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World Watch Research

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# Nicaragua: Persecution Dynamics

January 2025



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[research@od.org](mailto:research@od.org)

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## World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

## World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

## Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

## Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

## Brief country details

**Nicaragua:**  
**Population (UN estimate for 2024)**

7,143,000

Nicaragua: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	6,775,000	94.8
Muslim	1,200	0.0
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	8,400	0.1
Ethnic religionist	34,200	0.5
Jewish	230	0.0
Bahai	13,800	0.2
Atheist	3,400	0.0
Agnostic	198,000	2.8
Other	108,600	1.5
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

## Map of country



## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Nicaragua:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Ideological pressure groups
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Government officials, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Organized crime cartels or networks

*Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.*



## Brief description of the persecution situation

Under President Ortega, churches and Christians are viewed as destabilizing agents, thus making them a target for intimidation, harassment, monitoring, legal prosecution, closure and expropriation of many Christian organizations (including universities and churches) in addition to violent actions with the aim of 'suffocating' the Church and silencing its voice. This has progressively intensified since 2018 as church leaders and others have continued to denounce the injustices and human rights violations perpetrated by the government. The November 2021 elections and changes to the legal framework have been used for increasing restrictions on the Church and Christian leaders who publicly called for the rule of law to be respected - especially during and after the election period - and who helped those most in need, including those considered opponents by the ruling Sandinista Party. Government repression has affected the life, freedom and integrity of Christians in the country, as well as the possibility for churches to carry out their activities normally.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Nicaragua has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Nicaragua is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christians and their activities are monitored by the authorities and surrounding community (ICCPR Art. 17).
- Christian leaders are monitored, and their activities are actively watched (ICCPR Art. 17).
- Perpetrators of violence against Christians are sometimes left unpunished (ICCPR Art. 2).

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **August 2024:** The Nicaraguan government, continuing its repressive trend of recent years, ordered the [cancellation](#) of the legal status of 1,500 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), including at least 100 evangelical churches (CNN, 19 August 2024).
- **April 2024:** The Nicaraguan government [sentenced](#) 11 evangelical pastors associated with the US-based Mountain Gateway organization to prison terms of between 12 and 15 years and fines of \$80 million each, on charges of money laundering. They were held in isolation without any contact to lawyers or family members (Vatican News, 3 April 2024). After 6 months, at the beginning of September 2024, they were [released](#) and immediately deported to Guatemala (ADF International, 5 September 2024).
- **March 2024:** Police [prohibited](#) the Catholic Church from holding processions during Lent and Holy Week. The authorities only allowed the 'Stations of the Cross' to be carried out inside or within church compounds, but not on the streets. Police surrounded churches in some parts of the

country to prevent any processions from taking place. During Palm Sunday, police and paramilitary surveillance was increased. Seven young people who participated in Holy Week activities on public streets were arrested (Infobae, 30 March 2024).

## Specific examples of positive developments

- **The *resilience of the Christian community in the country***: Despite the challenges, Christians find ways to carry out their ministry and serve the poor and needy (El Debate, 26 November 2024).
- **Attention paid by human rights organizations**: The violation of the religious freedom of religious leaders and communities in Nicaragua has been condemned by human rights groups such as the [ICHR](#) (OAS, 22 August 2024), the [UNHCR](#) (OACNUDH, 16 January 2024), [non-governmental organizations](#) (Colectivo Nicaragua Nunca Más, 2024) and [church councils](#) and confederations (Aciprensa, 23 September 2024).

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians**: Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation and are therefore not treated as a separate category for WWL analysis.

**Historical Christian communities**: The largest denomination in this category is the Roman Catholic Church. This denomination has had to face multi-faceted forms of hostility from government actors, especially when its church leaders have voiced opposition to government measures. Currently, it is the religious group most affected by state reprisals, since it is one of the last independent voices in the country and is widely respected by society. Other historical Christian denominations noted an increase in regime hostility towards them during the WWL 2025 reporting period, mainly through administrative (legal) reprisals for refusal to align with government propaganda.

**Converts**: Converts in Nicaragua are mainly former regime sympathizers or government officers that have become Christians and are now considered part of the opposition. This category also experiences hostility similar to that faced by the Historical churches where opposition to the ruling party is expressed.

**Non-traditional Christian communities**: This category is made up mainly of Baptist and Pentecostal groups, Mennonites and Moravian Lutherans. They are in the minority and do not have the same representation at social level as the Historical communities. This category also experiences hostility similar to the Historical churches whenever opposition to the ruling party is expressed (especially if they had been receiving regime-support in the past), with the main threat being loss of legal status to operate in the country or restrictions on certain church events. Both forms of hostility are a form of government reprisal for their refusal to support regime interests.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Given the government's intensive control over all the country, persecution is present nationwide and at all levels. The cities with the highest number of incidents of persecution against Christians are Granada, Jinotega, Masaya, Jinotepe, Leon, Managua, Matagalpa, Boaco and Estelí.

## Position on the World Watch List

Nicaragua: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	71	30
WWL 2024	70	30
WWL 2023	65	50
WWL 2022	56	61
WWL 2021	51	63

The upward trend in the country's persecution score continued in the WWL 2025 reporting period, with a rise of 1 point. Although the violence score remained stable at 9.6 points (with higher numbers of Christian buildings being closed and Christians expelled from the country), the average pressure increased slightly, with the most notable rises in the *Private* (+0.3 points) and *Community spheres of life* (+0.5 points). This was driven by increased hostility targeting Christians who refused to show loyalty to the regime and were labeled "terrorists" or "enemies" of the government. Repressive methods have become so systematic that they not only disrupt the normal development of church-organized activities but also impose a culture of fear and self-censorship among congregants to avoid becoming targets of a government that is increasingly restrictive toward the Church's work in the country.

## Persecution engines

Nicaragua: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Not at all
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Strong
Secular intolerance	SI	Weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

In this country, the three main persecution engines are blended.

