

World  
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## Honduras: Full Country Dossier

March 2022



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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

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# 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 1 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 / Honduras

## Brief country details

Honduras: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
9,869,000	9,442,000	95.7

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

Honduras: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	48	68
WWL 2021	46	67
WWL 2020	39	-
WWL 2019	38	-

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

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Honduras: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Organized corruption and crime	Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

In areas co-opted by criminal gangs, Christians who oppose criminal activities are likely to face harassment (either by extortion, beatings and death-threats) and even killing. Former gang members who convert to Christianity also become targets for surveillance and retaliation, especially if their conversion is not considered 'genuine' in the criminal group's opinion. Due to the high levels of corruption and collusion between the authorities and criminal groups, Christians are at risk of suffering reprisals when they endanger their interests.

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

**29 June 2021** – Comayagüela: One Christian was killed and five injured when a church minibus was [riddled with bullets](#). 15 Christians were in the vehicle at the time, all belonging to the Noah's Ark Church. The passengers who was killed had previously received death threats. (Source: Proceso Digital, 29 June 2021)

**9 February 2021** – El Paraíso: An evangelical pastor and his wife were [shot dead](#) and virtually beheaded in the El Hondable community. Both were found bound hand and foot. (Source: El Heraldo, 9 February 2021)

**2 January 2021** – Zona Norte Honduras: An evangelical pastor of a church in the El Veinte community was found [murdered](#) on the main street of the village of El Eden, in the municipality of Esparta, Atlántida. He had been attacked with machetes.

## Specific examples of positive developments

**September 2021** - El Paraiso: After a series of [robberies](#) affecting churches, homes and state institutions, the police managed to recover several objects that had been stolen from a study center and a church, including a computer and sound equipment. (Source: Noticias Policiales, 9 September 2021)

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: riddled with bullets - <https://proceso.hn/unmuerto-y-varios-heridos-deja-ataque-a-bus-en-una-colonia-capitalina/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: shot dead - <https://www.elheraldo.hn/sucesos/asesinan-pastor-esposa-paraiso-sucesos-AVEH1441634>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: murdered - <https://www.elheraldo.hn/sucesos/1433150-466/a-machetazos-matan-a-pastor-evangelico-esparta>
- Specific examples of positive developments: robberies - <https://www.policianacional.gob.hn/noticias/14005>

# WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Honduras

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/central-america-and-the-caribbean/honduras/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/central-america-and-the-caribbean/honduras/</a>	1 October 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18954311">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18954311</a>	1 October 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/HND">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/HND</a>	1 October 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/honduras/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/honduras/</a>	1 October 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf</a>	1 October 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	1 October 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index (Not included)	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/honduras/freedom-world/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/honduras/freedom-world/2021</a>	1 October 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report (Not included)	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Garda World country report	Garda World	<a href="https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/honduras">https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/honduras</a>	1 October 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/honduras">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/honduras</a>	1 October 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/central.htm#hn">https://www.internetworldstats.com/central.htm#hn</a>	1 October 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/honduras">https://rsf.org/en/honduras</a>	1 October 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/hnd">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/hnd</a>	1 October 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI	<a href="http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/HND">http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/HND</a>	1 October 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/honduras/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/honduras/</a>	1 October 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports (Not included)	USCIRF 2021	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/countries">https://www.uscifr.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank country report	World Bank	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/honduras">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/honduras</a>	1 October 2021

## Recent history

President Juan Orlando Hernandez, belonging to the National Party of Honduras, was re-elected to office in December 2017 under great [controversy](#) (Foreign Affairs, 20 December 2017). In 2015, the Supreme Court of Justice [ruled](#) in favor of allowing the incumbent president to run for another term (The Guardian, 24 April 2020). This decision was fiercely opposed by opposition parties and regarded as a violation of the Constitution. This led to civil unrest and the government declared a [state of emergency](#) (Daily Beast, 2 December 2017) and imposed [curfews](#) (BBC News, 7 December 2017). According to the UNHCHR, there were over 20 deaths, 60 injured and around 1,351 arrests for violations of the curfew ([UNHCHR](#), 27 January 2018). Despite all [calls to annul](#) the election results (BBC News, 10 December 2017) and despite the OAS [recommendation](#) to hold new elections (OAS, 6 December 2017), Hernandez held onto power. Since then, high levels of corruption and impunity have become [deeply entrenched](#) in Honduran society (Congressional Research Service, 23 January 2020).

To flee violence and poverty in Honduras, there has been a flood of migration heading for Mexico and the USA. According to the [UN Refugee Agency](#) (Fact sheet September-October 2020), as COVID-19 restrictions are easing, thousands are on the move again, some seeking asylum in Guatemala.



In November 2020, Hurricane Eta and Lota seriously [affected](#) Honduras (Amnesty International, 13 December 2020). The floods caused deaths, displacement and the destruction of homes, roads and infrastructure. According to Doctors Without Borders, as of 25 November 2020, 89,335 people were in shelters and 399,062 had been [evacuated](#) from their homes (MSF, 2 December 2020). This, coupled with the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, worsened the country's humanitarian crisis.

In November 2021, amid high voter turn-out, Honduras voted in the country's first ever female president. See below: *Political and legal landscape*.

## Political and legal landscape

President Hernández remained in power after a controversial presidential re-election held in 2017. The National Party held power in three consecutive periods (since 2010), which were all marred by allegations of corruption, violence and drug trafficking, and led to a [collapse](#) of the rule of law (Transparency International, 23 September 2019). The president's level of control increased due to the appointment of political allies to public office, including the judicial sphere. Thus there was a significant [deterioration in the democratic development](#) of the country (CADAL, 6 May 2020). According to the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Honduras has experienced a [decline](#) of 18% in terms of corruption control (Expediente Público, November 2021).

The work of the Mission to Support Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH), an investigative body of the Organization of American States (OAS) that began operations in January 2016, [came to an end](#) in January 2020 (OAS, 17 January 2020). From the start, the anti-corruption mission faced limited resources and [interference](#) by the Honduran congress (Insight Crime, 22 January 2020). With the end of the MACCIH came the end of the Special Prosecutor's Unit against Impunity and Corruption (UFECIC). This office was replaced with the Special Prosecutor's Unit against Corruption Networks (UFERCO) —however, the office lacks resources and has received [insufficient](#) national and international support, which seriously weakened anti-corruption efforts in Honduras (Wola, February 2021). This context has exacerbated opportunities for corrupt officials to take advantage of Honduras' COVID-19 response and tap into public funds and international donations.

The Social Forum on Foreign Debt and Development of Honduras, FOSDEH has stated that the [cost of corruption](#) is high (Expediente Público, November 2021). During the second administration of President Hernández, it is estimated that losses due to corruption amounted to 292 billion lempiras (12 billion dollars), an increase of 55% compared to his first administration. Between 2018 and 2021, the amount wasted represented 27% of the national budget. According to the [report](#) "Combating Corruption in Honduras", corruption in the country directly affected the quality of democracy, the effectiveness of the state authorities, and the high levels of poverty and inequality faced by Honduran citizens (Wola, UNAH and IUDPAS, December 2019). Violence is an additional factor caused by corruption in the country: Government authorities endorse criminal action at all levels, including violence exerted by criminal groups.

In June 2020, a new penal code was approved which [reduces](#) sentences for corruption and other crimes linked to organized crime, thus encouraging impunity (Insight Crime, 29 June 2020). The new penal code also deals with crimes against honor, such as slander and insults, often used to criminally [prosecute](#) journalists. There are also provisions that endanger the exercise of the rights of assembly and protest (Artículo 19, 2 May 2020). In October 2020, penal reforms were also carried out that expand the crime of usurpation and legitimize land eviction. In other words, it deepens the criminalization of the right to land to favor private companies and extractive activities. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras, OHCHR, pointed out that the application of these reforms “would generate a [serious precedent](#) on the matter and could aggravate the situation of conflict over access to land, particularly for peasant groups. and indigenous peoples" (Swiss info, November 2021).

