



## Nicaragua: Country Dossier

February 2019



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Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

February 2019

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# World Watch List 2019

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016	Total Score WWL 2015
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.9	94	94	92	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	93	89	88	81
3	Somalia	16.3	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.4	8.9	91	91	91	87	90
4	Libya	15.3	15.0	15.1	16.0	16.3	9.6	87	86	78	79	76
5	Pakistan	14.3	14.1	13.9	15.0	13.2	16.7	87	86	88	87	79
6	Sudan	14.7	15.0	14.6	15.6	16.1	10.6	87	87	87	84	80
7	Eritrea	14.7	14.9	15.8	16.0	15.2	9.4	86	86	82	89	79
8	Yemen	16.6	16.3	16.4	16.7	16.7	3.1	86	85	85	78	73
9	Iran	14.0	14.3	14.3	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	83	80
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	14.8	13.2	15.2	83	81	73	68	62
11	Syria	13.6	14.0	13.1	13.8	14.2	13.0	82	76	86	87	83
12	Nigeria	12.3	11.8	13.4	12.9	12.9	16.7	80	77	78	78	78
13	Iraq	13.9	14.4	14.1	14.6	13.6	8.1	79	86	86	90	86
14	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.9	16.7	1.1	78	78	76	76	78
15	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.6	14.0	15.3	16.5	2.4	77	79	76	76	77
16	Egypt	11.7	13.2	10.7	13.2	11.0	15.9	76	70	65	64	61
17	Uzbekistan	15.4	12.9	13.9	12.3	15.9	3.1	74	73	71	70	69
18	Myanmar	11.4	11.8	13.3	12.1	11.8	11.1	71	65	62	62	60
19	Laos	13.0	9.1	14.2	14.7	14.9	4.6	71	67	64	58	58
20	Vietnam	12.7	8.2	12.7	13.5	14.2	9.1	70	69	71	66	68
21	Central African Republic	10.2	9.7	11.9	10.6	11.1	16.1	70	61	58	59	67
22	Algeria	13.1	14.2	10.1	11.8	12.7	7.6	70	58	58	56	55
23	Turkmenistan	14.6	10.8	13.8	13.3	15.1	1.3	69	68	67	66	63
24	Mali	11.4	10.1	11.5	9.2	9.9	15.4	68	59	59	55	52
25	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	12.2	13.0	13.3	0.6	67	57	55	-	50
26	Turkey	12.4	11.1	10.7	13.2	10.9	7.2	66	62	57	55	52
27	China	10.4	8.0	10.3	11.8	14.5	10.0	65	57	57	57	57
28	Ethiopia	10.0	10.0	10.3	10.8	10.4	13.5	65	62	64	67	61
29	Tajikistan	13.8	11.9	11.6	12.1	12.9	2.4	65	65	58	58	50
30	Indonesia	10.6	11.1	11.3	10.2	9.3	12.0	65	59	55	55	50
31	Jordan	13.0	13.1	11.8	11.5	12.2	3.0	65	66	63	59	56
32	Nepal	12.4	11.4	10.6	10.9	11.9	7.0	64	64	-	-	-
33	Bhutan	12.9	11.1	12.3	12.4	14.0	0.9	64	62	61	56	56
34	Kazakhstan	13.2	10.8	10.3	12.2	13.5	3.1	63	63	56	55	51
35	Morocco	12.2	13.3	9.6	12.0	14.4	1.5	63	51	49	47	47
36	Brunei	13.4	14.3	10.5	10.3	13.4	0.7	63	64	64	61	58
37	Tunisia	12.1	13.2	10.7	11.2	12.0	3.3	63	62	61	58	55
38	Qatar	13.0	12.6	10.3	11.0	14.1	1.1	62	63	66	65	64
39	Mexico	8.3	7.5	12.2	10.2	9.7	13.5	61	59	57	56	55
40	Kenya	11.7	10.6	10.1	8.3	11.5	8.3	61	62	68	68	63
41	Russian Federation	12.5	8.4	10.7	10.4	12.0	5.7	60	51	46	48	45
42	Malaysia	11.8	14.2	12.1	11.7	8.6	1.5	60	65	60	58	55
43	Kuwait	13.2	12.2	10.1	10.5	12.2	1.5	60	61	57	56	49
44	Oman	12.9	12.5	9.8	9.6	12.8	1.7	59	57	53	53	55
45	United Arab Emirates	12.8	12.0	9.1	10.5	12.2	1.9	58	58	55	55	49
46	Sri Lanka	11.0	8.3	10.5	11.5	10.0	7.0	58	57	55	-	51
47	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.8	9.4	8.5	12.6	58	56	53	55	55
48	Bangladesh	11.0	9.1	11.6	10.5	7.8	7.8	58	58	63	57	51
49	Palestinian Territories	11.4	12.3	9.0	10.6	11.8	2.4	57	60	64	62	58
50	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	-	57	50
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.4	56	-	56	56	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	12.7	9.9	10.9	9.2	11.9	1.9	56	-	-	-	-
53	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	57	58	60
54	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	9.3	7.4	10.3	16.1	55	-	-	-	-
55	Bahrain	11.9	12.2	8.6	10.2	10.2	1.5	55	57	54	54	-
56	Cameroon	9.9	7.3	10.0	7.8	7.5	11.3	54	-	-	-	-
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.8	4.8	52	-	59	57	56
58	Niger	11.5	9.7	8.1	8.1	10.0	4.8	52	-	-	53	-
59	Cuba	8.8	4.4	9.1	10.5	11.8	3.9	49	-	-	-	-
60	Chad	11.5	8.2	9.0	8.0	8.7	3.0	48	-	-	-	-
61	Burkina Faso	9.0	8.0	8.8	6.6	7.9	7.2	48	-	-	-	-
62	Uganda	11.4	8.0	7.7	6.9	9.6	3.7	47	-	-	-	-
63	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.0	46	-	-	-	-
64	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.5	5.8	8.0	15.0	44	-	-	-	-
65	Mozambique	6.7	4.3	6.0	6.9	6.0	13.3	43	-	-	-	-
66	Gambia	7.7	8.2	8.2	8.3	8.8	1.9	43	-	-	-	-
67	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.7	8.2	5.5	6.4	4.3	43	-	-	-	-
68	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	3.3	43	-	-	-	-
69	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.1	8.7	10.4	6.1	42	-	-	-	-
70	Togo	8.8	6.7	8.5	7.1	8.4	2.0	42	-	-	-	-
71	Venezuela	3.3	3.8	10.5	9.0	8.8	5.9	41	-	-	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	6.7	41	-	-	-	-
73	Nicaragua	2.3	3.6	6.4	8.9	7.9	11.9	41	-	-	-	-