### **Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)**

According to Freedom House, Nicaragua scored 16/100 in the [Freedom in the World 2024 Index](#) and is ranked as "not free". Political rights scored 4/40 and civil liberties scored 12/60 points. President Ortega has filled state institutions with loyal supporters, banned leading opposition parties and adapted the legal framework (including the Constitution) to allow his indefinite re-election and violations of civil rights. Government officials at all levels must support the regime or face the consequences for being considered traitors or terrorists. The whole state apparatus functions to keep the president and his political elite, including members of his family, in power. Through weakening democracy and the rule of law, his goal has been to remain in power without giving the opposition a fair opportunity to be able to participate in the political life of the country.

Church leaders and Christian groups – especially Roman Catholics – have faced acts of retaliation when they have questioned the regime's authority and legitimacy and demanded that human rights (including specific mention of religious freedom) and democratic principles be respected. As a result, the ruling party has carried out a campaign in which church leaders and Christians have been threatened, monitored, mistreated, arrested, prosecuted, insulted, expelled from the country, called enemies and terrorists, and have generally been constantly harassed. Churches have also been vandalized and church services disrupted, prohibited and hindered, with the aim of creating a climate of fear for those identifying as committed Christians and publicly supporting the Church and its leaders.

### **Communist and post-Communist oppression (Strong)**

The ruling party, the Socialist Sandinista National Liberation Front (SNFL), reveres President Daniel Ortega, often referred to as "Comandante Daniel," as a central figure of authority. Socialist-Communist patriotism is promoted in schools and enforced on citizens through state institutions, sometimes by violent means. The regime meticulously monitors institutions and seeks to suppress Christian values and perspectives that could challenge party ideology or threaten its authority. Christians, particularly religious leaders critical of the regime, face severe repression, constant surveillance, and censorship, often becoming victims of politically motivated violations of religious freedom.

Through its state apparatus, the government aims to control and stifle churches and religious leaders who fail to demonstrate significant loyalty to the president. This includes leveraging the legal status required for churches to operate in the country, with threats of criminalizing church-affiliated institutions and representatives if they do not provide detailed accounts of their activities to the regime. Additionally, religious elements such as festivals and Biblical references are sometimes distorted and co-opted to serve the regime's interests, a tactic commonly observed in other authoritarian states like Cuba and Venezuela, with whom Nicaragua maintains a close relationship.

This engine is clearly and closely blended with aspects of *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Organized corruption and crime*.

### Organized corruption and crime (Medium)

The dictatorial context favors corrupt practices which have become deeply rooted in the country. According to the [Corruption Perceptions Index 2023](#), Nicaragua is at rank 172 out of 180 countries, scoring 17 points (0= highly corrupt and 100= very clean). This highlights the alarming level of corruption entrenched in Nicaragua, which is aimed at consolidating the regime’s power while enabling the expansion of illicit markets, including drug trafficking, smuggling and illegal mining. Key state institutions, such as the judicial system, security forces, and public services, function primarily to serve the interests of the Sandinista leadership. These institutions employ bribery, political manipulation, and coercion to maintain their grip on power, leaving little room for accountability or justice. In parallel, non-state actors, including paramilitary groups (often referred to as "Ortega death squads"), criminal networks and Sandinista mobs, operate in close collaboration with the government. These groups are empowered to target regime opponents with impunity, employing violence and intimidation to suppress dissent. Christians, particularly those vocal about issues like corruption, human rights or the plight of the marginalized, often become targets of these entities.

The Church is particularly vulnerable under these circumstances. Christian leaders and institutions face harassment and threats, aimed at discouraging their advocacy for justice, peace and social reform. Churches that support the victims of state and non-state aggression or challenge the regime’s authority are especially at risk. This creates an environment of fear and silences many within the Christian community, effectively limiting their ability to engage in public discourse or provide humanitarian support. Furthermore, the pervasive climate of impunity erodes trust in public institutions and places the Church in a precarious position, struggling to navigate between its mission of serving the community and the risk of retaliation from an increasingly oppressive state apparatus.

### Drivers of persecution

Nicaragua: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	-	-	-	-	WEAK	STRONG	WEAK	STRONG	MEDIUM
Government officials	-	-	-	-	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	-	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	Very weak	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	Weak	Very weak	-	Very weak	-
Violent religious groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

(table continues below)

Nicaragua: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	-	-	-	-	WEAK	STRONG	WEAK	STRONG	MEDIUM
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	Weak	Weak	Medium	Weak
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	-	-	-	-	Very weak	Weak	Very weak	Weak	Very weak
One's own (extended) family	-	-	-	-	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	Weak	Strong	Medium
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	Very weak	Medium
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	Very weak	Very weak

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** Government officials at all levels support the regime. The whole state apparatus functions to keep the president and his political elite – including some members of his family – in power through totalitarian control, which means there is no room for opposition or any kind of criticism. The army, police, Congress and the Electoral Tribunal work together to suppress and censor any form of opposition. Christians are affected where their activities, preaching or teaching are seen to be attempts at destabilizing the government or challenging the president's authority.
- **Political parties (Strong):** The ruling FSLN party controls almost all state entities, it has managed to weaken all opposition parties and civil society leadership, thus hindering usual democratic processes and any transparency in future elections. Christians who question the ruling party's legitimacy or who demand transparent elections have become the target of reprisals.
- **Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Strong):** The government uses a variety of violent groups (also known as "Ortega death squads" or parapolice forces) to terrorize citizens and silence anyone daring to demand that the elite step down from power. They are known for disrupting church services.

- **Ideological pressure groups (Medium):** These are the groups with radical political ideologies promoted by FSLN. The best known is the so-called “Sandinista Youth”. They are the ones who identify Christian opponents as targets for action to be taken against them by the authorities or themselves.