Human rights organizations have also indicated that during the COVID-19 crisis, the government attempted to [silence](#) health personnel trying to publicize the seriousness of the health crisis (CIPRODEH, 14 April 2020). Similarly, the government has been [accused](#) of using the curfew and other measures to increase the surveillance and criminalization of human rights defenders (CEJIL, 23 June 2020).

The relationship with the USA has changed under the Biden administration since the US government is increasing its efforts to combat transnational bribery in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. In July 2021, the so-called [Engel list](#) was published which named several individuals, including current and former government officials, suspected of corruption and antidemocratic conduct in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras (US State Department, Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors Report, July 2021). In the case of Honduras, there are 21 people listed, most notably a former first lady, current and former congressmen, and a former director of Inversión Estratégica de Honduras (INVEST-H). The Engel List is a key component of the [US-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act](#), a bill passed by the US Congress in December 2020 (Foreign Affairs, 22 December 2020). The US government considers a range of [measures](#) against those on the Engel List, including revocation of US visas for individuals and their relatives and inclusion in the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)'s Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List (Kroll, 15 January 2021). As of February 2021, the US-bill “Honduras Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Act” was [introduced](#) (US Congress, February 2021), which temporarily imposed sanctions and other penalties on Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez and the government of Honduras for systemic corruption and human rights violations, with particular focus on the Honduran police and armed forces.

After the crisis surrounding the 2017 elections, reforms to the electoral law were promised to make future elections more transparent. Amendments to the law were approved in May 2021; however, the changes were [labeled](#) superficial and exclusive of minority parties (Contra Corriente, 27 May 2021). One positive aspect is the provision mandating the National Electoral Council (CNE) to use digital technology for obtaining same-day vote tallies, which involves the

use of fingerprint readers and an electronic certificate, assuming funds for this are provided.

During the run-up to elections in 2021, the population of Honduras was under pressure by the influence of organized crime, drug trafficking and gangs, which control large areas of the territory (See below: *Security landscape*). Despite the insecurity, Honduras was able to hold presidential and legislative elections in November 2021. The election could be carried out without violent incidents, the voter turn-out was high and the [results](#) were accepted (OAS, 30 November, 2021). With Hernandez not running for a further term, the National Party's presidential candidate was Nasry Asfura. He was beaten by leftist Xiomara Castro (wife of Manuel Zelaya, a former president deposed in a 2009 coup), who won more than 50% of the vote and thus became the [first female](#) Honduran president. Castro will now have to contend with institutions which have been shaped by years of control by the National Party (Americas Quarterly, 14 October 2021).

In the midst of all this, the Church has on more than one occasion denounced injustices, [corruption](#) and the rampant impunity in the country (RFI, 9 October 2020). Similarly, church leaders encouraged the public to make use of their [voting rights](#) and the authorities to act within the framework of the law and guarantee the freedom and transparency of the electoral process (Vatican News, 15 October 2021).

## Religious landscape

Honduras: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	9,442,000	95.7
Muslim	13,800	0.1
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	6,200	0.1
Ethno-religionist	46,100	0.5
Jewish	400	0.0
Bahai	49,600	0.5
Atheist	20,800	0.2
Agnostic	203,000	2.1
Other	86,950	0.9
<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)

Honduras is a Christian majority country; the Constitution guarantees the free exercise of all religions and beliefs without any preeminence, as long as they do not contravene the laws and public order. It also sets out that religious leaders may not hold public office or interfere in political processes. Despite this, it has become normal for church leaders to speak out about events of national interest and to [hold public office](#) (Criterio, 6 January 2022). The Church, as an institution, has the [greatest territorial presence](#) in the country and enjoys the greatest levels of trust within the communities and the population (World Vision, 21 September 2021). The Roman Catholic Church is organized in 250 parishes throughout Honduras; the Episcopal Church has 38 congregations in total at the national level. Non-traditional church groups (referred to as 'evangelical') number more than 17,000 congregations in the country. Some of these belong to large denominations like the Assemblies of God and the Church of God, while many others have affiliations to smaller networks or work independently. For many years, the state authorities have shown a tendency to favor the Roman Catholic Church; according to the US State Department IRFR 2020, the Inter-Ecclesiastical Forum – an interfaith NGO – reported government discrimination in residency applications for foreign missionaries. It stated the government did not approve or respond to applications of residency extensions for certain religious groups, while favoring others.

The government has had a close relationship with the Evangelical Fellowship of Honduras – CEH. Thanks to the space granted to this organization, it has enjoyed [influence](#) in various government institutions throughout the 12 years that the National Party was in power (Criterio, 6 January 2022). During the 2021 electoral campaign, the Evangelical Confraternity signed an [agreement](#) with the presidential candidate of the National Party, Nasry Asfura, by which the latter pledged to adhere to Christian principles and values. Representing independent evangelical churches, the Network of Evangelical Pastors and Leaders of Honduras, the Lucas Foundation for Health and the Latin American Theological Fraternity of Honduras all harshly criticized this agreement, calling it a form of ideological and partisan manipulation (Criterio, 18 November 2021). On the other hand, both leaders of the [Catholic Church](#) (Aica, 26 October 2021) and the [Evangelical Church](#), such as the President of the Association of Pastors of Tegucigalpa called on all parties to maintain peace in the elections and for the National Electoral Council to act with integrity (Hondudiaro, 27 November 2021).

Churches have faced many difficulties in carrying out their activities:

1. Due to the corruption of local authorities, some Christian organizations were unable to deliver aid directly to those affected by the COVID-19 crisis or by the natural disasters that hit the country. For example, the Agape Christian Church [publicly complained](#) that it was not allowed to distribute donated aid directly to the victims of Hurricane Eta (Iglesia Cristiana Agape - Facebook, 7 November 2020). The armed forces even received orders to confiscate such aid and deliver it themselves on behalf of the government. (For more information, see below: *Social and cultural landscape*.)
2. Christians remained at risk of gang violence and police and army abuse in collusion with criminal groups. Ordinary citizens are often coopted into helping gangs monitor church leaders and other prominent Christians to identify anything that could endanger the inter-

ests of the gangs. COVID-19 lockdown restrictions also helped gangs [increase their control](#) of communities, which affected many Christian families (AA, 15 May 2020). Some churches and Christian leaders dedicated to helping young people or who carry out evangelization in areas coopted by gangs can quickly appear to be gang collaborators and hence become targets of the security forces. In other cases, church activities that can be perceived as opposing criminal activity face gang restrictions. (For more information, see below: *Security situation*.)

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, Christian denominations continued to [welcome](#) immigrants (for instance, from Haiti) to their churches and to help alleviate suffering at the border (Agenzia Fides, 7 July 2021). Some Christian organizations [criticized](#) the militarization of borders and the level of abuses committed against those fleeing violence (Agencia EFE, 18 July 2021).

Finally, even though Honduras is a predominantly Christian country, there are radical secular and ideological groups that seek to remove the Christian voice from the public sphere. Citizens supporting ideological pressure groups show little or no tolerance towards the Christian faith. Church leaders and other Christians are frequently criticized and insulted when they defend their faith-based points of views on issues relating to family and marriage. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, the Honduran Congress [approved](#) a constitutional amendment aimed at preventing the legalization of abortion (BBC News, 22 January 2021). As a result, feminist organizations criticized the 'harmful influence' of religious groups on public health issues. In general, in the political arena, the Church has also had an important influence during legislative discussions on issues related to equal marriage, abortion, and issues related to the feminist movement. For this reason, a large part of sexual minorities, civil society organizations and some citizens blame Christian religious leaders for the 'deadlock' of these issues.

## Economic landscape

According to UNDP's HDI 2020:

- **Gross national income (GNI) per capita (2019):** 5,308
- **GNI per capita for women:** 4,173
- **GNI per capita for men:** 6,446
- **Inequality in income:** 37.8%
- **Poverty:** 22.3%

According to the World Bank (country overview):

- The country has been facing high levels of poverty and inequality. International estimates for the latest available year (2019), before the double impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and hurricanes Eta and Iota, showed that 14.8 percent of the Honduran population lived on less than US\$1.90 per day. In addition, almost half of the population (4.8 million people) lived on less than US\$5.50 per day, the second highest poverty rate in LAC after Haiti. Another third of the population was near-poor and vulnerable to falling back into poverty, while the size of Honduras' middle class (18 percent) was among the smallest in the region (compared to an average middle class of 41 percent).

