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## Nicaragua: Full Country Dossier

February 2022



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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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 / Nicaragua

## Brief country details

Nicaragua: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
6,481,000	6,141,000	94.8

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

Nicaragua: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	56	61
WWL 2021	51	63
WWL 2020	41	72
WWL 2019	41	73
WWL 2018	-	-

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

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

Under President Ortega, churches and Christians are viewed as destabilizing agents thus making them a target for intimidation, harassment, monitoring and attack. This has not stopped them denouncing the injustices and human rights violations perpetrated by the government. The electoral period and the re-adjusted legal framework has been used as a pretext for increasing restrictions on the Church and Christian leaders who have been publicly calling for respect for the rule of law - especially during the period for elections - and helping those most in need, including those considered opponents of the ruling Sandinista Party.

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

**January 2021 - Managua:** Pastor Rudy Palacios attended a party meeting of the Democratic Restoration Party (PRD), but upon arrival, he found more than a dozen policemen who [detained](#) him. (La Prensa, 30 January 2021) The Pastor was taken to a jail cell where he was beaten. Authorities removed the information from his cell phone. According to internal sources, the constant harassment against him forced to all his family to move to other localities in several times.

**May 2021 - Matagalpa:** Radamez Traña, a Catholic activist disappeared for about 4 days after demonstrating with a Nicaraguan [flag](#) and another of the Catholic Church in front of a police station. On the day of his disappearance, he was intercepted by 3 people who held him, beat him and threatened to convince him to leave the opposition (Article 66, 1 June 2021).

**September 2021 - Masaya:** Roman Catholic priest Edwin Román, known for openly denouncing regime abuses, reported on social media that the police and regime sympathizers had [surrounded](#) the church of San Miguel Arcángel on various occasions (Twitter, 30 September 2021). In April 2021, Sandinista mobs and police officers (almost 80 persons, in total) [threw](#) stones at the same church and injured a journalist (Facebook, April 2021).

## Specific examples of positive developments

Despite the increase in regime hostility towards the Church (also by government supporters), especially against the leaders of the Catholic Church, churches are respected for their high level of commitment and identification with the needs of the vulnerable in society. Thus, even with the restrictions and obstacles to carrying out its humanitarian work and advocacy (e.g. calling for the rule of law to be respected), the churches' perseverance has become [a sign of solid hope](#) in the midst of chaos generated by the dictatorial measures of the Ortega regime (Crux Now, 2 August 2021). In the COVID-19 context, the Catholic Church showed greater concern and [commitment](#) than the government in safeguarding the health of the population (Radio Corporación, 22 August 2021).

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: detained - <https://www.laprensa.com.ni/2021/01/30/politica/2778470-policia-orteguista-retiene-amenaza-y-golpea-al-pastor-rudy-palacios-y-a-dos-miembros-del-prd>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: flag - <https://www.articulo66.com/2021/06/01/golpean-secuestran-radhames-trana-opositor-matagalpa-radhames-trana-paramilitares-nicaragua/>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: surrounded - <https://twitter.com/EdwingRoman14/status/1443359427248148486?s=08>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: threw - <https://www.facebook.com/100063538151484/posts/149028400558431/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: a sign of solid hope - <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-americas/2021/08/nicaraguan-cardinal-says-church-will-carry-on-despite-government-attacks>
- Specific examples of positive developments: commitment - <https://radio-corporacion.com/blog/archivos/107088/arquidiocesis-de-managua-llama-a-sacerdotes-extremar-medidas-ante-el-covid19-en-parroquias/>

## WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Nicaragua

### 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/nicaragua/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/central-america-and-the-caribbean/nicaragua/</a>	30 September 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19735631">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19735631</a>	30 September 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/NIC">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/NIC</a>	30 September 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nicaragua/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nicaragua/</a>	30 September 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>	27 September 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	30 September 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index (Not included)	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	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/nicaragua/freedom-world/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/nicaragua/freedom-world/2021</a>	30 September 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2021 report	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/nicaragua/freedom-net/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/nicaragua/freedom-net/2021</a>	30 September 2021
Garda World country report	Garda World	<a href="https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/nicaragua">https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/nicaragua</a>	30 September 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/nicaragua">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/nicaragua</a>	30 September 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/central.htm#ni">https://www.internetworldstats.com/central.htm#ni</a>	30 September 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/nicaragua">https://rsf.org/en/nicaragua</a>	30 September 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2021	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/ni">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/ni</a>	10 February 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI	<a href="http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NIC">http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NIC</a>	30 September 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/nicaragua/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nicaragua/</a>	30 September 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports	USCIRF 2021	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Nicaragua%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf">https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/Nicaragua%20Chapter%20AR2021.pdf</a>	30 September 2021
World Bank country report	World Bank	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nicaragua">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nicaragua</a>	30 September 2021

### Recent history

From 1936 to 1979, Nicaragua was a dictatorship ruled by the Somoza family, which was eventually overthrown by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (SNLF). From 1984 to 1990, Daniel Ortega became president of Nicaragua for the first time. Later in 2006, he won the presidential elections again and has held power ever since.

Over the years, Daniel Ortega has become an authoritarian ruler. He has turned his back on his revolutionary ideals and has come to resemble the dictator he deposed. Although until recently the country appeared to be one of the most stable and [safest](#) in the region (El Nuevo Diario, 20 March 2018), since 2018 Nicaragua has seen a weakening of the rule of law, nationwide corruption and repression. State and non-state agents endorsed by the government have targeted regime dissidents and their supporters and sometimes killed them.



Efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 pandemic were hindered by the lack of interest of the government in imposing confinement, social distancing and quarantine measures. On the contrary, the government [encouraged](#) street celebrations and other forms of assembly which potentially put citizens' health at risk (France 24, 14 September 2020). According to the BBC, the authorities did not provide [reliable](#) information on infections and vaccines related to COVID-19 (BBC News, 21 May 2020). A health and economic crisis was thus added to the socio-political chaos.

Multilateral organizations and the international community imposed sanctions on Nicaragua, [accusing](#) the Ortega government of human rights violations and the censorship of anti-government media (Foreign Policy, 18 June 2021). There was an increase of violence during the presidential electoral process to ensure President Ortega and his political allies stayed in power (see below: *Political landscape*). It was no surprise that he won with a [landslide victory](#) in November 2021 (BBC News, 9 November 2021).

## Political and legal landscape

The ruling SNFL party is Socialist and has centralized all power, taking control of the entire state apparatus. Although the largest opposition bloc since 2018 has been the [National Coalition](#) (Wtop News, 25 June 2020) made up of seven civil and political organizations, there is a distinct [lack of unity](#) among its members (Crisis Group, 7 May 2021). For the presidential election on 7 November 2021, it was clear that there was no group [strong enough](#) to successfully face the Ortega dictatorship at the polls (El País, 13 May 2021).

[Corruption networks](#) within the government have succeeded in countering all forms of opposition by imposing political and legal obstacles (Havana Times, 6 February 2021). Daniel Ortega and the ruling party control not only the executive branch but also the electoral, judicial and legislative powers, the police, the army, and even some city mayors. The regime has a [legal framework](#) in place that allows the current restriction of rights and abuse of powers to be considered legitimate (Amnesty International, 30 September 2020). Thus, despite the already existing restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly, right to association, and other repressive laws, the Legislative Assembly (which has an Ortega majority) has approved a whole package of laws that violate civil and political rights and reduced the credibility of the whole electoral process.

As reported by Infobae on 27 December 2020, the above-mentioned package of [laws](#) contained:

- i. The Foreign Agents Regulation Law, by which the government could block financing to all civil society organizations which it considers "disruptive" to the country's internal and external affairs;
- ii. The constitutional amendment that will allow life imprisonment for "hate crimes", an ambiguous definition that under the regime's logic could include the actions of opposition groups;
- iii. The Special Cybercrime Law, the objective of which is to punish with jail sentences anyone who "spreads false news" on social networks or the media;
- iv. The Law for the defense of the people's rights to independence, sovereignty, and self-determination for peace. Anyone the government considers to be a "traitor to the

homeland" is thus prevented from running for a position elected by the general public.

