

World
Watch
Research

Colombia: Full Country Dossier

December 2021



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Colombian woman (c) Open Doors International

Introduction

World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes 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 conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Colombia

Brief country details

Colombia: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
50,576,000	48,011,000	94.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Map of country



Colombia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	68	30
WWL 2021	67	30
WWL 2020	62	41
WWL 2019	58	47
WWL 2018	56	49

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Colombia: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Organized corruption and crime	Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials, Political parties
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials, Violent religious groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Secular intolerance	Government officials, Ideological pressure groups, Political parties

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

Church leaders are being threatened, harassed, extorted and even murdered as a result of the increased territorial control and violence perpetrated by non-state actors (such as guerrillas and other criminal groups) especially in the rural and other most neglected areas in the country. In most cases, this violence is the direct result of Christians being involved in such activities as: a) denouncing corruption and violence, b) working for the defense of human and environmental rights; c) working among youth; d) assisting in the restoration of peace; e) opposing criminal activities in sermons; and f) any kind of action defying the de facto authority of local criminal groups or that might endanger their illegal activities.

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, some church leaders supporting demonstrators in the recent protests also faced threats and violence. In indigenous communities, there is significant opposition towards Christian missionaries and indigenous converts, who, as a result, face imprisonment, physical abuse, denial of basic rights, and are often hindered from making use of their ancestral territory, among other forms of punishment. In addition, because of the growing radical secularism, there is an increasing intolerance towards Christian views in the public sphere especially about issues concerning life, family, marriage and religious liberty. Christians speaking in public about their beliefs are sometimes targeted for supposedly being discriminatory and

using hate-speech. For this reason, some of them choose to self-censor in order not to become targets of said accusations.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Colombia 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)

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

- Christians are targeted by militias for expressing their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face restrictions in employment in the public sector and experience discrimination in the private sector (ICCPR Arts. 25 and 26, and ICESCR Art. 6)
- Christians face harassment and violence if they discuss their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **November 2020 – Northern Colombia:** Paramilitary groups have been [closing churches](#) throughout northern Colombia. As reported by Voice of the Martyrs (16 November 2020), 60 churches have been closed down in the states of Antioquia, Bolívar, Chocó and Cordova. Many of these churches and pastors' homes were marked with the initials of the paramilitary group Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC). Many of the congregations also received official letters from the AGC, threatening them and ordering them to close. Also, they impeded other pastors from conducting worship services and home-visits.
- **March 2021 - Buenaventura:** Bishop Jaramillo received [death threats](#) due to his solidarity and interest in the life of Buenaventura's ordinary citizens. A priest had been informed that money was offered to assassinate him. On social media, a message was also circulated about a bomb being prepared for targeting him. (Aleteia, 5 March 2021)
- **March 2021 - Tolima:** On International Women's Day on 8 March 2021, a group of radical feminists [broke down](#) the doors of the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Tolima while parishioners were inside and covered the walls of the building with graffiti.
- **July 2021 - Magdalena:** According to country sources, 23 Christians were detained by indigenous leaders in Seynwra. They had gone out of the community to meet with other Christians to pray in a nearby area.

Specific examples of positive developments

- **Religious freedom:** Since the implementation of the Comprehensive Public Policy on Religious Freedom and Worship (2017) at the national level, various municipalities have made progress in promoting and protecting religious freedom in their communities.
- **COVID-19 programs:** Due to the acute crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it, churches have reinforced their strategies to reach the most vulnerable. New and diverse [programs](#) (Agenzia Fides, 19 December 2020), campaigns (Vatican News, 25 February 2021) and [missionary activities](#) (Agenzia Fides, 22 July 2021) have been implemented to provide medical, material and spiritual assistance, especially to the communities located in the areas most exposed to violence. Similarly, churches have made efforts to raise awareness among the population to motivate solidarity.

External Links - Situation in brief

- 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: closing churches - <https://www.facebook.com/306800529496451/posts/1750432685133221/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: death threats - <https://es.aleteia.org/2021/03/05/obispo-amenazado-de-muerte-la-verdadera-muerte-es-quedarse-callado/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: broke down - http://www.fides.org/en/news/69772-AMERICA_COLOMBIA_Rite_of_reparation_in_the_Cathedral_of_Ibague_after_the_desecration_of_March_8
- Specific examples of positive developments: programs - http://www.fides.org/en/news/69261-AMERICA_COLOMBIA_The_communities_of_the_department_of_Guainia_thank_the_Church_for_its_help_during_the_pandemic
- Specific examples of positive developments: missionary activities - http://www.fides.org/en/news/70546-AMERICA_COLOMBIA_Violence_in_Antioquia_religious_communities_ask_to_respect_the_right_to_peace

WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Colombia

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/americas/colombia/	2 August 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19390026	2 August 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-COL.html	2 August 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/colombia/	2 August 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf	2 August 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	2 August 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index (Colombia is not included)	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/colombia/freedom-world/2021	2 August 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	https://freedomhouse.org/country/colombia/freedom-net/2020	2 August 2021
Garda World country report	Garda World	https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/colombia	2 August 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/colombia	2 August 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	https://www.internetworldstats.com/south.htm#co	2 August 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	https://rsf.org/en/colombia	2 August 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/col	2 August 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI	http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/COL	2 August 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/colombia/	2 August 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports (Colombia is not included)	USCIRF 2021	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank country report	World Bank	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/colombia	2 August 2021

Recent history

Colombia became independent from Spain after a period of struggle in the years 1810-1819. The Santa Fe Independence Act was signed in 1810 and there followed six battles in the war of independence. The most famous was Battle of Boyacá fought on 7 August 1819, won by the revolutionary forces under Simón Bolívar.

Current President Ivan Duque of the Democratic Center Party won the elections in June 2018, and is tasked with dealing with the many challenges arising from the implementation of the Agreement for the Final Termination of the Conflict between the Colombian State and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) [signed](#) in 2016, during the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos (High Commissioner for Peace, 24 November 2016). The peace process is still being hindered by difficulties with Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace, known as the [JEP](#) court system (AS/COA, 3 August 2018), and by guerrilla and paramilitary groups and criminal gangs. The main guerrilla groups are the National Liberation Army (ELN) and rebels from the FARC who decided to resume the five decades long armed conflict.

Towards the end of 2019, nationwide [demonstrations](#) took place which were led by students, indigenous leaders and unions. The protests focused on political, social, economic and security issues (The Guardian, 4 December 2019). During the demonstrations that continued in 2020, the protestors were joined by [illegal groups](#) such as the ELN (La Opinion, 24 September 2020). Widespread dissatisfaction with President Iván Duque's administration increased greatly. The compulsory isolation measures which were introduced to combat the spread of the COVID-19

virus also had a negative impact on the economy and in other areas.

In April 2021, [nationwide demonstrations](#) took place once again, driven first by the rejection of a tax reform proposal and continued later in response to the government's violent action against protesters (New York Times, 27 May 2021). Despite [dialogue](#) commencing between the government and Colombia's National Strike Committee (CNP), made up mainly of unions, the protests were suspended by the CNP because concrete agreements were not reached (La Prensa Latina, 6 June 2021). The country is currently preparing for the 2022 legislative and presidential elections.

Political and legal landscape

In November 2019, thousands of citizens [protested](#) against various political reforms (and rumors of cuts to pensions and public education) and called for a general strike (Al-Jazeera, 26 November 2019). In response, the president set up a "[national dialogue](#)" (Semana, 3 July 2020) and for four months he spoke with strike leaders and others to discuss the issues at stake. Many of the protesters' demands were deemed "unfeasible" by the government. Although many citizens threatened to restart the demonstrations, these did not materialize immediately due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As mentioned above, in April 2021, despite COVID-19 assembly restrictions, nationwide demonstrations took place once again. In light of the government's violent action against protesters, in June 2021 the CNP suspended all strikes in an attempt to save lives. However, this move was not approved by the protesters themselves, who said they did not feel represented by the CNP. The economic and social policies adopted during the pandemic were insufficient to alleviate unemployment and poverty or to improve public health services and also caused an increase in the population's distrust of the political class. The widespread [dissatisfaction](#) with President Iván Duque's administration was shown in a survey in May 2021, in which his popularity fell to the lowest level ever, going from 20% in April 2021 to 18% in May 2021 (Invamer, 24 May 2021). According to Invamer, Gustavo Petro, leader of the country's left-wing movement, leads the polls for the 2022 presidential election (El Espectador, 6 December 2021). Although it is too early to make any predictions about the next election, it is a clear sign of discontent with the current government.

Apart from the protests, the implementation of peace agreements and the fight against corruption are still the most dominant issues for the government. The peace process is slower than expected and between December 2019 and November 2020, 28% of the provisions were fully implemented, in contrast to 26% in 2019. 18% of provisions were at an intermediate level of progress and on track to be completed in the established time. Another 35% of the provisions had only just been started and the remaining 19% of the provisions [had yet begun](#) (Matriz de Acuerdos de Paz Iniciativa Barómetro & Instituto Kroc de Estudios Internacionales, 21 May 2021).

The ex-combatants grouped in the political party named Partido Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (known as FARC), will now [call](#) themselves simply "Comunes" since FARC has too many negative associations due to the more than half a century of armed conflict (PanamPost, 25 January 2021). However, this has not prevented the party's [internal crisis](#), which could soon lead

to a split (El Tiempo, October 2021).

The [United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia](#) verified the killings of 14 former FARC-EP combatants during September 2021, bringing the total since the signing of the Final Agreement to 283 men and 9 women. Although the killing of former combatants decreased during 2021 (44) compared with the same period in 2020 (53), risks, including threats, continue to affect their reintegration and some former combatants have been forced to relocate (UN Mission in Colombia, September 2021). [Indepaz](#) reported that, as of 8 November 2021, 44 signatories of the peace agreements (all ex-combatants) had been murdered or had disappeared (Indepaz, December 2021). The assassination of leaders and ex-combatants has hindered the implementation of the Final Agreement and affected the general perception of its practicality. Likewise, the murder of leaders of the National Program for the Substitution of Crops for Illicit Use has continued. Levels of fear in many communities are high due to the presence of members of the ELN, FARC and other criminal groups (See below: *Security situation*).

The legal framework and the policies to fight corruption are weak. According to HRW 2021, government security forces were accused of collaborating with or tolerating the activities of criminal gangs, which included some former paramilitary members. The report also stated that the judicial system was overburdened and inefficient, and that corruption and the intimidation of judges, prosecutors and witnesses were hindering the judicial process.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights made an official visit to Colombia in [June 2021](#) and announced it was setting up a 'Special Follow-up Mechanism on Human Rights Matters for Colombia'. It also acknowledged the openness of the Colombian government to international scrutiny, noting the serious human rights violations in the latest demonstrations and the various obstacles for guaranteeing the right to protest (CIDH, June 2021).

Similarly, the [United Nations](#) has repeatedly expressed concern about the human rights situation in various parts of Colombia during the latest protests and has called for compliance with the regulatory framework governing the use of force that includes the principles of legality, precaution, necessity, proportionality and accountability (HCHR, 22 July 2021). The United Nations has also [reiterated](#) their concern regarding the persistent threats, attacks and killings targeting community and social leaders, including women leaders and those from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities (UN, November 2021).