- The COVID-19 crisis significantly impacted Honduras's economy. The country's GDP is expected to have contracted by 9 percent in 2020 due to the pandemic and the unprecedented impact of two successive hurricanes. While the country's economy is expected to rebound in 2021 to a 4.5 percent growth, amid the reactivation of domestic economic activity and recovering investment and external demand, risks and challenges remain.

According to the [economic report](#) of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tegucigalpa during the first quarter of 2021 the Honduran economy recorded an increase of 6.2% compared to the fourth quarter of 2020; determined by the dynamism in economic activity; contrary to what happened in the previous quarter, in which tropical storms Eta and Iota occurred affected agricultural production (CCIT, October 2021). In October 2021, the Consumer Price Index registered a monthly variation of 0.53%, mainly influenced by the rise observed in the prices of some foods, fuels and housing rental services.

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO, accessed 1 October 2021), Honduras is [highly dependent](#) on international remittances, these transfers represent 22% of GDP and 30% of the income of poor households. For its part, the [Semiannual Survey of Family Remittances](#) prepared by the Central Bank of Honduras showed that 81.3% of the surveyed migrants (1,100) indicated that they send cash remittances to Honduras, reporting a monthly average of US \$ 425.20 (BCH, August 2021). The main recipients are their mothers with 44.9% of total remittances, followed by their siblings and their children. Recipients of remittances direct these resources to cover basic needs or current consumption such as: maintenance, medical treatment and education. 55.3% of those surveyed stated that their monthly cash deposits are the main source of resources for those who receive them.

An important feature of the Honduran labor market is the high incidence of informality. In the context of COVID-19, it is quite probable that the impact of the crisis is not only reflected in the increase in unemployment, but also in a diminished labor income, especially of the less-qualified. In addition, the [evaluation](#) of the effects of tropical storm Eta and hurricane Iota carried out by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Inter-American Development Bank concluded that the disaster brought a total cost of approximately 52,099 million lempiras (CEPAL, May 2021).

This context of economic crisis explains why Honduras is a country receiving international aid. However, cases of [corruption](#) and diversion of funds by the government have deterred humanitarian aid from being channeled through the government (WPR, 26 January 2021). Also, national strikes and demonstrations, made worse by vandalism and looting, have all negatively impacted the country's economy in recent years. In this scenario, churches have become one of the most [trusted](#) institutions for the channeling of international aid for humanitarian purposes (Vatican News, 8 December 2020).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European) 90%, Amerindian 7%, black 2%, white 1%
- **Main language:** Spanish. There is presence of Amerindian dialects
- **Urban population:** 59% of total population (2021)
- **Literacy rate:** 88.5

According to the World Bank (country profile):

- **Population aged 15-64:** 64, 439(2020)
- **Education:** Pre-primary - 39.361%; Primary - 90.229%; Secondary - 58.734%
- **Compulsory school education:** 12 years
- **Gender Parity Index (GPI):** 1.057 (2019)
- **Unemployment:** 9.39% (2020)
- **Refugee population:** 34,473 (2020)

According to the UNDP's HDI 2020:

- **HDI score and ranking:** Honduras' HDI value for 2019 is 0.634— which put the country in the medium human development category—positioning it at 132 out of 189 countries and territories.
- **Life expectancy:** 75.3 years (2019). Between 1990 and 2019, Honduras' life expectancy at birth increased by 8.5 years.
- **Education:** Between 1990 and 2019, Honduras' mean years of schooling increased by 3.1 years and expected years of schooling increased by 1.4 years.
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII):** Honduras has a GI value of 0.423, ranking it 100 out of 162 countries in the 2019 index .

In general, deficiencies in education, health, safety and essential public services have been constant. These failures became even more evident with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The international community has provided [humanitarian aid](#) (USAID, 29 July 2021), however, there has been [criticism](#) over the politicization in aid delivery, the hoarding of donations by the government, and the many situations that have prevented humanitarian aid from reaching thousands of Hondurans (Cespad, 26 November 2020). In some cases, the support was directed only to those municipalities controlled by the ruling political party, excluding other communities that urgently required aid. The government's order that all aid and donations should be [administrated](#) by "Copeco", the state government's National Risk and Contingency Management department (Criterio, 8 November 2020), was also severely criticized since it is known to have been involved in [corruption scandals](#) in the past (Revistazo, 14 January 2021). Church leaders, human rights defenders and others have been angered by the obstacles set up by the authorities, which have been preventing the effective distribution of food, clothing and medicines.

Regarding education, the Social Forum on External Debt and Development of Honduras has indicated that in 2019, public education still presented [difficulties](#), many of the students abandoned their classrooms, due to the high level of insecurity, as well as the lack of family resources (in Honduras 7 out of every 10 families are on the poverty line, according to FOSDEH data) and cannot cover all their needs, which often forced entire families to migrate. The lack of resources has also led to child labor (FOSDEH, March 2021). The crisis worsened in 2020, approximately 40% of children and young people abandoned their school education due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is a culture of human rights violations in the country by both state and non-state agents. According to Human Rights Watch, security forces committed abuses while enforcing the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights called Honduras one of the most dangerous countries for human rights defenders in Latin America (HRW 2021). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras (OHCHR) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) have called on the government to adopt measures to protect the indigenous Garífuna, when defending their land and natural resources.

The country has a history of quelling anti-government protests harshly; this was particularly the case in 2018 and 2019. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 confinement measures, no major protests occurred. In November 2021, the government incorporated [changes](#) which could affect the right to protest. (OAS, 16 November 2021). In general, the [penal system](#) is regularly manipulated to harass human rights activists (OAS, 27 July 2021).

In addition, widespread violence from gangs has [compelled](#) entire families to flee their homes, increasing the number of migrants seeking refuge in other countries (Al-Jazeera, 26 January 2021). In areas with a high presence of gangs, these groups oversaw the distribution of humanitarian assistance, including aid supplied by church groups and organizations. Christians daring to oppose gang interference risked becoming a target for reprisals. (For more information on gang violence, see below: *Security situation*.) According to UNHCR statistics, at least 247,000 people were [internally displaced](#) in Honduras between 2004 and 2018 due to violence (UNHCR, December 2021). According to the UN Refugee Agency, more than 149,000 Hondurans have been [forced to flee](#) and since late 2018 it is estimated that nine caravans have been organized allowing for 17,000 to 25,000 Hondurans to leave the country. The caravans, while highly visible, eclipse continuous outflows, which are better reflected in deportation figures: In the period January 2018 - 19 July 2021, 250,978 Hondurans were deported (UNHCR, September 2021). In addition to violence, the reasons for such displacement were the impact of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) (ReliefWeb, 10 June 2021) and natural disasters. Faced with these problems, in October 2020, the Bill for the Prevention, Care and Protection of Internally Displaced Persons was officially [submitted](#) before the National Congress of Honduras (OHCHR, January 2021).

At the international level, restrictive measures for immigrants were implemented under former US President Donald Trump. The current US president, Joe Biden, promised to improve the legal status of immigrants (and asylum seekers); however, in April 2021, he secured agreements with Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala to [tighten](#) their borders and stem the flow of migration (The



Guardian, 12 April 2021). In the meantime, the US government is looking to address the reasons why people from Central America are leaving in such high numbers. Tackling corruption in the region is to be one of the main strategies. In this situation, churches have sought to develop activities serving the most vulnerable. According to a [study](#) carried out by World Vision, these activities mainly involve trauma care and the distribution of humanitarian aid (World Vision, September 2021), the promotion of human rights and strengthening the family.

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 49.1% of the population – survey date: March 2021
- **Facebook usage:** 49.1% penetration – survey date: March 2021

This poor level of Internet access reflects the high number of students without access to education. In June 2020, the Government approved [Decree 060-2020](#) (Legislativa, 2020) to facilitate online teaching via digital media, however by the end of the WWL 2022 reporting period, the measures had not yet been [implemented](#) (Proceso Digital, 3 January 2022).

According to World Bank (country profile):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 70.3 per 100 people.