In addition to the above, [electoral reforms](#) were introduced that limit the participation of opposition political parties and any dissident voice. This put the transparency and fairness of the whole electoral process at risk (DW, 21 December 2020). In addition to the restrictive regulatory framework, practices such as monitoring, intimidation, smear campaigns and threats have been carried out against opponents (or people considered opponents) not only by the national police force, but also by ruling party supporters.

Through such manipulation of the law - timed for the run-up to the presidential election - consolidation of power was successfully achieved:

- i. The legal identity of opposition political parties was [cancelled](#) (CSE, 18 May 2021);
- ii. Civil society organizations and companies found their operations impeded and their licenses [revoked](#) (Race and Equality, 19 April 2021) due to [alleged](#) violations of the law (100 Noticias, 16 August 2021);
- iii. Citizens and [journalists](#) considered opponents were harassed (PR Newswire, 2 June 2021);
- iv. [8 presidential candidates](#) were arrested under the pretext of criminal activity (The Guardian, 4 August 2021).

As well as formerly denouncing the lack of civil and political rights, the international community has expressed [concern](#) about the negative impact that the president's policies may have - not only for Nicaragua, but also for the whole of Latin America. President Ortega has dismissed such [foreign interference](#) (Aldhu, 20 February 2021), prevented the arrival of [international electoral observers](#) (25 Confidential 11 June 2021), threatened that Cuba should leave the Organization of American States (OAS), which he referred to as a "[sewer](#)" (25 Confidential, 24 June 2021), and accepted that the arrested presidential candidates were indeed [political prisoners](#) (Article 66, 24 June 2021). All this was carried out to ensure that President Ortega would remain in power for a fifth term – the fourth consecutive period.

Since June 2018, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) set up a Special Follow-up Mechanism for Nicaragua (MESENI) in order to follow up on its recommendations. However, the Ortega government banned the IACHR from working in Nicaragua, which is why [MESENI](#) has been working from the headquarters of the Commission in Washington DC (OAS, April 2021). Among the latest actions carried out by the Organization of American States (OAS), the Permanent Council approved Resolution [1175 \(2324/21\)](#) "The Situation in Nicaragua" (OAS, 15 June 2021), in which it expresses its concern over the fact that the Nicaraguan government did not implement electoral reforms in accordance with international standards in order to guarantee that the November 2021 elections were free and fair.

The Regional Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for Central America and the Dominican Republic (OHCHR) also urged the government [to put an end](#) to arbitrary arrests and release all those detained (OAS, 9 July 2021), and [condemned](#) the criminal prosecution of opposition leaders who had announced their intention to run in the November election (OAS, 9 July 2021). As the [High Commissioner](#) pointed out, the arbitrary detentions, attacks, harassment by the national police, stigmatization of people perceived as opponents, threats on social media and harassment against independent media and journalists all generated

a climate of fear that inhibited the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression (OHCHR, 22 June 2021).

The [Interamerican Court of Human Rights](#) stated in an Advisory Opinion that the Supreme Court of Justice in Nicaragua did not have the competence to interpret the Interamerican Convention (IA Court HR, 07 June 2021). Accordingly, President Ortega's reelection can be seen as being unconstitutional and illegitimate.

To put pressure on Ortega's administration, various countries have imposed sanctions in an attempt to halt the violation of human rights and force a return to democracy in the country. Among the countries imposing sanctions are:

- i. The [United States of America](#) with sanctions relating to the freezing of assets, prohibition of financial transactions and cancellation of visas to more than 100 of those involved in violations of fundamental freedoms, including the members of the Ortega Murillo family (US Department of State, 12 July 2021). In addition, the US Senate unanimously voted for the [RENACER Act](#) for imposing selective sanctions against anyone working against democracy in Nicaragua (US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 22 June 2021);
- ii. [Canada](#), with sanctions relating to the prohibition of transactions and effective freezing of assets of nine key members of the Government of Nicaragua (Government of Canada, 12 July 2021);
- iii. The [European Union](#), with sanctions targeting 8 Nicaraguan officials, including first lady and Vice-president Rosario Murillo, consisting of a travel ban to the EU and the freezing of assets for individuals and entities (Human Rights Watch, 5 August 2021).
- iv. Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico [recalled their ambassadors](#) in protest at the arbitrary detention of opposition leaders (Article 66, 9 August 2021). Vice-president Murillo described these governments as intrusive, interfering and disrespectful.

Additionally, civil society organizations have been highlighting cases of arbitrary detention and persecution against critics of the government. Among those active are: [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW, 22 June 2021), [International Crisis Group](#) (ICG, 20 May 2021), Freedom House (Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021), and Amnesty International (AI 2021).

Through all the manoeuvring to stay in power, the ruling party's excesses have been [so evident](#) (La Prensa, 25 February 2021) that they have caused an even greater [decline](#) in popularity and acceptance of the current government (BBC News, 5 July 2021). The apparent [negligence](#) in handling the pandemic (EFE, 24 April 2021) - including harassment of [health professionals](#) (OAS, 28 July 2021) - and the [restrictions](#) and obstructions on the distribution of humanitarian aid in the wake of the Iota and Eta hurricanes, have all served to exacerbate the political crisis in the country (Diálogo, 12 January 2021). In contrast, civil society actors such as the Church have gained wider acceptance due to their continued demands for the authorities to [respect](#) democratic processes (Prensa CELAM, 17 May 2021) and to provide free elections on [equal terms](#) (Article 66, 4 July 2021). Church leaders suffered reprisals for their outspokenness as well as for helping regime [victims](#) (DW, 23 November 2020) and for promoting measures to prevent the increase in COVID-19 infections. The government, for its part, had been encouraging citizens to attend [large events](#) (CNN, 31 March 2021), which included the promotion of religious activities not authorized by the Church.

## Religious landscape

Nicaragua: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	6,141,000	94.8
Muslim	1,100	0.0
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	7,600	0.1
Ethno-religionist	31,100	0.5
Jewish	220	0.0
Bahai	12,600	0.2
Atheist	3,100	0.0
Agnostic	184,000	2.8
Other	100,200	1.5
<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)

Since the social unrest began in April 2018, church leaders (mainly Roman Catholics) were involved in the official dialogue between opposition groups and the government, first as mediators and later as observers. However, in March 2019, as an act of protest at the regime's lack of commitment and continued violation of human rights, the Catholic Church decided [to cease all active participation in the talks](#) (Havana Times, 8 March 2019). Since then, the Catholic Church's support for the most vulnerable sectors of society has caused it to be regarded as a 'public enemy' by the government and its allies. As a result, church leaders and churches have been frequent targets for all kinds of [retaliation](#) (Article 66, 3 August 2021), including the possibility of being prosecuted for '[electoral crime](#)' when demanding respect for democratic processes (100 Noticias, 11 August 2021).

The [OHCHR Report about the Situation in Nicaragua](#) (OHCHR, 19 February 2021) published details of continued attacks, threats, arbitrary detentions, harassment, and intimidation of persons perceived as opponents of the government. These included acts of intimidation and violence against churches and Christians, especially Roman Catholics. The authorities [clearly favor](#) churches that publicly support Ortega's actions (Infobae, 5 February 2021). These churches - mainly Protestant - have been [co-opted by the regime](#) to toe the ruling party line either out of conviction or fear. The result has been increased division among Protestant groups and [social polarization](#) regarding the Church's stance in the context of the November 2021 presidential election (100 Noticias, 19 May 2021).