# Nicaragua – Country Dossier

## February 2019

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## Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Further news and analysis is supplied by World Watch Monitor and WWR staff.

World Watch List Nicaragua	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	-	-
WWL 2018	-	-
WWL 2017	-	-
WWL 2016	-	-
WWL 2015	-	-

*Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.*

**Please note:** The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

## WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Country

### Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19735631>

### Recent country history

From 1936 to 1979, Nicaragua was a dictatorship ruled by the Somoza family, which was eventually [overthrown](#) by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). 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, that changed in the WWL 2019 reporting period. The country has been the scene of nationwide protests against the corruption and dictatorship, with several [deaths](#) resulting from the harsh reaction by the authorities.

### The religious landscape

Due to the violent social unrest which began in April 2018, President Ortega asked for [mediation](#) by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church in the national dialogue aiming to end the crisis. However, the [conditions](#) set out by the Church representatives called for respect for the rule of law, the suppression of paramilitary forces and new elections, as well as the return of democracy and the separation of powers to achieve peace and national reconciliation. This proved too uncomfortable for the government and the dialogue was stopped. Further, church leaders have [openly](#) expressed their defense of the poor and needy and allowed Catholic churches to be used as medical posts and collection centers for protesters. As a result, church leaders have been threatened, harassed, defamed and churches have been attacked. Some Christians have been killed for not supporting the government's repressive measures. Given the harsh persecution against Christians and church leaders, multilateral organizations have condemned such violations of human rights. Even the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights [requested](#) protective measures for some religious leaders in the country.

### The political landscape

The State apparatus has been conditioned to serve the ruling party. Since the last elections (in 2016), the ruling party has centralized all power, taken control of the media and has made a point of giving government jobs to family and friends. Corruption networks and impunity have restricted all opposition. However, the army is a [unique exception](#): It has distanced itself from Ortega, making it clear that it will not prevent people from taking part in protests.

