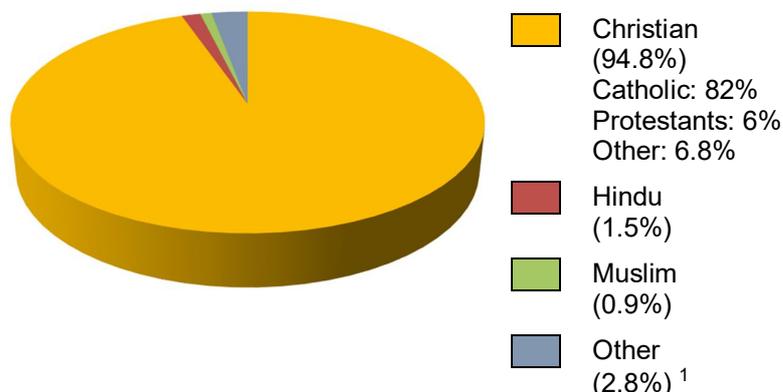
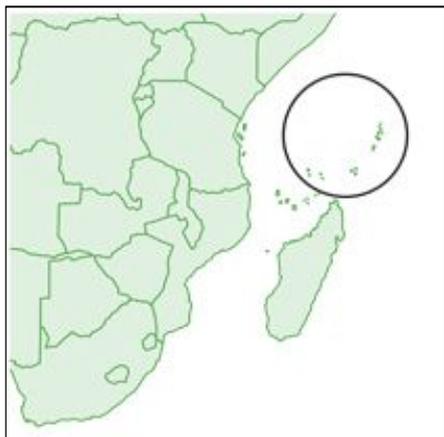


# SEYCHELLES



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<b>Area:</b> 286 km <sup>2</sup>	<b>Population<sup>2</sup>:</b> 91,000	<b>Political system:</b> Democracy	<b>Major Language(s):</b> English, French, Seychellois Creole
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## Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

The Republic of the Seychelles consists of 115 islands, south of the equator in the Indian Ocean and has a population of about 9,000 – the smallest population of any independent African State. The capital, Victoria, is on the main island of Mahé. The nation was named after the French minister of finance Vicomte Moreau des Séchelles, by the commander of the French expedition in 1756. The then uninhabited islands were originally settled by the French in 1770 before the British took control during the Napoleonic Wars. The country gained independence in 1976 with the exception of some islands retained as the British Indian Ocean Territory.

Of the total population, it is estimated that approximately 76 percent is Roman Catholic and six percent is Anglican. Other Christian denominations which make up a small percentage of the population include Assemblies of God, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Nazarites, the Pentecostal Church and Seventh-day Adventists. There are also a small number of representatives of the Hindu, Muslim and Baha'i faith. In May 2015, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture reported that the population of Muslims has grown rapidly in recent years from under a hundred people in the 1960s to an estimated 2,000 people today. Islam was not officially established in the Seychelles until the first mosque was built in 1982.

Many Seychellois still believe in magic and witchcraft, and seers, known as bonom di bwa, are still active, practising fortune-telling and selling charms. Though the clergy and civil authorities disapprove, many see little conflict between their conventional religious observance and less orthodox beliefs in ancient religions.

The government formally recognises the Catholic Church, as well as the Anglicans, the Seventh-day Adventists, the mosques and the local centre of the Baha'i religion. Though other religious groups are not technically legal in the Seychelles, they are recorded as associations in a register which also includes lay associations. This is monitored by the regulating body for both religious and secular associations, the Registrar of Associations, which records a total of 54 in all. Registration is fairly simple with hardly any bureaucratic obstacles to overcome as the only

requirement to obtain recognition is that religious organisation must have a minimum of seven members. Groups may gain economic advantages such as tax privileges by further registering with the finance ministry. Although there is no penalty for not registering a group, only those registered have legal status and can petition for air time on the radio or provide spiritual counsel in prisons.

The constitution has been amended several times since its declaration in 1993 but had continued to prohibit discrimination on any grounds. This includes the prevention of laws establishing any religion, providing instead for the freedom of belief and religious practice. Individuals are also given the right to change, manifest and publicise their religion through Article 21 which proclaims the freedom of conscience. However this right “may be subject to such limitations as may be prescribed by a law and necessary in a democratic society”. The article goes on to stress that this may be “in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health; or for the purpose of protecting the rights or freedoms of other persons”.<sup>3</sup>

Article 21 of the constitution also guarantees that individuals “attending any place of education shall not be compelled to impart or receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance,” and that no person may be obliged to “to take any oath that is contrary to [his] religion or belief... or in a manner that is contrary to that belief.” It is also stated that the law should not impose or establish any religion and that an individual’s religious belief should not act as a qualification for public office. However the article allows for religious communities to provide religious instruction for their members.

The government does not permit the direct transmission of broadcasts from religious groups with the exception of live broadcasts of particular religious ceremonies on alternate Sundays. However religious organisations are guaranteed airtime for the transmission of their programmes on the national radio station. All pre-recorded broadcasts must be examined and approved by the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation, and the Catholic and Anglican Churches receive the largest allocation of airtime for this type of transmission. All other groups including Hindus, Muslims, Seventh-Day Adventists and Baha’i members were granted 15 minutes of pre-recorded air time on the radio every two weeks. Smaller minority religious groups protested that the government did not allocate them their own dedicated broadcast time.

Freedom House’s Freedom in the World report for 2015 described the Seychelles as partly free with regards to restrictions on the freedom of the press. The government has the power to restrict the broadcast of material considered to be objectionable and coverage is biased in favour of the ruling party. The report also notes that religious freedom is respected in practice and that Churches generally function without government interference, speaking out in favour of human rights and democratisation.<sup>4</sup>

## **Incidents**

During the time under review, there were no reports of religiously-motivated discrimination and state employees were given paid leave to celebrate the major religious events. However there were some reports of non-Catholic students in state schools not having access to alternative activities during classes providing Catholic instruction. According to the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour’s International Religious Freedom Report for 2014, most public schools are managed on land leased by the Catholic Church and Catholic instruction is included as part of the curriculum. Non-Catholic students were reportedly sent to the back of the classroom and were not given any alternative work during this time.

## **Prospects for Freedom of Religion**

The situation of the freedom of religion in the Seychelles has remained unchanged since 2013 without any recorded instances of societal action affecting religious freedom. No restrictions are in place on religious worship by any denominations and tax-free status is granted by the government for registered religious groups. However while guaranteed by the constitution, religious freedom was restricted in some areas, particularly in regard to the need for government approval for the transmission of religious broadcasts.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country\\_199\\_1.asp](http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_199_1.asp)

<sup>2</sup> <http://countryeconomy.com/demography/population/seychelles>

<sup>3</sup> [www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/details.jsp?id=9115](http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/details.jsp?id=9115)

<sup>4</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/seychelles>