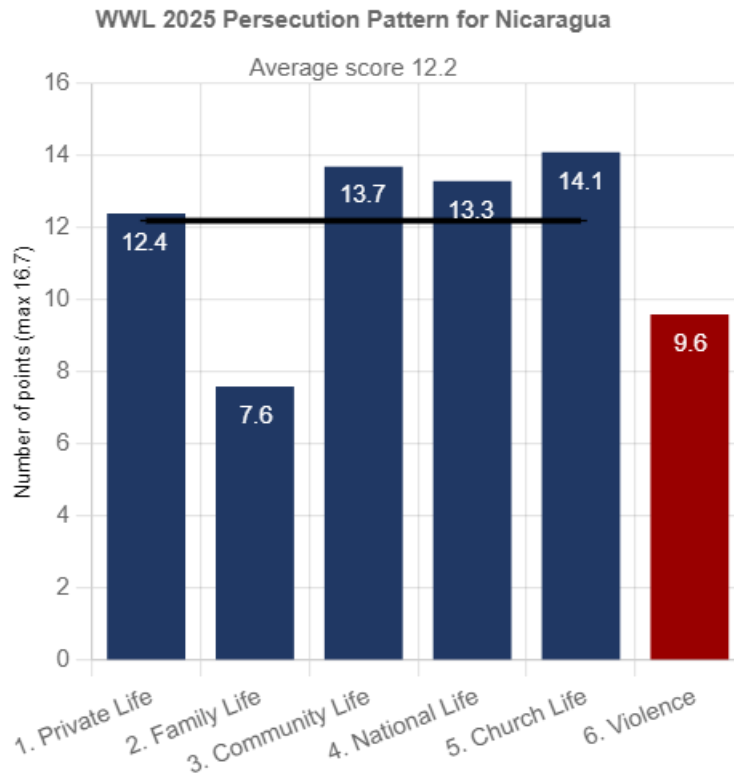
#### **Drivers of Communist and post-Communist oppression**

- **Government officials (Strong):** Government officials monitor church leaders and religious activities in general in order to identify any signs of ideas opposing the principles of the Sandinista Revolution. State authorities harass Christians (including Church leaders) who express faith-based views in conflict with regime policy or who accompany or provide support to the opposition. The government accuses and treats them as traitors and enemies.
- **Political parties (Strong):** Militant members of the FSLN ruling party play an important role in boosting patriotism and support for the government. Given that they use the state apparatus to impose the ideology of the Party, they are the ones who provide the resources for the repression of the Christians who oppose it.
- **Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Medium):** These act as the tough, violent arm of the regime. They seek to silence any dissenting voice in order to prevent the influence of the opposition spreading in society. Christians speaking up about democracy, respect of human rights or rule of law become the main targets of these groups.

#### **Drivers of Organized corruption and crime**

- **Government officials (Medium):** The authorities at local and national levels can conduct illegal actions with impunity given the existing networks of corruption. Government officials on their own or using paramilitary groups and criminal groups repress Christian dissidents and any Christian organization seeking to publicize corrupt government activities. Christians are an especially vulnerable group since they have nowhere to turn to for protection.
- **Political parties (Medium):** The ruling party exerts absolute control through the government. Since the ruling party is the main corrupt agent of the state, Christians can hardly make known their faith-based points of views regarding democracy and transparency without being punished or censored.
- **Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Medium):** Thanks to the alliances they have with government officials, paramilitary groups have had the freedom to attack and terrorize citizens in the wake of anti-government and anti-corruption protests.
- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Medium):** The government employs members of gangs for their squads and parapolice groups to suppress opposition voices. The state thus makes use of organized crime and its economic resources to attack civilians (including Christians) who are critical of the regime.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Nicaragua shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Nicaragua was at a very high level, rising from 12.0 points in WWL 2024 to 12.2 points in WWL 2025.
- Pressure was strongest in the *Church* (14.1), *Community* (13.7) and *National* (13.3) *spheres of life* due to the repressive measures employed against church leaders and churches who are regarded as being supporters of anti-government elements who oppose regime interests.
- The violence score remained unchanged at 9.6 points. Despite appearing stable, WWL 2025 saw a significant increase in reported incidents of violence across nearly all categories.



## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2025 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.*

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

#### ***Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.75 points)***

With the increasing trend towards direct action against church leaders, it has become more frequent that Christians have been targeted and threatened by the regime when they a) express faith-based political opinions criticizing government practices and the lack of transparency in the elections, b) defend Church opposition to ruling party ideology, c) when they use social media to support priests or human rights activists under government surveillance or even when they simply click “like” on a post in which prayers are requested for the release of imprisoned church leaders. This was most noticeable in the case of Bishop Rolando Álvarez at the beginning of the WWL 2025 reporting period.

Action has also been taken to prevent the entry into the country of Christians who have advocated for the release of imprisoned church leaders. Surveillance, especially of social networks, is permanent and the criminalization of any Internet content opposing regime interests is now justified under the new Cybercrime law. Many Christians self-censor to avoid reprisals.

#### ***Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.50 points)***

This has been a widespread problem, especially among Catholic Christians living in areas where priests and bishops have experienced high levels of government hostility, such as Masaya, Matagalpa, Managua, Leon, Boaco and Jinotega. Meetings between them were often misinterpreted as being conspiratorial against the government and/or supporting the opposition, particularly when they occur in the run-up to national elections or in circumstances in which discontent and distrust against the government becomes more noticeable. Also, when Christians meet in their homes for any reason, their cars may be photographed and they are liable to be disturbed by the police. This could be made worse by the presence of a church leader or Christian activist. At times, the continuous application of curfews or police fencing also prevented Christians from being able to get together for meetings, even when there was no religious motivation.

#### ***Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.25 points)***

Within pro-government families, or with any member of the FSLN party, to be Christian and critical of the government can provoke trouble, especially in a context of escalating repression towards manifestations of faith and support for the Church. When a Christian is known as an 'opponent', government authorities are likely to interrogate extended family members too. In order to avoid retaliation for being linked to an 'enemy of the regime', the extended family may report on activities, companions, or meeting places of their Christian relative, thus putting the latter in danger.

***Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.00 points)***

As stated by the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Nicaragua](#)): “Prison authorities continued to deny political prisoners access to Bibles, a practice reported since 2018”. This also applies to imprisoned church leaders. Such materials can cause Christians in jail to be classified as terrorists and mistreated and they must use them in secrecy. In some extreme cases, Christians avoid having them in their possession as they could link them to congregations or church leaders known for their stance against the regime. With the absence of Christian material, they are expected to lose faith and plunge into despair. The possession of Christian material is also risky for family members who try to share it with political prisoners, since they are then considered to be in possession of subversive material. Also, according to in-country sources, if they keep at home anything bearing prayers and biblical messages referring to Bishop Álvarez or other church leaders facing persecution, or to peace in the country, or to anyone who has been abducted, or to political prisoners, that is all considered suspicious material and hostility towards them will increase. Additionally, there have been known situations in which ordinary Christians and church leaders suffered mistreatment during entry controls into the country because they had among their belongings Catholic rosaries, World Youth Day material and new editions of the Bible.

**Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere*****Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.50 points)***

The main obstacle for Christian parents is the school indoctrination mentioned in Block 2.8. If parents try to protect their children from state propaganda or complain about the socialist-communist influence at school, they are immediately considered regime opponents and become victims of questioning by the authorities and other reprisals. Although in the past, most Christian parents tried to find private space for sharing their faith with their children, due to the massive closure of Christian educational projects, parents are currently encountering more obstacles.

***Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)***

Educational programs in schools indoctrinate young children in the ideology propagated by the regime. As stated in [IRFR 2023 Nicaragua](#): “Ministry of Education regulations for primary school education require that the educational goals and curriculum for elementary grade students and teachers follow the government’s ‘Christian, Socialist, and Solidarity’ principles.” As a result, children and young people are forced to carry FSLN flags and banners with wording that praises the regime and to attend pro-government rallies. Children of Christian parents are compelled not only to learn teaching that does not conform to Christian faith but are encouraged to believe that any ideology that goes against the government's must be eradicated by force. The presidential couple are revered as national heroes, admiration for Hugo Chávez (former Communist leader of Venezuela) is encouraged and “Augusto Sandino” (anti-USA Nicaraguan rebel leader in 1927-1933) has been compared to Christ.

***Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (3.50 points)***

Christians who oppose the regime have faced, or been threatened with, kidnappings, arbitrary imprisonment, and forced displacement from their homes, leading to the prolonged separation of families. Arbitrary arrest is one of the regime's most frequent tactics against individuals deemed 'enemies,' a practice that intensified following the ruling party's consolidation of power in the November 2021 elections. Many detainees, often Christians, are held in isolation, denied any form of communication with their families, and kept in the dark about their whereabouts until information eventually surfaces. In some cases, Christians flee their homes to protect their relatives from reprisals, often being unable to maintain contact for extended periods due to police surveillance. Furthermore, the government has at times barred Christians from re-entering the country or revoked their citizenship, labeling them as "terrorists". This tactic not only isolates them from their families but also makes it impossible for them to return, further exacerbating the separation and alienation faced by these individuals.

***Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.25 points)***

Children of Christians are likely to face discrimination and abuse as long their parents keep opposing the regime. Government supporters threaten them as a means of warning their parents to stop being critical of the government. These actions are sometimes led by teachers, classmates or other parents. If Christian children refuse to participate in pro-government activities, they are frequently labeled "children of terrorists" or "coup heirs". Also, there are sporadic cases involving Christian denominational protectionism where children are victims of bullying when their religious practices are not accepted by their classmates.

**Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere**

***Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.50 points)***

Civilian groups and pro-government sympathizers look out for any suspicious activity in neighborhoods, schools and workplaces and act violently against any anti-government protesters or against anyone suspected of not aligning with the regime. They support the police by recording names, addresses and movements of regime opponents. Christians in the community linked to churches and leaders known for their opposition to the regime are likely to be targeted and followed on a daily basis. This monitoring increased after the November 2021 elections. According to USCIRF ([Nicaragua 2024 - Country Update](#)): "Throughout 2023 and into 2024, uniformed and plainclothes government agents in Nicaragua have also intimidated clergy and parishioners by conspicuously monitoring Catholic houses of worship, schools and ceremonies."

***Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.50 points)***

Christians - especially those in public employment - must frequently attend political events in which both the ruling FSLN and the almost messianic figure of the president are praised as heroes; in such

context, church affiliation is seen as a sign of national betrayal because the Church is labeled an “enemy of the state” that must be eliminated, and church leaders are presented as being “traitors to the country”. Christians are forced to attend pro-government events in order not to be considered 'opponents' and not to expose their churches and families to harassment. The regime is also known to organize 'religious events' (for political purposes and without the consent of church leadership) with the aim of discrediting church leaders and confusing congregations. Pressure is exerted on workers to attend and show their support during such events. Those who do not participate in these types of events are automatically suspected of being opponents.

***Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.50 points)***

University authorities often collaborate with the government to exert pressure on students opposing the regime. This collusion has progressively increased since April 2018, especially with the widespread closure and confiscation of educational institutions in the last few years. These institutions are now under total state control, leading to a rise in obstacles and reprisals for Christian students. Students in contact with church leaders or denominations known for opposing the regime are particularly vulnerable. They can be targeted by university authorities, including professors with strong ties to the regime, and risk being accused of terrorism and "handed over" to the police. Such students face severe consequences, including expulsion, suspension and permanent barriers to prevent them from continuing their education. In some cases, their academic records are entirely erased; if not, their expulsion is recorded, making it extremely difficult for them to gain admission to any of the few remaining private education institutions. This systematic targeting serves as a powerful tool for suppressing dissent and undermining the potential of future Christian leaders.

***Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)***

Due to the high levels of social monitoring and surveillance, all citizens (and especially those who speak out against the regime) are watched not only by government authorities but also by the Citizen Power Councils (CPC) and the Sandinista Leadership Committees. Christians, including church leaders (especially those who were in prison or have a relative under arrest, or who are known to be close to a church leader regarded as a 'terrorist'), face having to constantly report their activities and meeting places to the authorities. They are interrogated by the police because outspoken Christians are automatically viewed as being linked to anti-government activities. They are also interrogated if they try to provide assistance to Christian leaders (including priests and nuns) facing government harassment. Some have been forced to make public statements condemning the very people they were trying to help.

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Nicaragua](#)): "In October, media outlets reported police had summoned at least nine laypersons, regular churchgoers of the Catholic Church in northern cities of the country, telling them they were under investigation without specifying a reason. Police instructed them to report to a police station to 'sign in', which some had to do weekly and others every 15 or 20 days. Police required those under investigation to report in advance any travel beyond their respective municipal limits. Legal experts said police had no legal authority to impose such measures."

