
World Watch Research

Venezuela: Persecution Dynamics

February 2025



OpenDoors

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World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

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

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

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

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

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

Copyright, sources and definitions

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

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

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

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

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

Reporting period

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

Brief country details

Venezuela: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
29,395,000	27,137,000	92.3

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

Venezuela: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	27,137,000	92.3
Muslim	97,200	0.3
Hindu	590	0.0
Buddhist	36,100	0.1
Ethnic religionist	219,000	0.7
Jewish	7,200	0.0
Bahai	174,000	0.6
Atheist	63,900	0.2
Agnostic	1,341,000	4.6
Other	318,500	1.1
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

Map of country



Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Venezuela: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Government officials, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
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

The authorities do not permit government opposition or criticism, which puts church leaders, Christian groups and Christian organizations at risk of government retaliation if: i) their religious activities denounce the regime's corruption, lack of democratic practices and human rights violations; ii) they show support for opposition leaders; or iii) they engage in humanitarian work not tolerated by the government.

Government retaliation may include threats, church attacks, defamation, arbitrary arrests, surveillance, censorship, restricted access to public services and denial of access to basic goods such as food and medicine. Amid the worsening socio-economic crisis in the country, the government exploits the scarcity of essential goods and services to manipulate the population, especially during election periods. This includes indoctrinating schoolchildren with Socialist-Communist ideology and obtaining political loyalty from church leaders in exchange for not declaring their churches illegal. Easy access to food, medicine and education is often reserved for supporters of the ruling party.

Christians also face threats and violence from criminal groups, particularly Colombian guerrillas, who act with impunity and frequently support the regime. These groups frequently hinder church-run humanitarian aid programs which provide assistance to the most vulnerable sectors of society, including migrants.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- July 2024, Sucre:** Bolivarian National Guard Officers [burst into](#) the San Baltasar church in Cumaná following distribution of humanitarian aid by the church and Caritas to those affected by the flooding of the River Manzanares. Officials stated that only President Nicolás Maduro could authorize the provision of such emergency assistance. As a result, the church had to be closed (NTN 24, 16 July 2024). The news article did not state how long the closure should last.
- January 2024, Monagas:** On 2 January 2024, Catholic missionary-priest from Kenya, Josiah Asa K'Okal, was [found dead](#) hanging from a tree after he had been reported missing the day before. The circumstances of his death remain unclear. He had been responsible for evangelization in the Warao community (Agenzia Fides, 3 January 2024).

- **January 2024, Tachira and Apure:** ELN guerrilla groups have been issuing laws for residents in the areas under their control. Church leaders must also comply, otherwise they are likely to face reprisals. For instance, the ELN must be notified of any journeys or visits with international agencies. Any form of humanitarian assistance also needs ELN [permission](#). Further, church leaders are banned from mentioning any local issues concerning extortion, kidnapping or guerrilla warfare in sermons (ArmandoInfo, 7 January 2024).

Specific examples of positive developments

Representatives of the Roman Catholic Church [publicly](#) demanded transparency and electoral verification after the July 2024 elections (Vatican News, 30 July 2024). Despite the political context and the danger of reprisals, the Catholic Church has continued to [speak](#) for the people and demand better democratic principles in the country (La Croix, 13 August 2024). Churches in the country have also continued to provide [aid](#) to vulnerable communities where they have been suffering severely from the economic crisis in the country (Aciprensa, 11 October 2024).

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Since expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation, they are not treated as a separate category for scoring in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: The largest denomination in this category is the Roman Catholic Church. However, the small Orthodox and a growing Protestant community made up of the Lutheran, Calvinist, Presbyterian and Anglican churches also belong to this category. It is mainly Christians from this category who suffer intimidation and attacks for expressing Christian views and values which clash with the ideology of the regime and the interests of criminal groups, which sometimes act in collusion with the authorities.

Converts: In Venezuela, this category mainly consists of Christians moving from one church denomination to another who then face criticism and rejection for abandoning the traditional faith of their families. However, it also consists of people who become Christians after abandoning the Socialist/Communist ideology of the ruling party or after leaving a criminal group. In these last cases, they are monitored and persecuted if they speak out or their humanitarian work is considered an act against the regime or when they represent a threat to the stability of the criminal group (especially in the border areas of the country). In general, Christians belonging to this category also face reprisals and interference related to the main persecution engines present in the country.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category is mainly made-up of Pentecostals, Baptists and Evangelical groups. They represent a growing minority but suffer the same repression as the historical Christian communities when they refuse to support the government. However, these church groups are more vulnerable to being put under pressure to show sympathy with the regime (in exchange for administrative and economic benefits and permission to set up humanitarian aid programs). If they refuse, they are forced to operate illegally because official registration will be denied or indefinitely delayed. They can also face other kinds of non-administrative reprisals, especially against their church leaders. The churches belonging to this category also tend to be very vulnerable to the hostilities and violence exerted by criminal groups, especially those located in the border areas.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The operation of the three main Persecution engines (DPA, CPCP and OCC - see below) is blended, causing the dynamics of persecution to spread throughout the country. In the WWL 2025 reporting period, most cases of persecution against Christians occurred in Amazonas, Aragua, Apure, Barinas, Barquisemeto, Bolivar, Carabobo, Distrito Capital (Caracas), Falcon, Guarico, La Guaira, Mérida, Miranda, Sucre, Táchira, Zulia. Unreported cases in other cities are highly likely.