Countries (e.g. the USA) have imposed financial [sanctions](#) and multilateral organizations (e.g. the [UN](#) and the Organization of American States, [OAS](#)) have expressed their "strong condemnation of acts of violence, repression and violations of human rights and abuses". President Ortega has accused them of [interfering](#) in national affairs. Christians cannot participate in the political sphere since they are considered traitors and enemies of the regime.

## The socio-economic landscape

While it is true that Nicaragua was regarded as one of the most stable countries in Central America, largely avoiding the turmoil caused by gang violence that has plagued such countries as Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, in recent years the growing corruption and dictatorial measures taken by the government have caused widespread impunity for criminal activities and dissatisfaction among the general public. [Events escalated in April 2018](#), when the Nicaraguan government approved legislation to cut social security benefits while raising people's required contributions. Protests [erupted](#) and got out of control when pro-government groups violently crushed the demonstrations. Although the bill was [cancelled](#), the protests continued and the repression became more violent, to the point of reaching more than 500 deaths in 2018 (mostly students and other young protesters) according to a [report](#) by the Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights (ANPDH) 2018. In this context, Christians have become frequently become [targets](#) of the government's repressive measures, not only because of their support for dissidents, but also because the churches have proved to be among the strongest voices to condemn the violence being used against protesters. Journalists reporting on the demonstrations are constantly [harassed](#) and their reports are censored.

Nicaragua is primarily an agricultural country with small industries and is thus one of the [least](#) developed and [poorest](#) countries in Central America. The economy is very fragile and the [insecurity](#) caused by the protests has had a negative effect. According to the [World Bank](#) 2018 predictions, the economy was expected to contract in 2018 by 3.8% due to the social and political unrest. The ongoing demonstrations and a fall in consumer and business confidence are taking their toll and will damage recent efforts in poverty reduction. Added to this is the threat of [unemployment](#), especially affecting Christians who are not prepared to serve the ruling party. The [losses](#) in the tourist industry due to insecurity are a major factor. Also, the [emigration](#) of large numbers of Nicaraguans to Costa Rica and other Central American countries threatens stability in the whole region.

## Concluding remarks

For many years, Nicaragua has been under the control of an increasingly dictatorial government. However, since citizens took to the streets in 2018, the regime has rolled out full-scale repressive machinery in an attempt to maintain the status quo, making the illegality of its measures and policies all the more evident. Journalists, human right activists and many others have been repressed through violent means with total impunity. This has induced Christian leaders to defend standard social values and demand the respect and protection of human rights; they have thus become targets for government reprisals.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Country

1. Recent country history: overthrown - <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83T00966R000100030027-9.pdf>
2. Recent country history: safest - <https://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/nacionales/459004-nicaragua-seguridad-america-latina/>
3. Recent country history: deaths - <https://www.dw.com/es/la-ong-anpdh-eleva-a-512-el-n%C3%BAmero-de-muertos-en-nicaragua/a-45620566>
4. The religious landscape: mediation - <https://www.ultimahora.com/la-iglesia-catolica-inicia-tarea-mediacion-la-crisis-nicaragua-n1144773.html>