In reaction to the voices of Christian leaders calling for the upholding of human rights, there has been a systematic increase in hostilities and harassment against church leaders, particularly

bishops, priests and the churches and faith-based organizations in their charge. Some examples are:

- i. [Obstructing](#) plans for the distribution of humanitarian aid among victims of the hurricane disasters (Fides, 24 November 2020);
- ii. [Canceling visas](#) for church leaders (CNN, 21 October 2020) and [hindering](#) their return to the country (Confidencial, 19 February 2021);
- iii. [Initiating smear and disinformation campaigns](#) against church leaders and certain church activities (Facebook, 29 December 2020), claiming they are [instigators](#) of a coup d'état (100 Noticias, 10 June 2021) and accomplices in the criminal act of spreading rumours of a bishop's [poor state of health](#) (La Prensa, 22 December 2020);
- iv. Promoting religious festivals [not authorized](#) by the Church (Vos TV, 23 March 2021) and which potentially put the health of the community at [risk](#) (Fides, 3 August 2021);
- v. Deliberately and indiscriminately [increasing](#) electricity and water charges for churches (OLIRE, 24 October 2020);
- vi. [Targeting church leaders with insults](#) (Confidencial, 9 September 2021), [threats](#) (Verdad en Libertad, 10 August 2021) and [beatings](#) for not aligning themselves with the regime (Confidencial, 16 April 2021) and for [supporting](#) those accusing the regime of human rights violations (Actualidad con Dino Andino Twitter account, 31 July 2021);
- vii. Unexplained deaths in strange circumstances of [relatives](#) of certain church leaders (Swissinfo, 11 January 2021) and [members of the clergy](#) (La Prensa, 24 April 2021);
- viii. Incidents of church [desecration](#) and vandalism (Radio Corporacion, 12 October 2020), especially during services of remembrance calling for [justice](#) for the victims of the 2018 protests (Article 66, 19 April 2021).

Despite all the negative government reactions to church social work, church leaders have continued to support the November 2021 presidential election by:

- i. [Encouraging](#) the population to fulfill their civic duties through voting for the benefit of society as a whole (Fides, 22 February 2021);
- ii. Raising awareness among the voting public to support the legitimacy of the next government by casting their vote;
- iii. Remaining [vigilant](#) regarding the transparency of the electoral process (Fides, 12 August 2021);
- iv. Denouncing the [persecution](#) of those considered political opponents (Nicaragua Investiga, 7 July 2021) and the mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis.
- v. Continuing to avoid spreading COVID-19 after the [confusion](#) generated by the authorities when they promoted religious activities without consulting church leaders (Radio Masaya, 1 August 2021).

## Economic landscape

According to UNDP's HDI 2020:

- **Gross national income (GNI) per capita (2019):** 5,284
- **GNI per capita for women:** 4,656
- **GNI per capita for men:** 5,930

- **Inequality in income:** 30.7 %
- **Poverty:** 16.3%

According to World Bank (country overview):

- **Economic growth:** Economic growth is expected to fall to -2.5% in 2021.
- **COVID-19:** Along with the violence that has prevailed in the last years, the impact of hurricanes Eta and Iota, job losses, restrictions to foreign and national enterprises, and a fall in consumer and business confidence, the COVID-19 outbreak had a serious social and economic effect, further halting progress achieved in poverty reduction since 2005.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) reported that in the context of COVID-19, Nicaragua had not yet recovered from the 3 consecutive years of economic contraction. Despite the help of the [\\$353.5 million](#) from the International Monetary Fund to alleviate the health crisis (Swissinfo, 23 August 2021), all factors indicate that the situation will persist, especially affecting such sectors as tourism. GDP growth was [-2.0%](#) in 2020, with predictions for 2021 and 2022 of 2.0% and 1.8% respectively (ECLAC, 8 July 2021).

[Economic contraction](#) has continued due to the COVID-19 health crisis, the damage caused by hurricanes Eta (Global Risk Insights, 28 February 2021) and due to [repressive](#) measures introduced by the authoritarian socialist regime (Confidencial, 22 May 2021).

The socio-political instability and government authoritarianism has caused a "[total standstill](#)" to investments in the country (Confidencial, 8 July 2021). There has also been a reduction in the labor force due to the fact that many citizens decided to emigrate to other countries – thus the country is experiencing a [brain drain](#) (Voz de América, 7 April 2021).

Christians, as well as the entire population, face the consequences of the economic crisis and the imposition of a socialist economy that only benefits the allies of the regime. As punishment for church representatives publicly denouncing government abuses, government support given to church groups to finance their social work has been [progressively reduced](#) (Confidencial, 19 January 2021). Also, public service fees for places of worship have been [increased](#) significantly for no apparent reason (Aciprensa, 27 October 2020). The authorities have also imposed [obstacles](#) to churches collecting and providing humanitarian aid for the victims of natural disasters (Dialogo, 12 January 2021).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and White) 69%, White 17%, Black 9%, Amerindian 5%
- **Main language:** Spanish
- **Urban population:** 59.3% of total population (2021)
- **Literacy rate:** 82.6% (2015).

According to World Bank data:

- **People using at least basic drinking water services (% of population):** 81.52 (2017)

- **School enrollment (gross):** For pre-primary (2010) is 55.6%; for primary (2010) 122.71% and for secondary (2010) 73.43%
- **Compulsory school education:** 7 years
- **School Gender Parity Index (GPI):** 1.035 (2010). This refers to the ratio of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools (2010)
- **Unemployment:** 6.837% (2019)
- **Refugee population by country of origin:** 8,711 (2019)

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI 2020):

- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** Nicaragua's HDI score is 0.660, which put the country in the medium human development category, positioning it at 128 out of 189 countries and territories. Like all averages, the HDI indicates inequality in the distribution of human development across the population at the country level. Between 1990 and 2019, Nicaragua's HDI value increased from 0.497 to 0.660, an increase of 32.8%.
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII):** Nicaragua has a GI value of 0.428, ranking it 101 out of 162 countries in the 2019 index.

According to the [UNHCR's Global Trends Report 2020](#):

- **Refugees:** The total number of refugees (and people in a refugee-like situation) leaving Nicaragua in 2020 was 8,700 in 2019, compared to 4,377 in 2019. Since violence began in 2018 and the situation deteriorated in 2020, many Nicaraguans have fled to neighboring Costa Rica, Panama, Mexico and Europe.

On 3 November 2020, Hurricane Eta hit the city of Puerto Cabezas and Hurricane Iota made landfall close to the city on 17 November 2020. These two hurricanes [affected](#) over 1.8 million people, destroyed or damaged 44,000 houses, and killed at least 21 people (Reuters, 24 November 2020). The main [area affected](#) was the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RACCN) where indigenous Miskito and Mayagna communities are located (Relief Web, 8 January 2021). Other departments - such as Jinotega and Matagalpa - also experienced heavy rainfall. Even before these events, there was an increasing social crisis (especially after the protests in 2018) that was [exacerbated](#) by the poor basic infrastructure (Acaps, 5 January 2021), which limited access to basic services, and by the restrictions on aid distribution imposed by the government. Only a few government-approved organizations (i.e. those not considered political enemies) were allowed to operate. As a consequence, Nicaragua is one of the [poorest](#) countries in Latin America (Voz de America, 24 September 2020) and the situation has worsened through the rate of [emigration](#) (Confidencial, 3 October 2021).

Another aspect to consider is the degree of regime influence in the education sector: School curricula often include programs to [indoctrinate](#) children according to ruling party ideology and to promote loyalty to the Sandinista movement (Confidencial, 8 June 2021). Schoolchildren and students are taught that violence, repression and the censorship of anti-Socialist ideologies (including Christianity) are [acceptable methods](#) for defending the homeland (Radio Universidad, 9 December 2020). In addition, the government [budget](#) to support church initiatives related to education has been reduced dramatically, putting at risk the continuation of those activities (Confidencial, 19 January 2021).