Relationships with the Andean Community, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Pacific Alliance have also been maintained and strengthened. In April 2020, Colombia officially became the [37th member](#) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 28 April 2020). Finally, Colombia [joined](#) other Latin American countries in the Forum for the Progress of South America (ProSur) in supporting initiatives for the adoption of a global response to pandemics (Andina, 26 May 2020).

Men and women have equal rights in relation to marriage, divorce and guardianship of children ([OECD, 2019](#)). Legislation is insufficient concerning child marriage however, permitting marriage of children over 14 with parental approval (Civil Code 1974). 23% of girls are married by 18 and according to [Girls Not Brides](#) (accessed 2 August 2021), these unions are more prevalent among Indigenous and Black/Afro-Colombia communities. As part of the 2016 peace agreement be-

tween the government and FARC, gender and women’s rights provisions were included in the peace deal. Progress in implementing these provisions has, however, been slow and women continue to face high levels of insecurity and violence; female human rights defenders are particularly vulnerable to attack ([Georgetown, 2019/20, p.48](#)).

Military service is mandatory for men in Colombia for a period of 18-24 months. There are some exemptions, such as physically or cognitively impaired people or some indigenous groups ([War Resisters International](#), 20 October 2017). Other groups such as religious leaders are also exempt in peace time.

It is important to note that in the political context, religious communities (including Christians) are still considered valid social actors in the promotion of dialogue and peace. They have functioned as active participants in some departmental and national public policies, although this has also caused criticism from secularists and made them targets for acts of aggression.

Religious landscape

Colombia: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	48,011,000	94.9
Muslim	27,500	0.1
Hindu	12,300	0.0
Buddhist	2,300	0.0
Ethno-religionist	314,000	0.6
Jewish	5,000	0.0
Bahai	83,600	0.2
Atheist	145,000	0.3
Agnostic	1,439,000	2.8
Other	536,500	1.1
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

The [1991 Constitution](#) guarantees the freedom of religion and states that every person enjoys the right to profess their own belief individually or collectively (Article 19). There is no official state religion; all religious denominations are equal by law, nonetheless, the state maintains a concordat with the Holy See and an internal legal agreement entitled [Decree 354](#) (Mininterior, 19 February 1998) with 13 non-Catholic Christian groups (El Heraldo, 2 August 2019). Among other things, this decree gives legally binding recognition of marriages and the guarantee that property used for worship cannot be seized by the state.

Churches that do not join those covered by Decree 354 may choose to request recognition of their legal status and be registered in the Public Registry of the Ministry of Interior. This will allow them to collect funds, receive donations, establish religious education institutions, perform religious services (excluding legally registered marriages) and directly enter into agreements with public or private entities, foundations, national and/or international organizations for the development of social and educational projects. However, according to the US State Department (IRFR 2020), unregistered entities may still perform religious activities without penalty but may not collect funds or receive donations. This implies a disadvantage for these church groups since they do not enjoy the same benefits granted to recognized churches.

The state has continued to recognize the religious sector as being an important element in establishing peace in the country and has called for the active participation of churches and faith-based organizations in different scenarios. However, despite public recognition of the religious sector, there still exists a general rejection of public religious expression, especially if these come from public officers, including high profile public representatives like the [president](#) (El Espectador, 7 August 2020) or [vice president](#) (Corte Constitucional de Colombia, 4 May 2021). In the WWL 2021 reporting period, the courts attempted to ban expressions of personal faith made by local government staff on social media networks, in the belief this is necessary for adhering to the secular principle of Church-State separation. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, a judge refused to marry two women, claiming that same-sex union goes against "Christian morality." After a legal action, another judge [reversed](#) that decision and urged him to fulfill his duties. To date, the judge has not complied with the ruling due to a procedural impediment (Infobae, 21 October 2020). Additionally, the Constitutional Court of Colombia is [reviewing](#) the case of Kika Nieto, who was censored for sharing online (on YouTube) her religious beliefs about marriage (ADF International, 19 April 2021). Previously, a court had already ordered the removal of the video. Similarly, organizations in defense of life have denounced [censorship](#) in spaces for dialogue promoted by political parties (Aciprensa, 24 April 2021).

From mid-March to 15 July 2020, social isolation measures were imposed throughout the nation in attempt to counter the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Throughout this period, church activities were suspended even though various sectors of the economy could resume operations from mid-April onwards. Although the government authorized the mobility of religious leaders, illegal armed groups maintained strong mobility limitations in rural areas despite state permission. Since September 2020, the [reopening](#) of Catholic churches for religious services was authorized in all municipalities, regardless of the level of COVID-19 infection in response to the Legislative Decree 1168 (Vatican News, 1 September 2020). Due to the lockdown, many Christians were unable to receive pastoral care and relatives were at times unable to [bury](#) their dead according to Christian rites due to the practice of mandatory cremation (El Tiempo, 29 June 2020). It is worth noting that some (mainly Protestant) churches refused to [obey](#) the restrictions imposed and were fined as a result (La Silla Vacía, 22 March 2020).

The Episcopal Conference of Colombia followed government orders by stating that during January 2021 churches would not be [re-opened](#) in the cities where curfews and other restrictions were in place. The Conference also made it clear that it was up to each Bishop in his respective jurisdiction to determine the procedures to be followed in accordance with the local authorities (Infobae, 9 January 2021). In addition, some religious leaders chose to [promote](#)

vaccination as a way to combat the spread of the Coronavirus (Vatican News, September 2021).

During the protests and turmoil described in the political and legal landscape, various churches and faith based organizations in the country - including [Catholic](#) (Religion Digital, 7 May 2021), [Mennonite](#) (Justapaz, 6 May 2021), [Methodist](#) (SEMIR, 5 May 2021) and [Evangelical](#) (Protestante Digital, 6 May 2021) churches - issued pronouncements supporting the peaceful mobilization of citizens calling for peace and reconciliation and/or condemning the violent action by the security forces against the protesters. Around forty religious leaders of various denominations [met](#) with Colombian President Iván Duque to seek possible solutions to the conflict (Diócesis de Cucuta, 10 May 2021). The Catholic Church offered to be [dialogue mediator](#) between the National Unemployment Committee and the National Government (Radio Nacional, 5 May 2021). With the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Catholic Church also set up a [platform](#) for dialogue among the younger generation who led the protests (Vatican News, 6 June 2021).

In Cali, one of the main areas of protest violence, leaders of different churches headed by evangelical pastors formed "[The Ecumenical Frontline](#)" (Hoy, 31 May 2021). It rejects all acts of violence and seeks to address the human rights crisis, rejecting violence and denouncing the abuses of the security forces.

Amid the recent protests and violence, churches have also been targets of vandalism and other forms of attack. For instance, the police illegally occupied facilities belonging to a [Roman Catholic school](#) in Bosa (Agencia de periodismo investigativo, 5 May 2021).

Additionally, in areas co-opted by guerrillas and other criminal groups, the Roman Catholic Church has also sought to promote dialogue with armed groups in an attempt to end the continuing violence and insecurity. The Church has also played an active role in the education of young people, helping prevent them from enlisting in the various criminal/guerrilla groups in the country. Such activity often places church leaders involved in politics and social activism in danger. Especially in areas co-opted by guerrillas and other criminal groups, there were reports of death threats, forced displacement, mobility limitations, the forced prohibition or holding of religious services and church burglary (See below: *Security situation*).

A special note about 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' in indigenous communities:

Within indigenous communities, the religious factor is an important component of their culture and identity and shapes their relationships with other people and even natural resources. As in many indigenous communities in Latin America, the religious practices are mostly related to syncretistic practices adapted from Roman Catholic rites. In some cases, they identify themselves as Catholics and indigenous leaders tend to be more receptive to the presence of Roman Catholic members than with Christians from other denominations. However, any type of preaching or religious activity requires permission from the leaders. Anything going against the customs of the ethnic group will be punished. Due to the general acceptance of Catholic traditions inside indigenous communities, most 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' are of Protestant or Evangelical origin.

In indigenous communities, Christian's face opposition where they reject the religious practices and customs of the ethnic group to which they belong. This has led to indigenous leaders often seeing Christian influences from outside as a destabilizing element. Since ethnic leaders are those who administer justice in their territories, religious freedom of indigenous people is not duly guaranteed by local (state) authorities where it concerns a religion differing from the community one. Therefore - and only with regard to indigenous people - those adhering to 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' refer in this country dossier to those Christians who refuse to follow the ancestral or traditional beliefs of the ethnic group to which they belong because it contradicts their faith. Thus, when syncretistic religious customs related to Roman Catholic rites (or ancestral religious customs that worship nature) are practiced in the indigenous community, they refuse to participate and consequently face hostility and rejection. (See below: *Clan oppression*.)

Economic landscape

According to UNDP's HDI 2020:

- **Gross national income per capita (2019):** 14,257
- **GNI per capita:** 11,594 for women; 17,018 for men
- **Inequality in income** is 35.5%
- **Population vulnerable to multidimensional poverty** is 6.2%

According to the World Bank:

- After accelerating to 3.3 percent in 2019, economic growth was on track to accelerate further in 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic hit the economy hard, causing the worst recession in almost half a century. Different fiscal measures mitigated the impact on the economy of COVID-19 and of the public health measures taken to contain its spread. Yet, the economy contracted 6.8 percent in 2020.

Unemployment and Economic growth:

- According to the Unemployment Rates Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the unemployment rate [decreased](#) to 13.7% in the country (OECD, July 2021). Growth was on track to accelerate further in 2020, but the COVID-19 crisis affected private consumption and investment. Among other factors, the COVID-19 restrictions and the global economic contraction caused the economy to enter a deep recession.
- According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics, after several months of contraction, GDP for the third quarter [grew](#) 13.2% when compared to the same period last year. (Valora Analitik, November 2021). For September 2021, the unemployment rate was 12.1%, which represented a [reduction](#) of 3.7 percentage points compared to the same month in 2020, when it was 15.8% (Camara de Comercio de Bogota, October 2021)
- The Colombia report January-June 2021, carried out by the Circle of Latin American Studies-CESLA [indicates](#) that many jobs were lost permanently, foreign trade was reactivated in the first half of 2021 (CESLA, June 2021). In May 2021, the main imported products were gasoline, mobile phones, corn, vaccines against COVID-19 and other medicines. Additionally, it points out that, in terms of fiscal policy, the first semester of 2021 was mark-

ed by the failure of the tax reform project.

The latest tax proposal, called the "Sustainable Solidarity Law", presented to counteract the budget gap that had worsened during the pandemic was [withdrawn](#) by the president due to the continuing protests and violence (BBC News, 2 May 2021).

