

Guyana

Cooperative Republic of Guyana



Key Facts



OAS Membership Date: 26 May 1991

Head of State / Head of Government:
President David Granger

Capital city: Georgetown

Population: 740,685

Language(s): English (official), Guyanese Creole, Amerindian languages, Indian languages (including Caribbean Hindustani, a dialect of Hindi), Chinese

Religions: Protestant 34.8%, Hindu 24.8%, Roman Catholic 7.1%, Muslim 6.8%, Jehovah's Witness 1.3%, Rastafarian 0.5%, other Christian 20.8%, other 0.9%, none 3.1%

Ethnic Groups: East Indian 39.8%, black (African) 29.3%, mixed 19.9%, Amerindian 10.5%, other 0.5%

Currency: Guyanese dollar (GYD)

Gross domestic product (PPP): \$6.301 billion (2017 est.)

Legal System: civil law; note - a new civil law code was enacted in 2002, replacing the 1916 code

Political system: The president of Guyana is both the head of government and chief of state. The pre-designated candidate of the winning party in the last National Assembly election becomes president for a 5-year term (there are no term limits in this position in Guyana). The president's Cabinet of Ministers

is appointed by the president and is responsible to the National Assembly. The prime minister as well is appointed by the president.

Guyana's legislative branch exists in unicameral form (one house) and is known as the National Assembly. There are 65 seats in the National Assembly, and members are elected directly in multi-seat constituencies and a single nationwide constituency by proportional representation vote. Members of the National Assembly serve 5-year terms.

The highest court in Guyana is the Supreme Court of Judicature (consists of the Court of Appeal with a chief justice and three justices, and the High Court with a chief justice and 10 justices organized into 3-5 judge panels). In 2009, Guyana acceded to the Caribbean Court of Justice as the final court of appeal in civil and criminal cases, this replaced the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London which had previously reserved this designation.

Economy: Guyana's economy has seen steady growth and primarily relies on agriculture and extractive industries. The economy is highly dependent on the export of six commodities (sugar, gold, bauxite, shrimp, timber, rice), which made up 60% of its GDP and of which is highly susceptible to adverse weather conditions. In recent years, much of Guyana's economic growth has come from a surge in gold production, which has helped to offset the fall in sugar production. In January 2018, an estimated 3.2 billion barrels of oil were found off of Guyana's shore. Guyana is expected to become a petroleum producer by March 2020.

The country's export market, specifically the raw materials sector, was broadened in 2006 after joining the Caricom Single Market and Economy in January 2006. Due to this, Guyana has experienced positive growth every year over the past decade, inflation has been kept under control, and the country's debt has seen a massive reduction (less than half of what it was in the 1990s). The reason for such a high accumulation of debt in the past was a result of the state-led development model pursued in the 1970s and 1980s. However, Guyana continues to struggle with a shortage of skilled labor and a deficient infrastructure.

Diplomatic Relations

Relations to the OAS: Since Guyana's ascension to the Organization of American States in 1991, the country has intensified its relationship with the organization as well as bolstered its own democratic principles. Currently, Guyana is an active participant in programs and committees dedicated to improving democracy, security, integral development, and human rights across the Western Hemisphere. The OAS has in turn stated that they are ready to assist in any way possible ahead of Guyana's next elections. Guyana is also bound by the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which was signed in 1994 and has a central aim of upholding and strengthening democratic institutions in the nations of the Western Hemisphere.

Relations to Venezuela: In the past, Venezuela has claimed roughly half the territory of Guyana for its own following the Latin American Wars for Independence (Guyana was once a British colony). The dispute was subsequently settled by arbitration in 1889. In 1967, Venezuela motioned to not allow Guyana to enter into the OAS, and even backed an uprising in the disputed territory in 1969. Over the next twenty years tensions gradually cooled, and Venezuela in 1990 supported Guyana's entry into the OAS. On the day the Maduro regime was sworn in following a questionable election, Guyana was one of the 19 countries that refused to recognize the Maduro regime as the legitimate government of Venezuela. Guyana has since joined the voices of others in the international community in calling for fresh elections. As of 5 November 2018, Guyana has accepted roughly 2,800 refugees fleeing the crisis in Venezuela. However, many Guyanese are uneasy of the influx of refugees into their country due to the decades-long border dispute with Venezuela. Some feel the intake of refugees as a necessity in times of crisis, and others view it as a silent invasion. While a majority of Venezuelans are coming into Venezuela for safety, security, to provide for their families, and find income-producing work, the border situation has become extremely violent. As Venezuela has descended into chaos, its eastern border has become more and more lawless. *Sindicatos*, or violent gangs, have plagued the region and are responsible for countless deaths. Guyana has since called upon the International Criminal Court of Justice (ICC) to enshrine its borders and

stop Maduro from encroaching on its territory. If Venezuela is staved off from the border the dispute, the hope is that the violence will stop as well. This gives Guyana an enormous stake in the crisis and how the situation is resolved will not only effect Guyana's economy, but its national security as well. While some Guyanese accuse the Maduro regime of working with the gangs, most experts on the conflict believe that since there is little cooperation between both governments, the *sindicatos* take advantage of the power vacuum, which only emboldens them.