The Church remains one of the country's institutions with the greatest credibility among the population. The humanitarian support offered by churches during the COVID-19 crisis has caused the authorities to accuse them of [plotting a coup](#) (100 Noticias, 23 October 2020). Despite the churches' assistance in helping the public access basic services such as food, medicine, medical care, and spreading of trustworthy information concerning COVID-19 and the vaccination process, they have faced government opposition because those activities weaken the regime's control over the population.

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 54.8% penetration - survey date: March 2021
- **Facebook usage:** 54.8 % penetration – survey date: March 2021

According to World Bank (country profile 2020):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 88.4 per 100 people

According to Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2021:

- "Although users in Nicaragua have wide access to digital platforms and websites, the regime of President Daniel Ortega and its allies have asserted control over the online landscape through the manipulation of information, politically motivated use of copyright claims to remove content, and new legislation that severely punishes users who disseminate supposedly false or harmful content."

Even before the introduction of the Cybercrimes Law (see above: *Political and legal landscape*), intermittent [Internet outages](#) were used by the government to inhibit protesters (NPR, 5 June 2021) or key persons perceived as regime opponents. However now, all citizens live with the [permanent risk](#) of being unable to use the Internet and of being criminalized for comments contradicting the government narrative (AP News, 27 October 2020). Domestic NGOs, Roman Catholic Church representatives, [journalists](#) (Connectas, 21 June 2021) and opposition members all claim that the government has been [monitoring](#) their email and telephone communication (US State Department, Human Rights Report 2020). [Intimidation](#) and the resulting effect of self-censorship has become greater and is especially directed at human rights defenders, active members of an opposition political force, journalists and against church leaders who have been calling for the defense of democratic values and rule of law (Divergentes, 17 March 2021).

According to RFI (World Press Freedom 2020), since the protests in 2018, the media (especially opposition media outlets) have faced face severe hindrances (including government-orchestrated shortages of newsprint, rubber, and other essential supplies), harassment campaigns, arbitrary arrests and death threats. As this has become more severe, many journalists have had to [flee abroad](#) (100 Noticias, 25 June 2021) while others have been jailed on terrorism charges. As part of the persecution of independent media during the 2021 electoral process, non-aligned journalists have faced difficulties due to the "law regulating foreign agents" which aims to prevent "crimes against state security" and requires any person or entity receiving foreign funds (including journalists working for international media) to register as a "foreign



agent” with the Interior Ministry. Thus, [non-authorized voices](#) can be effectively silenced (Article 66 Facebook site, 12 May 2021).

For some Christians, church leaders, and Christian groups in exile, the use of social media networks and independent media are the only means by which they can share and receive information. Due to the government's control over the media and prosecution of non-aligned citizens, they are exposed to the risk of being monitored, sanctioned, and publicly accused of plotting a coup. Zoom meetings organized by churches have been monitored by informers and, on occasions when something suspicious was said, police officers suddenly appeared outside the houses of the church leaders involved.

## Security situation

In June 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [expressed](#) concern about the accelerated deterioration of the human rights situation in the country (OHCHR, 22 June 2021). Arbitrary arrests, assaults, harassment by the national police, stigmatization of persons perceived as opponents, threats on social networks, and harassment against independent media and journalists have generated a climate of fear that inhibits the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression. Similarly, the last Universal Periodic Review of Nicaragua showed that the country [had not complied](#) with international human rights obligations since that date (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2019).

Human Rights Watch (HRW 2021) has denounced the current impunity for human rights violations committed by the police and severe restrictions on freedom of expression and association, as well as political discrimination against public administration officials who support the opposition. Likewise, the US State Department's [Nicaragua 2020 Human Rights Report](#) of 30 March 2021 states that significant human rights issues included: Unlawful or arbitrary killings (including extrajudicial killings) committed by the government or its agents; forced disappearances by parapolice forces; torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by prison guards and parapolice; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary detentions by police and parapolice; political prisoners and detainees; politically motivated reprisal against individuals located outside the country; a serious lack of independence of the judiciary; and arbitrary and unlawful interference with privacy.

Due its totalitarian tendencies, the ruling party relies on the police and other national security entities to ensure it stays in power, despite any violations of human rights committed by them. In addition to the police, the authorities hire vigilante groups (also known as “Ortega squads”) made up of local gang members, police officers in civilian clothes, ex-guerrillas,

members of pro-government organizations (such as Sandinista Youth) and government sympathizers to violently oppose dissidents. The US-administration places the “Ortega police” in the [same category as other criminal organizations](#) (UPI, 6 March 2020). Despite all evidence to the contrary, both the president and army have denied the presence of paramilitary forces or their activities in the country. This repression and violation of freedom [escalated](#) as the November 2021 elections approached (Human Rights Watch, 20 September 2021).

The frequent victims of these acts of repression are not only ordinary citizens perceived as opponents; church leaders (both Catholics and Protestants) have also become targets of

reprisals. Christians, church leaders and religious groups – mainly Catholics – who criticize or expressly disagree with the government about human rights violations (or the incorrect data concerning the COVID-19 pandemic) became some of the most frequent targets in 2020 and 2021. Church leaders (especially Catholic bishops and priests) have been attacked, exiled, defamed, sermons have been monitored, churches have been vandalized and surrounded by intimidating numbers of police during church services. The victims of such actions have no recourse to justice and no protection; the laws passed in the WWL 2022 reporting period empower the government to criminalize any act that is considered contrary to the regime's line.

## Trends analysis

### 1) The international community rejects the dictatorial practices of the Ortega regime

Concerned about the abandonment of democracy and rule of law and the lack of guarantees concerning transparency and free citizen participation in the November 2021 elections, the international community and human rights organizations have condemned the repressive measures of the Ortega government. The Vatican in Rome has also spoken out on several occasions in support of Christians in the country.

### 2) The repression of opposition voices is increasing

As the November 2021 presidential elections approached, citizen discontent with the possibility of Ortega's presidency being extended motivated the regime to act more harshly against public critics. The Church has not been immune to the worsening of the situation.

### 3) Corruption is on the increase

Investigations have shown that corruption has worsened over the years that President Ortega has been in power. The lack of rule of law, the mismanagement of public funds for political purposes by the Sandinista party (including propaganda celebrating the presidential couple), collusion with part of the private sector and the cooperation with groups acting outside the law, have deepened the multidimensional crisis and conditions of inequality that exist in the country. The growing dependence on a state that cannot resolve its internal affairs makes those sectors that are considered enemies of the government more vulnerable, including the Church when it demands that human rights be guaranteed for all.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: safest - <https://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/nacionales/459004-nicaragua-seguridad-america-latina/>
- Recent history: encouraged - <https://www.france24.com/es/20200914-nicaragua-seis-meses-pandemia-covid-19-falta-informacion>
- Recent history: reliable - <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-52716064>
- Recent history: accusing - <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/18/the-race-to-avert-a-second-dictatorship-in-nicaragua/>
- Recent history: landslide victory - [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-59202881?at\\_medium=RSS&at\\_campaign=KARANGA](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-59202881?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=KARANGA)
- Political and legal landscape: National Coalition - <https://wtop.com/latin-america/2020/06/fractious-nicaraguan-opposition-unites-to-challenge-ortega/>
- Political and legal landscape: lack of unity - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/central-america/nicaragua/88-risks-rigged-election-nicaragua>