Like everyone else in the country, Christians also suffer from the economic setbacks. In some rural areas, Christian families face mobility restrictions imposed by illegal groups, which limit their access to their crops and other livelihood activities such as fishing. Even though fraught with challenges and danger, church humanitarian [assistance](#) to vulnerable sectors of the population has been possible (Vatican News, 15 April 2020). This has helped ease the strain on government resources in some areas caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

In general, women remain the most economically vulnerable. Over the past decades, significant improvements have been made in relation to education opportunities for girls, such that there is now gender parity ([UNDP, 2019](#)). Whilst women continue to have fewer work opportunities, the number of women in the workforce is also on the rise ([Borgen Project, 2020](#)). However, it remains challenging for women to attain high profile positions, such as governmental posts; candidates are also vulnerable to threats and attacks ([The Guardian, 1 October 2019](#)). Men face economic challenges as the primary financial providers and are often targeted for extortion and fines.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Mestizo and White 87.6%, Afro-Colombian (includes Mulatto, Raizal, and Palenquero) 6.8%, Amerindian 4.3%, unspecified 1.4% (2018 est.).
- **Main language:** Spanish
- **Urban population:** Approximately 81.7% of the total population
- **Literacy rate:** 95.1% .
- **Population below poverty line:** 35.7%.

According to World Bank:

- **Education:** The school enrollment for pre-primary (2011) is 55.53%; for primary (2018) is 114,527% and for secondary (2018) is 97.506%. The duration of compulsory education is 12 years (2019).
- **School Gender Parity Index (GPI) (2018):** 1.013. This refers to the ratio of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.
- **Unemployment:** 15.04%
- **IDPs/Refugees:** 189, 889 (2020). Colombia has received a massive influx of Venezuelan immigrants. According to [official](#) government information, as of August 2021, more than 1,842,390 Venezuelans were in Colombia (Migracion, 31 August 2021).

According to the UNDP's HDI 2020:

- **HDI score and ranking:** Colombia's HDI value for 2019 is 0.767, which put the country in the 'high' human development category, ranking 83rd out of 189 countries and territories.
- **Life expectancy:** 77.3 years (2019). Between 1990 and 2019, Colombia's life expectancy at birth increased by 7.5 years.
- **Gender inequality:** Colombia has a 2019 Gender Inequality Index value of 0.428, ranking it 101st out of 162 countries. The labor force participation rate for women is 57.3%, compared to 80.9% for men.

According to the most recent National Population and [Housing Census](#) published in 2018 by The National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE, 30 June 2018), 4.4% of the Colombian population regard themselves as indigenous: 1,905,617 citizens (distributed in 115 native indigenous people distributed over a large part of the national territory), a rise of 1% compared to the 2005 Census. The State recognizes the autonomy and self-determination of indigenous groups, which means that the indigenous populations establish and regulate their norms of coexistence. Hence, ethnic leaders attempt to impose a lifestyle regulated by their ancestral customs and act as the only authority in the area.

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, the COVID-19 crisis increased the vulnerability of the most neglected and poorest sections of society. Faced with unemployment, it was the poorest communities and the informal sector which have suffered most severely. The most vulnerable sectors, especially the rural and indigenous sectors, do not have minimum development conditions, public services and social infrastructure. State support is often so low or endemic corruption between criminal groups and local authorities is so rooted that it adds to the continuity of multidimensional poverty and often to a greater presence of illegal and armed groups. In most cases, violence is most acute in rural areas.

The pandemic also led to an increase in alleged cases of police abuse. In the cities, a large proportion of employment is informal, and many street vendors felt compelled to work despite restrictions that ordered them to stay at home; some reported to organizations, such as [International Crisis Group](#) (ICG), harassment by the police if they did not give the agents a part of their profits (ICG, 14 September 2020). Research shows arrests and other penalties for public health violations rose considerably more in low-income areas than in more affluent areas. The inhabitants of the areas under the control of armed groups, and particularly the youth, have paid a high cost. During the year 2021, the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) has paid attention to 121 minors who had been [recruited](#) by illegal armed groups in the national territory (RCN Radio, 11 October 2021). Even during the last riots in the country, the most affected also ended up being the most vulnerable areas since due to the roadblocks there were serious problems in the [supply](#) of food and medicine (Connectas, July 2021).

The last demonstrations have highlighted once again the issue of human rights violations in the country. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and its Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (RELE) have expressed their [deepest concern](#) over the seriousness and high number of complaints of human rights violations resulting from the excessive use of force in the context of social protests (IACHR, 7 May 2021).

Christians are a majority in the country and several Christian communities and church leaders are active in many of the poorer sectors of society, for instance, in education and in the provision of basic goods for the neediest families, especially given the current acute economic and social crisis. The Catholic bishops of Colombia appealed for [solidarity](#) to combat the alarming rate of unemployment due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Especially in the WWL 2022 reporting period, such social involvement has put many Christians at particular risk, as discussed below in *Security situation*.

Colombia operates according to patriarchal norms, whereby men are the primary financial providers and women assume a greater share of domestic chores. A 2015 study on social acceptance of violence against women reveals that social attitudes concerning gender are changing; in 2014, 31% of respondents believed that men should be the head of the household, compared to 45% in 2009 ([Proyectamos Colombia, 2015](#)). Domestic violence nonetheless remains widespread in Colombia, and the rate of femicides has reportedly increased in the context of COVID-19 ([Al-Jazeera, 20 October 2020](#)).

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 73.8% penetration - survey date: December 2020
- **Facebook usage:** 72.9% penetration – survey date: December 2020

According to World Bank:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 131.672 per 100 people
Data by [Statista \(2021\)](#) reveals that men and women use social media at an equal rate. Mobile internet usage is also very similar, with 52% of men accessing the Internet through a mobile device, versus 48% of women (Statista, 2019). This indicates that Christian men and women have a similar level of access to digital Christian resources and community.

According to Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020:

- Colombia is a partly free country (Score 65): The key Internet controls reported were the blocking of political, social or religious content, and the arrest and imprisonment of bloggers for posting political or social content. Some bloggers were physically attacked (including being killed in custody). Other critics and human right organizations experienced digital attacks.

According to Reporters Without Borders (World Press Freedom 2021):

- Colombia continues to be one of the western hemisphere's most dangerous countries for journalists, who are still the frequent targets of death threats, physical attacks, abduction and murder. Coverage of such subjects as the environment, public order, armed conflicts, corruption or collusion between politicians and illegal armed groups elicits systematic harassment, intimidation and violence. Journalists also continue to be permanently threatened by "bacrim," gangs of former paramilitaries now involved in drug trafficking. Rebel armed groups such as the ELN and FARC dissidents try to silence alternative and com-

munity media that cover their activities, leading to the creation of information “black holes”, especially in rural areas and areas near the Venezuelan and Ecuadorean borders.

During lockdown, Christian groups have used online media and technology to continue evangelizing. The restrictions imposed on mobility and gathering for worship have forced many church leaders and their congregations to become familiar with virtual communication platforms in order to remain in contact. Such online platforms have also exposed them to insulting and intolerant action by ideological groups and others during online Christian events open to the wider public.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that in rural areas, such as Nudo de Paramillo and Catatumbo, armed groups require Christians to disclose all contacts, messages and other information on their mobile phones. This monitoring can put others and the Christians themselves at risk.

Security situation

According to the [2020 Report](#) of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the high levels of violence are generating serious human rights violations (UNHCHR, February-March 2020). Of particular concern were attacks against human rights defenders, indigenous peoples, and an increase in cases of alleged arbitrary deprivation of life, as well as grave human rights violations committed against children in the context of violence and armed conflict. OHCHR registered 36 'massacres', 6 of which caused 133 deaths, the highest number recorded by the Office since 2014. The departments most affected were Antioquia, Cauca and Norte de Santander, where ongoing disputes to control illicit economies were a major cause of this violence. [Insight Crime](#) also adds Nariño as another Colombian department most impacted by the spike of violence (Insight Crime, 12 July 2021).

The Institute of Studies for Development and Peace-[Indepaz](#) has recorded that from 1 January – 30 September 2021, 131 social leaders or human rights defenders have been assassinated (Indepaz, 30 September 2021). In addition, there were 74 '[massacres](#)', causing 263 deaths, in the period January to September 2021 (Indepaz, 30 September 2021).

In some instances, violence has been reported as a result of [abuses](#) by the national police and armed forces. For instance, in the case of the [disproportionate](#) use of force against demonstrators (MAPP/OEA, 4 May 2021). it is noteworthy that the national police are not under the command of the Ministry of the Interior or Justice, but under the Ministry of Defense, a legacy of the country's long internal armed conflict. Calls for reform have often proposed that the police force be moved out of the Defense Ministry to ensure strict civil scrutiny and ensure that civilian courts handle serious [abuse](#) cases (ICG, 14 September 2020).

The main perpetrators of violence are organized armed groups, namely the ELN, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC), FARC units that did not accept the peace process and FARC members who have decided to return to fight the government. In addition to these groups, there are criminal groups referred to as "Organized Armed Groups" (GAO - formerly known as BACRIM). The variety of groups, some having connections with Mexican cartels, means there is a continual struggle for gaining territory and power. There are so-called 'invisible borders' demarcated by armed groups, especially in the

Pacific area, South of Bolívar, Catatumbo and Bajo Cauca.

According to the [UNHCHR](#) (February-March 2020), the ELN operates mainly in Antioquia, Arauca, Cauca, Chocó, Norte de Santander and Nariño, the EPL in Cauca and Norte de Santander, and groups composed of former members of FARC-EP in Caquetá, Meta and Guaviare. The AGC, the Chaparros and La Mafia, and other transnational criminal organizations operate mainly in Antioquia, Cauca, Chocó, Córdoba, Guainía, Huila, La Guajira, Magdalena, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo and Valle del Cauca. The United Nations reported that in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, illegal armed groups and criminals [imposed](#) their own social control measures (UN News, 14 July 2020), such as setting up illegal checkpoints and [using violence](#) against people breaching lockdown rules (Human Rights Watch, 15 July 2020). Many of these activities have not been reported and registered not only out of fear of retaliation but also due to the travel restrictions imposed by the government. State-run schools were also closed from March 2020 due to the pandemic, creating new opportunities for armed groups to [take](#) children from their homes for recruitment purposes (ICG, 2 December 2020).

Families participating in the 'National Comprehensive Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops' continued to be subjected to threats and killings. This is especially worrying considering that the area planted with coca was 143,000 hectares as of 31 December 2020, 7% less than the 154,000 hectares reported in 2019 ([UNODC](#), 'Monitoring of territories affected by illicit crops 2020', July 2021). Nevertheless, levels of cocaine production remain unchanged. For the last five years, coca crops have been particularly concentrated in border areas and in geostrategic areas for cocaine trafficking. Of the 20 departments registered with coca in 2020, five made up 84% of the total area with coca, namely Norte de Santander, Nariño, Putumayo, Cauca and Antioquia. Norte de Santander has the largest area for coca crops (40,084 hectares in 2020), a reduction of 4% compared to 2019; Nariño has the second largest plantation area with approximately 9,000 hectares.

When guerrillas or criminal groups take possession of a town or community for drug trafficking or plantation use, one of the first steps they take is to exert their authority over the local population through violence. Additionally, these groups seek to recruit young men, women and even children, especially those located in the poorest and neglected areas of the country. Guerrillas and other criminal groups controlling territory constantly try to silence those who represent an obstacle to their illegal activities. Community leaders, including church leaders, thus become victims of violence. The risk is greater for leaders involved in promoting human rights, denouncing corruption and participating in politics or in activities that seek to influence the population (especially young people). Assassinations and threats transmit a clear [message](#) to the local population: "'Remain silent, leave your land, do not defend your rights', or: 'Stay within the invisible borders demarcated by the armed groups'" (ICG, 6 October 2020).