Position on the World Watch List

Venezuela: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	52	71
WWL 2024	53	67
WWL 2023	56	64
WWL 2022	51	65
WWL 2021	39	-

The main cause of the drop in the overall score was the decrease in the violence score, which fell from 10.7 points in WWL 2024 to 9.6 points. There were fewer killings and church attacks than before (but more arrests). Many incidents involved intimidation and revenge by local criminal groups, particularly acting in the Colombian border area. Pressure only increased in the *Private sphere of life*. The authorities do not tolerate any opposition or criticism of the government, and socially committed Christians have been targets for hostility, especially during the recent presidential elections. There is a government strategy to divide the Church into two distinct groups: One group consists of those church leaders who openly show loyalty to the regime—some under the threat of reprisals—and the other group is made up of those leaders maintaining a critical stance, advocating for human rights and democracy.

Persecution engines

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

(table continues below)

Venezuela: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Strong
Secular intolerance	SI	Very 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.

The main Persecution engines (DPA, CPCP and OCC) are blended.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

According to the World Justice Project ([Rule of Law Index 2024](#)), Venezuela ranks last among 142 countries (#142), underscoring the severe erosion of democratic principles and governance. Despite widespread allegations of irregularities and lack of transparency in the July 2024 presidential election, Nicolás Maduro was officially declared as winner, further demonstrating his administration's determination to retain power at all costs. This outcome reinforces concerns regarding the regime's disregard for democratic processes and the rule of law, particularly as many members of the international community deem Maduro's government illegitimate.

The state apparatus continues to align fully with the Socialist/Communist ideology of the regime, systematically suppressing dissent and opposition. A notable instrument of control is the government-mandated identification card, used to determine access to essential services such as food and healthcare, disproportionately favoring supporters of the ruling party. These systemic violations of fundamental rights extend to Christians, particularly church leaders who publicly advocate for genuine democratic reform or denounce corruption and human rights abuses. Churches and Christian organizations providing humanitarian aid are often viewed as undermining the regime's portrayal of itself as the sole provider for citizens. As a result, many such organizations and individuals have faced verbal and physical harassment, arbitrary arrests, administrative sanctions, and the destruction of property. In some cases, religious gatherings have been disrupted or totally prohibited. President Maduro frequently accuses independent church leaders of colluding with political opposition groups, interfering in political affairs, misleading the faithful, and fostering division rather than promoting peace. These accusations, coupled with actions targeting Christian communities, highlight the regime's broader strategy to neutralize perceived threats to its authority.

Communist and post-Communist oppression (Strong)

The government, following the ideal of Bolivarian Revolution, rules according to Socialist/Communist principles and seeks to control all areas of life in society, trying to ensure that all activities are favorable to the regime. When the Church stands firm in its convictions and defends its autonomy and teaching, it faces harassment from the government, for instance, when church leaders oppose policies concerning life, marriage and family which contradict traditional Christian values. The government attempts to fragment the Church by offering economic or administrative benefits in exchange for political support, particularly targeting the newer and smaller church denominations under the threat

of losing legal status. Any dissident voice demanding the abandonment of Marxist ideology is censored and Christians actively engaged in community projects are swiftly labeled as enemies and traitors of the homeland. The repression worsens where church projects have international links, since this is viewed as being an “imperialist” attack on national sovereignty. To make sure society continues to be based on Socialist/Communist principles, the state education system is used to influence children from a young age.

Organized corruption and crime (Medium)

Venezuela experiences high levels of corruption and the active presence of various criminal groups. Venezuela is considered a '[narco-state](#)' (Miami Herald, 6 November 2023) and criminal networks operate with ease due to corruption at all levels of government; they can act with impunity and often carry out government orders to silence dissenting voices. The state uses paramilitary gangs (“colectivos”) in various cities to monitor and intimidate all opposition, including the social demands highlighted by churches and church leaders. Colombian guerrillas and other criminal groups involved in the business of migrant smuggling in the border region hinder church humanitarian work; they also try to indoctrinate and recruit minors. These criminal groups represent a risk for Christians, especially where church teaching directly opposes criminal activity.