- Political and legal landscape: strong enough - <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-05-13/la-falta-de-acuerdo-de-la-oposicion-nicaraguense-allana-el-camino-a-la-tercera-reeleccion-de-ortega.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Corruption networks - <https://havanatimes.org/opinion/the-model-of-corruption-and-impunity-in-nicaragua/>
- Political and legal landscape: egal framework - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/09/nicaragua-gobierno-pareciera-preparar-nueva-fase-represion/>
- Political and legal landscape: laws - <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2020/12/27/daniel-ortega-aprobo-un-paquete-de-leyes-que-anulan-las-libertades-democraticas-en-nicaragua/>
- Political and legal landscape: electoral reforms - <https://www.dw.com/es/nicaragua-r%C3%A9gimen-de-daniel-ortega-buscar%C3%ADa-eliminar-a-la-oposici%C3%B3n-en-busca-de-su-reelecci%C3%B3n-en-2021/a-56014534>
- Political and legal landscape: cancelled - [https://www.cse.gob.ni/sites/default/files/documentos/cancelacion\\_prd.pdf](https://www.cse.gob.ni/sites/default/files/documentos/cancelacion_prd.pdf)
- Political and legal landscape: revoked - <https://raceandequality.org/nicaragua-2/civil-society-organizations-in-nicaragua-suffer-from-persecution-and-grave-violations-to-fundamental-freedoms/>
- Political and legal landscape: alleged - <https://100noticias.com.ni/nacionales/109480-regimen-cancela-ongs-nicaragua-eeuu-espana-suecia/>
- Political and legal landscape: journalists - <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/us-press-leaders-protest-abuse-of-journalists-in-nicaragua-301304342.html>
- Political and legal landscape: 8 presidential candidates - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/04/nicaragua-candidate-vice-president-berenice-quezada-house-arrest>
- Political and legal landscape: concern - <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/053/94/PDF/G1905394.pdf?OpenElement>
- Political and legal landscape: foreign interference - <https://aldhu.home.blog/2021/02/20/el-gobierno-de-nicaragua-advierte-que-no-hay-espacio-para-otras-voces/>
- Political and legal landscape: international electoral observers - <https://www.confidencial.com.ni/politica/magistrados-electorales-descartan-observacion-internacional-en-los-comicios-de-noviembre/>
- Political and legal landscape: "sewer" - <https://www.confidencial.com.ni/politica/daniel-ortega-califica-a-la-oea-de-cloaca-y-advierte-de-enterrar-al-organismo/>
- Political and legal landscape: political prisoners - [https://www.articulo66.com/2021/06/24/daniel-ortega-oea-union-europea-estados-unidos-elecciones/?fbclid=IwAR08VKs75j0mkl\\_GO9aCe2SZyFqmtG19zPHzULYugsji7pN7K83Ngd4173w](https://www.articulo66.com/2021/06/24/daniel-ortega-oea-union-europea-estados-unidos-elecciones/?fbclid=IwAR08VKs75j0mkl_GO9aCe2SZyFqmtG19zPHzULYugsji7pN7K83Ngd4173w)
- Political and legal landscape: MESENI - <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/jsform/?File=/es/cidh/MESENI/boletines.asp>
- Political and legal landscape: 1175 (2324/21) - [http://scm.oas.org/doc\\_public/english/hist\\_21/CP44215E03.docx](http://scm.oas.org/doc_public/english/hist_21/CP44215E03.docx)
- Political and legal landscape: to put an end - <http://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2021/171.asp>
- Political and legal landscape: condemned - <http://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2021/145.asp>
- Political and legal landscape: High Commissioner - <https://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27193&LangID=5>
- Political and legal landscape: Interamerican Court of Human Rights - [https://www.corteidh.or.cr/corteidh/cf/Jurisprudencia2/busqueda\\_opiniones\\_consultivas.cfm?lang=en](https://www.corteidh.or.cr/corteidh/cf/Jurisprudencia2/busqueda_opiniones_consultivas.cfm?lang=en)
- Political and legal landscape: United States of America - <https://www.state.gov/nicaragua-sanctions/>
- Political and legal landscape: RENACER Act - <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/chair/release/committee-approves-renacer-act-to-hold-ortega-regime-accountable-for-subverting-democracy-in-nicaragua>
- Political and legal landscape: Canada - [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international\\_relations-relations\\_internationales/sanctions/nicaragua.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/sanctions/nicaragua.aspx?lang=eng)
- Political and legal landscape: European Union - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/05/new-eu-sanctions-nicaraguan-officials-amid-escalating-crisis>

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## WWL 2022: Church information / Nicaragua

### Christian origins

The Roman Catholic Church was the first Christian denomination in the country, aided by the Spanish colonization. The first church was established by the Franciscans in 1524 in Granada, but the largest amount of missionary work during the colonial period was carried out by the Jesuits. Protestant missionary activity (mainly in the eastern part of Nicaragua) began via the Anglican Church in the 1760s, although the influence of the Anglicans dates back to the presence of a few British settlements in the 1620s. Serious efforts to evangelize the Creoles and the Indians in the eastern part of Nicaragua did not begin until the arrival of the United Brethren of Germany (Moravian Church) in Bluefields in 1849.

(Source: [Programa Latinoamericano de Estudios Sociorreligiosos](#) - PROLADES, accessed 30 September 2020)

### Church spectrum today

Nicaragua: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	5,173,000	84.2
Protestant	1,422,000	23.2
Independent	480,000	7.8
Unaffiliated	38,800	0.6
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-973,000	-15.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,140,800</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	1,111,000	18.1
Renewalist movement	1,420,000	23.1

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 denomination in Nicaragua is the Roman Catholic Church, which is found throughout the country. According to WCD 2021 estimates, 84.2% of Nicaraguan Christians are Catholics.

However, Protestants and non-traditional evangelical denominations are growing and gaining an increased presence in the country.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Programa Latinoamericano de Estudios Sociorreligiosos - <http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/nic/espanol/religion-en-nica.pdf>

# WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Nicaragua

## Reporting period

1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

## Position on the World Watch List

Nicaragua: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	56	61
WWL 2021	51	63
WWL 2020	41	72
WWL 2019	41	73
WWL 2018	-	-

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

Nicaragua rose 5 points in WWL 2022. This was due to the dictatorial nature of the regime installed by President Ortega's elite, which has been making every effort to silence activists demanding civil society participation and that democracy be respected. This was particularly the case in the run-up to the November 2021 elections. Christian leaders, especially those linked to the Roman Catholic Church, denounced human-rights abuses and provided humanitarian assistance and as a result faced monitoring, discrimination, defamation and other forms of hostility. The ultimate goal of this intimidation of Christians is to make the Church and its leaders lose credibility among the population.

## Persecution engines

Nicaragua: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Not at all
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak



Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Medium
Secular intolerance	SI	Weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

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

**Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):** President Ortega has filled state institutions with loyal supporters, banned leading opposition parties and changed the legal framework (including the Constitution) to allow his indefinite re-election and violations of civil rights. Through weakening democracy and the rule of law, his goal has been to remain in power without giving the opposition a fair opportunity to be able to participate in the political life of the country. Church leaders and Christian groups – especially Roman Catholics – who question the regime's authority and legitimacy and request that human rights and democratic principles be respected, face acts of retaliation. As a result, the ruling party has carried out a campaign in which church leaders and Christians have been threatened, mistreated and insulted, called enemies and terrorists, and have generally been harassed. Churches have also been vandalized and church services disrupted, with the aim of creating a climate of fear.

**Communist and post-Communist oppression (Medium):** The ruling party is the Socialist Sandinista National Liberation Front (SNFL), and supporters of President Daniel Ortega revere him as “Comandante Daniel”. Socialist-Communist patriotism is taught in schools and it is imposed on citizens through the different state institutions, even through violent means. Hence, the regime monitors all institutions and seeks to repress Christian values and views which could endanger party ideology and threaten the regime's authority. Christians who criticize the regime face harsh repression and censorship and are victims of politically motivated religious freedom violations. Sometimes aspects of religion (such as religious festivals and Biblical references) are deliberately distorted and used to support the regime's interests, which is a common tactic in other Communist countries, such as Cuba and Venezuela, with which Nicaragua has a close relationship. This engine is clearly blended with aspects of Dictatorial paranoia and Organized corruption and crime.