The impact of violence and insecurity generated by these groups often causes families and entire communities to be displaced. The number of people affected by such displacement already reached more than 57,100 people in 2021 and has doubled and even tripled the total number of people displaced annually since 2012. The main affected areas are ethnic communities in the departments of the Pacific coast and the northwest of the country. So far only [18%](#) of displaced persons have been able to return to their place of origin, while more than 46,900 people remain

displaced due to inadequate security conditions for their safe return (Humanitarian Advisory Team, September 2021).

Organizations such as the [International Committee of the Red Cross](#) (CICR) have indicated that in the period January - April 2021, there was an increase in the consequences of the at least five existing conflicts in the country (CICR, 8 July 2021). These consequences include:

- damage from explosive devices
- missing persons
- attacks on medical missions
- confinement and mass displacement.

On many occasions, church leaders have [called upon](#) the authorities to introduce measures to reduce the level of criminal activity in the poorest areas (Agenzia Findes, 26 January 2021). In the absence of 'normal' criminal activities during the COVID-19 crisis, criminal groups sought [other means](#) to secure funds - including theft, trafficking of medicines, extortion, forced recruitment and threats - by targeting Christians (and others) who do not align with their criminal philosophy (BBC News, 23 April 2020). The increased levels of control gained by criminal groups during the pandemic has made it easier for them to exert power over entire territories and in the process threaten church leaders advocating for peace and opposing criminal activity). This was again the case in the WWL 2022 reporting period with Christian religious leaders being [threatened](#) (Fides, 5 March 2021), receiving [death threats](#) (Vanguardia, 8 December 2020) and being [displaced](#) (FoRB, 1 December 2020) and/or attacked. Churches have also been burgled and vandalized.

Gender-based violence and trafficking continue to be widespread and utilized as weapons of conflict by armed groups ([USDS, Trafficking in Persons report, 2020](#)). According to Human Rights Watch, sexual violence is particularly endemic in the south-western municipality of Tumaco ([HRW, 2019](#)). Victims struggle to access meaningful justice and perpetrators commonly enjoy impunity (HRW 2021). Despite these dynamics, women's involvement in peace and security processes remains limited ([Georgetown, 2019/20](#)).

Forced recruitment of young adolescents (primarily boys) poses an ongoing threat to Christian communities. Reports indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has been exploited by criminal groups to upscale recruitment and gang activity ([COALICO, 2020](#); [OLIRE, 2020](#)). Refusing to join gangs is not an option, causing many to flee for fear of reprisals ([Open Doors International, 1 March 2021](#)). As highlighted in a [2018 World Watch Monitor report](#), Christian women and girls are at times sexually assaulted by armed groups as a means of punishing her male relative (commonly church leaders).

Trends analysis

1) The COVID-19 crisis increased the vulnerability of certain social sectors

The instability in the health service and in society in general (generated by the government's handling of the COVID-19 crisis) has particularly affected groups that were already vulnerable, such as indigenous peoples, human rights defenders, social and religious leaders, migrants and low-income citizens. This has often left them at the mercy of criminals who exercise local control of some areas of the country. When Christians are the victims of crime, their faith is often not recognized by the authorities as being a major cause of vulnerability.

2) The implementation of the Peace Agreement does not seem to be a priority despite the increase in violence

Despite the COVID-19 closure measures, violence and insecurity in the country have increased. Thus, the guerrillas have taken advantage of the crisis to build up strength and expose the major flaws in the implementation of the Peace Accord. This is an increasingly urgent issue because criminal groups can now act with greater levels of impunity since they have gained greater territorial control. This has also increased the risk that Christian activities will be hampered in areas where guerrilla and other criminal groups act as the sole authority.

3) There is little tolerance for public expressions of Christian faith

Although the critical eye of society is directed to any type of action in the public sphere, intolerance increases when it comes to Christian groups, especially if they are deemed to have connections with government circles or seek political representation. Despite the scale of the humanitarian relief carried out by churches during the COVID-19 crisis, this situation has not improved.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: signed - <http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/Documents/proceso-paz-farc-acuerdo-final.pdf>
- Recent history: JEP - <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/explainer-colombias-special-jurisdiction-peace-jep>
- Recent history: demonstrations - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/04/colombia-protest-duque-bogota>
- Recent history: illegal groups - <https://www.laopinion.com.co/colombia/comandante-urriel-del-eln-confirmino-infiltracion-en-ultimas-marchas-en-el-pais-203073>
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WWL 2022: Church information / Colombia

Christian origins

Christianity came to Colombia through Spain's conquest and colonization from 1492 onwards. The Roman Catholic Church was able to establish itself as the sole Christian denomination. After Colombia gained independence from Spain in 1810, the Vatican in Rome established formal relations with the new state in 1835. The Roman Catholic Church took on an increasing political presence in the country which caused much friction with the political leaders of the time. As a result, Catholics were persecuted and religious communities such as the Jesuits were expelled from the country in 1851 and 1861.

In 1877 the radical government's attempts to establish a 'neutral' educational system degenerated into civil war with the active participation of several bishops and clerics. In 1886 the relationship between Church and State was settled in a new constitution which recognized the Catholic Church as the basis for national unity.

The loss of Catholic hegemony began with the arrival of the Presbyterian Church in the middle of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century Baptists and other Protestants arrived. In the 1960s the religious landscape began to change visibly due to social, economic and cultural changes caused by modernization, urbanization and literacy. Pentecostalism came from the USA and became very popular and this new Christian diversity was recognized in 1991 in the new Constitution of Colombia.

Church spectrum today

Colombia: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	11,000	0.0
Catholic	43,583,000	90.8
Protestant	1,849,000	3.9
Independent	2,581,000	5.4
Unaffiliated	500,000	1.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-513,000	-1.1
Total	48,011,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,320,000	2.7
Renewalist movement	16,407,000	34.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

The main Christian denomination in Colombia is the Roman Catholic Church, representing 90.8% of all Christians according to WCD 2021 estimates, losing 0.2% affiliation in comparison with last year. Protestant church groups have gained strength and become more visible, particularly where so-called 'Mega-churches' have become established in many cities with congregations of thousands.

WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Colombia

Reporting period

1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

Position on the World Watch List

Colombia: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	68	30
WWL 2021	67	30
WWL 2020	62	41
WWL 2019	58	47
WWL 2018	56	49

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

After the fast upward trend of the previous reporting periods, in WWL 2022 the persecution situation has remained much more stable, increasing by only 1 point. There was a fall in the score for violence due to fewer reports of Christians being killed. However, other categories of violence showed increases. Average pressure increased, mainly due to criminal groups expanding their areas of control in society (taking advantage of the crises caused by the national strikes and COVID-19 measures). Christians in indigenous communities continued to face hostility, and religious intolerance increased in society in general.

Persecution engines

Colombia: 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	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Medium
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

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.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

The Corruption Perception Index (CPI 2020) ranks Colombia 92nd out of 180, with a 39/100 score (0= highly corrupt and 100= zero corruption). Despite the initial efforts in the implementation of the FARC peace agreement, almost 5 years after it signing, FARC dissidents, members of the ELN and other guerrilla groups (referred to as "[Illegal Armed Groups](#)" – Colombia reports, 3 October 2021) fight for control of entire regions to carry out their illegal activities. During the WWL 2022 reporting period this was especially happening in areas such as the Pacific coast and Colombia's border with Venezuela, where [illicit markets](#) related to smuggling, illegal crops, drug trafficking and illegal mining are being disputed by several criminal groups attempting to control those territories and worsening the humanitarian and security crisis (ICG, 26 February 2021).

This context has led to both church leaders and Christian groups being victims of systematic monitoring, abduction, threats, extortion, forced displacement and killings, as well as there being attacks against Christian buildings and direct threats against pastor's children (concerning rape or forced recruitment). These measures are especially addressed to Christians who actively oppose criminal activity, speak out defending human rights, preach to combatants and civilians, carry out prayer activities in particularly violent areas and discourage young people from joining criminal groups.

Criminal groups also retaliate against former guerrilla members who abandon crime as a result of their conversion to Christian faith. The strengthening of criminal networks and their active presence in many areas of the country at the beginning of the pandemic has allowed them to continue to be the de facto authorities in areas of the country where state activity is [almost nil](#) (La Vanguardia, 7 July 2020) and the use of corruption allows them to act with [impunity](#) (Transparencia por Colombia, July 2021). Criminals forced Christian leaders to guard entry and

exit points, to prevent virus transmission and to have an exact record of the number of inhabitants in their territories. Criminal groups also increased church monitoring to make sure anything that could harm their interests was prohibited, and they increased their harassment against Christians considered to be informants for police or other rival criminal groups. During the national strikes, many Christians living in rural areas were forced by criminal leaders to participate in demonstrations against the government because some public policies are endangering their illegal interests.

While indigenous people are often most affected by organized crime since their territory is commonly co-opted by drug traffickers and guerrillas, some indigenous leaders rely on criminal members to intimidate indigenous Christian converts to force them to return to the community's syncretistic practices. Further, the level of violence in such places is also very high as a result of clashes between government troops and criminal groups and due to fighting between criminal groups.

Clan oppression (Strong)

As described above in *Religious landscape* concerning 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' in indigenous communities, the religious factor is an important component of indigenous culture and identity. Religion in their communities is often related to syncretistic practices adapted from Roman Catholic rites. Any type of preaching or religious activity requires permission from the leaders and anything going against the customs of the ethnic group will be seen as a threat and punished.

Such punishments (especially of converts to 'non-accepted forms of Christianity'), which may also involve their families, can include imprisonment, imposition of fines, physical abuse, denying access to basic goods and the confiscation of property. Obtaining protection from the government in these circumstances has been made more difficult by the COVID-19 crisis, which has reinforced the concept of indigenous autonomy and the power of local leaders. Adherents of 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' face severe opposition because of their faith and do not have the possibility of leaving their community without losing their land rights.

Secular intolerance (Medium)

Although churches have been considered an important element in society for supporting the implementation of the FARC peace agreement and for supplying social and humanitarian assistance during the COVID-19 crisis, there are other issues causing Christians to face verbal attacks, social hostilities and discrimination. When it comes to matters relating to abortion, gender orientation, same-sex marriage/adoption, freedom of conscience, and the active participation of Christians in public and political debate, Christian faith-based opinions or actions are greeted with hostility, especially when they contradict the demands of pressure groups such as the LGBT+ and radical feminist movements.

Additionally, there are attempts to legitimize religious intolerance against those making public expressions of faith during the exercise of their functions in private and public institutions. This opposition is based on a radical interpretation of state secularism and the right to non-discrimination. For instance, Christian medical staff who have tried to make use of their right to

conscientious objection have been criticized and put under serious pressure. There is also pressure to remove from public office any officials who openly defend their Christian faith or affinity towards a specific church. The participation of Christians in the political life of the country has diminished as a result. Christians who do not have a position in favor of abortion or the requests of the LGTB+ community are accused of being intolerant.