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

### ***Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (4.00 points)***

Whenever Christians publicly voice their faith-based perspectives on the regime's injustices, they are met with threats and other forms of hostility from state security forces, Sandinista mobs, or paramilitary groups. These actions are often carried out under the guise of legality, particularly under the enforcement of the Special Cybercrime Law. Being associated with the opposition through statements or photographs can result in being targeted, especially when the subject involves state abuse of religious leaders. Even Christians striving for neutrality, such as those working in journalism, face accusations of treason or spreading false information if they fail to defend or fully support state authorities. During the WWL 2025 reporting period, the intensified wave of hostility against the Church created an atmosphere of fear and coercion. This intimidation aims to compel Christians to self-censor and avoid openly criticizing the government. The repressive environment extends even to the families of political prisoners, many of whom fear reporting the injustices their relatives endure in detention facilities.

### ***Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (4.00 points)***

Both state and non-state actors, with the endorsement of the government, are responsible for harming Christians. Attacks on Christians, church leaders, Christian organizations, and their property are rarely prosecuted or punished, even in cases where victims overcome their fear of reporting incidents despite the risk of severe reprisals. Corruption networks ensure complete impunity for the perpetrators, bolster the regime's stability, and perpetuate hostility against those deemed "opponents." Even when an investigation is ostensibly conducted, it often seeks to downplay the severity of the crime, frequently shifting blame onto the victims by emphasizing their alleged negligence.

### ***Block 4.15: Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment. (4.00 points)***

There is unequal treatment for those who are considered opponents of the government, this includes, in addition to arbitrary detentions, the lack of assistance from a lawyer, or an impartial judge, and the violation of the right to due process. Additionally, the (official) press department blocks media coverage (including international monitoring) of judicial sources. Those prosecuted may also be denied pastoral support from their churches during and after the trial.

The minimum guarantees of human rights are not applied in the country, much less for the political prisoners who have been imprisoned for being considered opponents of the regime (including those who in practice were imprisoned for the same reason although without formally being classed as such due to the lack of transparency in state information). Thus, given the networks of impunity and corruption, Christians that are classified as dissidents or opponents of the government are doubly vulnerable during judicial processes in the country, especially if they are a church leader.

According to the 2024 UN report by the [OHCHR Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua](#), a pattern of repressive actions against Christians in the country was identified, including: "(i) the detention of individuals under unfounded, disproportionate criminal charges based on laws that violate human rights and/or false evidence; (ii) carrying out arrests without presenting a detention order and without informing the detainees of the reasons for their arrest; (iii) the excessive and arbitrary use of pretrial

detention, imposing it systematically without considering the specific circumstances of each case, the criteria of proportionality and purpose of the process, and without due consideration of alternative measures; (iv) the systematic violation of due process rights, including the lack of equality before the courts, unequal access to procedural resources, the inclusion of new offenses such as treason within already concluded processes with final convictions, and conducting trials in absentia, culminating in convictions for treason and resulting in the arbitrary deprivation of nationality; and (v) the systematic violation of the right to proper legal defense."

***Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (3.50 points)***

When churches issued statements concerning the seriousness of the human rights crisis, the violent actions against the Church in the country, the lack of transparency in the electoral process, the importance of respect for democracy, the response from the presidential couple (President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Rosario Murillo) was to insult Christian teaching, church leaders and other believers by labeling them as servants of satan, or demons who spread violence, hatred and discord with their subversive ideas. The objective behind delegitimizing the Church is to justify the repressive actions against it since the attacks are presented as being a necessary strategy to get rid of 'fake' religious leaders and bring peace back to the country.

Due to the government's control of the media, biased information has frequently been spread, with Christians and church leaders being portrayed as terrorists and traitors who were/are planning a coup and promoting social unrest. The president and vice-president have repeatedly insulted Christians in this way and have encouraged others to do so too, thus aiming to create a climate of intolerance towards the Church, especially against priests and bishops, or at least an atmosphere of fear among those supporting them. Militants of the party add to this by ridiculing Christians, for instance on social media platforms.

**Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere**

***Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points)***

As mentioned in several parts of this country dossier, Christian leaders (mainly Catholics) reported several forms of government retaliation, for instance:

- against churches running projects to support the poor and vulnerable,
- against those calling for a return to democracy and an end to human rights violations,
- against those advocating for the release of political prisoners,
- against those who publicly called for prayer for the health and freedom of Bishop Álvarez and other church leaders in prison,
- against those who criticized the abusive policies of the regime,
- and against all those who, from their position of religious leadership, promoted a faith-based message of unity and peace which contradicted the regime narrative.

Priests and bishops have been accused by the regime of being opportunists and schemers, and have faced as a result mental and physical abuse, prosecution and imprisonment. Christians, church leaders and their families have faced defamation, violence, arrests, forced displacement and other forms of



hostility, including denial of basic services. Some church leaders were prevented from holding services, while attendees were blocked from entering churches. The repression has escalated to the point that [Infobae](#) reported on 24 August 2024 that the regime had expelled 25% of the country's Roman Catholic priests, leaving many churches with very limited pastoral care.

***Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (4.00 points)***

Since the approval of the Law concerning Foreign Actors in October 2020, there have been increasing restrictions on church-run institutions due to the strict requirement to declare the origin of each item of international funding received. Fines have been arbitrarily imposed where the authorities consider the donor to be a danger to the national interest. The government has increasingly used this procedure to deny licenses for registration, to cancel the legal status of those entities and to generally hinder the activities of church-affiliated organizations, especially those dedicated to provide educational services.

In addition, the regime has continued to target humanitarian work carried out by such organizations, often via aggressive FSLN supporter action. Blocking the distribution of humanitarian and medical church aid in disaster areas and to those in poverty serves a clear purpose, namely, to keep the population dependent on the economic handouts that the government provides, thus buying the people's support and giving legitimacy to the regime. In the WWL 2025 reporting period, various Catholic dioceses in the country continued experiencing a financial blockade by government authorities. The impossibility of accessing bank accounts caused the suspension of humanitarian projects and paralyzed many other church activities, including the [elimination of pension funds](#) for retired priests (National Catholic Register, 28 August 2024).

***Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points)***

Since 2018, churches and Christian organizations have increasingly faced reprisals for criticizing the regime, exposing its human rights violations, and advocating for the rule of law. The hostilities against them escalated in the WWL 2025 reporting period, with such actions as the disruption of church services, frequent forced displacements, arbitrary detentions, imprisonment, revocation of nationality, confiscation of private and church property, expulsions, and the closure of religious organizations and church-affiliated media outlets.

***Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.75 points)***

The ruling party seeks to diminish the presence and role of the Church in the public sphere, especially when it contradicts their interests. Since 2023, restrictions on religious activities in Nicaragua have intensified, targeting both Catholic and other Christian denominations. Public worship events such as processions and pilgrimages have been largely banned, with police frequently imposing informal restrictions communicated verbally to clergy, leaving no official records. According to an August 2024 report by Martha Patricia Molina Montenegro entitled "[Nicaragua: A Persecuted Church?](#)", over 9,688 religious events were prohibited from 2019 to mid-2024, with bans becoming widespread in the last

two years of that period. In response, clergy have adapted by limiting activities to church premises, emphasizing prayer and meditation.

Although Nicaragua's laws theoretically protect religious freedom, in practice, virtually all public religious activities are prohibited, effectively confining church activities to their compounds. Additionally, municipal governments hold secular events during patron saint festivals, using their own images of saints to create the illusion of religious celebrations, further confusing the public and undermining the Church's role in the community.

## Violence

*Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:*

### **1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.**

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

### **2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:**

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*



Nicaragua: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	317	347
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	73	38
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	38	22
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	2	2
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	37	15
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	14	11
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	7	3
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	21	10
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	94	71

In the WWL 2025 reporting period, the number of recorded incidents increased across nearly all categories:

- **Church buildings attacked (317):** Most of the Christian properties closed or confiscated were a form of government reprisal against the church leaders responsible for running them and as way of dissuading the Church, its leaders and members from continuing to spread a message contrary

to the interests of the regime. Other attacks often involved arson, vandalism and damage to church property.

- **Christians detained (73):** Most of the detainees were Catholic leaders accused of being instigators of action against the regime. In many cases, the leaders had first suffered a police blockade, preventing them from leaving their homes. After some days, they were then formally arrested and in some cases, prosecuted.
- **Christians sentenced (38):** Many of these cases involved Christian activists or church leaders who had been publicly defending human rights, claiming justice for protesters, criticizing the regime’s abuses, or simply because of personal or professional connections to those considered to be government opponents. Some Christian prisoners were released during the WWL 2025 reporting period and were stripped of their nationality while also being expelled from the country.
- **Christians forced to leave the country (94):** The recorded incidents included national and foreign church leaders (pastors, priests, deacons, seminarians, missionaries, nuns, monks etc.) who had lived in the country for several years but were now expelled or denied re-entry to the country. Other cases involved Christians fleeing the country in the face of government reprisals.

## 5 Year trends

The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

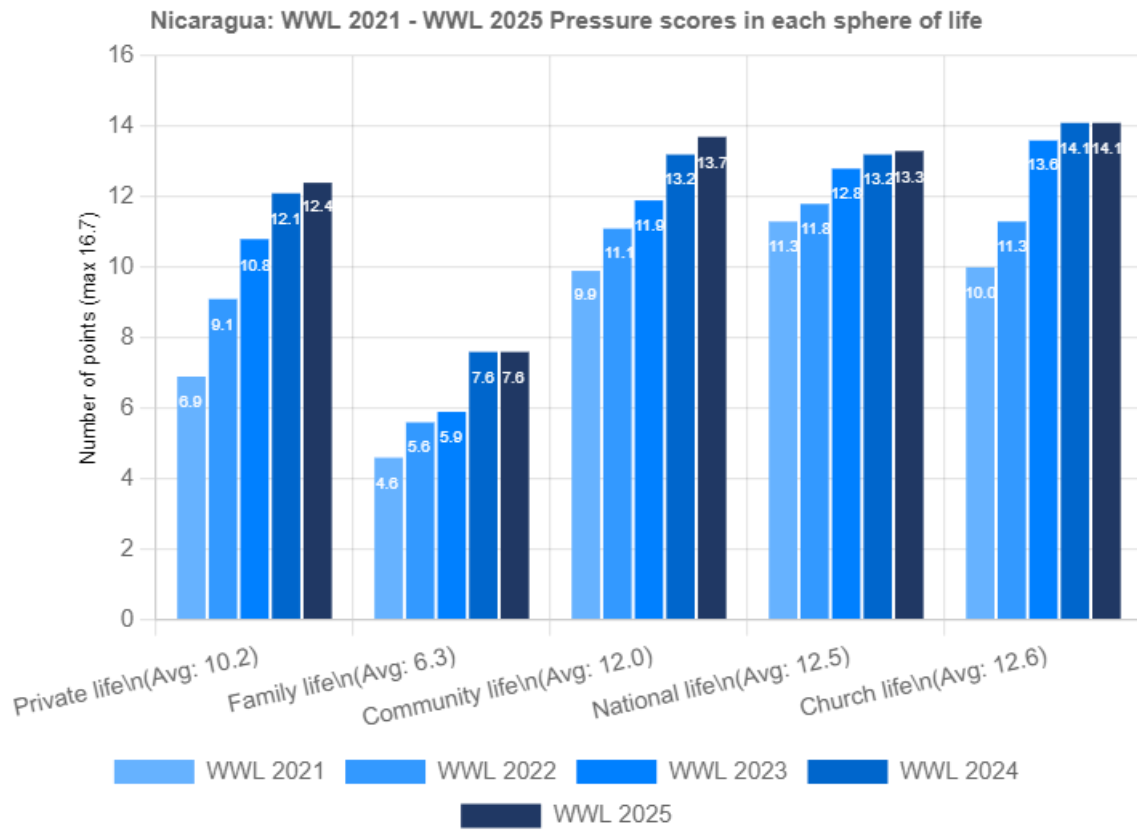
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Nicaragua: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	12.2
2024	12.0
2023	11.0
2022	9.8
2021	8.5