**Organized corruption and crime (Medium):** The dictatorial context favors corrupt practices which are deeply rooted in the country. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI 2021), Nicaragua is at rank 164 out of 180 countries, scoring 20 points (0= highly corrupt and 100= very clean). This reflects how serious corruption with the purpose of furthering regime interests has become and how illicit drug trafficking is also gaining ground. The judicial system, security forces and public services all operate to keep the Sandinista's leaders in power making use of all resources available: Bribes, manipulation and use of political influence are common practice. Similarly, non-state agents such as paramilitary groups, criminal groups and Sandinista mobs act in collusion with the government to repress opponents with impunity. Many Christians face the threats and illegal actions of these groups and have no recourse to justice.

## Drivers of persecution

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

- Government officials (Strong):** Government officials at all levels support the regime. The whole state apparatus functions to keep the president and his political elite – including some members of his family - in power through totalitarian control, which means there is no room for opposition or any kind of criticism. The army, police, Congress and the Electoral Tribunal work together to suppress and censor any form of opposition. Christians are affected where their activities, preaching or teachings are seen to be attempts at destabilizing the government or challenging the president's authority.
- Political parties (Strong):** The ruling SNFL party controls almost all state entities, it has managed to weaken all opposition parties and civil society leadership, thus hindering usual democratic processes and any transparency in future elections. Christians who question the ruling party's legitimacy or who demand transparent elections have become the target of reprisals.

- **Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Strong):** The government uses a variety of violent groups (also known as 'Ortega death squads' or parapolice forces) to terrorize citizens and silence anyone daring to demand that the elite step down from power. They are known for disrupting church services.
- **Ideological pressure groups (Medium):** These are the groups with radical political ideologies promoted by SNFL. The best known is the so-called "Sandinista Youth". They are the ones who identify Christian opponents as targets for action to be taken against them by the authorities or themselves.

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

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

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

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

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

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

## Christian communities and how they are affected

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

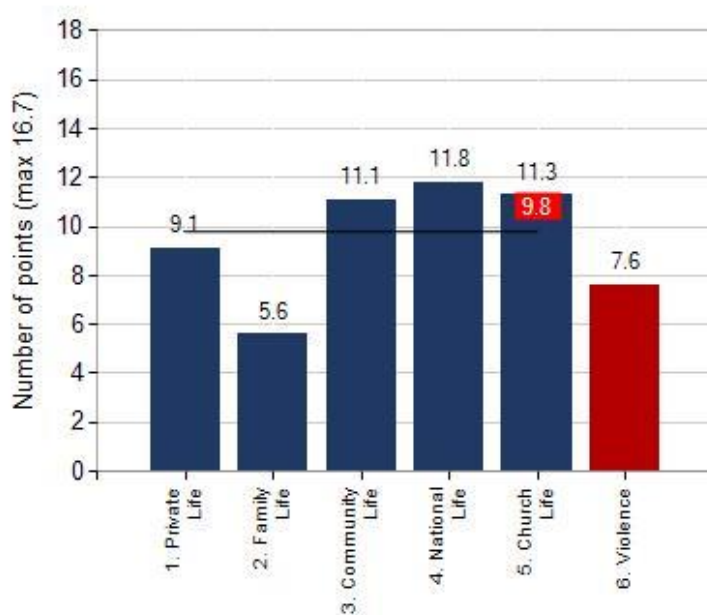
**Historical Christian communities:** The largest denomination in this category is the Roman Catholic Church. Where opposition to the government's dictatorial measures is expressed, verbal and physical aggression is likely to be faced from government officials, paramilitary groups and other regime supporters. Other historical Christian denominations noted an increase in regime hostility towards them during the WWL 2022 reporting period.

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

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** This category is made up of Baptist and Pentecostal groups, Mennonites and Moravian Lutherans. They are in the minority and do not have the same representation at social level. This category also experiences hostility similar to the historical churches whenever opposition to the ruling party is expressed (especially if they had been receiving regime-support in the past).

## The Persecution pattern

WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Nicaragua



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Nicaragua shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Nicaragua is at a high level, rising from 8.5 points in WWL 2021 to 9.8 points in WWL 2022.
- Pressure is strongest in the *National, Church and Community spheres of life* due to the restrictive measures employed against church leaders and churches who are regarded as being supporters of anti-government elements.
- The score for violence is 7.6 points. A considerable number of churches and Christians have been attacked to intimidate and silence them when their activities have been in conflict with the interests of the government.

## 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 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)**

It is frequent that Christians are targeted and threatened by the regime when they express faith-based political opinions criticizing the dictatorial government practices and the lack of transparent elections, when they defend Church opposition to ruling party ideology, or when they use social media to support priests or human rights activists under government surveillance. Additionally, with the entry into force of the Special Cybercrime Law to penalize any Internet content opposing regime interests, such intimidation led to self-censorship of Christians to avoid reprisals.

**Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.00 points)**

Within pro-government families, or with any member of the SNFL, to be Christian and outspoken about the repression of the government represents a risk, especially where the family might fear reprisals for being linked to an 'enemy of the regime'. In such cases, Christians are placed under pressure not to speak out against the regime and (sometimes) not to meet with members of their church, especially if it is being monitored by the government. There is also evidence of inter-denominational conflict within families where a family member has chosen a different church affiliation.

**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)**

Within pro-government families, or with any member of the SNFL party, to be Christian and critical of the government can provoke trouble. When a Christian is known as an 'opponent', government authorities are likely to interrogate extended family members. In order to avoid

retaliation, the extended family may report on activities or meeting places of their Christian relative, thus putting the latter in danger.

**Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.00 points)**

This has been a widespread problem, especially among Catholic Christians and especially in Masaya, Matagalpa and Leon. Meetings between them are often misinterpreted as being conspiratorial against the government and/or supporting the opposition. Also, when Christians meet in their homes for any reason, their cars may be photographed and they are liable to be disturbed by the police. At times, the continuous application of curfews also prevented Christians from being able to get together for meetings, even when there was no religious motivation. During the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters, Christians who gathered to help those most affected were monitored and any 'meetings' organized to provide help put them at risk of arrest.

**Block 1 - further information**

*To own or keep Christian materials (e.g. Bibles) is allowed for most citizens in the country; however, it can be difficult in places like prisons or police stations. Such materials can cause Christians in arbitrary detention to be classified as terrorists and mistreated. Some Christians avoid having Christian materials in their possession which could link them to congregations or church leaders known for their stance against the regime.*

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

Educational programs in schools indoctrinate young children in the ideology of the dictatorship. Children and young people are forced to carry SNFL flags and banners with wording that praises the regime and to attend pro-government rallies. Children of Christian parents are compelled not only to learn teaching that does not conform to Christian faith but are encouraged to believe that any ideology that goes against the government's must be eradicated by force. The presidential couple are revered as national heroes and "Augusto Sandino" has been compared to Christ.

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

The main obstacle for Christian parents to raise their children according to their Christian beliefs is the school indoctrination mentioned in Block 2.8. If parents try to protect their children from state propaganda, they are immediately considered regime opponents and become victims of reprisals. Most Christian parents try to find private spaces to share their faith with their children.

**Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.00 points)**

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

**Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (3.00 points)**

Christians who do not support the regime have faced (or been threatened with) kidnappings, arbitrary imprisonment and many have been forced to flee their homes. Such situations cause the separation of families for prolonged periods of time. Arbitrary arrest is one of the most frequent tactics against those considered 'enemies' and was a recurrent practice during the 2021 electoral period. Many of those who are detained (often Christians) are not allowed to have any kind of communication with their families and are isolated from their relatives for prolonged periods of time. In other cases, Christians flee their homes in order to avoid reprisals against their relatives and cannot usually keep in contact with them for a prolonged period.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

Civilian groups and pro-government sympathizers look out for any suspicious activity in the neighborhoods, schools and work places and act violently against any anti-government protesters. They support the police by recording names, addresses and movements of regime opponents. Christians in the community linked to churches and leaders known for their opposition to the regime are likely to be targeted and followed on a daily basis. This monitoring increased in the run-up to the November 2021 elections.