5. The religious landscape: conditions - <http://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20180616/45140363526/la-iglesia-de-nicaragua-propone-a-ortega-adelantar-elecciones-a-marzo-de-2019.html>
6. The religious landscape: openly - <https://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201805/how-catholic-church-working-peace-nicaragua-31389>
7. The religious landscape: requested - <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2018/06/01/la-cidh-pidio-a-nicaragua-que-protega-al-obispo-mediador-silvio-jose-baez-ante-el-grave-riesgo-que-corre-su-vida/>
8. The political landscape: unique exception - <https://www.france24.com/en/20180513-nicaraguas-army-distances-itself-ortega>
9. The political landscape: sanctions - <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm554>
10. The political landscape: UN - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/09/1018442>
11. The political landscape: OAS - [http://www.oas.org/es/centro\\_noticias/fotonoticia.asp?sCodigo=FNC-94948](http://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/fotonoticia.asp?sCodigo=FNC-94948)
12. The political landscape: interfering - <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/video/luis-almagro-nicaragua-ayuda-oea-daniel-ortega-dialogo-conclusiones/>
13. The socio-economic landscape: Events escalated in April 2018 - <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/20/world/americas/nicaragua-protests-ortega.html>
14. The socio-economic landscape: erupted - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-44398673>
15. The socio-economic landscape: cancelled - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/23/nicaragua-withdraws-social-security-changes-after-people-killed-in-riots>
16. The socio-economic landscape: report - <https://www.laprensa.com.ni/2018/11/11/nacionales/2494539-represion-suma-ya-535-muertos-en-nicaragua-segun-anpdh>
17. The socio-economic landscape: targets - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/09/nicaragua-christians-attacked-detained-and-killed-as-enemies-of-the-regime/>
18. The socio-economic landscape: harassed - <https://havanatimes.org/?p=140686>
19. The socio-economic landscape: least - <https://datos.bancomundial.org/pais/nicaragua?view=chart>
20. The socio-economic landscape: poorest - [http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/LAC/chronic\\_poverty\\_overview.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/LAC/chronic_poverty_overview.pdf)



21. The socio-economic landscape: insecurity - <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/103286/nicaragua-rates-of-theft-increase-in-2018>
22. The socio-economic landscape: World Bank - <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nicaragua/overview>
23. The socio-economic landscape: unemployment - <https://www.voanews.com/a/nicaraguan-doctors-say-they-were-fired-for-treating-protesters/4503333.html>
24. The socio-economic landscape: losses - <http://todaynicaragua.com/tourism-crushed-by-crisis-nicaragua-to-lose-us400-million-in-tourism/>
25. The socio-economic landscape: emigration - <https://www.pri.org/stories/2018-08-07/bloody-uprising-nicaragua-could-trigger-next-central-american-refugee-crisis>

## WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

### How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
6,285,000	5,964,000	94.9

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

### How did Christians get there?

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.

### What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Nicaragua	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	5,334,000	89.4
Protestant	1,378,000	23.1
Independent	441,000	7.4
Unaffiliated	38,000	0.6
Doubly-affiliated Christians	- 1,226,000	-20.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,965,000</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	996,000	16.7
Renewalist movement	1,479,000	24.8

*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: Believers 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.*

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

According to WCD 2018 estimates, 94.9% of the population is Christian, of which 89.4% are Roman Catholics. Although Nicaragua is predominantly Roman Catholic, there has been a decline in the Catholic population in recent years and an increase in the number of Protestants and Evangelicals, as testified by the Religions in Times of Pope Francis 2014 [Report](#). The Public Opinion Monitoring System,

conducted in the 4th Quarter of 2017 by M & R Consultores, [showed](#) that as of December 2017, 48.5% of Nicaraguans regarded themselves as Catholic and 35.3% as Evangelical.

## Religious context

Religious Context: Nicaragua	Numbers	%
Christians	5,964,000	94.9
Muslim	1,100	0.0
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	7,300	0.1
Ethnoreligionist	30,300	0.5
Jewish	230	0.0
Bahai	12,000	0.2
Atheist	2,900	0.0
Agnostic	170,000	2.7
Other	96,700	1.5

*OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.*

*Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)*

## Notes on the current situation

- Some Protestant church leaders have accused certain Christian groups (especially neo-Pentecostal churches) of expressing public support for the government and of receiving [favorable treatment](#) from government officials.
- [Recommendations](#) issued by multilateral organizations have been ignored by the government. This leaves Christians who are suffering persecution more vulnerable and with no authority to which to turn and seek protection.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

1. How did Christians get there?: until -  
<http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/cam/nic/espanol/religion-en-nica.pdf>
2. What church networks exist today?: Report -  
[https://www.liportal.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/oeffentlich/Honduras/40\\_gesellschaft/LAS\\_RELIGIONES\\_EN\\_TIEMPOS\\_DEL\\_PAPA\\_FRANCISCO.pdf](https://www.liportal.de/fileadmin/user_upload/oeffentlich/Honduras/40_gesellschaft/LAS_RELIGIONES_EN_TIEMPOS_DEL_PAPA_FRANCISCO.pdf)
3. What church networks exist today?: showed -  
[http://myrconsultores.com/files/Presentaci%C3%B3n\\_SISMOLV\\_Diciembre2017.pdf](http://myrconsultores.com/files/Presentaci%C3%B3n_SISMOLV_Diciembre2017.pdf)
4. Notes on the current situation: favourable treatment -  
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281332.pdf>
5. Notes on the current situation: Recommendations -  
<https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2018/06/01/la-cidh-pidio-a-nicaragua-que-protega-al-obispo-mediador-silvio-jose-baez-ante-el-grave-riesgo-que-corre-su-vida/>

## WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

### Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018. Nicaragua scored 41 points in WWL 2019 and is thus in the category "high persecution".