Drivers of persecution

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

(table continues below)

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

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

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- Government officials (Strong):** Most government officials – at all levels – are followers of Socialist/Communist ideology, loyal to President Maduro and will do anything to keep him in power. They seek to repress voices that could endanger the stability of the regime, thus Christians who demand that President Maduro should step down are harshly treated; the authorities can limit the exercise of human and/or civil rights and put pressure on Christians that show disagreement with the regime. The main organs of repression are the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB), the Bolivarian National Police (PNB) and its Special Actions Forces (FAES), the Scientific, Criminal and Criminal Investigations Corps (CICPC), the Bolivarian Intelligence Service National (SEBIN) and the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM).
- Political parties (Strong):** The ruling party is the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). Although there are opposition political parties, these are systematically repressed. The ruling party remains in power thanks to the weakening of the rule of law and the irregular use of the entire state apparatus. The ruling party monitors and silences (at times violently) Christians who

seek to weaken regime loyalty. Thus, many Christians face imprisonment, defamation, and physical, psychological and economic harassment.

- **Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Strong):** These groups, particularly the Special Action Forces, assist government officials and the ruling party in their efforts to remain in power. They use threats and violence to act against anyone seeking to undermine the government. The main groups are the so-called Integral Defense and Security Committees, 'colectivos'. ELN and ex-FARC members also belong to this category and operate in border regions when supporting the government represents a benefit to their interests.
- **Citizens (Medium):** The current state of crisis has caused many citizens to show their loyalty to the regime, either out of convenience or fear of reprisals. Such loyalty may include participating in acts of hostility against the Church, especially when religious leaders denounce human rights violations perpetrated by the Maduro government.

Drivers of Communist and post-Communist oppression

- **Government officials (Strong):** Most government officials at all levels seek to prevent the spreading of any ideas and beliefs which contradict Socialist/Communist principles, even if this means suppressing fundamental liberties. Those Christians who undertake socio-political projects in their communities are treated with suspicion and if their activities are not aligned with the regime's interests, they could be victims of sanctions and reprisals (mostly in the form of licenses and permits being denied). State school curricula also contain obligatory education in Marxist philosophy.
- **Citizens (Medium):** As explained above (under: *Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia*), for a variety of reasons, many citizens want to show loyalty to the ruling party. Many act as informers monitoring church activities and Christian initiatives in their localities, acting according to the Socialist-Communist principles.
- **Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Medium):** Paramilitary groups and regime sympathizers use pressure and violence to force citizens to follow the regime's Socialist-Communist ideals. They block any Christian activity relating to aspects of democracy, human rights and political liberties. The main groups are listed above under *Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia*.

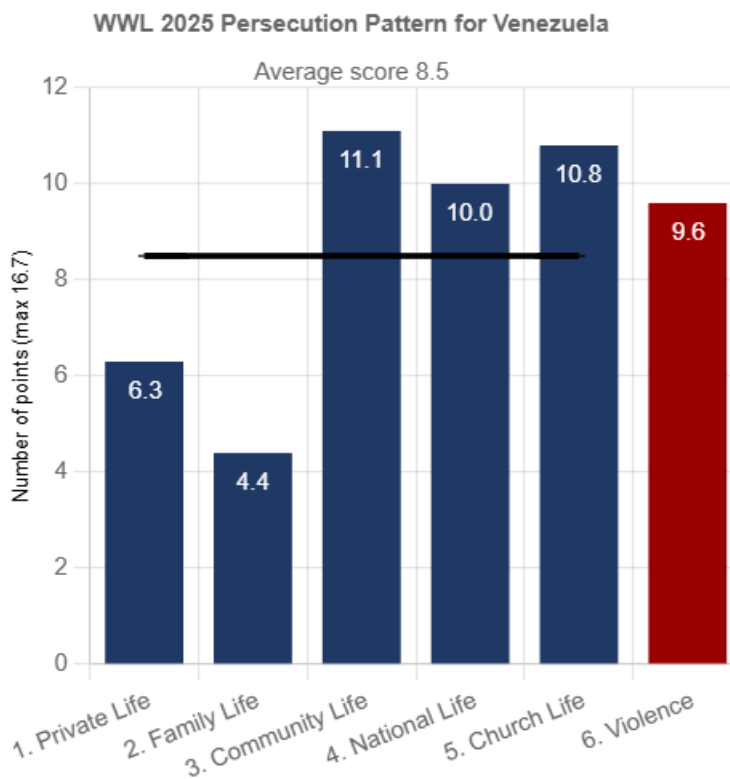
Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Government officials (Medium):** The state apparatus has become a platform for organized crime and corruption. Both the authorities and criminal groups intimidate dissident voices (including Christians) and act with impunity due to the widespread collusion between officials and organized crime.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Both the ruling party and opposition groups have been accused of corruption. The former for mishandling public funds and for government institutions being coopted by criminal groups; the latter for their lack of transparency in the use of donations. The lack of trust between opposition groups has indirectly helped the regime to stay in power.
- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Medium):** Criminal groups act in collusion with the power elite. Thanks to rampant corruption, these groups are part of the repressive arm of the government, which allows them total impunity in exchange for intimidating the opposition, including Christians. Drug-trafficking networks - mainly located in border areas with abundant

natural resources - are also taking advantage of the current political, social and economic crisis. The various criminal networks want to keep President Maduro's regime in power so that they can continue to carry out their illegal activities unchallenged. Christians are at risk where they denounce such criminal operations and try to protect ordinary citizens from their criminal activities.