According to [BuddeComm](#) Research (updated April 2021):

- Fixed-line teledensity, at only 4.9%, is significantly lower than the Latin American and Caribbean average. Poor fixed-line infrastructure has been exacerbated by low investment and topographical difficulties which have made investment in rural areas unattractive or uneconomical. Consequently, the internet has been slow to develop. DSL and cable modem technologies are available but are relatively expensive and thus take-up has been low thus far, while higher speed services are largely restricted to the major urban centers. Mobile penetration is substantially below the regional average.
- Regarding the COVID-19 impact, on the consumer side, spending on telecoms services and devices was under pressure from the financial effect of large-scale job losses and the consequent restriction on disposable incomes. However, the crucial nature of telecom services, both for general communication as well as a tool for home-working, offset such pressures. In many markets the net effect has been a reduced (and sometimes negative) subscriber growth, which will continue into 2021.

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

- Those working for opposition media or community media are often subjected to harassment, intimidation campaigns and death threats, and some have been forced to flee abroad. The security forces, especially the military police and army, are responsible for most of the abuses and violence against the media. Journalists are also often the targets of abusive judicial proceedings, and prison sentences for defamation are common, sometimes accompanied by bans on working as a journalist after release.

On 25 May 2021, parliament approved a new Electoral Law to use digital technology for making voting and counting more reliable. However, the approval of budget resources for acquiring the necessary equipment was [delayed](#) (Expediente Público, 14 June 2021) and at the time of November 2021 elections, the new systems [had not been implemented](#) (Criterio, December 2021).

Many Christians in the country made use of the technological resources at their disposal to continue their church work during the COVID-19 lockdown, whether in the form of broadcasting church services or in providing spiritual support to Christians isolated through the lockdown measures.

## Security situation

The main criminal [groups responsible](#) for the levels of violence and insecurity in the country are the MS13 and Barrio18 gangs. Other groups linked to drug trafficking are: Los Lorenzanas, Los Perrones and El Cartel de Taxis, which operate along the country's border (UNODC, last accessed December 2021). Global Initiative's Global Organized Crime Index shows that Honduras is a [hub](#) for human and arms trafficking, as well as being one of the main drug trafficking corridors in Central America (Global Initiative, 2021). In this scenario, both the MS13 and Barrio18 work together with other criminal networks to dominate cocaine distribution. Their main criminal activity is however extortion. Foreign criminal gangs are also active, for instance from Colombia and Mexico and El Salvador, which tend to focus on drug processing and trafficking, among other criminal activities. Criminal gangs have also [infiltrated](#) the government system through corruption (La Tribuna, August 2021) which allows them to act with [impunity](#) (Radiohc, 11 January 2021). As Human Rights Watch points out, abuses by security forces, including alleged complicity with criminal organizations, coupled with weak state institutions, have contributed to the persistence of gang violence (HRW 2021).

The [Strategic Regional Alliance](#) of USAID and UNDP reported that in the period January-March 2021, 895 homicides were registered, 7.3% more than in the same period in 2020. This increase could be attributed to the lifting of COVID-19 confinement measures (Infosegura, 9 June 2021). Young people between 18 and 30 years of age are the main victims of homicide. This age group registers an increase of 8.8% with respect to the same period in 2020. The greatest increase was among 15 -17-year-olds. The departments of Coayagua and Intibucá recorded the greatest increase in total homicides (compared to the same period in 2020; Cortés and Francisco Morazán recorded the greatest reduction.

There was also political violence in the country affecting candidates and all people involved in the 2021 electoral process. The [OAS Electoral Observation Mission](#) condemned the acts of violence perpetrated in the context of the elections, particularly the assassinations (OAS, 14 November 2021). According to official figures, there were approximately 64 victims of [political violence](#) in Honduras in the period 23 December 2020 - 25 October 2021 (IUDPAS-UNAH, November 2021). The acts of violence were killings, coercion, threats, attacks and kidnappings. Official data at the end of 2021 [reported](#) a homicide rate of 34.97%, down from 38.67% in 2020 (Sepol, November 2021). But, even if killings have gone down in number, citizens continue to face restrictions on mobility, extortion, forced recruitment, violence, and the usurpation and

dispossession of homes, which [forces them](#) to move home either within the country or as refugees in other countries (Voa, 10 May 2021).

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), a [survey](#) of over 3,100 people found that 20% moved in family units to flee violence and that over 30% of unaccompanied children cited, in addition to some form of violence and death threats associated with gang recruitment, their inability to access essential services such as education (News UN, 17 December 2020). The organizations also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic was an added stress factor for those at risk in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras as the restrictions on movement and border closures hindered their ability to flee danger. The [Mid-Year Trends 2021](#) made by UNHCR reports that in the first six months of 2021, asylum applications were most commonly lodged by nationals from Syria, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Venezuela and Honduras (UNHCR, 2021).

In areas co-opted by gangs, Christians who oppose criminal activities are likely to suffer harassment, either by extortion, beatings, death-threats and even killings. Most Christians living in these circumstances do not have any government institution to turn to for protection, due to the widespread corruption of the authorities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, gangs took advantage of the lockdown and other measures to strengthen their territorial control. Christian leaders found themselves subjected to carrying out their activities, including humanitarian assistance, under the authorization of these groups.

## Trends analysis

### 1) Political instability is affecting the whole of society

The crisis in the country has its deepest roots in the political instability caused by the governing administrations, especially that of President Hernández. This instability affects not just the political sphere but has impacted social, economic, security, health and immigration factors as well. The deterioration of the country's situation has made it difficult to fully respect and guarantee fundamental rights. Thus, churches involved in advocacy and humanitarian work have become victims of reprisals, both from state and non-state actors.

### 2) Corruption networks have strengthened the reach of criminal groups

The political instability has allowed criminal groups to diversify and become stronger, especially through their close links with coopted authorities that guarantee impunity for their illegal activities. This causes general mistrust of all state authorities and political leaders, as well as an increase in the levels of violence. The corruption networks also represent a threat to churches where church activities are viewed as attacking criminal interests.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: controversy - <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/honduras/2017-12-20/election-crisis-honduras>
- Recent history: ruled - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/24/honduran-judges-throw-out-single-term-limit-on-presidency>

- Recent history: state of emergency - <https://www.thedailybeast.com/honduras-declares-state-of-emergency-amid-violent-clashes>
- Recent history: curfews - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-42261076>
- Recent history: UNHCHR - [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/HN/2017ReportElectionsHRViolations\\_Honduras\\_SP.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/HN/2017ReportElectionsHRViolations_Honduras_SP.pdf)
- Recent history: calls to annul - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-42297201>
- Recent history: recommendation - [http://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-090/17](http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-090/17)
- Recent history: deeply entrenched - <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1248036/download>
- Recent history: UN Refugee Agency - <https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/details/82934>
- Recent history: affected - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/12/devastating-impact-hurricanes-eta-iota-honduras/>
- Recent history: evacuated - <https://www.msf.es/actualidad/honduras/huracanes-honduras-casi-400000-personas-han-sido-evacuadas-sus-hogares>
- Political and legal landscape: collapse - <https://voices.transparency.org/honduras-how-a-surge-of-corruption-scandals-has-fueled-political-crisis-85af16ceac85>
- Political and legal landscape: deterioration in the democratic development - [https://bti-project.org/content/es/downloads/press/Honduras\\_BTI2020\\_ES.pdf](https://bti-project.org/content/es/downloads/press/Honduras_BTI2020_ES.pdf)
- Political and legal landscape: decline - <https://www.expedientepublico.org/ocho-anos-de-corrupcion-del-gobierno-de-juan-orlando-hernandez/>
- Political and legal landscape: came to an end - [https://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-003/20](https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-003/20)
- Political and legal landscape: interference - <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/a-death-foretold-maccih-shuts-down-in-honduras/>
- Political and legal landscape: insufficient - <https://www.wola.org/analysis/honduras-anti-corruption-efforts/>
- Political and legal landscape: cost of corruption - <https://www.expedientepublico.org/ocho-anos-de-corrupcion-del-gobierno-de-juan-orlando-hernandez/>
- Political and legal landscape: report - <https://www.wola.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Corrupci%C3%B3n-HN-ENG-3.6-1.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: reduces - <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/honduras-new-criminal-code/>
- Political and legal landscape: prosecute - <https://articulo19.org/honduras-nuevo-codigo-penal-exhibe-a-un-estado-que-criminaliza-la-libertad-de-expresion-y-el-acceso-a-la-informacion/>
- Political and legal landscape: serious precedent - [https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/honduras-corrupci%C3%B3n\\_preocupa-a-onu-reformas-que-limitan-investigaci%C3%B3n-de-corrupci%C3%B3n-en-honduras/47088686](https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/honduras-corrupci%C3%B3n_preocupa-a-onu-reformas-que-limitan-investigaci%C3%B3n-de-corrupci%C3%B3n-en-honduras/47088686)
- Political and legal landscape: silence - <http://www.ciprodeh.org.hn/index.php/noticias-principales/505-mesa-de-derechos-humanos-expone-el-estado-critico-de-la-nacion-en-tiempos-de-coronavirus>
- Political and legal landscape: accused - <https://www.cejil.org/es/foro-internacional-derechos-humanos-honduras-debe-garantizar-condiciones-seguridad-ejercicio-defensa>
- Political and legal landscape: Engel list - <https://www.state.gov/reports/section-353-corrupt-and-undemocratic-actors-report/>
- Political and legal landscape: US-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act - <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/2020/12/engel-u-s-northern-triangle-enhanced-engagement-act-passes-congress>
- Political and legal landscape: measures - <https://www.kroll.com/en/insights/publications/compliance-risk/engel-list-look-into-central-americas-corruption-risks>
- Political and legal landscape: introduced - <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/388>
- Political and legal landscape: labeled - <https://contracorriente.red/en/2021/05/27/new-honduran-electoral-law-wont-prevent-another-crisis/>
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- Political and legal landscape: first female - <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/could-honduras-shift-left-a-look-at-xiomara-castro/>