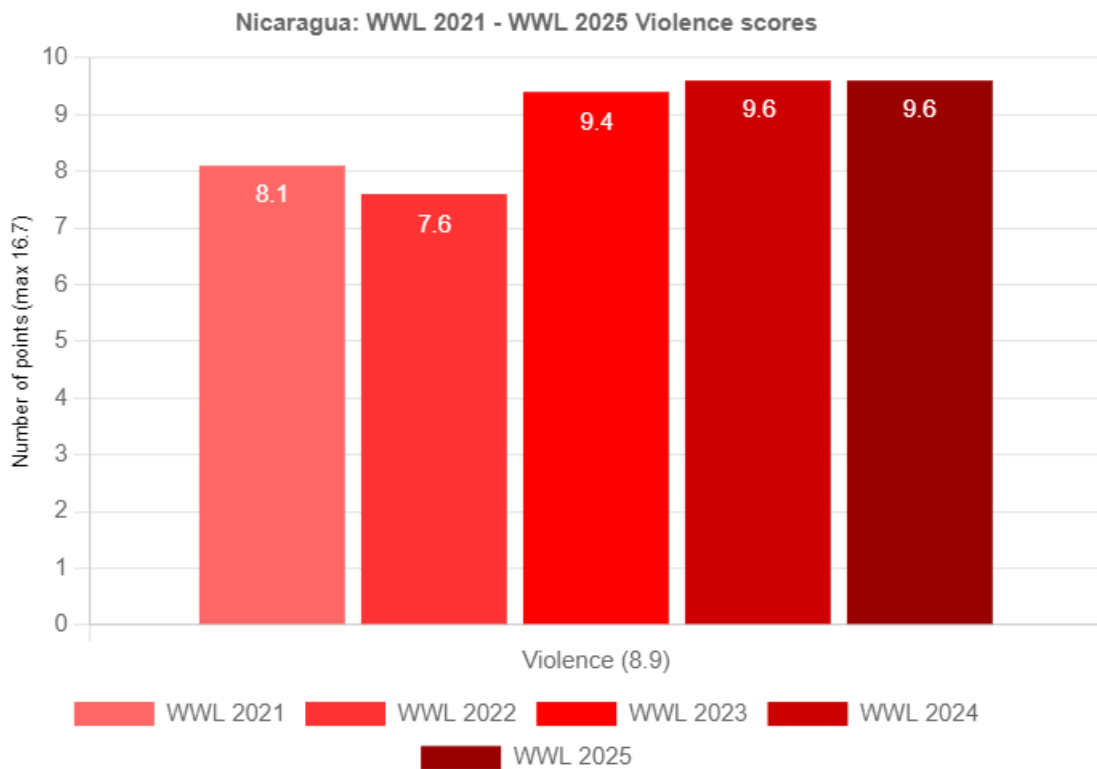
The table shows that the average pressure on Christians has steadily increased since WWL 2021, with a more notable increase since the 2022 elections that consolidated the Ortega dictatorship in his sixth presidential term. Since then, reprisals have become more direct, especially against church leaders considered “political enemies” and against the faith communities led by them.

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

As can be seen in the blue chart below, pressure in all *spheres of life* has been progressively on the rise, due to the fact that government and FSLN-supporter hostility towards Christians has intensified. This dynamic is most noticeable in *Community, National and Church life*.



**5 Year trends: Violence against Christians**



The red chart above shows that, as Christian communities have increasingly opposed government abuses, so reports of violence against the Church (in such categories as detentions, sentences, forced displacement, property attacks) have increased as well. The very high violence score seems to have stabilized at the level of 9.4 - 9.6 points.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Nicaragua	<b>Female Pressure Points</b> <b>Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024</b>
	Violence – psychological

Compared to other Latin American countries, women and girls experience relatively few gender-specific forms of religious persecution. Those most at risk are female dissidents of the regime, human rights activists, or, relatives of political opponents. Christian women – primarily Catholic – can fall into this category. They then easily find themselves at the mercy of allies of the government who keep them under constant surveillance and criminal groups.

Ongoing state oppression under President Daniel Ortega has worsened in the WWL 2025 reporting year, placing women in a condition of increased vulnerability. Due to a lack of confidence in the justice system, many victims have not reported crimes against them. Perpetrators enjoy impunity, and even those imprisoned for their crimes are often later granted pardons.

Christian women and girls also suffer the loss of Christian men and boys, who are more vulnerable to being imprisoned, abducted, or forced to flee Nicaragua (for further details, see below: Male gender profile).

More broadly, Nicaraguan women remain at high risk of domestic violence, although the introduction of new legislation to tackle this has been welcomed as a positive development ([Georgetown, GWPSI Nicaragua profile](#), accessed 7 January 2025). Whilst sporadic, there are some reports of women being beaten by men because of their association with the church, suggesting that women face an increased vulnerability to domestic violence and abuse because of their faith. Faith may act as an additional catalyst for violence to existing situations of domestic instability. A country expert records examples of women being beaten with belts and threatened with knife attacks from their husbands because of their affiliation and role at the church.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Nicaragua

Male Pressure Points

Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024

Abduction  
 Forced to flee town/country  
 Imprisonment by government  
 Violence – physical  
 Violence – psychological  
 Violence – Verbal

In general, country experts state that persecution affects all citizens, regardless of age, social status, gender or ethnicity. However, it is men who suffer greater forms of persecution because of their faith. Men and boys are, in general, more likely to experience visible forms of persecution than women. This is primarily linked to the roles that men and boys assume. Male youths are more likely to take part in demonstrations demanding the resignation of the president and suffer government retaliation. Reports suggest that male students have also been forced to participate in political events organized to show support for Ortega’s regime, even without their parents’ consent. This high-tension political pressure in all spheres of life often “forces them to leave the country to preserve their lives and this causes the family to fall apart.”

The violence and brutal persecution of the Catholic Church by the state has caused the exile and banishment of at least 57 priests in 2023. Reports indicate that arrests have been made at night or early in the morning, accompanied by violent raids, smear campaigns and threats. In addition, religious leaders face a judicial process full of irregularities under secrecy, with “hidden” hearings, and without the right to a trusted defence of those involved.

Most church leaders (primarily Catholic) or ministry leaders in Nicaragua are male and are subject to greater pressure and surveillance. When the government identifies a man associated with a church known for its opposition to the regime, he is more vulnerable to repression, and he will suffer hardships and pressure from state and non-state agents. “It has been known that banks and microfinance institutions had as a policy not to lend money to Christian ministers like pastors, even when it was to finance their own businesses and not necessarily [related] to their churches. They also tend to deny loans to Christian businessmen when they are targeted by government, or they are politically active,” a country expert reported.