- **Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Medium):** In addition to the paramilitary groups created by the dictatorial regime, this driver includes guerrilla groups such as ELN and ex-FARC members, both of Colombian origin and predominantly operating along the border with Colombia. Church activities in such areas are permanently risky, especially where Christian teaching openly opposes local criminal interests.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Venezuela shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Venezuela remains at a high level, remaining steady at 8.5 points since WWL 2024.
- Pressure is highest in the *Community*, *Church* and *National* spheres of life. The very high pressure in Community life reflects the intense government repression of Christians perceived as regime opponents in the various areas of day-to-day living and the influence of social control by criminal groups in some geographical areas.
- The score for violence is very high at 9.6 points, but is a decrease compared to WWL 2024 (10.7 points), attributed to the government's strategic interests during the electoral period. Nevertheless, it remains evident that both the ruling party and criminal groups continue to resort to violent methods whenever their interests are perceived to be at risk.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

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

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.00 points)

Due to the lack of independent media in Venezuela, social media remains the primary source for Christians to stay informed about the Church's situation. However, sharing faith-based opinions critical of the regime, supporting humanitarian efforts, or aligning with church leaders deemed opponents can result in harassment, punitive actions, or restricted access to essential goods. Under current laws and recent legislative initiatives, any post conflicting with government interests risks being labeled as hate speech or subversive. In the WWL 2025 context, this has intensified self-censorship, driven by fear of harsh reprisals against dissenting voices.

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

'Colectivos', informers and state agents seek to quell any opposition to the authorities in the communities. Thus, Christians who oppose the government's anti-democratic activities are not free to share their faith-based opinions with their extended family or others for fear that this information will be leaked and lead to interrogation and reprisals. Lately, due to the government's rapprochement with some religious communities, members of extended family have sometimes been acting as government informants if any faith issue is discussed that could be classified as political opposition or criticism of 'Biblical statements' made by some authorities. In addition, in places where armed groups control areas, such as the border with Colombia, Christians speaking about their faith and implying opposition to armed group interests could be risking their lives.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (2.75 points)

Due to the repressive policies imposed by the government, Christians identified as activists have faced significant risks when meeting privately in recent years. Increased government surveillance of private activities has led to arrests under accusations of inciting violence, planning acts of terrorism, or, as seen in WWL 2025, attempting to boycott elections. Additionally, in border regions near Colombia and other areas, various guerrilla groups and drug traffickers—sometimes acting in collusion with the government—have taken control of certain zones. In these territories, the presence of criminal groups frequently obstructs Christians from gathering, even for legitimate purposes unrelated to religious activities.

Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (2.50 points)

Due to the high levels of intolerance and polarization stemming from the imposition of Socialist/Communist principles, expressing opinions opposing the regime—even when defending religious beliefs—poses a significant risk of denunciation, arrest, and prosecution. Such accusations may even come from one’s own family members, either out of fear or genuine loyalty to the government, fostering widespread self-censorship. Furthermore, the social control exercised by criminal groups increases the risks faced by Christians, particularly young people and activists, when openly promoting Christian values that challenge criminal enterprises or the rules imposed by these groups. Reports of interdenominational conflicts have also emerged, further limiting Christians from discussing their faith even within their immediate families.

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)

Socialist ideology is a compulsory component of the state school curriculum. The children of Christians at these schools are thus forced to learn and promote the guiding principles of Communism and various Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) postulates. Also, in rural and border areas taken over by guerrilla groups, children of Christians are forced to receive information distributed by guerillas for the purposes of recruitment. There are also some internal reports of pressure being exerted on non-Catholic children to attend Catholic classes or to follow Catholic practices in schools.

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

State schools teach Socialist ideology which often contradicts the Christian values that parents wish to instill in their children's minds and hearts. Fearing reprisals, Christian parents hardly dare to express their disagreement with the school compulsory curriculum or when their children are chosen to be part of the so-called “revolutionary youth camps”. In areas where guerrilla groups are active (especially in border regions such as Zulia, Tachira, Apure, Barinas, Bolivar and Amazonas), Christian parents may face serious threats of violence if they try to prevent their children from being indoctrinated by criminal groups.

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

When Christian parents are targeted as perceived opponents of the regime, children also suffer the consequences and are criticized, mocked, or used as 'bad examples' at school, for instance. The children of Christian parents sometimes face threats and other kinds of harassment as a way for the regime to put pressure on the parents and force their compliance. This also applies when Christian parents refuse to follow the rules imposed by criminal groups and their children become victims of reprisals as a way of intimidating their parents. While not widespread, conflicts among students can arise due to differing religious affiliations. In such cases, evangelical Christian children may face rejection or pressure to participate in Catholic rituals at Catholic schools.