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## WWL 2022: Church information / Honduras

### Christian origins

Christianity [arrived](#) in Central America as a result of Spanish colonization (Asociacion Cultural Coloquios Historicos, 1992). Roman Catholic priests accompanied the Spanish and eventually began to preach to the Indians. The first Catholic service in Honduras was celebrated on the beaches of present-day Trujillo on Sunday, 14 August 1502. Later in 1521, Franciscan missionaries arrived who, together with the Mercedarians in 1548, began the task of evangelization and baptism of the Amerindians.

In 1768, Christian Frederick Post arrived as a representative of the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Places. He and other Anglicans were sent to preach to the English-speaking natives and settlers on the Mosquito coast. The Reverend M. Newport established a school and later an Anglican church. Anglicans established congregations in Puerto Cortés, Tela and La Ceiba. Methodists also arrived in the Bay Islands in 1844, Baptists two years later, and Seventh-day Adventists in 1887.

[Evangelists](#) from the Central American Mission arrived in 1896 (Honduras is Great, 2018). Later, new missionaries arrived and settled in San Pedro Sula, Tela, Omoa, Puerto Cortés, Trujillo and other communities in the north of the country. In 1914, Humberto and Dorotea Cammack arrived in Tegucigalpa and founded the first Evangelical Friends Church in 1916 (today: Iglesia Central de Santidad). From there, the work spread to La Paz, Comayagua, La Esperanza, Márcala, Santa Lucía de Intibucá, Juticalpa and Catacamas.

### Church spectrum today

Honduras: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	9,700	0.1
Catholic	6,661,000	70.5
Protestant	1,568,000	16.6
Independent	720,000	7.6
Unaffiliated	532,000	5.6
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-49,400	-0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,441,300</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,156,000	12.2
Renewalist movement	1,737,000	18.4

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 Honduras is the Roman Catholic Church, representing 70.5% of all Christians according to WCD 2021 estimates. Nonetheless, evangelical denominations in the country continue to grow fast and have also achieved significant influence in the political arena.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: arrived - <https://chdetrujillo.com/historia-de-la-iglesia-hondurena/>
- Christian origins: Evangelists - <https://hondurasisgreat.org/protestantes-honduras/>

# WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Honduras

## Reporting period

1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

## Position on the World Watch List

Honduras: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	48	68
WWL 2021	46	67
WWL 2020	39	-
WWL 2019	38	-

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

Honduras rose 2 points compared to WWL 2021 due to increases in pressure and violence. Criminal groups (particularly Barrio 18 and MS-13) are exerting social control over most areas of the country, often acting with impunity through complicity with coopted government officials. The situation for Christians is particularly difficult where churches are active in youth-programs which often include former gang members. The increase in the score for violence is mainly due to a higher number of killings of Christian leaders considered a threat to criminal interests. Additionally, the government (President Hernandez' administration) has been hostile towards any churches and/or Christian leaders not supporting its political vision.



## Persecution engines

Honduras: 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	Very weak
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Very weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very weak
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)

Honduras is currently one of the most corrupt countries in the region. According to Transparency International (CPI 2021), the country ranks 157/180 and scores 23/100. This means that corruption in the army, police, administration and political arena is widespread. ASJ estimates [impunity at around 87% of all crimes](#) in Honduras (ASJ, accessed 1 March 2022). These corruption networks aim to make sure that perpetrators strength their control over several areas of the country, with the authorities turning a blind eye and sometimes or even supporting criminal activity through an ambiguous legal framework (see above: *Political and Legal landscape*).

During President Hernandez' administration, it was proved that the highest echelons of the state had links with major criminal networks, including those linked to the drug trafficking market in the wider Latin American region. This made the whole country vulnerable to the control of gangs and drug trafficking networks. Since many areas of the country are controlled by gangs, Christians living there who oppose criminal activities are likely to suffer harassment, either by extortion, beatings, death threats, and even killings. Church leaders cannot freely conduct their activities in those areas without being monitored or targeted, especially when they (and Christian parents) try to promote a culture of peace and prevent young teenagers from joining criminal groups.

In addition, former gang members who convert to Christianity also become targets for surveillance and retaliation, particularly if their conversion is not considered 'genuine' or 'acceptable' by local gang members. Most Christians living in these circumstances do not have any government institution to turn to for protection due to the widespread corruption of the authorities and high levels of impunity.

## Drivers of persecution

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

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

### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Government officials (Medium):** Due to the high levels of corruption in the country, there is a close relationship between criminal groups and government authorities at all levels of the state apparatus from the government elite to the police officers in the neighborhoods. This relationship allows the impunity of gang activity and is a form of collaboration with government interests.
- **Organized crime cartels (Strong):** The degree of violence and insecurity due to the gangs' territorial control and criminal activities, plus the complicity of the security forces, represent a threat to the whole of society. Christians are in a particularly vulnerable situation because there are times when they cannot congregate or carry out church activi-

ties out of fear of being attacked. The prominent gangs are Mara Salvatrucha MS and Mara 18, whose members force Christians to be accomplices to their criminal activities, regardless of their faith; if they refuse, they become victims of extortion, threats, and possibly even killings.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

### **Main areas for Organized corruption and crime**

The areas where this engine was influential during the WWL 2022 reporting period were Atlantida, Colon, Comayagua, Copan, Cortes, El Paraiso, Francisco Morazan, Gracias a Dios, Intibuca, Lempira, Islas de Bahías, Olancho, San Pedro Sula, Santa Barbara, Tegucigalpa and Yoro.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

### **Communities of expatriate Christians**

Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation and are therefore not treated as a separate category for WWL analysis.

### **Historical Christian communities**

This category consists mainly of Roman Catholic churches and small Orthodox and Protestant communities. These communities are targeted by gangs, especially when the latter see them as opposing their activities. These churches also suffer at times from oppression by the ruling party, and sometimes, they are the object of insults and criticism from ideological groups, who wish to try to impose their non-Christian values on society. Some of the Protestant churches in this category, do not enjoy the same benefits granted to the Catholic Church and are highly criticized for their close relationship with government.