### What type of persecution dominates?

- **Dictatorial paranoia:** The current president is using violence and repression in order to hold onto power. Since the church leaders are the strongest opposing voice demanding a return to democracy and the rule of law, Christians have become victims of harsh reprisals.
- **Communist and post-Communist oppression:** The ruling party has Socialist philosophy as its basis. Although it does not follow a strict Communist line, the government uses certain elements which have evolved into totalitarian control, oppression and the violation of human rights.
- **Organized corruption and crime:** Criminal and paramilitary groups carry out orders from government and party officials to silence dissenting voices and enjoy impunity. Christians suffering persecution can expect no just enforcement of the law due to corruption within the State apparatus.

### Who is driving persecution?

Persecution against Christians is orchestrated by the ruling party and acted out by state authorities at the local and national levels, hand in hand with paramilitary groups. These groups may be "[Ortega squads](#)", ideological pressure groups such as the Sandinista Youth group, militants or sympathizers of the regime. These groups exert verbal and physical violence, especially silencing Christians who either [support](#) and help demonstrators, openly demand the regime to [step down](#) from power, or publicly condemn the relentless violation of human rights.

### What it results in

Due to the current dictatorship, Christians cannot express faith-based opinions criticizing the regime's violent repression without serious reprisals. Religious leaders and Christian associations are impeded in their ministry when they are seen to be supporting dissenting groups. They are then considered [terrorists](#) who are planning a coup and may be [arrested](#), [kidnapped](#), [threatened](#), [forced to leave](#) their homes or even murdered. In addition, against Christian families' wishes, children and young people are being indoctrinated in loyalty to the revolutionary principles of the government in schools.

## Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

Nicaragua	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	7	17	5	15	2

*Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.*

## Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- In August 2018, the legal advisor of the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua was [arrested](#) in Managua and threatened with death for alleged ‘acts of terrorism’.
- In July 2018, a pastor of the Baptist network "The Rock" had to [flee](#) the country with his two sons. Paramilitary agents were threatening him after he helped protestors with food and prayer. He has been accused of terrorism and a warrant for arrest is preventing his return to the country.
- In June 2018, , a family (2 parents, 2 children, and 2 grandparents) were [killed](#) in Managua when members of a paramilitary group burned down their home. The family all belonged to the Church of Life Fountain. It is suspected that the attack was due to the family helping regime protestors and for not allowing snipers to use their home.
- In June 2018, , a Roman Catholic priest in Dario City was [threatened](#) with an AK-47 rifle pointed at his head. The group of masked men shouted: "We are going to kill you because you are preaching poison", but left without carrying out the threat.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

1. Who is driving persecution?: “Ortega squads” - <https://confidencial.com.ni/daniel-ortegas-death-squads-are-free-to-act-in-nicaragua/>
2. Who is driving persecution?: support - [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/nicaraguan-priest-says-church-is-being-persecuted-during-government-crackdown/2018/07/24/08f180ac-121a-42a0-a24f-d6bb86a2aa09\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.088ffa42327f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/nicaraguan-priest-says-church-is-being-persecuted-during-government-crackdown/2018/07/24/08f180ac-121a-42a0-a24f-d6bb86a2aa09_story.html?utm_term=.088ffa42327f)
3. Who is driving persecution?: step down - <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2018-07/bishops-nicaragua-opposition-demonstrations-government-ortega.html>
4. What it results in: terrorists - <https://www.wsj.com/articles/church-becomes-target-in-nicaragua-crisis-1532376158>