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. (2.25 points)

Where Christians have been arbitrarily detained or have had to leave the country to stop being targeted, they are forced to live separated from their families for prolonged and indefinite periods. For those who have fled, it is impossible to return to their homes either because they could be imprisoned or because they are prohibited from entering the country. In some cases, Christian activists opt to send their families out of the country to keep them safe. Sometimes forced displacement is generated by criminal groups terrorizing Christians living in the zones under their control. Although forced migration is a recurring reality in the country, it involves many dangers such as encountering mafia groups in control of the roads, especially when passing through the Darién (Panamanian crossing).

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

Christians in public employment are often compelled to participate in pro-government events, such as marches and electoral campaigns, against their conscience. This is particularly evident in the government's strategy during WWL 2025 to project widespread public support. Most comply out of fear of dismissal or retaliation. In some cases, Christians have been pressured into attending activities involving Santería rituals to retain access to state benefits. Amid the severe economic crisis, the government often coerces citizens, especially the poorest, into participating in events that contradict their faith as a means of survival. Similar pressure has been reported in workplaces and educational institutions.

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.00 points)

Despite the pressure to take on board Socialist/Communist ideology and despite the lack of academic freedom, education at state schools and universities is key for students hoping for a better future (usually abroad). Especially at universities, if students are Christians and politically active, they will likely be targeted for reprisals in the form of suspension or expulsion, or harassed to such a degree that they simply give up their studies. Similarly, it has been reported that Christian students refusing to participate in Santería rites have also at times become victims of reprisal. Additionally, in the border areas, the active presence of armed groups is a factor that influences whether Christian students can continue their school education, or not.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

In general, religious affiliation as such is not a determining factor or a cause to be discriminated against in public or private employment; this only happens against those considered to be government opponents - e.g. when a Christian is active in politics or social issues. On repeated occasions, the president has indicated that there cannot be people in managerial or government positions who are against the revolution and against him. Those who are not members of the ruling party or who disagree with the government's anti-democratic measures are likely to be harassed and even dismissed from

their positions (ignoring the fact that they are acting on grounds of faith). Alternative employment may well be impossible to find due to the lack of private initiatives in the country.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

Special groups, such as the 'colectivos' and 'compatriotas cooperantes', are sent to interrogate political dissidents, including Christians who speak openly against the government or are engaged in church-based or civil society initiatives. The aim is to discourage any activity that could endanger the regime's interests, especially if it is related to humanitarian work funded by international donors or involves any kind of contact with those considered opponents. Also, in areas where criminal groups dominate, Christians involved in humanitarian aid programs and similar projects are forced to seek permission from those groups before carrying out such projects.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.75 points)

Although, the Constitution establishes that the state shall guarantee the freedom of religion and worship, there are other legal provisions included in the criminal code and administrative regulations which can lead to faith-based opinions being considered hate speech or plans for a coup, where they go against ruling party interests.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)

Anyone expressing an opinion deemed to "promote hatred and discrimination" risks being criminally prosecuted and labeled an enemy of the state, with the regime arbitrarily defining these terms. As a result, churches that would typically advocate for justice and the rights of the Venezuelan people often remain silent, fearing prosecution or being branded as "opponents", as occurred with several church leaders during the WWL 2025 reporting period amid mass arrests and the crackdown on dissenting voices, including the closure of independent media outlets. Christians and church leaders who speak out against human rights violations, demand respect for democratic processes, highlight the humanitarian crisis, or criticize government policies face threats, arrest, and attacks from the regime or its sympathizers. The pervasive lack of freedom to express opinions publicly has made self-censorship widespread.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)

Political parties that do not align with the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PUSV) face severe restrictions, effectively barring them from meaningful participation in the country's political life, as evidenced during the recent electoral period. Consequently, Christian political parties are unable to operate. Christian civil society organizations, particularly those involved in social projects and humanitarian aid, face harassment, obstacles, and intense scrutiny, especially regarding their funding, and are heavily criticized when their efforts do not align with the regime's political agenda of being the sole social provider. Since the distribution of food and essential services—regulated through the "national card"—serves as a tool for government control, the regime actively blocks any perceived

competition. Christians supporting civil society initiatives are also targeted. Additionally, Christian NGOs face significant challenges from threats posed by criminal groups, whether or not they operate in collusion with public officials, particularly in border regions.