Drivers of persecution

Colombia: Drivers of Persecution									
	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	-	-	-	STRONG	WEAK	-	MEDIUM	-	STRONG
Government officials	-	-	-	Medium	Very weak	-	Medium	-	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	Very weak
Non-Christian religious leaders	-	-	-	Strong	-	-	Very weak	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Weak	Weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	-	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	Medium	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	-	-	-	Medium	Very weak	-	Weak	-	Weak
One's own (extended) family	-	-	-	Strong	Weak	-	Weak	-	Weak
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	Strong
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	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 Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Strong):** There is a strong link between crime cartels and revolutionary and paramilitary groups; their motives for targeting Christians are very similar and they act mainly in rural areas where the State's presence is weak. These groups (Gulf Clan, Black Eagles, Los Rastrojos, Los Paisas, Caparrapos, La Constru, Los Costeños, the Border Command and many others) fight each other for territorial control and target Christians and Christian organizations that carry out activities promoting peace, human

rights for indigenous people and help against drug addiction. More recently, Christians have been targeted when they try to provide humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable sectors of society and refuse to support activities favoring the illegal interest of those groups. Christians are viewed as a threat to criminal interests, especially when they defy criminal group orders.

- **Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Strong):** These groups (such as FARC dissidents, the ELN and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) closely monitor church activities and impose restrictions on them. They threaten, displace and attack Christians for working in support of the FARC peace agreement, for promoting human rights and opposing violence, for assisting displaced persons, for helping with land restitution claims, for not following the orders regarding the promotion of coca cultivation, for providing material and spiritual assistance during the COVID-19 crisis, and when they did not want to comply with orders to join the demonstrations against the government. These illegal groups accuse Christians of betrayal if they are perceived to be involved with the government or with rival criminal groups and are very interested in discouraging the growth of local churches.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Many government officials have directly and indirectly allowed criminal action to take place against Christian leaders and churches in areas under gang control. Both the authorities and criminals can then act with impunity, especially because some authorities are in collusion with organized crime cartels and other criminal groups. The authorities' indifference towards the hostilities faced by Christian in this context is often denounced by Christian leaders, but the fear of reprisals is permanent.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Corruption among members of the political class helps promote the cover-up of criminal group activities and they hinder progress in the implementation of the FARC peace agreement. Their decisions reinforce impunity, allowing organized crime cartels to continue with their illegal activities and exert violence against Christians in the most neglected areas of the country. Furthermore, in the most recent local elections, there was evidence that corruption was so strong that criminal groups could justify their violent actions as a form of support for a political party; they used violence and intimidation to influence the 'Christian vote' to help achieve party goals.

Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** These leaders remain loyal to their ancestral beliefs and oppose anyone spreading non-accepted forms of Christian faith in the indigenous communities. Restrictions take the form of constant monitoring, cutting basic services, arrests, threats, violence and of reporting Christians to the ethnic religious authorities.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Shamanism, ethno-religions and similar cults, although not strictly classified as religions, are manifestations of a kind of 'spirituality' that reject Christianity. In the indigenous communities, adherents will attempt to impede Christian activities and force Christians to be part of their ancestral ceremonies. Pressure increased when there were mobility restrictions, since many adherents of 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' found themselves isolated and almost totally at the mercy of the indigenous authorities.

- ***One's own (extended) family (Strong)***: Belonging to the indigenous community is expected to have a higher priority than family ties, thus any family member abandoning the religious syncretistic practices of the community to become an adherent of a 'non-accepted form of Christianity' is liable to be labeled a traitor and face rejection from their wider family. This has caused particular hardship for converts during the COVID-19 lockdown measures.
- ***Citizens (Medium)***: Members of indigenous communities must be faithful to the tribe and their customs. Therefore, they are bound to denounce any practice that may hinder the stability of the community, including the activities of converts to a 'non-accepted form of Christianity'.
- ***Government officials (Medium)***: The authorities collaborate by either allowing or ignoring discrimination and violence aimed at Christians who refuse to follow the syncretistic practices of the indigenous communities. The authorities regard some Christian leaders as enemies of the cultural identity of the ethnic group and in consequence, as a threat to the preservation of indigenous customs.
- ***Revolutionary or paramilitary groups (Medium)***: Although ethnic groups are also victims of paramilitary groups at times, there are nevertheless occasions when guerrillas have teamed up with indigenous leaders to harass converts to a 'non-accepted form of Christianity'. This cooperation aims to defend ethnic group leaders' interests and to force - most often by violent means - those Christians to stop practicing their non-accepted faith in the community.
- ***Organized crime cartels or networks (Medium)***: Organized crime cartels have sometimes acted in complicity with indigenous leaders to intimidate adherents of a 'non-accepted form of Christianity' in the communities. Such cooperation aims to defend ethnic group leaders' interests and to put those adherents under strict control, thus preventing them from spreading their Christian faith inside the community.

Drivers of Secular intolerance

- ***Ideological pressure groups (Medium)***: LGBT+ and radical feminist groups demand a radical Church-State separation. Instead of allowing plurality, through their influence Christian opinions are either not accepted in the public sphere or are kept to an absolute minimum. These groups harass, ridicule and censor Christians when they speak publicly and manifest faith-based points of view that disagree with their interests. This is particularly the case if they are public officials who defend their Christian beliefs or refuse to perform acts related to gender or abortion issues under the protection of the right to conscientious objection. Also, they have carried out violent demonstrations outside churches as a way of showing their rejection of Christian values which defend unborn life. These groups are pushing hard for more public policies that diminish the role of the Church in the public sphere and that include school curricula with mandatory content which overrides Christian parents' rights concerning the education of their own children.
- ***Government officials (Medium)***: It is common that state authorities, including some ministries and some judges of local and national courts, support the interests of ideological pressure groups such as LGBT+, radical feminist and secularist groups. They are known to push for the adherence to the views of these groups and actively react against the points of view of Christian leaders, Christian parents and those who disagree with them. Christians

are at a disadvantage when they manifest their faith-based points of view since the judicial authorities tend not to give Christians the same protection and equal opportunities as to other groups when it comes to protecting the right to freedom of expression.

- **Political parties (Medium):** Political parties (such as the Alternative Democratic Pole or the Colombian Liberal Party, Green Party and Progressive Party) deliberately hinder political initiatives coming from Christian politicians or politicians supported by Christian groups. They severely criticize other politicians' personal expressions of faith and demand radical Church-State separation with no participation of Christians in the political arena. They also promote non-discrimination and hate-speech initiatives that could undermine the free expression of Christian citizens.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

- **For Organized corruption and crime:** According to the violence data gathered by organizations such as PARES and JUSTAPAZ and the reports from Open Doors researchers, Christians experience high levels of pressure and violence from criminal organizations and illegal armed groups in the following areas: Antioquia, Arauca, Caquetá, Casanare, Cauca, Cesar, Chocó, Córdoba, Guaviare, Magdalena, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, Santander, Sucre, Valle del Cauca.
- **For Clan oppression:** Especially in indigenous communities with the most traditional customs and, in consequence, with less acceptance of other (Christian) rites than those of their own ethnicity, those who abandon the religious practices of the tribe face persecution. In Colombia there are 115 indigenous groups, of which 22 were recently included in the last [census](#) carried out in 2018 (DANE Informacion para todos, 16 September 2019). These native peoples are located in the 32 departments of the country. According to Open Doors researchers, indigenous Christians face the highest levels of discrimination, intolerance and violence in Cauca, Cesar, Choco, Magdalena, Norte de Santander.
- **For Secular intolerance:** This Persecution engine depends: i) on the public policies implemented by the national government, and ii) on social attitudes within society mainly encouraged by intolerant groups with radical ideologies against religion or Christianity. It is present throughout the country, especially in urban areas such as Antioquia, Arauca, Bogotá, Boyacá, Caldas, Cauca, Cesar, Huila, Nariño, Putumayo, Valle de Cauca and Vichada.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians

Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation. These communities are therefore not scored as a separate category in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities

This category consists mainly of Roman Catholic churches and small Orthodox and Protestant communities. These groups are in danger of attacks in areas controlled by drug cartels and by other forms of organized crime and guerrillas. They also struggle with the increasing religious intolerance in society and its rejection of public manifestations of faith, not to mention the ob-

stacles and risks of church work within indigenous communities (particularly as experienced by Protestant Christians). In sporadic cases, some Protestants experience rejection from other traditional churches (such as the Catholic Church), as part of the dynamic of the Persecution engine *Christian denominational protectionism*.

Converts

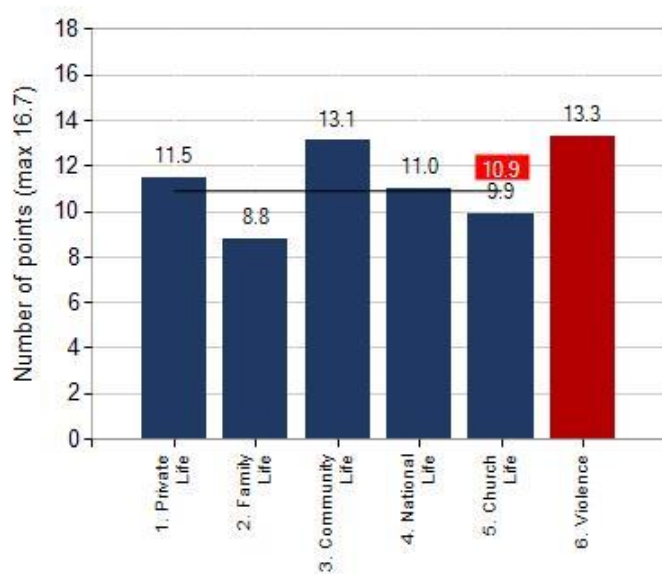
For Colombia, this category includes cross-denominational converts, converts within indigenous communities, and converts to Christianity from guerrilla groups and criminal organizations. Especially in the indigenous context, converts are victims of harassment, expulsion, death-threats, and other physical and psychological forms of violence for abandoning the majority belief-system within the community to which they belong. Converts are also affected by criminal networks in the same way as Christians belonging to Historical and Non-traditional Christian communities, especially if they are former members of illegal groups.

Non-traditional Christian communities

This category is mainly made up of Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations. They are also affected by the pressure and violence exerted by organized criminal groups and guerrillas, in the same way as Historical Christian communities. Although the government has recognized their important role in the implementation of the FARC peace agreement and its humanitarian assistance in neglected areas, these denominations do not receive the same government benefits granted to the country's historical churches and those churches which signed a covenant with the state. In addition, where they try to be of influence in the political sphere, they face severe opposition from radical feminist and secularist groups who label them as bigots because Evangelical faith is perceived as being discriminatory.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Colombia



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Colombia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Colombia is at a very high level, having risen from 10.7 points in WWL 2021 to 10.9 points in WWL 2022. This rise was mainly due to the continuous pressure from criminal and ethnic groups exerted on Christians in large parts of the country's rural territory.
- All *spheres of life* scored 8.8 points or above (out of a maximum of 16.7 points), with pressure highest in the *Community sphere of life* (13.1 points).
- The score for violence is extremely high, although it dropped from 13.9 points in WWL 2021 to 13.3 points. The decrease is because there were fewer reported killings of Christians, despite other categories registering higher numbers than in WWL 2021.