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

Sometimes, Christians must attend political events in which both the ruling SNFL and the almost messianic figure of the president are praised as heroes; in such context, church affiliation is seen as a sign of national betrayal. Christians are forced to attend progovernment events in order not to be considered 'opponents' and not to expose their church and families to harassment. The regime is also known to organize 'religious events' (without the consent of church leadership) with the aim of discrediting church leaders and confusing congregations. Pressure is exerted on workers to attend and show their support during such events.

**Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.25 points)**

The collusion between the administrative authorities of the universities and the governmental authorities to repress students who oppose the regime has persisted since April 2018. In this scenario, Christian students related to any Christian leader, pastoral work or church known for its opposition to the regime run the risk of being easily targeted by university authorities (including professors closely related to the regime) and can face being 'handed over' to the police on charges of terrorism. Such Christian students are suspended, their academic records are deleted or, if they are not deleted, it is recorded that they were expelled, making it difficult for them to be accepted in private educational centers.

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

Due to the high levels of social monitoring and surveillance, all citizens and especially those who speak out against the regime are watched not only by government authorities but also by the Citizen Power Councils (CPC) and the Sandinista Leadership Committees. Christians in these circumstances (especially those who were in prison or have a relative suffering arbitrary arrest, or are closer to a religious leader regarded as a terrorist) face having to constantly report their activities and meeting places to the authorities. They are interrogated by the police because outspoken Christians are automatically viewed as being linked to anti-government activities.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)**

Every time Christians publicly express their faith-based points of view concerning the injustices of the regime, the authorities lash out against them with threats and other forms of repression carried out by state security forces, Sandinista mobs or paramilitary groups, allegedly operating within the legal framework. To be linked with the opposition via statements or pictures can be a reason to be targeted. Even if Christians try to be neutral, this attitude is considered treason just because they do not defend the regime. Through such intimidation, it is intended that Christian academics, journalists and other professionals self-censor and refrain from open criticism of the government.

**Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.75 points)**

The only political party operating without obstruction is the Sandinista National Liberation Front (SNFL). Politicians who have made known their disagreement with the president or even called for his resignation had no chance of being allowed to participate in the November 2021 elections. This also affected Christians who tried to create a Christian political alliance to participate in democratic elections. In general, Christian civil society organizations are very restricted; especially through the new legislation which counters any kind of opposition with legal accusations about acting against the state and planning a coup financed with foreign sup-



port. Such accusations occurred, for example, when young people who participated in a march (where protesters were demanding democratic elections and the stepping-down of the president) were given medical assistance, or when collections were planned for funding aid for the victims of the recent hurricanes.

**Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.75 points)**

Those who harm Christians are both state and non-state agents endorsed by the government. Any kind of attack against Christians, church leaders, Christian organizations and Christian property is hardly ever brought to prosecution, let alone punished. The corruption networks ensure impunity for the perpetrators and stability for the regime. Even when an investigation is carried out, the final analysis can be sure to diminish the actual crime, for instance by highlighting the negligence of the Christians involved.

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

Due to the government's control of the media, biased information has at times been spread, with Christians and church leaders being portrayed as terrorists and traitors who are planning a coup. The president has continued to insult Christians in this way and has encouraged others to do so too, thus creating a climate of intolerance towards the Church. Militants of the party add to this by ridiculing Christians, for instance on social media networks. When churches issued statements concerning the seriousness of the COVID19 pandemic, the lack of transparency in

the electoral process, the importance of respect of democracy, and denounced other human rights abuses, the response from the presidential couple (President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Rosario Murillo) was to insult Christian teaching, church leaders and other believers by labeling them as demons who spread hatred and discord. The objective behind delegitimizing the Church is to justify the repressive actions against it since the attacks are presented as being a necessary strategy to bring peace back to the country.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

**Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.75 points)**

With non-Catholic denominations having the legal status of NGOs, the new restrictive legislation has meant that many churches with members known for their opposition to the regime, face arbitrary delays regarding permits and authorizations. The registration of individual churches depends upon whether the church denomination involved is considered a threat by national security.

**Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.75 points)**

Regime militants, mobs and paramilitary units monitor church services and other religious activities in order to know the content of the preaching and teaching of religious leaders. Comments about human rights abuses, allegations of corruption and demands to free political

prisoners are then used as evidence for accusations of terrorism or of plans to stage a coup. Church leaders received official guidelines warning them not to speak out against the government and to protect the interests of the ruling SNFL party through their preaching and teaching. On the other hand, during the COVID-19 crisis, recommendations made by the Church to prevent the spread of the pandemic were taken by the regime as a challenge to its authority.

**Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (3.75 points)**

Since the approval of the Law of foreign actors, there have been increasing restrictions on church-run institutions due to the strict requirement to declare the origin of each item of international funding received. Fines have been imposed where the authorities consider the donor to be a danger for the national interest. The government has used this procedure to deny licenses for registration and to generally hinder the activities of church-affiliated organizations. In addition, the regime continues targeting the humanitarian work carried out by such organizations, often via aggressive SNFL supporter action. Blocking the distribution of humanitarian and medical aid in disaster areas and to those in poverty serves a clear purpose: The government wants the population to be dependent on state services and not on those of non-state actors.

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

Churches and Christian organizations – especially those who participated in the 2018 demonstrations and are linked to the Catholic Church - have been targeted for reprisals for criticizing the regime, denouncing its human rights violations and calling for respect of rule of law. The government has retaliated with verbal and physical violence and even vandalism and desecration of church buildings. Government hostility towards churches with anti-SNFL views increased after the April 2018 protests and reached its highest level during the 2021 electoral campaign. It is clear that the SNFL has drawn up a 'black list' of Christian leaders' names.

## 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.*

Nicaragua: Violence Block question	WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	1
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?	28	35
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	1	2
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	1	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	1	2
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	0

6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	22	62
6.9	How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	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?	4	5
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	11	3

In the WWL 2022 reporting period:

- **Churches attacked (28):** Most churches were attacked by pro-government mobs as part of reprisals by state officials after church leaders had made statements opposing the government. These attacks often involved arson, vandalism and damage to property.
- **Christians attacked (22):** These incidents happened mostly when Christian activists or church leaders were involved in publicly defending human rights, claiming justice for protesters and in criticizing the regime. The attacks were perpetrated through beatings and death threats by security agents, government sympathizers, paramilitary groups or other allies of President Ortega's regime.
- **Christians forced to leave the country (11):** Most of these cases were foreign church leaders who had lived in the country for several years but were now denied further residency by the authorities. Other cases involved Christians fleeing the country in the face of government reprisals.
- **Christians forced to leave their homes (4):** All cases involved Christian leaders who had been constantly threatened by groups supporting the government and had to change their location due the continue threats against them.

