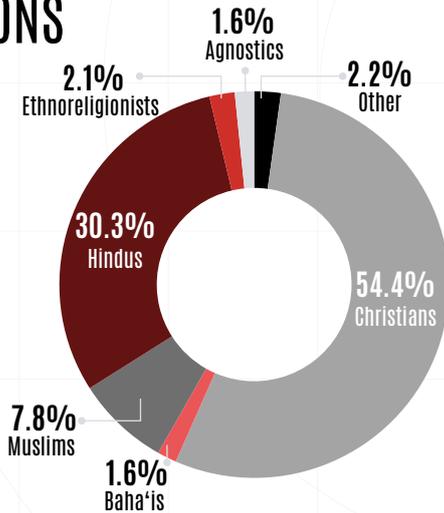




# GUYANA

## RELIGIONS



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The Constitution<sup>1</sup> states that Guyana is a secular state. Article 145 (1) guarantees freedom of conscience, including freedom of thought and religion, freedom to change one's religion or belief, to manifest it and propagate it through worship, teaching, practice and observance, either individually or collectively, in public or in private. Conscientious objection to military service is also recognised (Article 140, 3, c).

No religious community can be prevented from providing religious instruction to its members (Article 145, 2). Except with one's consent (or that of one's guardian for minors), no person attending a place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or take part in or attend a religious ceremony or observance other than their own (Article 145, 3).

No one can be forced to take an oath contrary to their religion or beliefs, or in a manner contrary to their religion (Article 145, 4).

No law may be discriminatory in itself or in its effects, where discrimination means the different treatment of people based on their race, place of origin, political opinion,

colour or creed (Article 149, 2 and 3).

The Ethnic Relations Commission is charged with promoting and enhancing respect for religion, culture, and other forms of diversity typical of a plural society (Article 212D, f).

There is no official registry for religious groups, but they must follow the registration procedures of non-profit organisations to obtain formal recognition.<sup>2</sup> Proper registration requires submitting a group's name, the address of its place of worship, and information about its leaders. Once formally recognised, groups can conduct financial operations, acquire properties, and benefit from tax advantages.<sup>3</sup>

To enter the country, foreign missionaries need the authorisation of the Department of Citizenship within the Ministry of the Presidency. In Amerindian (Indigenous) villages, foreign religious groups need the permission of the local council.<sup>4</sup>

## INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

In late 2019, President David Granger attended various religious celebrations marking important anniversaries for

a number of Churches. On the 12th anniversary of Solomon’s Temple, he highlighted the role Churches play in education, both after emancipation and today.<sup>5</sup> Upon the 175th anniversary of the Arundel Congregational Church, attended by members of various Churches, he noted how this Church had contributed to Guyana’s nation-building process.<sup>6</sup>

In May 2020, in response to restrictions imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, religious leaders noted that the Churches continued to evangelise and encourage their communities through the Internet, Facebook, etc. This has allowed them to reach more people in different parts of the world. However, this still comes with drawbacks since many people, especially the elderly, may not have access to the Internet and cannot participate in online services.<sup>7</sup>

In August 2020, places of worship were allowed to hold public celebrations as part of the gradual reopening of the country, within the strict confines of COVID-19 security measures adopted by the authorities.<sup>8</sup>

## PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The 2018-2020 period saw no violations of religious freedom. The government has openly expressed its appreciation for Churches and their public role. The prospects for the future are positive.

## SOURCES / ENDNOTES

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2 Office of International Religious Freedom, “Guyana,” 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/guyana/> (accessed 31st October 2020).

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4 Ibid.

5 “‘The Church plays a vital role in education’,” Guyana Chronicle, 26th August 2019, <https://guyanachronicle.com/2019/08/26/the-church-plays-a-vital-role-in-education/> (accessed 23rd November 2020).

6 “President praises work of church in village revival,” Guyana Chronicle, 25th November 2019, <https://guyanachronicle.com/2019/11/25/president-praises-work-of-church-in-village-revival/> (accessed 14th September 2020).

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8 “Some churches to restart indoor ministries today,” Stabroek News, 2nd August 2020, <https://www.stabroeknews.com/2020/08/02/news/guyana/some-churches-to-restart-indoor-ministries-today/> (accessed 14th September 2020).