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

Corruption and rampant impunity within the state apparatus, especially in light of ongoing human rights violations to secure the regime's hold on power during the recent elections, have allowed state and non-state actors (e.g., members of criminal groups) to apply pressure on or commit acts of violence against Christians critical of the regime or Christian human rights activists without facing prosecution or punishment. In the absence of an independent justice system, Christians lack any effective authority to appeal to. Combined with rising insecurity and widespread loss of trust in state institutions, including the legislative and judicial branches, this has driven thousands of Venezuelans, including Christians, to flee 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. (3.50 points)

With the exception of the Roman Catholic church, which enjoys full legal recognition, other religious groups must be registered as a 'nonprofit civil association' with the Directorate of Justice and Religion (DJR) in order to receive permits, licenses and some economic benefits. Even though full legal church status is denied by law to non-Catholic denominations, the DJR imposes arbitrary registration requirements and legal taxes on them and the success of the process depends largely on their regime support. Thus, due to deliberate bureaucratic hindrances, the registration process (or the renewal of the legal permit to operate) can last more than a decade for churches considered to be aligned with the opposition. Most of these churches, unless they show a certain level of loyalty to the regime, are thus forced to operate illegally and permanently risk action being taken against them by the authorities.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.50 points)

Through local authorities, criminal groups, and regime sympathizers, the government maintains constant surveillance of churches' teachings and preaching, monitoring for any criticism of the regime, including its promotion of SOGI postulates or Socialist/Communist ideology. This repression, particularly evident in WWL 2025, has led many Venezuelan religious leaders to adopt self-censorship, avoiding topics such as social justice, peace, poverty, or any subject that could be perceived as critical of the country's leadership. Similarly, in areas controlled by criminal groups, preaching is similarly monitored to identify potential threats to their illegal activities. Some churches have faced disrupted services, and congregations have been subjected to intimidation.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.50 points)

Every time the Venezuelan Church raises its voice in protest, it becomes a target not only of the government but also of regime sympathizers and allied criminal groups. Christians who openly reject Socialist/Communist ideology, call for respect for the will of the people expressed in elections and denounce regime abuses are under constant threat of being arrested or otherwise 'silenced'. Lately, even not showing oneself as sympathetic to the regime is a risk factor, because the difference to other religious leaders who do openly provide their support is clearly evident. Also, when churches publicly denounce or call attention to criminal activities and corruption (especially in the country's border areas), they risk reprisals from local armed groups.

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

Given that the aim of the regime is to remain in power and exert total control, Christian leaders are frequently pressured into appearing publicly as supporters of the regime. Where they refuse and remain critical of the government, vocal about human rights, work in humanitarian aid projects or defend biblical views on marriage and family, they will almost certainly face reprisals. For instance, some pastors have faced smear campaigns and court cases on accusations of terrorism and hate speech. Criminal groups have also actively collaborated in intimidating opposition voices, including church leaders, not only when they do not align themselves with the regime, but also when their church ministry is seen as a threat to their criminal activities.

Violence

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

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

Possible reasons for this may be:

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

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

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*

- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

Venezuela: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	3	5
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	9	14
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	2	3
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	1
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)?	26	27
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?	3	3
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	19	18
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	4	4

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- **Christians killed (3):** The incidents involved local criminal groups murdering Christian religious leaders who openly opposed their illegal activities, mainly in the border areas of the country.
- **Christian buildings attacked (9):** Most of the incidents involved criminal groups attacking churches. With a similar goal of intimidation, the closure of a Christian radio station was ordered by the government..
- **Christians attacked (26):** Most of the incidents involved criminal groups threatening and attacking church members (including Christian leaders), mainly with death threats. Some attacks by regime sympathizers were also reported.
- **Christians forced to leave their homes (19):** All the cases involved Christians, particularly church leaders, who had been victims of reprisals for their pastoral work in areas coopted by criminal groups acting with impunity in the country.

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.