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 2021 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://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.25 points)

For Christians to meet up with fellow believers is particularly risky in indigenous communities or in territories controlled by organized crime. If they do, they are quickly accused of not following community norms or of not complying with curfews or other rules imposed by gangs and of conspiring against the ethnic or criminal leaders. This includes meetings which are not for worship purposes. Due the humanitarian and security crisis existing in the country's Pacific Coast, control and monitoring increased there, making it even more difficult for Christians to be in contact with each other.

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.). (3.00 points)

Christians face various levels of risk. In the organized crime context, it is highly risky for anyone to make a public call for peace or for resisting involvement in criminal activities. Any kind of communication or publication is monitored and easily identified by criminal groups. This situation has worsened during the WWL 2022 reporting period, since social networks were a main communication resource during nationwide strikes against government policies. Illegal groups attacked Christians who did not support their demands against the authorities or raised their voices against violence and criminal activities.

In some cases, Christians using social media to defend biblical views regarding matters of marriage, family, unborn life and religious liberty were aggressively criticized in an attempt at censorship. This was also the case with the Vice-president herself, who was harshly criticized by the Constitutional Court and radical secular groups for using her (personal) social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) to seek – in the Roman Catholic understanding – protection

from the saints during the health crisis.

Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (2.75 points)

In indigenous communities (e.g. in the Catatumbo area), access to Christian media is difficult. When it is possible and an adherent of a 'non-accepted form of Christianity' uses it to spread the Christian faith, he will be punished by the ethnic leaders because it could influence other indigenous members to convert. In areas co-opted by criminal groups, accessing or using Christian material with contents that could affect the interests of these groups (e.g. denunciations of illegal activities or encouragement for conversion to Christianity) will be punished. Christian content is often considered harmful for criminal groups exerting their authority in an area, especially books which present Jesus as a solution for the problem of violence.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (2.75 points)

In the indigenous community worldview, the concept of fidelity to ethnicity prevails over family ties. Thus, a member of a family who converts to Christianity or belongs to a 'non-accepted form of Christianity' will be rejected by the extended family. The same goes for areas dominated by criminal groups, especially when a family member's faith clearly opposes the criminal activities of local groups.

Similarly, there were some situations where the new Protestant faith of a family member was not accepted by his/her wider Roman Catholic family. Rejection by members of the extended family has even occurred even when some were invited to participate in a virtual church service. In some cases, the situation became so polarized that threats of violence ensued.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.25 points)

In order to prevent any 'destabilization of indigenous identity', the ethnic leaders threaten parents belonging to a 'non-accepted form of Christianity' and try to prevent them from passing on their faith to their children. They sometimes arrange that the children of such Christians be raised by other relatives or other members of the indigenous community that adhere to the indigenous customs (which often include the use of witchcraft, charms, shamanism etc.) in order to ensure that ancestral traditions are maintained. Within the areas controlled by criminal networks, Christian parents can hardly prevent their children from being indoctrinated or recruited by ELN and dissident FARC guerrillas because any opposition could lead to their assassination or expulsion from their land and homes. The intention of these groups is to influence the youth so that a criminal attitude becomes embedded in society. The forced recruitment of children increased noticeably during the last WWL reporting periods.

Elsewhere in Colombia, parents face difficulties raising their children according to Christian convictions because of the promotion of compulsory ideological content regarding sexuality which contradicts Christian teaching. The Constitutional Court has already established that school regulations must respect gender identity issues and the chosen sexual orientation of their students, which can jeopardize the whole ethos of Christian denominational schools and the right of parents to raise their children according to their convictions. Even when parents choose an educational institution that matches their Christian values, neither the institution nor the parents can prevent the promotion of content that contradicts their religious beliefs regarding sexual orientation and gender identity.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.25 points)

In the context of indigenous communities, schools have become an area of pressure for those adhering to 'non-accepted forms of Christianity'. Since the educational legislation of 1994, the Associations of Traditional Indigenous Authorities (AATIs) were granted full authority to administer their educational institutions with an emphasis on ethnic education, which openly and legally promotes their animist worldview. Indigenous education aims to maintain the cultural identity of the ethnic group. Community beliefs are then taught, which are clearly anti-Christian and indigenous Christian families struggle with this difficult situation and often choose not to send their children to school, which clearly limits their future possibilities. Also, such parents could be involved in legal proceedings that would cause them to temporarily or permanently lose legal custody of their children.

Elsewhere in Colombia, the content approved for education bears a significant secularist influence and promotes attitudes that consider religious beliefs to be discriminatory, intolerant, and unwelcome in the public sphere. Pressure is exerted on Christian children to learn through the "Coexistence Manual" about concepts which contradict their Christian faith and values. Examples of such concepts are: "Recreational sexuality", "sexual orientation", "gender identity", "sexual diversity", "sexual and reproductive duties" (a term that includes abortion), as well as "freely choosing a sexual partner". Thus, children who want to continue their studies successfully are forced to participate in such classes. Also, state schools do not always provide alternative religious classes for those Christians that are not Catholic. To obtain good grades, sometimes non-Catholic school children are obliged to join in Catholic activities organized by the school and are required to learn Catholic doctrine.

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

Children of Christian indigenous parents often face pressure to make them not follow their parent's faith. Sometimes these children are excluded from community activities, are mocked and mistreated to prevent them from spreading any 'non-accepted Christian' influence. This both discourages possible new conversions and puts pressure on parents to renounce their Christian faith. In areas co-opted by organized crime, it is common that guerrilla members recruit children from an early age, especially children from Christian families. This is done to put pressure on families and make them stop their Christian activities and stop resisting the local

criminal 'authorities'.

Elsewhere in Colombia (especially in urban areas), due to the growth of intolerance towards Christianity in society, some Christian children are severely criticized and mocked (because Christian faith is seen as being unnecessarily radical) when they refuse to be part of secular celebrations or to participate in activities supporting ideological pressure groups. In some cases, Christian children of certain Christian denominations suffer bullying because of the clothes they wear. In rural areas (such as Nariño and Amazonas), there are cases where non-Catholic children are discriminated against by being given lower marks than they deserve because they follow a Christian denomination different from the Catholic one.

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. (3.00 points)

Adherents of a 'non-accepted form of Christianity' who have been expelled from indigenous communities are often forced into separation from their families (wives and children) as a punishment for not giving up their faith. There are even cases, as mentioned above, in which children are separated from their families to prevent them from being raised as Christian believers.

Also, the number of IDPs continues to increase due to violence in areas controlled by criminal groups and guerrillas. In such areas, the dominant criminal group has the authority to decide who can live in their zone; as a consequence, many Christians have been forced to leave their families. In addition, Christians are sometimes forced to leave their homes in order to protect their children from being recruited by criminal groups, but this has been made especially difficult by the restrictions on mobility imposed by such groups. Also, the pressure to comply with anti-Christian activities and rituals has led some parents to send their children away to relatives where there is more freedom for Christians.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.25 points)

In some indigenous communities, those following 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' are excluded from basic resources (often including access to clean water and health facilities) or from financial benefits, as a way to pressurize them into stopping their activities. The lack of access to drinking water continues to affect several indigenous Christian communities of the Nasa ethnic group in Cauca and Huila. Christians in the communities of Bari, El Tablón, Eden, Epena, Sanaan, and La Guinea share the same difficulties. Difficulties increased during the COVID-19 lockdown period because they could no longer go and request such basic needs from neighboring communities.

In other areas, criminal groups have prevented Christians from receiving government aid or humanitarian aid from other civil society actors and have accused Christians of being informers. In departments such as Choco, Antioquia, Cesar, Putumayo and Norte de Santander, criminal groups have directly blamed Christians for bringing information to other groups when obtaining

food (such as fish or crops). Criminal groups are keen to ensure that Christian leaders (or the Christian community itself) remain loyal to their authority and regularly threaten them with attack, abduction or death should they not be compliant.

Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.25 points)

Given the importance of community life within ethnic groups, Christians are expected to participate in community events and to take part in the religious festivities in indigenous communities, otherwise, they are identified as traitors and punished. Punishments include imprisonment, forced labor, isolation, displacement, etc.. They are also blamed for any unfortunate events that occur in the community by their not attending the rituals. There is evidence that in some indigenous territories, the traditional authorities have forged alliances with illegal armed groups to ensure full participation in ceremonies and activities. Furthermore, indigenous people, who for some reason were outside the community at the time when the lockdown measures were implemented, were prevented from entering again if they did not participate in an animist ritual of purification, regardless of whether that was contrary to their (Christian) faith or not.

Although criminal groups do not hold their own religious ceremonies or organize community events, leaders of such groups can call on the community to make announcements or impose 'new rules', which happened frequently as a way to maintain isolation during the lockdown period. The announcements promoted violence, corruption and drug trafficking, which clearly went against Christian values. Elsewhere in Colombia, there were cases reported of Christian workers being placed under severe pressure by their companies to participate in activities linked to issues of gender and gender-based non-discrimination, even when they stated that such activities were contrary to their faith.

Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (3.25 points)

Indigenous authorities use a system of fines (either in the form of money or harvest products) for Christians who refuse to participate in community practices and festivities that contradict their faith (such as ancestral traditions or even certain festivities based on Catholic rites). Sometimes, when ethnic groups collude with criminals, the fines or quotas are substantially higher for such adherents of 'non-accepted forms of Christianity'. In a broader context, criminal groups demand protection money (quotas) from pastors, priests, and other Christians in exchange for not exercising violence against them and for allowing them to continue their religious duties. The problem is greater when the territory is disputed by different groups and, on occasions, the fees demanded by criminal groups include the recruitment of their children. Regions like Cauca, Choco, Antioquia, Meta, Putumayo, Huila, Caqueta, Magdalena, Tolima, Norte de Santander, Guaviare, Nariño, Valle del Cauca and Bolivar are greatly affected by this.

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, this situation intensified due to the de-facto control of social life by criminal groups imposing their own rules in most of the rural areas of the country. Christians had to pay high fees to be allowed to distribute aid packets in the community and to resume holding services and other activities in the churches. The situation is more difficult where

the territory is in dispute between various criminal groups and all of them ask for fees to finance their illicit activities (or all of them agree not to allow any kind of aid distribution at all).

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

In order to limit Christian activities, ethnic leaders make use of monitoring and control mechanisms within the indigenous communities. Thus adherents of 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' have faced constant interrogation when they refuse to participate in community activities related to payments or rituals. Such intimidation worsened when the COVID-19 lockdown measures were still in place.

In areas where there is hardly any state authority in existence, criminal groups have become the de facto local authorities. In this capacity, they carried out interrogations to force Christians to inform them about their activities, to look for possible alliances with them, and to obtain information about the movements of other groups, including the security forces.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.50 points)

In indigenous communities, the discrimination and mistreatment of adherents of 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' goes unpunished because the ethnic and religious leaders are both the instigators and those who impart justice in that jurisdiction. The affected Christians cannot seek court justice before other government entities due to the special indigenous jurisdiction.

Elsewhere, impunity is a widespread phenomenon due to links between criminal leaders and corrupt officials. If a criminal investigation is carried out, the authorities often fail to take into account that Christians are much more vulnerable to criminal attack because their religious convictions are considered a threat by criminal groups. Also, in contexts related to radical secularism, signs of intolerance that trigger attacks against churches and Christians have not been properly investigated. In some cases, Christians are being sanctioned instead of being considered victims. Thus the mistreatment of and discrimination against Christians has become normal practice that does not need to be held in check.