5. What it results in: arrested -  
<https://www.periodistadigital.com/religion/america/2018/08/21/religion-iglesia-america-nicaragua-paramilitares-secuestran-asesor-juridico-obispos-nicaraguenses-carlos-cardenas.shtml>
6. What it results in: kidnapped - <http://www.vanguardia.com/mundo/435709-iglesia-catolica-de-nicaragua-denuncia-secuestro-de-comunicadora>
7. What it results in: threatened - <https://www.laprensa.com.ni/2018/06/10/politica/2433494-le-apuntan-con-ak-a-parroco-de-ciudad-dario-y-lo-amenazan-sos-la-proxima-victima>
8. What it results in: forced to leave -  
<https://www.laprensa.com.ni/2018/08/23/nacionales/2462941-se-exilia-padre-cesar-augusto-gutierrez-de-monimbo-por-amenazas-de-muerte-y-carcel>
9. Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: arrested -  
<https://www.periodistadigital.com/religion/america/2018/08/21/religion-iglesia-america-nicaragua-paramilitares-secuestran-asesor-juridico-obispos-nicaraguenses-carlos-cardenas.shtml>
10. Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: flee -  
<https://www.laprensa.com.ni/2018/10/15/nacionales/2484333-el-pecado-del-pastor-evangelico-rudy-palacios>
11. Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: killed -  
<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/pastor-and-5-family-members-killed-for-refusing-to-open-their-home-to-pro-government-forces-in-nicaragua/129761.htm>
12. Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: threatened -  
<https://www.laprensa.com.ni/2018/06/10/politica/2433494-le-apuntan-con-ak-a-parroco-de-ciudad-dario-y-lo-amenazan-sos-la-proxima-victima>

## WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

### Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

### Position on World Watch List (WWL)

Nicaragua scored 41 points in WWL 2019 and is thus in the category "high persecution". The dictatorial tendency of the government has become noticeably stronger since the social unrest began in April 2018. This has led to a high level of persecution - unprecedented in recent years in the country - particularly targeting church leaders opposing the regime.

### Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Nicaragua	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Not at all
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Not at all
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Medium
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 (long version).*

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

Since President Ortega won the elections in 2007, he has filled State institutions with loyal supporters, banned leading opposition parties and changed the Constitution to allow his indefinite re-election. Discontent among the citizenship led to large-scale protests against his presidency starting in April 2018 and there have been hundreds of people killed. Church leaders - especially Roman Catholics - provided care for demonstrators and condemned the government brutality. As a result, the ruling party has carried out a campaign in which church leaders and Christians in general have been threatened and insulted, called [enemies and terrorists](#), imprisoned and killed; churches have also been vandalized and church services disrupted.

#### **Communist and post-Communist oppression (Medium):**

The ruling party is the socialist Sandinista National Liberation Front, and supporters of the president revere him as "Comandante Daniel". This sort of Socialist-Communist patriotism is taught to children and youth in schools. The regime monitors all institutions and seeks to repress religious values and points of views endangering party ideology. This engine is clearly blended with aspects of *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Organized corruption and crime*.

#### **Organized corruption and crime (Medium):**

According to the [Corruption Perceptions Index 2017](#), Nicaragua is at rank 151 out of 180 countries, scoring scoring 26 points (0= highly corrupt and 100= very clean). This indicates that [corruption](#) is a serious issue; local officials, community leaders and the justice system are susceptible to bribes,

manipulation and political influence. The government currently enjoys total impunity for crimes committed against opponents.

## Drivers of persecution

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

*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 (long version).*

**Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:** The main drivers are the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front party (SNLF) as well as paramilitary groups (the Ortega death squads or parapolice forces) and supporter mobs who carry out [violent measures](#) against Christians and [church leaders](#).

**Drivers of Communist and post-Communist oppression:** The main drivers are militant members of the SNLF ruling party, government officials and paramilitary groups who monitor church leaders and religious activities in general in order to identify any signs of ideas opposing the principles of the “revolution”. The Sandinista Youth also play an important role in boosting patriotism and support for the government.

**Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:** The main driver of this persecution engine is the government at the local and national level, hand in hand with the ruling party, since they control the entire state apparatus and hire [vigilante groups](#) (also known as “Ortega Squads”) formed by local gang members, policemen acting in civilian clothes, ex-guerrillas and members of a pro-government organization (Sandinista Youth) and allows them to violently oppose dissidents with impunity. In this context, corruption encourage repressive and violent practices, in where Christians represent an especially vulnerable group since they do not have nowhere to turn to for protection.