### **Converts**

These are former gang members who have converted to Christianity or so-called 'cross-denominational converts'. They suffer the same kind of persecution as traditional historical communities. In the case of ex-gang members, they are likely to suffer persecution from their original gangs, rival gangs and security forces. They will be monitored to ensure that their conversion does not affect the interests of criminal groups. If their conversion is not regarded as genuine, they may be put under pressure to return to criminal activities. In the case of 'cross-denominational converts', for instance those who have switched from attending an historical church to join a non-traditional church group, they might face rejection from the rest of their family.

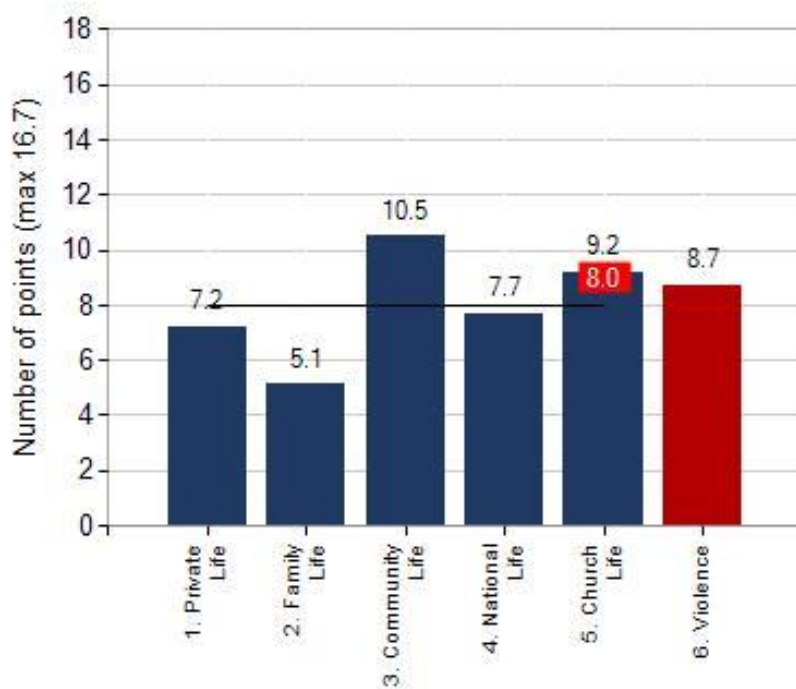
### **Non-traditional Christian communities**

This category is made up of neo-Protestant churches such as the Church of God, Assemblies of God, Abundant Life Church, Living Love Church, International Christian Center, and various Great Commission churches. They suffer the same type of persecution as the traditional communities and additionally, by being a minority, they do not have the same representation at a social or

political level. This means they are likely to be more vulnerable to criminal activities in areas co-opted by criminal groups. Due to their pastoral work in violent areas, most gang converts are associated with these church groups.

## The Persecution pattern

WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Honduras



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Honduras shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a high level (8.0 points), rising from 7.8 in WWL 2021.
- Pressure is strongest in *Community Life* (10.5 points) and *Church Life* (9.2 points), which is typical for a situation mainly dominated by *Organized corruption and crime* but also influenced by less prevalent *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Secular intolerance*.
- The score for violence is 8.7 points, a rise from 7.6 in WWL 2021, caused mainly by the higher number of killings of pastors perpetrated by criminal actors during the WWL 2022 reporting period.

## 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 2022 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. (3.50 points)**

To go against the rules, curfews and other restrictions imposed by gangs is a risk for Christians. This affects especially those Christians belonging to churches that are known to be unsupportive of the government or criminal groups. Also, when Christians meet up with others - especially if they are young - the police are likely to suspect them of threatening public order or belonging to a gang.

### **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)**

Due to the presence of *Secular intolerance*, Christian opinions are sometimes targeted, threatened with censorship and harshly criticized where they touch upon the biblical view of family, life and marriage. For instance, during the legislative debate on the decriminalization of abortion, the defense of faith-based opinions in social media was sometimes considered to be a violation of the principle of laicity of the state. In areas co-opted by gangs, Christians who reveal their faith and encourage others to abandon all contact with crime are likely to become the target of reprisals for defying the authority of the local gangs.

### **Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.00 points)**

In the context of criminal groups, the extended family can represent a risk for those Christians who do not follow the gang's orders or try to denounce them to the authorities. In such cases, the extended family is likely to have members acting as informers. Also, the extended family is sometimes used to monitor how genuine an ex-member's conversion is.

### **Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (2.75 points)**

Criminal groups have an active presence in the country and in many families there is at least one member related to the criminal world. If Christianity represents a threat to their illegal activities, discussing faith issues and biblical principles can be risky. Additionally, where a gang member's conversion is not accepted gang leader, family members could be put under pressure to find out how genuine the convert's new faith is.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

### **Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.50 points)**

In Honduras, the Constitution of the Republic establishes freedom of worship and ensures the right of parents to choose the school institution that best suits their Christian beliefs (despite ideological pressure groups claiming that parental religious beliefs obstruct the free development of children). In areas co-opted by gangs, children run the risk of being enrolled by criminal groups at an early age and forced to be part of the so-called "Hitman schools" ("*escuelas*

*de sicarios*”). Parents can hardly do anything about it - they are threatened if they try – and consequently, if their children do join up, parents are denied any opportunity of educating them and passing on their Christian values and beliefs.

**Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents’ faith. (3.50 points)**

This situation is highly likely to occur if Christian parents are perceived as a risk to the stability of criminal groups. Usually, children are targeted as a means of intimidating Christian parents with the aim of making them give up any influence they may have in the community. It is a risk for children to be athletes (such as runners) or to have some special quality that is appreciated in criminal life (talent in mathematics) because it makes them more likely to be pressed into gang membership. Additionally, according to the US State Department (IRFR 2020), some Adventist children were discriminated against concerning their parents' teaching about Saturdays.

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

In areas with the highest rates of violence generated by organized crime, Christians who became targets of threats by criminal groups, have few options. Most will flee their homes (and sometimes country) to safeguard their lives and that of their family. Sometimes, if the children of Christian parents suffer from gang harassment, their parents decide to send them to other cities or out of the country in order to keep them safe.

**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.00 points)**

There have been reports of sporadic cases where some denominations have put pressure on students to attend certain religious events in order to get graduate certification. However, the state youth-program “Guardians of the Fatherland” is far more dangerous. It is known that members of the national police and armed forces use this youth-program with its military uniform to encourage schoolchildren to adopt a war mentality, especially in areas of the country such as Ocotepeque, Atlantida or Gracias a Dios.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

Converted gang members are monitored to make sure they do not have any contact with rival gangs and that they live a true Christian life. Ordinary Christians also face constant monitoring by these groups because it is important for them to know if their message of peace and non-violence is becoming influential. Gangs are also known for implementing security systems - for instance, in San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa - to keep an eye on the local population and the police with the acquiescence of the local authorities.

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

In general, access to education is free for all, and religious education is allowed at all levels, including universities. However, especially in rural areas, criminal groups more or less control all access to schools/universities through extortion schemes and surveillance for recruitment purposes. As a result, several schools in the country have been forced to shut down. This process involves teachers, students, and also parents (as gang collaborators) who threaten (and retaliate against) Christian students who defy criminal group interests. Additionally, according to IRFR 2020, university students belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist Church are discriminated against when their Saturday Sabbath is not respected and teaching activities are scheduled for Saturdays.

**Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (3.50 points)**

The main business of gangs is based around extortion, fees that in the country are called 'war taxes'. This is a method of financing criminal groups and enjoys total impunity in the country. Christians must often pay a fee to carry on their daily activities or to be allowed to enter specific areas of the country. When it is about church affiliation or activities which a gang opposes, the fine will be high, as a way of intimidation intended to discourage such activities.

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

Christians are frequently forced to pass on information about personal and church activities that could endanger the interests and activities of criminal groups and their allies. The levels of corruption generate so much mistrust that even an interrogation carried out by police officers can endanger the safety of Christians, if they are then accused of being whistleblowers.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.50 points)**

In general, the Constitution guarantees the free exercise of all religions as long as they do not contravene laws and public order. However, the criticism of leaders and political authorities involved in corruption scandals in church sermons can put preachers at risk. In addition, by legalizing censorship and controlling freedom of expression, these same acts can also be considered manifestations of hate speech and discrimination. According to the Constitution, religious leaders are also prohibited from making any kind of political statement.

