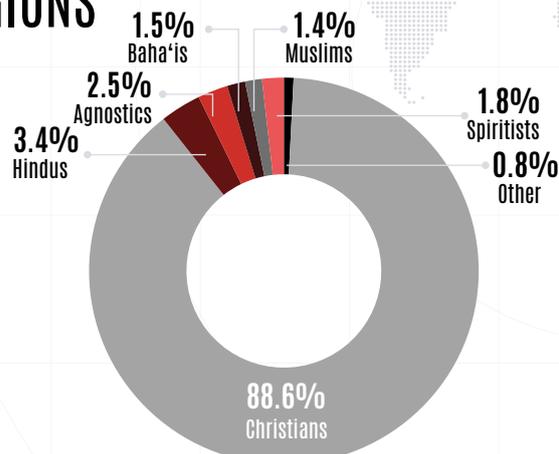




SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

The Preamble to the Constitution of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines¹ states that the nation was founded on the belief in the supremacy of God and the dignity of man.

Article 1 of the national charter specifies that everyone enjoys certain fundamental rights and freedoms, such as freedom of conscience, irrespective of race, place of origin, birth, political opinions, colour, creed or sex, subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 4 (3, c) recognises the possibility of conscientious objection to military service.

People are entitled under Article 9 (1) to freedom of conscience, thought, religion and worship, which are inviolable rights in all areas, including religious teaching, practice and observance, whether alone or with others, in public or in private.

No one attending an education establishment, in prison or performing their military service shall be required to receive religious instruction or attend religious ceremonies other than those of their own religion, except with their

consent (Article 9, 2).

Each religious community has the right to establish and maintain their own educational institutions (Article 9, 3).

Lastly, no one shall be compelled or coerced into taking an oath against, or in a manner contrary to, their beliefs or religion (Article 9, 4).

Article 26 (1) stipulates that no minister of religion shall be elected as a representative or appointed as a senator.

A Code of Conduct was adopted in 2010 for the general elections planned for that year, which continues to be respected. It requires that candidates uphold the highest moral principles in accordance with Christian ethics whilst not using religion to obtain the support of voters. They must also respect Church timetables and not disrupt public worship.²

The 2006 Education Bill regulates religious matters in education.³ Religious education must be part of the curriculum of every public or private school. If a private school is owned or operated by a religious entity and admits students who do not share its beliefs, the latter may opt out of its religious instruction and religious ceremonies.

Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost Monday and Christmas are national holidays.⁴

In 2018, the country's parliament (House of Assembly) approved a law that allows the use of cannabis for religious purposes; the legislation does not apply only to Rastafarians.⁵

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

In April 2019, Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves praised the contribution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to the country. He noted that on Fridays, the government stops working before sunset to accommodate public servants who are members of this Church.⁶

In early March 2020, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Catholic Church took preven-

tive measures. In May 2020 it resumed Sunday Masses, whilst complying with the protocols established by health authorities.⁷

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGION FREEDOM

The prospects for religious freedom are positive. As in the 2016 and 2018 reports, no episode of religious intolerance was reported in the period under review and the prospects for religious freedom are positive.

SOURCES / ENDNOTES

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2 "Code of Conduct on 2010 Elections for St. Vincent and the Grenadines," Caribbean Elections, http://www.caribbeanelections.com/eDocs/articles/vc/vc_Election_Code_of_Conduct_2010.pdf (accessed 3rd April 2020).

3 Chapter 202, Education Act, Ministry of Education, Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, http://education.gov.vc/education/images/Stories/pdf/education_act_cap202-1.pdf (accessed 3rd April 2020).

4 "Public Holidays 2019," The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, <http://pmoffice.gov.vc/pmoffice/index.php/public-holidays> (accessed 3rd April 2020).

5 "Cannabis Cultivation (Amnesty) Bill, 2018," 1st August 2018, Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, http://www.gov.vc/images/PoliciesActsAndBills/Cannabis_Cultivation_Amnesty_Bill_2018.pdf (accessed 22nd September 2020).

6 Libna Stevens, "In St. Vincent, Prime Minister Praises the Work of the Adventist Church During Inauguration of New Headquarters," Seventh-day Adventist Church, 25th April 2019, <https://www.interamerica.org/es/2019/04/en-la-isla-san-vicente-primer-ministro-celebra-la-obra-de-la-iglesia-adventista-durante-inauguracion-de-la-nueva-sede/> (accessed 29th October 2020).

7 "Letter from the Bishop – COVID 19," 5th March 2020, Roman Catholic Diocese of Kingstown, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, <https://catholicsvg.org/letter-from-the-bishop-covid-19/> (accessed 22nd September 2020); "Letter from the Bishop – Resumption of Sunday Masses," 21st May 2020, Roman Catholic Diocese of Kingstown, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, <https://catholicsvg.org/letter-from-the-bishop-resumption-of-masses/> (accessed 22nd September 2020).