## 5 Year trends

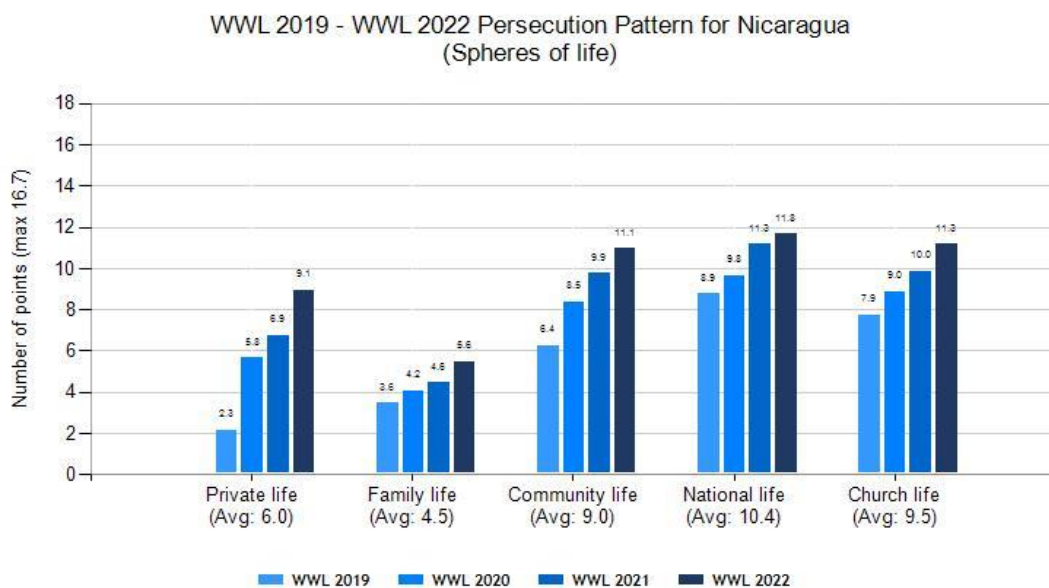
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

## 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Nicaragua: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	9.8
2021	8.5
2020	7.5
2019	5.8
2018	0.0

The table shows that the average pressure on Christians has steadily increased since WWL 2019, which is the period following the April 2018 protests, marking the point where government action against opposition voices intensified.

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

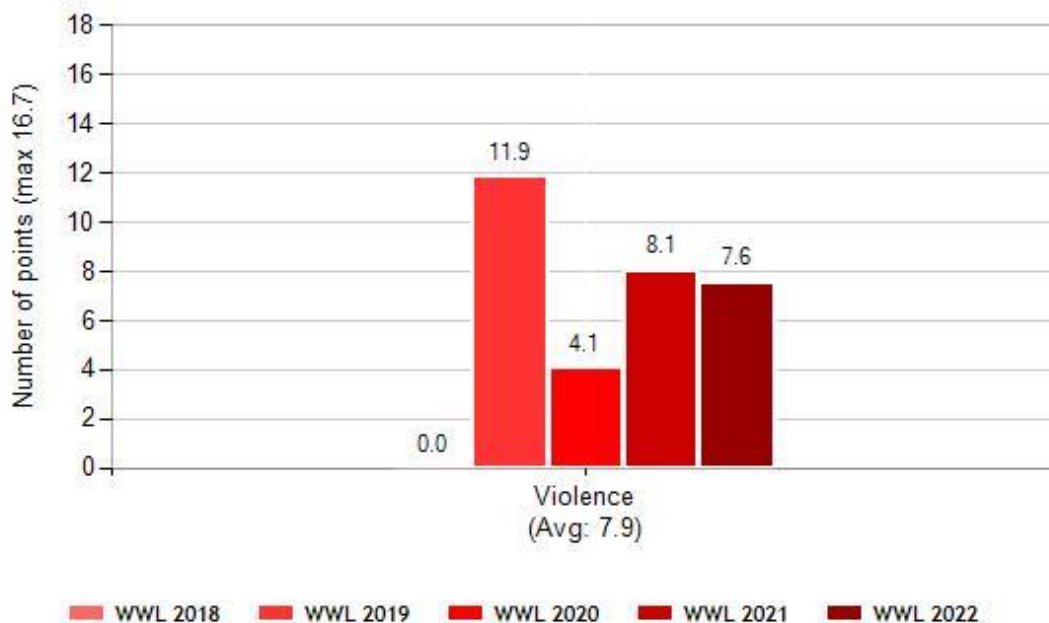


Pressure in *all spheres of life* is on the rise, due to the fact that government and SNFL-supporter hostility towards Christians has intensified as church leaders refused to give in to intimidation, especially during the run-up to the 2021 elections. electoral context.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

Although the highest level of violence was reached in WWL 2019, the scores in the WWL 2021 and WWL 2022 reporting periods are still in the category 'very high'. (See chart below.)

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



### Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

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

As described above, ongoing state oppression under President Ortega worsened in the WWL 2022 reporting period, placing women in a situation of extreme vulnerability. Due to a lack of confidence in the justice system, many victims have not reported the crimes against them. Perpetrators enjoy impunity, and even those imprisoned for their crimes are often later granted pardons.

Christian women and girls also suffer the loss of male family members, who are more vulnerable to being imprisoned, abducted or forced to flee Nicaragua (see below: *GSRP / Male*).

More broadly, Nicaraguan women remain at high risk of domestic violence, although the introduction of new legislation to tackle this has been welcomed as a positive development ([Georgetown, Women Peace and Security Index 2021/22](#), p.29).

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied food or water; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Men and boys are, in general, more likely to experience visible forms of persecution than women. This is primarily linked to the roles that men and boys assume. Male youths are more likely to take part in demonstrations demanding the resignation of the president and suffer government retaliation. Additionally, most church leaders (primarily Catholic) or ministry leaders are male.

When the government identifies a man associated with a church known for their opposition to the regime, he is more vulnerable to repression, and he will suffer hardships and pressure from state and non-state agents. Those who provided shelter and medical assistance to protesters in 2018 continue to experience government retribution years later, including slander, arbitrary investigations by government agencies and unfounded charges.

Catholic priests are especially vilified by President Ortega. As noted in a recent report by the Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights, “In 2020 the government’s hatred of the Catholic Church has not stopped; on the contrary, it worsens every day, having reached critical levels” ([CENIDH, 2020](#)). Priests and parishioners have been taken hostage inside churches, denied water and electricity, verbally abused and physically beaten. Others have been abducted, or imprisoned where they face maltreatment, and are denied access to family members ([OAS, 9 July 2021](#)).

As a result of the high levels of pressure, many men – particularly church leaders - feel forced to flee the country, facing the dangers of possible capture by human traffickers and other criminal groups.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020) and USCIRF 2021, no information on cases of persecution of non-Christian groups was reported.

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

The presidential elections of November 2021 lost all legitimacy and credibility. In this context, the social importance of such actors as churches must be emphasized. However, with President Ortega elected for another term, the constant attacks on Christian leaders and others look set to continue. International supporters of democracy in Nicaragua require a definite strategy for returning the country to democracy and avoiding any strengthening of the Ortega-dictatorship.

### **Communist and post-Communist oppression**

The more the government tries to restrict protests and critical voices, the more widespread the dissatisfaction with the SNFL-Communist political model is becoming. Repression, surveillance, arrests, etc. targeting those who defend democracy, will continue to be tactics of the regime as long as it exists. Nevertheless, the churches' perseverance in the face of persecution has given it a voice of true authority to defend social interests and seek the well-being of those most in need.

### **Organized corruption and crime**

Corruption in the country will continue to permeate all sectors of society as long as the Ortega administration continues. Given that his allies and supporters are financed with state money, it is possible that when these funds become scarce, ties with criminal networks that finance the political interests of the regime will be strengthened. Thus, impunity and legal protection will continue to be guaranteed for all those who adhere to the government's postulates, and those causing damage to churches and carrying out acts of violence against Christians will continue to go unpunished.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Georgetown, Women Peace and Security Index 2021/22 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPS-Index-2021.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: CENIDH, 2020 - <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2051677.html#:~:text=In%20an%20August%20report%2C%20the%20Nicaraguan%20Center%20for,it%20worsens%20every%20day%2C%20having%20reached%20critical%20levels.%E2%80%9D>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: OAS, 9 July 2021 - [https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media\\_center/PReleases/2021/171.asp](https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2021/171.asp)

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