

Background- Barbados¹

The island nation of Barbados (population about 290,000 in 2016) is one of the wealthiest countries in the Caribbean, with a strong human rights record. However, it has faced criticism for its harsh treatment of suspected criminals, including a mandatory death penalty.

Barbados achieved independence gradually and peacefully following centuries of colonization. The island was originally settled by Arawak and Carib Indians but virtually all fled by the early 1600s to escape repeated slave raids by the Spanish and Portuguese. Beginning in the mid-1600s, the island was repopulated by small numbers of British sugar plantation owners and large numbers of African slaves brought to work the plantations. Although slavery was abolished in 1834, political power remained in the hands of white plantation owners until the 1930s. In 1937 and 1938, a series of labor riots led to the formation of the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) and a British investigation that endorsed domestic demands for unions and expanded suffrage. Over the next three decades, activists gradually achieved universal adult suffrage, greater black leadership, and, eventually, full independence. Nowadays, in Barbados, there are two major political parties: the BLP and the Democratic Labour Party (DLP).

Since independence in 1966, Barbados had been peaceful and economically successful, although it has faced occasional conflicts with its neighbors over resources and allegations of financial corruption. In recent years, Barbados has had diplomatic scuffles with Trinidad and Tobago over fishing rights and with Venezuela over offshore oil.

Barbados's economy draws on agriculture, tourism, remittances, and financial services. However, it was briefly placed on a list of tax havens and, more recently, was hurt by the global financial crisis, especially the government's much criticized failure to prevent the collapse of CLICO, the Caribbean's largest insurance company.²

Barbados is an active member of the inter-American system of protection of human rights, having signed the American Convention in 1978 and ratified it in 1981, and has recognized the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court since 2000.

Barbados' primary human rights issue is its treatment of prisoners, especially its unenforced, but still on the books, death penalty. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled against

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² Archive of articles on CLICO, BARBADOS TODAY, <https://www.barbadostoday.bb/category/local-news/clico/> (last visited Feb. 15, 2017); *Assurance for CLICO Policy Holders*, BARBADOS ADVOCATE (Sept. 14, 2016), <http://barbadosadvocate.com/news/assurance-clico-policyholders>; *Bajan Law Firm Distances Itself from CLICO Transaction*, STABROEK NEWS (March 2, 2012), <http://www.stabroeknews.com/2012/archives/03/02/bajan-law-firm-distances-itself-from-clico-transaction/>; *CLICO Case Going on For Too Long*, NATION NEWS, (Sept. 14, 2016), <http://www.nationnews.com/nationnews/news/85476/editorial-clico>; Sandy Dean, *Duprey Offers to Repay All of CLICO's Debts*, BARBADOS TODAY (May 22, 2016), <https://www.barbadostoday.bb/2016/05/22/duprey-offers-to-repay-all-of-clicos-debts/>.

Barbados in two cases brought by prisoners who were sentenced to be hung for murders committed during robberies or fights.³ The prisoners challenged the mandatory nature of the death penalty and prison conditions which included isolation, overcrowding, inability to see family and friends, and lack of toilets, lighting, ventilation, and privacy. As of 2015, the prison system has improved and is independently monitored, complies with international standards, and generally provides arrestees with prompt access to counsel, family members, bail, and an independent judiciary.⁴ However, occasional complaints of police violence continue and, also as of 2015, the government was prosecuting a police shooting and investigating allegations that police beat two suspects to coerce them to confess to a robbery.⁵ Additionally, Barbados remains ambivalent about the death penalty. Although Barbados has not actually executed anyone since 1984, many Barbadians continue to support the death penalty and a bill to remove the mandatory death penalty has stalled in the Senate.⁶

More information

Additional background was provided by the sources below.

For historical background, see the [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) and [BBC Country Profiles](#).

For an overview of the current human rights situation, see the [U.S. Department of State's 2015 Human Rights Report](#).

For information on the history, people, government, economy, geography, communications, transportation, and military, see the [Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook](#).

For information about human rights, including all relevant treaties and legal documents, see [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#).

³ DaCosta Cadogan v. Barbados, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations, and Costs, Judgment, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (ser. C) No. 204 (Sep. 24, 2009), <https://iachr.ils.edu/cases/dacosta-cadogan-v-barbados>; Boyce et al. v. Barbados, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations, and Costs, Judgment, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (ser. C) No. 169 (Nov. 20, 2007), <https://iachr.ils.edu/cases/boyce-et-al-v-barbados>.

⁴ Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015: Barbados, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (2015), <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252989>.

⁵ *Two Men Reportedly Tortured in Barbados*, AMNESTYUSA (March 21, 2014), <https://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/uaa06914.pdf>.

⁶ Offences Against the Person (Amendment) Bill, 2014, <http://www.barbadosparliament.com/bills/details/52> [<https://web.archive.org/web/20160325101805/http://www.barbadosparliament.com/bills/details/52>]; *Barbados 'To Abolish Mandatory Death Penalty'*, THE DAILY OBSERVER (Oct. 2, 2011), <http://www.antiguaobserver.com/barbados-to-abolish-mandatory-deathpenalty>; *Death Penalty Debate Gets Going Again in Barbados*, LOOP NEWS (March 4, 2016), <http://www.loopnewsbarbados.com/content/death-penalty-debate-gets-going-again-barbados>; *Death Penalty Worldwide: Barbados*, CORNELL CENTER ON THE DEATH PENALTY WORLDWIDE (March 7, 2013), <https://www.deathpenaltyworldwide.org/country-search-post.cfm?country=Barbados>.