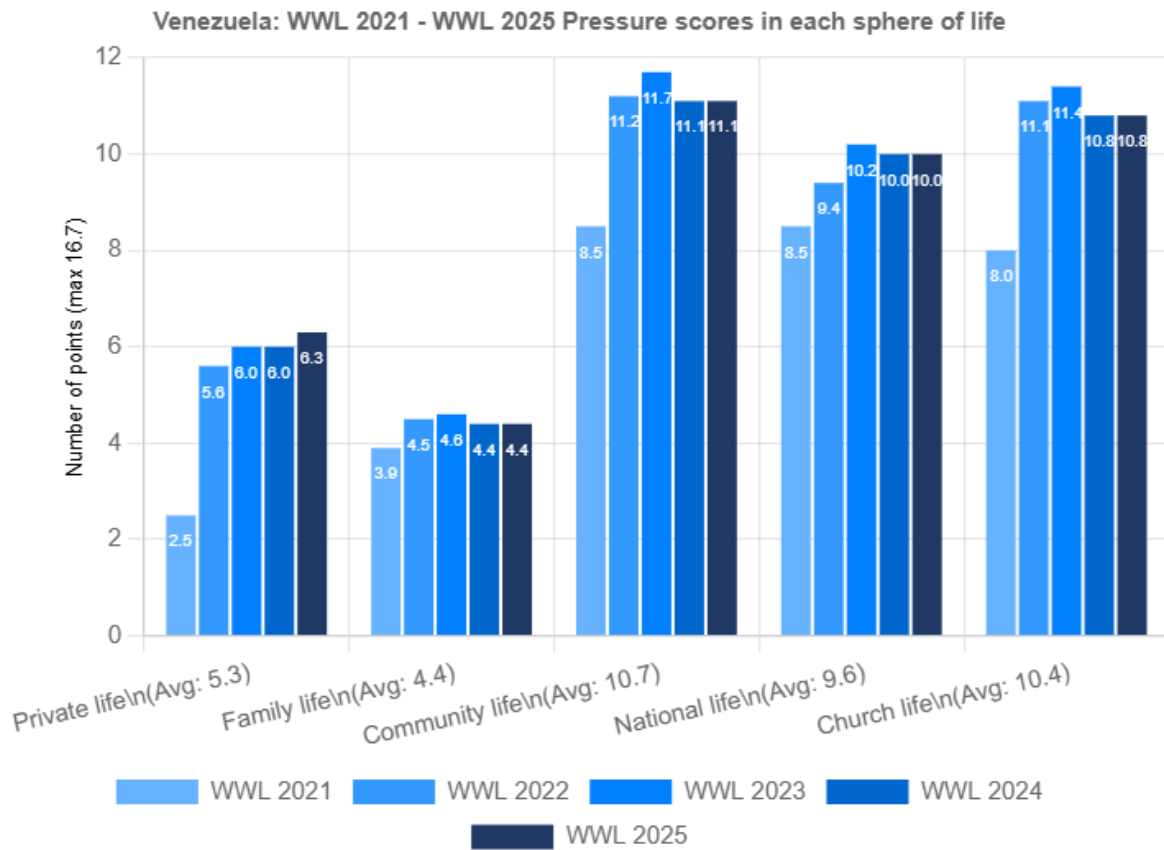
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Venezuela: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	8.5
2024	8.5
2023	8.8
2022	8.4
2021	6.3

The table above shows that since WWL 2022, the average pressure on Christians has levelled off within the range of 8.4-8.8 points. Its highest level was in WWL 2023 due to an increase in intimidation and retaliation by both the government and criminal groups.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

As can be seen in the blue chart below, in comparison to the levels of pressure in WWL 2021, all spheres of life have seen clear increases in the pressure on Christians. Variations occur because the levels of repression against churches and church leaders depend on the current political interests of the regime. For instance, when it is convenient for the government, as happened lately during the electoral campaign phase, the humanitarian work carried out by churches was allowed. However, when church leaders make public calls for the respect of democracy and human rights, the pressure increases against them. Additionally, as criminal groups have become more active and bolder, this has also had an impact on the level of pressure experienced by Christians in all *spheres of life*.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The red chart above shows that the score for violence increased in large steps from WWL 2021 to WWL 2023 (which reached the category 'extremely high'). Violence went down since WWL 2024, due to the 'more friendly' strategy adopted by the government in the electoral campaigning period, but there were still many violent incidents against Christians not just from the government seeking to silence opposition voices, but also from criminal groups intimidating Christians whom they regard as defying their 'authority' over the areas under their control.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Within the context of Venezuela's ongoing complex humanitarian crisis, Christian women face several vulnerabilities. Young girls are trafficked and can end up trapped in prostitution networks, exchanging sex for food or medicine ([USDS, 2023, Trafficking in Persons Report: Venezuela](#)). Christian women were reportedly better paid because their purity is presumed, and desired, but a country expert explained: "In the past it was known that Christian women are better paid ..., however there are no recent indications about this. In this difficult context, desperation might cause moral boundaries to be ignored in order to survive."

Many young women are choosing to escape Venezuela in light of economic and social factors. Within the context of displacement they are exposed to organized trafficking and exploitative criminal groups, where once again, their presumed purity can increase their perceived economic value. While many women and girls are leaving Venezuela, it is primarily young men that depart to seek economic opportunities, including in Christian families and communities. Left alone, women become more vulnerable and at increased risk of prostitution as a means of survival. State support is not a viable option; given that most government services are offered to those who belong to the party, Christian families who refuse to align with the government do not receive state support and as a result fall into destitution.

Women in Venezuela, in addition to hunger and economic downturn, face gender-based violence on a daily basis. Women are subject to psychological, physical and sexual violence, most often at the hands of their partners. Data collected in 2022 reported that there was one femicide every 37 hours ([Insight Crime, 6 February 2023](#)). Regardless of the violence experienced, most women will choose not to report to the authorities.

In summary, Christian women and girls are vulnerable to exploitation in all contexts in Venezuela – whether on the move when fleeing the country, upon arrival in new countries, or when left alone and vulnerable by absent male family members. Wives of political prisoners for instance, are subjected to diverse forms of maleficence. A local source explained: "They are subjected to strong pressure that has even led them to pay 'supposed' fines (extortion) so that their husbands do not suffer physical harm. These 'fines' and strong psychological pressure are led by agents of the public force."