## Context

The country has been under the control of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) since 2006. In the WWL 2019 reporting period the government has become excessively violent and repressive. Christians supporting Nicaraguan citizens (including demonstrators) caught up in the crisis which erupted in April 2018, have been labeled terrorists by the ruling party and accused of participating in a coup. The crisis has led to other problems such as a decline in the economy and an increase in violence. The reduction in tourism has helped caused a severe rise in unemployment.

See the Keys to Understanding section above for more details.

## 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.

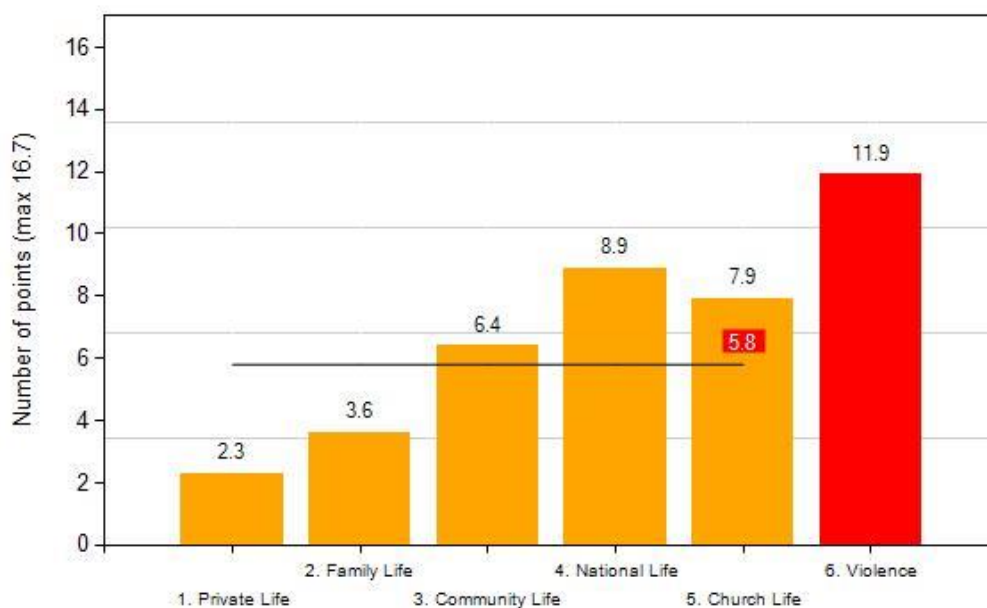
**Historical Christian communities:** The main denomination in this category is the Roman Catholic Church. Where opposition to the government's dictatorial measures is expressed, verbal and physical hostility is likely to be experienced by government officials, paramilitary groups and other regime supporters.

**Converts:** These are either cross-denominational converts from one church to another, or former regime sympathizers who have become Christians and are now part of the opposition. This category also experiences hostility similar to the traditional 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 traditional churches where opposition to the ruling party is expressed.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence

WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern for Nicaragua



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Nicaragua shows:

- The average pressure is 5.8 points.
- Pressure is strongest in the *National* (8.9) *Church* (7.9) and *Community* spheres of life (6.4).
- With 11.9 points, the score for violence is at an extremely high level.

#### **Private sphere:**

In general, Christians can live their faith in private. But as soon as church leaders become known or are highly influential in opposing dictatorial measures taken by the ruling party, they have to self-censor their religious points of view for fear of retribution.

#### **Family sphere:**

Christian life can be lived out in the family as long their members are not part of the opposition, have not taken part in the protests and have not publicly criticized the regime. The Sandinista Front imposes its ideology in the public education sector, ignoring the parents right to educate their children according to their own convictions. They are taught a form of patriotism which upholds violence as a valid political method and the censorship of any teaching that contradicts the regime. If parents refuse, they are considered opponents and therefore become victims of reprisals.

#### **Community sphere:**

Christians are monitored in centers of study, at the workplace and in church congregations and are forced to participate in pro-government events in order not to be considered regime opponents. Where Christians refuse, they are threatened with losing their jobs. Banks and microfinance institutions also have a policy of not lending money to pastors. Medical care is restricted since, during the clashes, paramilitary groups and security forces regularly prevent doctors and hospital authorities from providing assistance to those injured, as a way of discouraging others to join the opposition.

