action by religious entities, thus cutting them off from participating in public life as representatives of the population.

¹ Pentecostals: 17%, Anglicans: 7%, Adventists 5%

² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19546909> accessed on 3 May 2016.

³ Semi-presidential republic: <http://www.statisticsguyana.gov.gy/census.html> accessed on 8 March 2016.

⁴ http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_102_6.asp accessed on 8 March 2016.

⁵ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238762.pdf> accessed on 8 March 2016.

⁶ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238762.pdf> accessed on 8 March 2016

⁷ <https://americalatinacaribe.lutheranworld.org/es/content/secretario-de-la-iglesia-de-guyana-goalsarran-reflexiona-sobre-la-reforma-desaf%C3%ADos-que-la> accessed on 8 March 2016.

⁸ <https://es.globalvoices.org/2014/12/04/el-presidente-de-guyana-suspende-al-parlamento-para-evitar-una-mocion-de-censura/> accessed on 8 March 2016.

⁹ <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=16951> accessed on 8 March 2016.