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Within Venezuela's context of extreme violence and instability, Christian men and boys face various forms of pressure and violence. Most notably, young men are at particular risk of being targeted by criminal gangs and guerrilla groups, especially along the Colombian border. "These criminal groups make tremendous economic proposals to the youth, but the pastors try to dissuade the youth from joining in a very [covert] way because if the criminal leaders find out about their opposition, they will

disappear,” a country expert explained. However, they are more likely to be recruited into the ranks of the Bolivian Guard or Venezuelan army, enticed by the promise of food and medicines.

As of 2023, there were more than 270 political prisoners behind bars, and about 19 million people unable to access health care and nutrition. More than 7.7 million Venezuelans have fled the country, generating one of the largest migration crises in the world ([HRW 2024, Venezuela country chapter](#)). Exacerbated by the economic and political crisis, many men and boys are forced to leave the country in order to find work to support their families. While on the move, they are vulnerable to being captured and exploited by organized crime groups ([International Crisis Group, 9 August 2022](#)). Their families who they leave behind also become vulnerable, as highlighted in the female gender profile above.

Church leaders, who are predominately male, suffer the highest levels of persecution, especially at the hands of the government with Catholic leaders typically most vulnerable. As a country expert explained: “In this context, those who oppose [the government] based on their faith-based points of view are also victims of the regime, religious leaders have been discredited or defamed, attacked verbally and physically, religious activities have been interrupted, religious practices such as burials have [also] been interrupted. In general, there is persecution from the ruling party against Christians whenever they openly denounce the injustices and irregularities of the regime.”

Church leaders also face threats and economic exploitation from criminal gangs, particularly if they are involved in outreach efforts to young people, which could threaten gang recruitment levels. Pressure is greatest in areas on the country’s border, where criminal groups fight for territorial control. A country expert disclosed that “in the territories controlled by criminal groups, especially in the border area of the country, collections of passage, extortion, are a way of controlling the area. Religious leaders must make these payments not only to enter the territories in which they carry out their activities, but they must also have the leader's authorization.”

Reflecting the seriousness of threats against church leaders in the WWL 2025 reporting period, three were killed with many more forced to flee their homes.

Persecution of other religious minorities

As reported by the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Venezuela](#)):

- “According to the online publication *The National Interest*, the state-owned news channel Telesur TV described Israel as ‘a modern-day genocidal Nazi regime backed by Jewish media’. In December [2023], Rodríguez, the President of the National Assembly, stated that the Maduro-controlled body condemns the Holocaust ‘in the same way we condemn and repudiate the crimes of Netanyahu’s Zionism against the Palestinian people’.”

According to [The Jerusalem Post](#) (8 August 2024):

- Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro claimed in a speech that Zionists were the masterminds behind the civil unrest in Venezuela that followed the disputed July 28 election.

Trends Summary

1) President Maduro's efforts to ensure continuity in power

The lack of guarantees for free, transparent and democratic presidential elections in Venezuela underscores the Maduro regime's unwillingness to restore the rule of law and end abuses of power and human rights violations. Instead, the regime attempts to exploit the country's humanitarian crisis for political gain. The Maduro government responds to criticism from civil society by silencing dissent through intimidation and retaliation, often in collusion with criminal groups. The regime views the Church's humanitarian and pastoral work as a threat to its totalitarian ambitions, especially when the Church is seen as a voice of authority, and consequently, attempts to discredit and divide it.

2) Continuation of Communist practices to silence dissident voices

Despite the appearance of some political openness to gain votes at the July 2024 election, authoritarian practices inspired by Communist ideology continue to dominate social life in Venezuela. Civil society cannot operate freely, and any expression or perception of opposition or criticism of the regime's interests leads to retaliation through intimidation and other forms of reprisal. Efforts to maintain political control include keeping certain churches under close surveillance, especially those that do not show loyalty to the regime. These churches are seen as enemies, and their humanitarian work is obstructed by authorities when it is not politically convenient, further complicating their mission.

3) Corruption and impunity empower criminal groups

Ongoing impunity and collusion with authorities enable criminal groups to strengthen and expand their territorial influence, using fear as their primary tactic and exploiting the ineffectiveness of the state's policies, particularly in border areas. This has resulted in increased violence from both government actions and the activities of local and foreign criminal organizations. Churches working among the most vulnerable face heightened risks, as their peace-promoting activities, drug-rehabilitation programs, and humanitarian support for migrants are perceived as challenges to criminal operations and a provocation to the groups vying for control.

Further useful reports

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

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

External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Copyright, sources and definitions: Persecution dynamics - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: burst into - <https://www.ntn24.com/noticias-actualidad/condenan-agresion-de-la-gnb-a-monsenor-zarate-por-llevar-ayuda-humanitaria-a-damnificados-de-cumanacoa-502285>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: found dead - https://www.fides.org/en/news/74558-AMERICA_VENEZUELA_Kenyan_missionary_found_dead_Warao_indigenous_people_call_for_serious_and_credible_investigation
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: permission - <https://armando.info/hasta-los-curas-dicen-amen-a-los-mandamientos-del-elN-en-tachira-y-apure/>
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