#### **National sphere:**

Public administration and public life are controlled by the ruling party through government representatives, militant citizens and paramilitary groups. The media is almost entirely under State control and gives a distorted image of Christians, accusing them of plotting a coup and of being terrorists.

#### **Church sphere:**

Where Christians publicly disagree with the government and speak up for a return to democracy and the rule of law, they will be exposed to hostility measures both through official means and unofficially (e.g. through insults, defamation, mockery, beatings and killings), causing many to flee their homes. Religious services have been interrupted by regime sympathizers or suspended; churches have suffered financial cuts and some have been looted.

#### **Violence:**

Being some of the strongest voices against the increasingly totalitarian nature of the regime, church leaders (and the churches where they serve) were targeted in particular. For an overview of statistics and examples, see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

## Gender specific persecution

**Female/Male:** Government oppression affects all Christian dissidents regardless of their gender. However, women are in a more vulnerable position since they easily find themselves at the mercy of criminal groups and allies of the government who can commit illegal acts with impunity, and male youths are more likely to take part in the increasingly violent demonstrations demanding the resignation of the president and suffer government retaliation.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

All religious denominations are persecuted if they openly disagree with regime policies and behavior. But even groups with no clear stand regarding the current social and political conflict also suffer from the high levels of insecurity. For this reason, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints said in a statement that all its remaining 158 [Mormon missionaries](#) were to be transferred to other countries due to the current instability.

## Future outlook

**The political outlook:** The Sandinista National Liberation Front have implemented socialist reforms which will continue to have a negative effect on the economy. It is likely that the continued violation of human rights by the regime and its supporters will continue.

### The outlook for Christians, viewed through the lens of:

- **Dictatorial Paranoia:** With the president refusing to hold early elections, he will legally stay in power for 3 more years. Participating in demonstrations has become officially illegal in the country and can be punished with imprisonment. Under the current repression, the free expression of faith-based opinions touching on political matters is not possible.
- **Communist and post-Communist oppression:** While the regime remains in power, religious activities will continue to be monitored and Christianity in general will be restricted in public spaces. Supporters of Christian values which contradict tenets of the revolution will continue to be attacked. If schoolchildren and youth are successfully indoctrinated by the party over the years, it will be even more difficult for the country to ever return to respecting the rule of law and guaranteeing human rights, including religious liberty.
- **Organized corruption and crime:** The State apparatus has been created to serve the ruling party, thus, as long it holds absolute power, Christians can be persecuted by the regime and its supporters with impunity. In addition, the context of violence and impunity will encourage other criminal gangs to target Christians and Christians property.

**Conclusion:** At the start of 2018, Nicaragua appeared to be one of the least violent and most stable countries in Central America. However it was only a superficial peace since the roots of corruption and totalitarianism were already developed and resulted in the outbreak of the current crisis beginning in April 2018. Christians - especially Catholic leaders - have played a key role as mediators in national dialogue and as voices of opposition. For the latter, they have been victims of harsh reprisals, suffering disproportionate levels of violence. Government repression is likely to stay in place but demonstrations and acts of opposition will in all probability decrease (due to the fear of reprisals) which would probably cause a reduction in the levels of violence too.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

1. Persecution engines: enemies and terrorists - <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2018/07/23/silvio-baez-nicaragua-ortega-violencia/>
2. Persecution engines: Corruption Perceptions Index 2017 - <https://www.transparency.org/country/NIC>
3. Persecution engines: corruption - <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/278759.pdf>
4. Drivers of persecution: violent measures - <http://cb24.tv/2018/07/17/paramilitares-en-nicaragua-amenazan-con-volarle-la-cabeza-a-quien-proteste-contr-el-presidente/>
5. Drivers of persecution: church leaders - <http://cb24.tv/2018/07/17/paramilitares-tildan-a-sacerdotes-nicaraguenses-de-asesinos/>
6. Drivers of persecution: vigilante groups - <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/pueden-convertirse-los-grupos-parapoliciales-de-nicaragua-en-organizaciones-criminales-2/>
7. Persecution of other religious minorities: Mormon missionaries - <https://ldsmag.com/church-transferring-all-missionaries-out-of-nicaragua/>