**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. (3.25 points)**

Christians are not forced by law to enlist in military service; however, there is no legal provision about conscientious objection. Christian journalists run the risk of being threatened, harassed,

prosecuted, arbitrarily arrested, forced disappeared, etc. when they denounce human rights abuse, corruption networks or criminal activities. The goal is to force them not to publish opinions/investigations that could endanger the interests of the government and criminal groups. In addition, due to the influence and pressure exerted by criminal groups, the population is forced to fit into their rules and collaborate with their purposes. In this context, Christians report being compelled not to denounce acts of corruption in the institution where they work, to provide confidential information for criminal purposes, to make their teaching 'crime-friendly' and to encourage children in getting to know gang-life. They are also at risk if they refuse to collaborate with the financing of illicit activities. Finally, as mentioned above (IRFR 2020), some teachers and other workers affiliated to the Seventh-day Adventist Church have not been allowed to observe their Saturday Sabbath because a Saturday is officially part of the working week.

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

Criminal groups (in collusion with government officers at various levels) basically have the authority to decide who can enter or leave the territories under their control. Christians who for whatever reason try to move from one area to another are thus faced with having to pay fees. The COVID-19 context exacerbated the situation, with gangs even gaining control of national borders to prevent those classified as a threat or enemy from fleeing the country.

**Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.25 points)**

Corruption is endemic in the country. Various state institutions try to cover up the trails of corruption and even the judicial system contributes to the atmosphere of impunity. Also, gangs that target Christians with pressure or violence are seldom taken to court due either to the ineffectiveness of the government authorities or to their collusion with criminal groups. This means that those actively opposing Christian values and activities are seldom punished by law.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

**Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.75 points)**

Officials at all levels are often in collusion with criminal groups, thus making it risky to report illegal activities and threats. The simple fact of trying to do so generates a lot of mistrust and reprisals can be serious. Also, the government has suppressed dissenting voices, thus endangering the freedom of speech, which includes the freedom to speak out against those who are causing harm. So, in this context, Christians demanding justice, new transparent elections, and respect for the rule of law are at risk of being silenced by the government or from their allies in organized crime.

**Block 5.6: Work among youth in particular has been restricted. (3.50 points)**

Considering that the usual recruitment age for gangs is 10 -14 years old, anyone daring to prevent recruitment (either through education, social programs or evangelization), represents



a threat to the gangs and their stability. It must be borne in mind that gangs terrorize neighborhoods throughout the country, dictating to young people an impossible choice - join or die! Also, in areas where the state runs its 'Guardians of the homeland' program, church work among young people and children is restricted and monitored and may be considered as being hostile towards the government.

**Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.50 points)**

Churches that encourage the conversion of gang members, or Christian groups that welcome former members into their congregations, are perceived as a threat to the authority of criminal groups. As a result, church leaders, relatives and members of the congregation may face serious reprisals. This is to intimidate other religious leaders and gang members and prevent them from carrying out similar actions that could lead them to be killed or forced into displacement. In previous years, some criminal groups could accept conversions occurring under certain conditions. However, conversion and leaving a criminal gang has now become more difficult than in the past.

**Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)**

Church leaders are very vulnerable to societal violence, including extortion and threats, because of their prominent positions in society and their ongoing presence and work in areas with minimal state presence and strong and active criminal presence. Church leaders cannot freely conduct their activities without being monitored or targeted by gang leaders, especially when they promote a culture of peace and try to prevent young teenagers from joining criminal gangs. The family of Christians also become targets for threats and reprisals, as a way to put pressure on them to stop their activities in the area. Christian leaders who manage donations for church work are forced to collaborate by paying a 'protection fee' (called a quota or rent), so that local churches can carry out their regular activities with minimum disruption.

## 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.*

Honduras: Violence Block question	WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	13	6
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?	3	4
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
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?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	1	3
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	7	37
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	100 *
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?	0	0
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?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	9	35
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

In the WWL 2022 reporting period:

- **Christians killed (13):** The work of Christians in poor neighborhoods or with youth frequently defies the control of criminal groups in those territories. This cost Christians their lives at the hand of gangs.
- **Christians sexually harassed (7):** The reported cases are of daughters of pastors who, as a way of reprisal against church work of their Christian parents', were victims of attempted rape, sexual harassment and coercion to engage in pornographic activities.
- **Christian attacked (100\*):** Most attacks involved death-threats against pastors and their families when they refused to pay extortion fees or collaborate in criminal activities, or when they insisted on carrying out humanitarian work in territory controlled by gangs, or

even persevered in youth-work involving former gang members.

- **Christians forced to leave their homes (9):** Members of a church founded in 2018 were received death-threats and were forced to displace because they refuse to sell or rent their land to be used as drug production operated by a local narco group.

## 5 Year trends

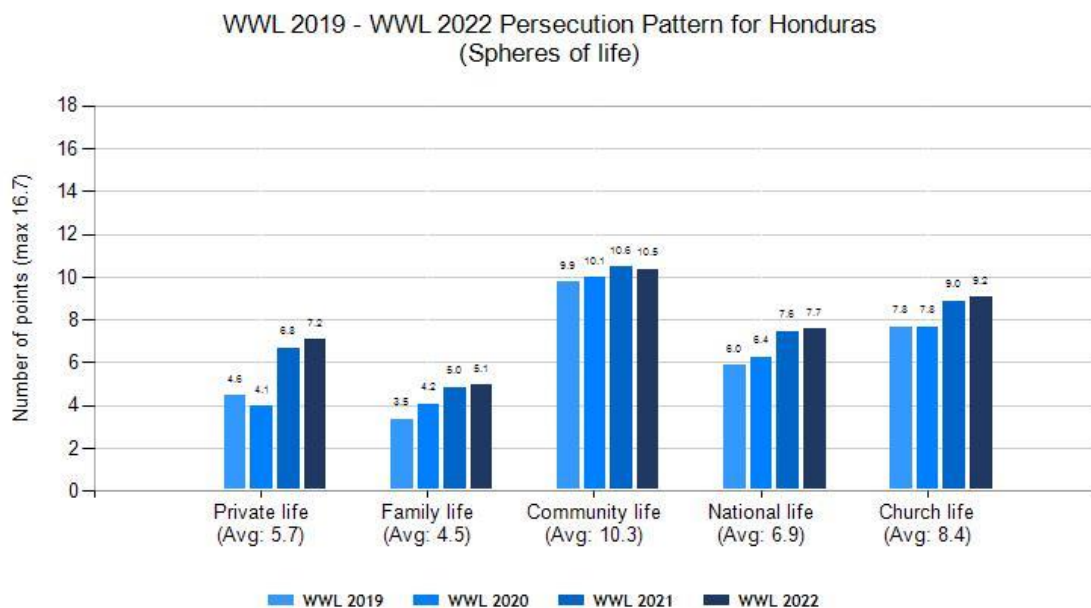
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Honduras: WWL 2019 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	8.0
2021	7.8
2020	6.5
2019	6.3

