

# Guyana

Stable / Unchanged —



Religion	Population	Area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Christians : <b>54.8%</b></li> <li>○ Hindus : <b>30.2%</b></li> <li>○ Muslims : <b>7.6%</b></li> <li>○ Ethnoreligionists : <b>2.3%</b></li> <li>○ Agnostics : <b>1.6%</b></li> <li>○ Baha'is : <b>1.6%</b></li> <li>○ Others : <b>1.9%</b></li> </ul>	771,000	214,969 Km <sup>2</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution states that Guyana is a secular state.<sup>[1]</sup> Freedom of conscience is guaranteed, 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.<sup>[2]</sup> Conscientious objection to military service is also recognised.<sup>[3]</sup>

No religious community can be prevented from providing religious instruction to its members.<sup>[4]</sup> Except with one's consent (or that of one's guardian for people under 18), no person attending a place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend a religious ceremony or observance other than their own.<sup>[5]</sup>

No one can be forced to take an oath contrary to their religion or beliefs, or in a manner contrary to their religion.<sup>[6]</sup> 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.<sup>[7]</sup>

The functions of the Ethnic Relations Commission include encouraging and creating respect for religion, culture and other forms of diversity typical of a plural society.<sup>[8]</sup>

There is no official registry of religious groups, but they must follow the registration procedures of non-profit organisations to obtain formal recognition.<sup>[9]</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 exemptions. To enter the country, foreign missionaries need the authorisation of the Ministry of Citizenship. In Amerindian villages, foreign religious groups need the permission of the local council. There is no religious education in state schools. Religious education is compulsory in private schools that are affiliated to a specific religion!<sup>[10]</sup>

## Incidents

As in the 2014-2016 period, there have been no reported incidents of religious intolerance for the period under review. Thus, nothing has changed in this regard. On the contrary, numerous concrete actions have been undertaken to seek greater harmony among Guyana's various religious groups, the largest of which are Christians and Hindus. Here are some examples of that:

In January 2017, Social Cohesion Minister Dr George Norton met with representatives of the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana, the African Cultural and Development Association, the (Hindu) Viraat Sabha Organisation, the Guyana Rastafarian Association and the Guyana Islamic Trust "to ensure continuity and increased areas of collaboration as part of advancing the social cohesion agenda".<sup>[11]</sup>

In February 2017, in the context of the UN-promoted World Interfaith Harmony Week, Guyanese President David Granger announced that social cohesion is "an important part of his government"<sup>[12]</sup> and that interfaith harmony encourages a culture of cooperation to tackle conflicts. He stated that Guyana is a model of interfaith harmony, a cosmopolitan state where most people belong to one of the world's three major religions: Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. In July of the same year, in a meeting with the Muslim community, the president stressed that the country is an "oasis of religious tolerance", noting that the three major religions have actively contributed to the creation of an "atmosphere of tranquillity and harmony".<sup>[13]</sup>

## Prospects for freedom of religion

Prospects for freedom of religion in Guyana are good, given the absence of incidents that undermine it and the explicit concern of the government for social cohesion. The authorities view positively the influence of religions and recognise their contribution to a climate of social peace.

## Endnotes / Sources

[1] All references from the constitution are from Guyana's Constitution of 1980 with Amendments through 2016, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guyana_2016.pdf?lang=en), [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guyana\\_2016.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guyana_2016.pdf?lang=en), (accessed 23rd March 2018).

[2] Ibid., Art 145, s 1.

[3] Ibid., Art 140, s 3, cl c.

[4] Ibid., Art 145, s 2.

[5] Ibid., Art 145, s 3.

[6] Ibid., Art 145, s 4.

[7] Ibid., Art 149, s 1 and 2.

[8] Ibid., Art 212D, f.

[9] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Guyana', International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, US State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 9th March 2018).

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

[11] 'Social Cohesion Minister meets religious and other groups', Kaieteur News, 17th January 2017, <https://www.kaieteurnews.com/2017/01/17/social-cohesion-minister-meets-religious-and-other-groups/>, (accessed 7th March 2018).

[12] Shauna Jemmott, 'Embrace harmony, shun discrimination', Guyana Chronicle, 1st February 2017, <http://guyanachronicle.com/2017/02/01/embrace-harmony-shun-discrimination>, (accessed 7th March 2018).

[13] 'Guyana an oasis of religious tolerance', Guyana Chronicle, 10th July 2017, <http://guyanachronicle.com/2017/07/10/guyana-an-oasis-of-religious-tolerance>, (accessed 7th March 2018).