Those who provided shelter and medical assistance to protesters in 2018 continue to experience government retribution years later, including slander, arbitrary investigations by government agencies, and unfounded charges. Catholic priests are especially vilified by President Ortega. As noted by the US State Department ([IRFR 2021 Nicaragua](#)): “Throughout the year, President Daniel Ortega and Vice President and First Lady Rosario Murillo verbally harassed priests and bishops, labelled them 'terrorists in cassocks' and 'coup-plotters', and accused them of committing crimes.”

Priests and parishioners have been taken hostage inside churches; verbally and psychologically abused, and physically beaten. Others have been abducted, or imprisoned where they face maltreatment, and are denied access to family members ([OAS, July 9, 2021](#)).

Considering such violence and pressure, many men – particularly church leaders – feel forced to flee the country, facing the dangers of possible capture by human traffickers and other criminal groups. Others who remain have been subjected to immigration restrictions and increased difficulty moving freely within the country. The Ortega dictatorship has stripped priests and civilians of their nationality and citizenship rights, accusing them of “treason against the country”. A country expert summarizes: “All possible obstacles are imposed because they not only want to harass the Church and the leaders they consider to be in opposition but also because the ultimate goal is to prevent the spread of the faith.”

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Nicaragua](#)):

- On October 21-22 [2023], unidentified persons vandalized at least 41 Jewish graves (located in a small corner of Managua’s main cemetery) with red paint and swastikas. Similarly, a small public monument with a menorah was vandalized with red paint and damaged. According to reports, the government removed the markings.

## Trends Summary

### 1) The president's hold on society is becoming increasingly authoritarian

In order to ensure it stays in power, the ruling party under President Ortega has set aside democratic rules and respect for human rights and has instead installed a culture of fear and repression among citizens to prevent any dissident voice from being heard. As the legitimacy of the authorities is constantly questioned, repression increases to prevent any destabilization of the government. In this context, the Church, with its outspokenness and support for the neediest in society, continues to be a voice of authority and offers comfort and hope to citizens, despite all government reprisals.

### 2) Continuous attempts to suffocate civil society

The abuse of state power and the manipulation of the legal framework are the most frequent government methods for silencing any civil society voice that is contrary to its interests. The cancellation of legal status, the expropriation of assets, the criminalization of representatives and institutional activities, the loss of nationality, forced exile etc. have been the tactics used to suffocate civil society until it disappears. One of the most frequent targets of reprisals has been the Church. This only makes the government's level of desperation more apparent; its most effective tool is to sow fear among the population in order to remain in power.

### 3) The concern of the international community takes on greater relevance

Since the government crackdown of 2018, the international community has been willing to collaborate in the restoration of democracy and the establishment of minimum guarantees for human rights in the country. Although no firm results have yet been achieved, it is encouraging that international sanctions and frequent condemnation of government actions have generated sporadic

adjustments in the levels of repression to prevent the country from remaining completely isolated from the international community. It is important to highlight that the international community has been one of the first instances to identify and highlight the role of the Church in the country and the continuous forms of repression of which it is a victim.

## Further useful reports

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

## External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: cancellation - <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/08/19/americas/nicaragua-ban-church-organization-civil-society-intl-latam/index.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: sentenced - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2024-04/nicaragua-11-evangelical-pastors-sentenced.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: released - <https://adfinternational.org/news/nicaragua-leaders-released#:~:text=The%2011%20pastors%20and%20ministry%20leaders%20are%20now%20safe%20in,Guatemala%E2%80%9D%20following%20their%20unjust%20detention>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: prohibited - <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2024/03/30/el-regimen-de-daniel-ortega-desplego-un-mega-operativo-con-miles-de-policias-para-evitar-procesiones-de-semana-santa/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: resilience - [https://www.eldebate.com/religion/iglesia/20241126/catolicos-confinados-nicaragua-iglesia-unica-institucion-supone-riesgo-regimen\\_247230.html](https://www.eldebate.com/religion/iglesia/20241126/catolicos-confinados-nicaragua-iglesia-unica-institucion-supone-riesgo-regimen_247230.html)
- Specific examples of positive developments: ICHR - [https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media\\_center/preleases/2024/189.asp&utm\\_content=country-nic&utm\\_term=class-mon](https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/preleases/2024/189.asp&utm_content=country-nic&utm_term=class-mon)
- Specific examples of positive developments: UNHCR - <https://www.oacnudh.org/oacnudh-celebra-la-liberacion-de-sacerdotes-y-exige-fin-a-la-persecucion-religiosa/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: non-governmental organizations - <https://colectivodhnicaragua.org/campana-libertad-de-religion-y-creencias/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: church councils - <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/106971/iglesia-catolica-en-nicaragua-celam-anuncia-jornada-de-oracion>
- Persecution engines description: Freedom in the World 2024 Index - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nicaragua/freedom-world/2024>

- Persecution engines description: Corruption Perceptions Index 2023 - <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/nicaragua>
- Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.00 points): IRFR 2023 Nicaragua - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nicaragua/>
- Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points): IRFR 2023 Nicaragua - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nicaragua/>
- Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.50 points): Nicaragua 2024 - Country Update - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-06/2024%20Nicaragua%20Country%20Update.pdf>
- Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points): IRFR 2023 Nicaragua - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nicaragua/>
- Block 4.15: Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment. (4.00 points): OHCHR Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua - <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/033/27/pdf/g2403327.pdf>
- Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (4.00 points): Infobae - <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2024/08/24/daniel-ortega-ya-expulso-al-25-de-los-curas-de-nicaragua-y-muchas-iglesias-se-quedan-sin-parrocos/>
- Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (4.00 points): elimination of pension funds - <https://www.ncregister.com/cna/dictatorship-in-nicaragua-eliminates-priests-retirement-fund>
- Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.75 points): Nicaragua: A Persecuted Church? - <https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AGU014jXphMJx-s&cid=0838F7F6F8B60838&id=838F7F6F8B60838%21136066&parId=root&o=OneUp>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Georgetown, GWPSI Nicaragua profile - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/nicaragua/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: IRFR 2021 Nicaragua - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/NICARAGUA-2021-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: OAS, July 9, 2021 - [https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media\\_center/PReleases/2021/171.asp](https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2021/171.asp)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Nicaragua - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nicaragua/>