



## Religion

## Population

## Area

- Hindus : **44.2%**
- Christians : **33.2%**
- Muslims : **16.7%**
- Agnostics : **1.8%**
- Baha'is : **1.8%**
- Chinese Folk Religionists : **1.4%**
- Others : **0.9%**

1,277,000

1,969 Km<sup>2</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The 1968 Mauritius constitution (revised and amended in 2016) declares religious freedom to be a fundamental right<sup>[1]</sup> thus prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of religious affiliation. People can convert to other religions and believers can distribute religious material to those who are not part of their group. Nobody, however, can exert coercion and thus no one can be forced to follow precepts or attend the services of any religious group. New religious groups can be founded and registered. The government protects rights, but its regulation of religion is fairly unintrusive<sup>[2]</sup> Residence permits for missionaries are limited to three years with no extensions.<sup>[3]</sup>

Religious education is present in both in state and private schools. Furthermore, the government regularly grants subsidies to religious groups according to their number of followers as indicated in the national census<sup>[4]</sup>

## Incidents

Ethnic tensions still exist in the country, especially between Muslims and the Hindu majority. This mirrors divisions that are strongly linked to ethnicity and religious affiliation.<sup>[5]</sup> Similarly, the Creole community (mostly mixed-race descendants of former slaves who follow Catholicism) feels itself discriminated compared with other groups, particularly in their access to jobs.<sup>[6]</sup> However, no major violent incident due to religion has been reported and the general situation is somehow better than in previous years.

The Council of Religions (CDR) has promoted harmony, dialogue and peaceful coexistence between religions since 2001. Its nucleus is the Baha'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic and Jewish groups – the main religious traditions in the country, but it also involves many smaller denominations.<sup>[7]</sup> The council promotes, among other things, interreligious

education in schools and has worked with the Ministry of Education in the production of a curriculum for intercultural education.<sup>[8]</sup>

Two mosques and a Muslim cemetery in the Savanne District have reported damage, including graffiti. In the case of the cemetery, local press suspected that the perpetrators were supporters of the Hindu Patriotic Organisation (Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, HSS).<sup>[9]</sup> Tamil temple was vandalised in Port Louis.<sup>[10]</sup>

Several Hindu places of worship were also vandalised in different parts of the country. Police have been accused of failing to find the culprits in such incidents.<sup>[11]</sup>

The Council of Religions wrote a letter to the Prime Minister in order to complain about threats made via social media following emergency relief efforts to help victims of the Berguitta cyclone. These threats were directed against certain ethnic and religious groups (mainly Christian Creoles). The council called on the government to adopt tougher legislation to counter such acts.<sup>[12]</sup>

Bottles of fruit juice tainted with kerosene and insecticide were allegedly distributed among pilgrims during the Hindu Festival of Maha Shivaratri in Vandermeesh, Rose Hill and Phoenix. There were no reports of casualties.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Prospects for freedom of religion

In the present context, no relevant changes are expected for the foreseeable future.

## Endnotes / Sources

[1] Mauritius's Constitution of 1968 with Amendments through 2016, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mauritius_2016.pdf?lang=en), [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mauritius\\_2016.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mauritius_2016.pdf?lang=en) (accessed 23rd May 2018).

[2] Cf. The Arda (Association of Religion of Data Archives) [http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country\\_147\\_3.asp](http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_147_3.asp).

[3] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, "Mauritius", International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, US State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper> (accessed 23rd May 2018).

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Cf. Author's interview with a church leader engaged in social work.

[7] History, Council of Religions, <http://conseildesreligions.e-monsite.com/> (accessed 23rd May 2018).

[8] "RÉDUIT – CONSEIL DES RELIGIONS : Forum sur l'interculturalité dans le système éducatif", *Le Mauricien*, 3 March 2016, <https://www.lemauricien.com/article/reduit-conseil-des-religions-forum-sur-l-interculturalite-systeme-educatif/> (accessed 23rd May 2018).

[9] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ashminta Banto, "Lieux de culte saccagés: "Si la police ne fait rien, on prendra les choses en main", lance la VOH", *Inside News*, 30th October 2017, <https://www.inside.news/2017/10/30/lieux-de-culte-saccagessi-la-police-ne-fait-rien-prendra-les-choses-en-main-lance-le-voh/> (accessed 22nd February 2018).

[12] Rev Philippe Goupille, "Lettre au premier ministre", 26th January 2018, <https://pastoralzenn.org/wp->

content/uploads/2018/02/Lettre-au-Premier-Ministre-version finale-26.01.18-1.pdf (accessed 23rd May 2018).

[13] Nicholas Atiane, "Du 'diesel' et du 'pétrole' dilués dans du jus, distribués aux pèlerins", Inside News, 12 February 2018, <https://www.inside.news/2018/02/12/du-diesel-et-du-petrole-dilues-dans-du-jus-distribues-aux-pelerins/> (accessed on 22nd February 2018); Vishal Seddur, "Acte machiavélique : Les jus destinés aux pèlerins contenaient de l'insecticide et du kérosène", Inside News, 12th February 2018, <https://www.inside.news/2018/02/12/acte-machiavelique-les-jus-destines-aux-pelerins-contenaient-de-linsecticide-et-du-kerosene/> (accessed 22nd February 2018).