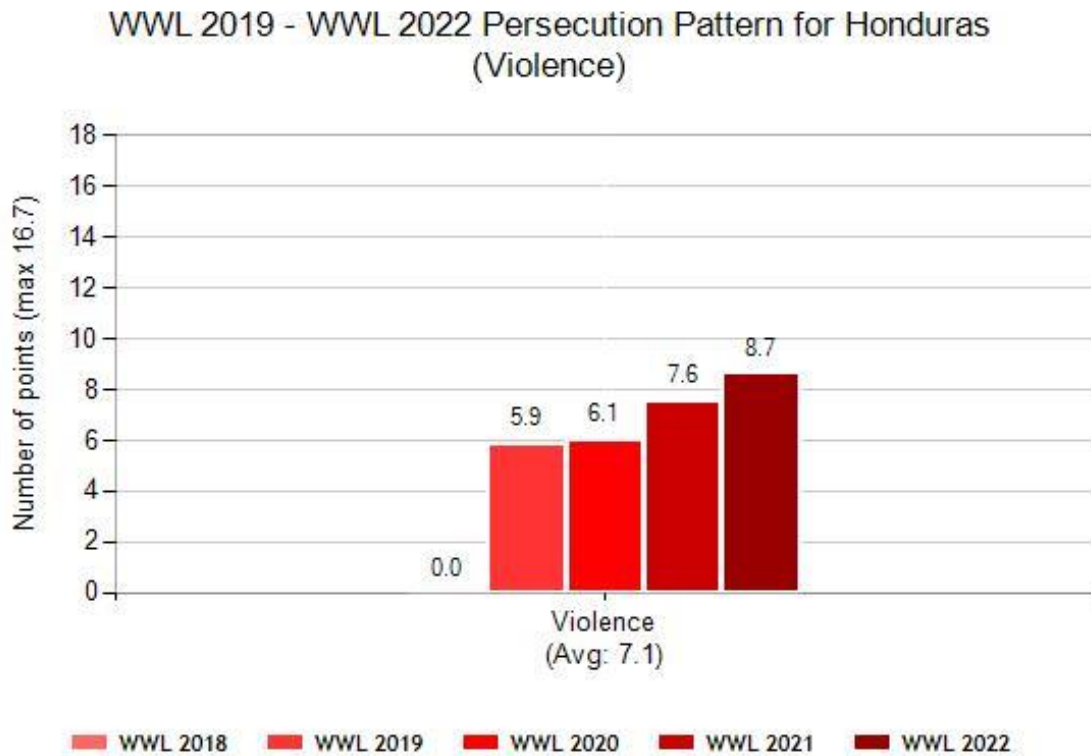
The situation in Honduras has been under detailed study since WWL 2019, which explains why the table above only lists four WWL reporting periods. It shows that the overall level of pressure on Christians has gradually crept up from 6.3 points to 8.0 points.

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



The chart above shows that pressure in almost all *spheres of life* increased over the period WWL 2019 - WWL 2022. During the last four reporting periods, pressure remains at the highest level in the *Community and Church spheres*, mainly due to the increased influence of criminal groups operating as de facto authorities and acting with impunity throughout the country.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



In the chart above, the scores for violence show a progressive increase during the last four WWL reporting periods. Thus, the danger that Christians face in living out their faith freely is caused by the greater territorial control of gangs and the lack of political will on behalf of the authorities to confront the culture of violence that they foster.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological

Technological	-
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Irrespective of religion, it is dangerous to be a woman in Honduras. According to reports by the Violence Observatory, there were 278 reported violent deaths and homicides in 2020 ([CDM, accessed 14 January 2022](#)). Rape and domestic violence are widespread, although women are slow to report abuses due to high rates of impunity granted to perpetrators ([ASJ, accessed 14 January 2022](#)). As a country expert commented: “The climate of fear in both the public and private spheres and the lack of accountability for violations of women's human rights is the rule and not the exception.”

Increasing numbers of women and girls are fleeing Central America amid reports that criminal gangs are systematically targeting adolescent girls for sexual enslavement ([US Department of State, “Trafficking in Persons Report,” 2021, p.273](#)). However, the majority of migrants fleeing Honduras are men, leaving many households in Honduras to be led by women.

Within this context of violence and instability, Christian women and girls can face additional challenges on the basis of their faith. There have been several reports of teenage daughters of pastors being victims of rape, sexual harassment and coercion to engage in pornographic activities at the hands of [gang members](#) (La Prensa, 5 March 2017). “Christian girls are the object of greater attention,” a country expert explained, “as their virginity is something they want to 'take away' at all costs.” They are further systematically targeted as a means of blackmailing or intimidating their families, in order to stop missional activity occurring in gang territory. Some girls have been abducted and killed for refusing to engage in sexual relationships with gang members. Survivors are left both physically and psychologically traumatized.

Finally, Christian women and girls are also psychologically impacted by the extreme pressure on Christian men and boys, as detailed in the male gender profile below.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

High rates of criminal activity and the presence of notorious gangs such as [MS-13](#) and Barrio 18 also pose daily security threats to Christian men and boys (BBC News, 14 February 2020). Church leaders are particularly vulnerable to attacks and threats, especially those involved in missional activities or seeking to stop the trafficking of narcotics. Extortion through fines and threats are commonplace. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, there have been several reports of pastors being violently abducted and killed (for examples, see: [Proceso Digital, 30 May](#) 2021; [La Prensa, 18 May](#) 2021). In February 2021, Edwin Arellano, a pastor of a youth group in an evangelical church was shot dead. His family suspect he was targeted for his ministry among gang members ([La Prensa, 8 February](#) 2021).

One of the greatest threats facing young Christian men and adolescents is forced gang recruitment. Whereas women and girls are commonly victims of sexual and gender-based violence, young men are exploited for criminal purposes, including drug trafficking. According to an ex-gang member who lives in a church safe house, his choice to leave has left him in grave danger. “If the gang doesn't kill me, those who want revenge will kill me....It's what I have to resign myself to.” ([El Confidencial, 1](#) November 2018)

Some gang members are permitted to leave gangs upon conversion to Christianity (particularly Evangelical Christianity), but will come under close scrutiny and monitoring from both their old gang as well as rival gangs. Any signs that they are not actively living out their faith can result in their death. Ex-gang member converts additionally face assimilation challenges; state security officers who identify them as former gang members – typically by tattoos or scars - can submit or stop them at any time for suspected crimes.

In light of such pressure and cycles of violence, many Christian men and boys choose to flee Honduras, although they remain vulnerable while displaced. As a country expert explained: “Even when Christians flee the country – because there are no safe zones inside the national territory – they continue under the mercy of the same, or different criminal groups involved with the trafficking of migrants.”

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020):

- "Muslim leaders reported one incident in which individuals who identified as evangelical Protestants appeared at an Islamic community outreach event in February, disrupting the event and making offensive remarks and disparaging comments about Muslims, such as 'go back to your country'. Muslim leaders said the evangelical Protestants made threats, forcefully removed hijabs from women, and destroyed religious materials. According to the Muslim leaders, they did not file a complaint."
- While Muslim community representatives said they continued to receive a few derogatory messages on social media, it was emphasized that they received far more supportive comments than negative messages.

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of the main persecution engine:

### Organized corruption and crime

Corruption and impunity have been dominant in the country's recent history. The deep network of collaboration between the various criminal groups and the authorities, especially at the local level, are the greatest obstacle to eradicating violence in the country. However, the new government, elected in November 2021, may bring hope for change and a better guarantee for respecting human rights and the rule of law. Government measures to curb violence and insecurity will have a positive impact on the freedom of the Church and its humanitarian activities. It is hoped that these will be carried out in increasing safety even when the churches are known for opposing the interests of local criminal groups.

### External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: impunity at around 87% of all crimes - <https://www.asj-us.org/learn/honduras-violence>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: CDM, accessed 14 January 2022 - <http://derechosdelamujer.org/project/monitoreo-2020/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: ASJ, accessed 14 January 2022 - <https://www.asj-us.org/learn/honduras-violence>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: US Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report," 2021, p.273 - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/TIPR-GPA-upload-07222021.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: gang members - <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1050121-410/mareros-obligan-a-mujeres-a-tener-relaciones-sexuales-sino-las-matan>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: MS-13 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-51501103>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Proceso Digital, 30 May 2021 - <https://proceso.hn/asesinan-a-pastor-evangelico-tras-bajarlo-de-su-vehiculo-en-santa-cruz-de-yojoa/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: La Prensa, 18 May 2021 - <https://www.laprensa.hn/sucesos/sicario-asesina-a-pastor-frente-a-los-miembros-de-su-iglesia-en-tegucigalpa-honduras-HYLP1464344>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: La Prensa, 8 February 2021 - <https://www.laprensa.hn/sucesos/honduras-pastor-jovenes-hombre-asesinado-negocio-tacos-JWLP1441239>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: El Confidencial, 1 November 2018 - [https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2018-11-01/mara-o-muerte-palizas-violaciones-formar-jefes-pandilleros-honduras\\_1638674/](https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2018-11-01/mara-o-muerte-palizas-violaciones-formar-jefes-pandilleros-honduras_1638674/)

## 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=Honduras>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Honduras>