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Given the position of authority that both indigenous leaders and criminal leaders enjoy in their areas of influence, they control entry and exit from their territories as it suits their interests.

Thus, in indigenous communities, entry and exit is restricted as a form of punishment for those adhering to 'non-accepted forms of Christianity', placing them in a position of risk when they meet with other Christians in areas outside the community. Often, the uncertainty of not being able to return to their homes and losing contact with their families influences the slow growth in faith of new converts.

Criminal leaders prevent the normal transit of Christians and especially of church leaders, because their activities are seen as potentially damaging to illegal interests and because they are suspected of becoming informers for the state authorities or other rival groups. Control exercised by criminal leaders over rural areas (and even in some urban areas) is very strong and has increased even more in the WWL 2022 reporting period. The lock-down measures have reinforced this control and has made the activities of Christians even more dangerous.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.25 points)

According to indigenous customs, anyone whose faith differs from the community faith has no right to express themselves before the community. The reason is that such people might encourage other indigenous people to follow their religious convictions. Their voice is vetoed since their opinions are assumed to always have a religious motivation, even when the matter of debate is not necessarily linked to church or faith matters. Also, Christians in areas co-opted by a criminal group or guerrillas are not free to express any faith-based opinions which contradict the group's philosophy or which concern the implementation of the FARC peace agreement, human rights or environmental issues. Christians working on behalf of their local community who publicly denounced atrocities carried out by armed groups received death threats via printed flyers.

At the national level, Christians have experienced pressure in the media and on social networks, when expressing their views on issues like Christian participation in politics, the re-opening of churches, the defense of unborn life, Christian marriage, rights of parents to educate their children according to their beliefs etc. They are swiftly labeled as fanatics, accused of breaching the principle of Church-State separation and of halting progress in society when defending traditional biblical views. This situation is provoking a self-censorship among Christians.

Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (3.00 points)

Indigenous leaders and criminals, as the de facto authorities in the communities, exert pressure and violence on Christians, so that they act against their conscience to favor the objectives of these criminal groups. Thus, Christians can be forced to carry out activities to reinforce a faith contrary to their own, under the threat of ethnic leaders; and also, they can be intimidated into participating in illegal activities. For instance, Christians have been forced to publicly defend criminal interests, despite not agreeing with them (as happened in the protest marches against the national government).

In addition, there are difficulties for Christians receiving exemption from military service based on religious grounds. Also, since there is no full protection of the right to conscientious objection at the institutional level, Christian medical staff are not legally protected from being put under pressured to carry out abortions and euthanasia. The legal uncertainty about the limits of the right to conscientious objection also affects Christian notaries who have to declare marriages of people of the same sex and changes of sex, among other practices allowed by the state. Also,

Christian teachers experience challenges when as part of their duties, they are obliged to teach about gender ideology in sex education classes. When expressing their serious opposition to performing activities against their conscience, staff in medical, legal and educational professions run the risk of being accused of discrimination and of failing to fulfil their duties. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, this was also the case for Judge Ramiro Florez in Cartagena, who was accused of prevarication for refusing to marry a lesbian couple and was sanctioned as a result.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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. (3.50 points)

Christian organizations are not allowed to operate in indigenous communities. Christian indigenous schools or health centers are forbidden both by indigenous authorities and by the Colombian government because they are considered to be a threat to the indigenous culture. Church-affiliated organizations helping rehabilitate young drug-addicts are frequently targeted by criminal groups (since they see such youth-work as an 'attack' on their economic interests). Also, due to the high level of insecurity in the border areas, some Christian organizations could not carry on their humanitarian assistance for migrants (especially for those coming from Venezuela).

Elsewhere, educational institutions run by churches or other Christian organizations are sometimes under pressure - via threats of closure or fines - to accept the guidelines established by the Ministry of Education in matters related to sexual education. Also, organizations defending unborn life or the sanctity of marriage have also been harassed by radical feminist and LGBT+ groups to the point of legally denouncing them as discriminators and calling for violence against them. It has produced a chilling effect: Many organizations working in the educational field now prefer not to be linked to churches.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.25 points)

In rural areas controlled by criminal groups, the latter impose strong surveillance on all preaching, church activities and Christian materials used. The infiltration of churches by informers is common practice and their purpose is to report anything opposing the local criminal group's interests. Pastors must also be very careful with the information stored on their cell phones since it is common for groups to demand the handing over cell phones at checkpoints. It is becoming increasingly difficult for churches in areas dominated by one or more criminal groups because the prohibitions are constantly being increased. Any preaching mentioning social issues can lead to serious consequences.

Regarding ethnic groups, any preaching carried out by 'non-accepted Christian groups' will be reported and punished according to ancestral customs.

In cities like Bogota, Cali and Cartagena, what is taught in the churches about sexuality and related matters is monitored by ideological pressure groups associated with radical feminist and

LGTB+ groups. They deliberately seek possibilities for making accusations of discrimination. During the WWL 2022 reporting period, church continued to make use of digital technology for teaching and services, thus making it easier for radical secularists to monitor what was being preached and attack it.

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Christian leaders and their families who belong to 'non-accepted Christian groups' are particularly targeted for harassment in indigenous communities. They are often shunned by their community and made to live in very poor conditions.

In urban areas, verbal attacks are common where church leaders defend topics related to marriage, family, the sanctity of life, and the presence of the Church in the public sphere. After the re-opening of the churches, many church leaders were decried as being irresponsible and promoters of COVID-19 infection.

In territories co-opted by criminal groups, Christian leaders and their families are the most frequent victims of fines and mobility restrictions, especially if their activities are related to the defense of human rights, environmental issues, work with young people, the implementation of the FARC peace agreement, assistance for internally displaced persons, assistance with land restitution claims, discouraging coca cultivation and the refusal to collaborate with criminal groups. Pastors' children are a special target for human trafficking, forced recruitment or rape to discourage pastors from continuing their church ministry. In general, including indigenous contexts, since church leaders are notable public figures, attacks on them are an effective way of intimidating the whole population living in a particular zone.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.25 points)

Despite efforts by the Central government to promote a culture of respect for religious liberty, non-state actors impede churches and Christian organizations from getting due protection when speaking out against the persecution they experience. In indigenous communities, anyone from 'non-accepted Christian groups' who speaks out against their oppressors, faces threats, forced displacement, loss of property and arrest, among other measures. It is thus almost impossible to report incidents and obtain legal justice.

In areas where organized crime is extremely active, when Christians denounce their aggressors and seek protection from state authorities, criminal groups often respond with violent reprisals, discouraging any similar future attempts.

Elsewhere in society, it is becoming more frequent that when Christians are victims of acts of intolerance carried out by ideological pressure groups, government officials pay little attention to their reports, claiming that intolerant manifestations against religion are part of the right to freedom of expression. Radical groups also attack church buildings, which generates economic damage and demoralizes Christian communities.

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 5 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.

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. The use of symbolic numbers: In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

5. The symbol "x" in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Colombia: Violence Block question		WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	7	16
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	96	20
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	45	2
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?	2	6
6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	4	3
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	7	9
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	2	0
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	683	62
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?	6	1
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?	1	0
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	598	247
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1	0

Violent incidents against Christians for faith-related reasons remain at an extremely high level. Despite some lower numbers in a few categories of violence, criminal groups continued using fear and intimidation to keep Christians living in their areas under control. The biggest increases in Block 6 concerned the number of incidents of physical and mental abuse, the levels of forced displacement, the number of church buildings attacked, and the number of Christians held in detention.

In the WWL 2022 reporting period:

- **Churches attacked (96):** Most of the cases were related to attacks perpetrated by criminal groups as a way to intimidate Christians and pressurize them into adhering to their rules. Also, there were some incidents where radical ideological groups vandalized churches as

part of their advocacy for women's rights.

- **Christians arrested (45):** All arrests involved those belonging to 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' in indigenous communities. This was punishment by ethnic leaders when the Christians refused to abandon their faith despite pressure to return to the community traditions.
- **Christians attacked (683):** Most attacks involved Christians being threatened with death by guerrilla and other criminal groups, when their faith-based teaching and activities contradicted the interests of those groups.
- **Christian forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country (598):** All incidents involved Christians fleeing their homes due to the high levels of violence perpetrated against them (including their children) by criminal groups.

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

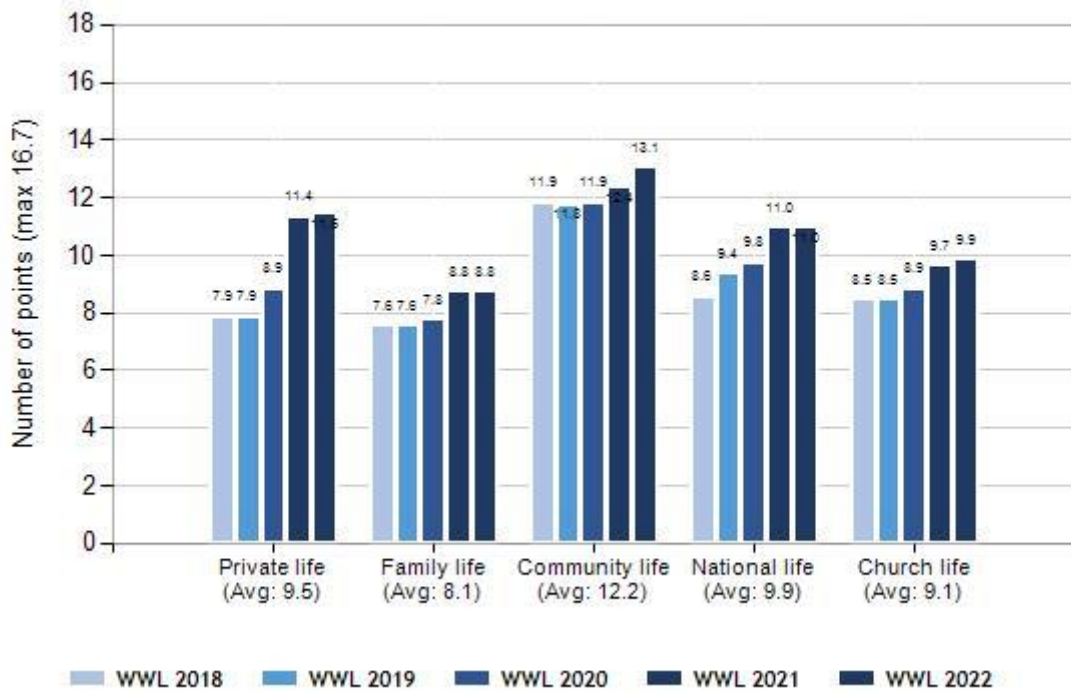
Colombia: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	10.9
2021	10.7
2020	9.4
2019	9.0
2018	8.9

The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians has been rising consistently in each of the last five WWL reporting periods. The increase has been due to the lack of efficiency in the implementation of the FARC peace agreement and to the increasing social control (mostly in rural areas) exerted by criminal groups against Christians considered a threat to their interests.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

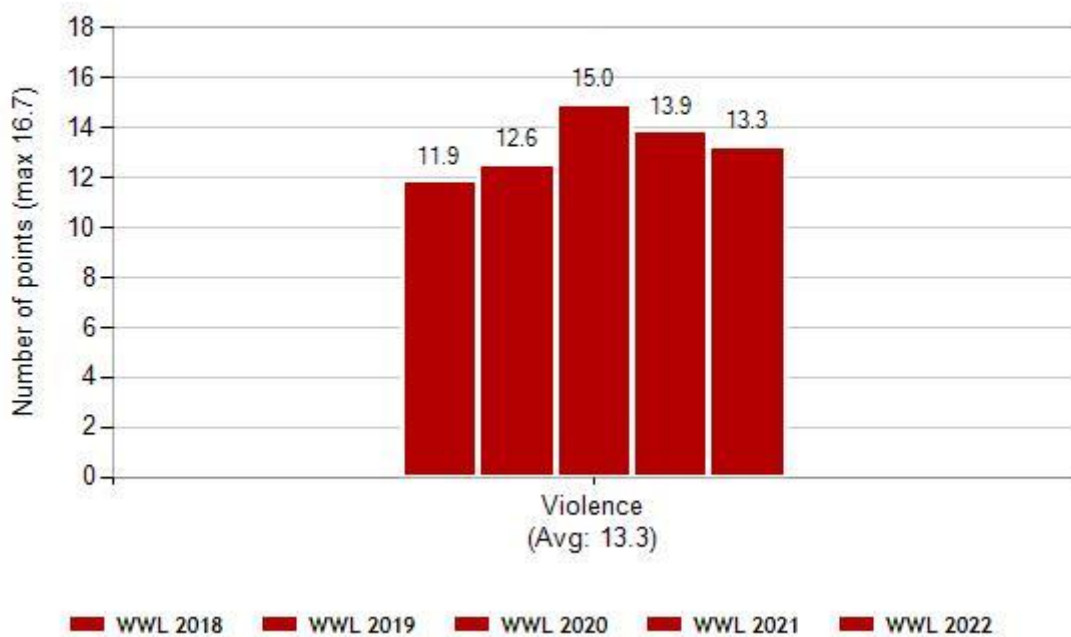
Over the five WWL reporting periods, all *spheres of life* have shown significant rises in pressure, making it difficult for Christians and religious leaders to freely express their faith in their daily lives due to the interference from mainly non-state actors. This is due to the levels of insecurity caused, for instance, by criminal groups in areas with no state control, FARC fighting units being re-established, and newer criminal groups emerging and fighting with others to gain control of territory. The rise in pressure is also influenced by increased *Clan oppression* and by the increased rejection (in society in general but also in some government authorities) of public manifestations of Christian faith related to *Secular intolerance*.

WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Colombia
(Spheres of life)



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Colombia
(Violence)



The chart above shows that the scores for violence have consistently been at an extreme level, with a peak in WWL 2020. These extreme levels are the result of:

- i) The delays and failures in the complex implementation of the FARC peace agreement;
- ii) The expansion of criminal and guerilla groups in ever larger areas of the country;
- iii) The violent repression of Christian converts in indigenous communities.

Despite the fact that during the two most recent WWL reporting periods, criminal groups and ethnic leaders took advantage of the COVID-19 crisis to enlarge their control over some areas, there were less Christians killed or forced to leave the country than in WWL 2020, causing an overall decrease in score. Nonetheless, it is highly probable that many incidents were not reported out of fear of reprisals.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Despite the cessation of formal hostilities in Colombia in 2016, violence remains rife; cases of sexual violence against women [continue](#) in rural areas where armed groups use this as a weapon of war to generate fear (HRW 2021). Women belonging to indigenous and Afro-Colombia ethnic groups are disproportionately [affected](#) by conflict-related violence (ONU Mujeres, Colombia). For instance, within indigenous communities, the authorities oppose Christians who refuse to accept the indigenous rites and customs. Christian women may be promised in marriage to non-Christian men in order to eradicate their faith, or be abandoned by their husbands, separated from their children, threatened and ostracized by the community. This exposes them to forced displacement where they are vulnerable to criminal groups, trafficking and sexual exploitation.

In areas under criminal control, the guerrilla indoctrination of children also affects Christian girls, since they not only have to accept the violent ideologies imposed despite their faith, but their vulnerability exposes them to becoming victims of abduction, rape, sexual harassment and trafficking. Such criminal activity worsened during the pandemic, and spiked rates of forced recruitment and forced prostitution were observed.

In gang-controlled territories, some girls are 'bought' from their parents on pain of death. This phenomenon also affects Christian families who are forced to give up their daughters, targeted for their perceived purity and obedience, to cartel leaders for sexual purposes – or even marriage. In other instances, the girl may be targeted for seduction. This serves to both satisfy the sexual desires of the criminal commanders, as well as to silence the work of churches.

“Strategically, they seduce them with gifts and by talking to them about how good it is to have money and independence from their parents, that is, to do what they want,” a country expert explained. “When the girls refuse, but the criminals have focused on them, they appeal to death threats against their families, so the girls end up giving in.”

Girls have also been put under strong pressure to use contraceptives and undertake abortions. This pressure is carried out more aggressively in schools in rural areas, where pupils are pressured into the use of contraceptives despite their parents' disagreement. Many Christians feel this interferes with the parents' right to educate their children according to their principles and beliefs.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Economic harassment via fines
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men have always faced a higher level of threats and violence in regions of armed conflict, partly because they represent the head of the family (or of the church, if they are pastors or priests). As the providers for the family, men face being extorted to provide finances for armed groups; non-church leaders face the risk of being killed; pastors or priests may be physically assaulted, extorted for financial gain, forced to leave their regions, or even killed. Exemplifying these dangers, in October 2020, Catholic priest Casildo Rodríguez fled to a safe place after receiving death threats from an armed group in Medellín ([Canal1, 6 October 2020](#)). This is one of many such cases.

Christian men were also impacted by the national strikes which took place in March 2021. They were reportedly forced by criminal and guerilla groups to participate and protest against new government policies. This happened in several regions.

Within some indigenous communities, converts face extreme pressure when they abandon the traditional community rites. They may be beaten, harassed, threatened or sent away to do forced labor in a different territory. "This aims to discourage new conversions or continuing with the Christian faith," a country expert explains.

Christian men and boys are also exposed to abduction, forced recruitment and violence at the hands of criminal armed groups. They are subject to indoctrination and mandatory participation in the activities of these groups which may include abductions, surveillance activities, sexual

abuse, killings and trafficking. As a country expert explains, “the phenomenon of forced recruitment is a frequent and unfortunate reality in the country, especially in rural areas where Christian children and youth are vulnerable because they are considered more docile.” According to [COALICO](#), there was a dramatic increase in the recruitment of children into armed groups in 2020, in part due to an exploitation of the COVID-19 crisis by criminals, who reinforced their territorial control while state resources were diverted to tackle the pandemic (June 2020).

In light of threats and reprisals, many see forced recruitment as an “inescapable destiny,” one country expert explained. Even if the children are able to escape the clutches of these gangs, they will face life-long threats from former gang-members and risk abduction in the future. The forced recruitment of Christian men and boys also impacts women and the strength of the family unit, as she must raise children alone and survive economically. As a country expert shared: “This also affects the community, as collective fear increases and with the recruitment of the family heads, the capacity to resist a possible criminal attack is lower.”

There is a noticeable lack of trauma management and resocialization programs for men. Gender-based policies promoted by the government do not give men the same opportunities to educate themselves or to participate in programs for managing and overcoming vulnerability. This is because, as men, they are expected to be stronger.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020):

- The Jewish community reported anti-Semitic comments on social media sites, including comments by a Communist group that posted: “Wealthy Jews represent exploitative capitalism.”
- According to a representative of the Abou Bakir Alsiddiq Mosque in Bogota, there were no reported acts of vandalism in 2020, unlike in previous years when unidentified individuals vandalized the mosque, most recently in June 2019.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Organized corruption and crime

The humanitarian and security crisis does not seem to be improving in the country due to the unstable political situation, and especially due to the strengthening of criminal groups that have extended their presence, particularly in rural areas. There have been serious delays in the implementation of the FARC peace agreement, possibly jeopardizing its continuity, which has generated uncertainty in society. This is also the case in the border zone with Venezuela, where the presence of the state is precarious and criminal groups from both countries are very active. Due to the high levels of corruption and impunity in the country, those highlighting problematic social issues fail to generate any positive public impact. Christians, who continue working in the defense of human rights, the fight against drugs or for the promotion of a culture of peace, find themselves facing worsening levels of pressure and violence. This is likely to continue as they

are not considered by the government and society to be particularly vulnerable.

Clan oppression

As it stands, the state has not yet provided any effective solution for protecting the individual dimension of the right to religious freedom for indigenous community members who decide to convert to Christianity and not follow traditional ethnic rites. The increased power of indigenous leadership and autonomy since the COVID-19 crisis began has reinforced the obstacles for indigenous Christians to live their faith in freedom; these Christians face of the neglect of government authorities and the creation of alliances between ethnic leaders and criminal groups.

Secular intolerance

Colombia is becoming a major center of Christian intolerance in the Latin American region; although it does not always manifest itself in a violent way, intolerance towards the political participation of committed Christians and towards public expressions of faith is clearly increasing and provoking self-censorship. Despite the central government's recognition of the religious sector as an important element of society and efforts to promote a culture of respect for religious diversity, Christian leaders are likely to continue being ignored by many government officials and radical ideological groups, when decisions are made relating to issues such as the sanctity of life, marriage and family. This situation will not improve as long as the right of freedom of expression and religious freedom is not fully guaranteed by the authorities.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: Illegal Armed Groups - <https://colombiareports.com/amp/colombia-illegal-armed-groups-maps/>
- Persecution engines description: illicit markets - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/87-deeply-rooted-coca-eradication-and-violence-colombia>
- Persecution engines description: almost nil - <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20200707/482186628438/la-onu-avisa-que-criminales-usan-la-pandemia-para-ganar-terreno-en-colombia.html>
- Persecution engines description: impunity - <https://transparenciacolombia.org.co/wp-content/uploads/lucha-contra-la-corrupcion-y-lucha-contra-el-narcotrafico-en-colombia-comprimido.pdf>
- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: census - <https://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/boletines/grupos-etnicos/presentacion-grupos-etnicos-2019.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: continue - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/colombia#23f1a9>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: affected - <https://colombia.unwomen.org/es/onu-mujeres-en-colombia/las-mujeres-en-colombia>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Canal1, 6 October 2020 - <https://noticias.canal1.com.co/nacional/amenazan-sacerdote-yarumal-antioquia/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: COALICO, - <http://coalico.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Bolet%C3%ADn-ONCA-No.-23.pdf>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Colombia>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Colombia>
- [Latin America – Organized corruption and crime – 2018](#)
- [Latin America – Challenges to religious freedom – 2015](#)

External Links - Further useful reports

- Further useful reports: Latin America – Organized corruption and crime – 2018 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Latin-America-Organized-corruption-and-crime-2018.pdf>
- Further useful reports: Latin America – Challenges to religious freedom – 2015 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/WWL-Latin-America-Challenges-to-religious-freedom-2015.pdf>