

World
Watch
Research

Honduras: Full Country Dossier

February 2023



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Honduras

Brief country details

Honduras: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
10,221,000	9,780,000	95.7

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Honduras: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	53	67
WWL 2022	48	68
WWL 2021	46	67
WWL 2020	39	-
WWL 2019	38	-

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

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

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **August 2022 – Yoro:** Two heavily armed men intercepted and [shot dead](#) the young Christian, Franklin Munguía Luque in the community of Nueva Armenia. He was the son of evangelical Pastor Saúl Edgardo Munguía, leader of the Filadelfia Pentecostes Assembly Church (Aciprensa, 12 August 2022).
- **July 2022 – Lempira:** Deputy Marco Tulio Rodríguez reported that gang members from El Salvador had come to the Department of Lempira to [loot](#) schools and churches. The deputy confirmed that non-locals with multiple tattoos had been active for several days. Churches reported several thefts of religious objects (Contexto, 7 July 2022).
- **2 March 2022 – El Paraíso:** Roman Catholic priest Enrique Vásquez Cáliz, diocesan director of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) in San Pedro Sula, was shot and [killed](#). The Bishop of San Pedro de Sula had reported his disappearance just hours before finding him dead (Aciprensa, 4 March 2022).

Specific examples of positive developments

- **July 2022:** Honduran churches have worked together with a World Vision project promoting [child welfare](#) in some of the most vulnerable urban populations (World Vision, 28 July 2022).
- **August 2022:** The Association of Catholic Media of Honduras sent a [letter of solidarity](#) to the Catholic Church in Nicaragua condemning the closure of church radio stations by the Ortega regime. The letter "stressed that Christian media are a means of evangelization, bearers of hope, education and information" (Article 66, 8 August 2022).

External Links - Situation in brief

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: shot dead - <https://www.noticiacristiana.com/sociedad/2022/08/asesinan-hijo-pastor-honduras.html/amp>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: loot - https://contextohn.com/contexto_regional/pandilleros-de-el-salvador-roban-en-escuelas-e-iglesias-de-lempiras/
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: killed - <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/asesinan-a-tiros-a-director-diocesano-de-obras-misionales-pontificias-en-honduras-90454>
- Specific examples of positive developments: child welfare - <https://www.worldvision.hn/blog/laiglesiaysupapelenchildhoodrescue>
- Specific examples of positive developments: letter of solidarity - <https://www.articulo66.com/2022/08/08/medios-catolicos-honduras-dialogo-nicaragua-iglesia/>

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Honduras

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 186-187)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	1 July 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18954311	1 July 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2021	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/HND	1 July 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/honduras/	1 July 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/honduras	1 July 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.49)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	1 July 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	8 September 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Honduras not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom Index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/honduras/freedom-world/2022	1 July 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries, Honduras not included	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/honduras	1 July 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/central.htm#hn	1 July 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/honduras	1 July 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/hnd	1 July 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/HND	1 July 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/honduras/	1 July 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Honduras not included	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/honduras/overview	1 July 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=HND	1 July 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 36-37)	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/e408a7e21ba62d843bdd90dc37e61b57-0500032021/related/mpo-lac.pdf	1 July 2022

Recent history

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

To flee violence and poverty in Honduras, there has been a flood of migration heading for Mexico and the USA that are part of the group known as the "migrant caravan". According to information reported by [OHCHR/ACNUR External Update for November 2022](#), 847,154 people were estimated to be victims of extortion in Honduras in 2022 and 800 children and youth lost their lives violently in 2022 in Honduras (ACNUR, November 2022). It must not be forgotten that Honduras also acts as a [transit country](#) for 'foreign migrants', mainly Cuban and Venezuelan nationals who often attempt to enter the country illegally to get to the US border. This form of irregular migration in the country also impacts the displacement figures (Reliefweb, April 2022).

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

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

Political and legal landscape

President Hernández remained in power after a controversial presidential re-election held in 2017. The National Party held power in three consecutive periods (since 2010), which were all marred by allegations of corruption, violence and drug trafficking, and led to a [collapse](#) of the rule of law (Transparency International, 23 September 2019). The president's level of control increased due to the appointment of political allies to public office, including to the judiciary. Thus there was a significant [deterioration](#) in the democratic development of the country (CADAL, 6 May 2020). According to the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Honduras has experienced a [decline](#) of 18% in terms of corruption control. The report points out that corruption has had two characteristics in the last decade, namely its systematic nature and the construction of a structure of impunity that shields it (Expediente Público, November 2021). Violence is an additional factor caused by corruption in the country: Government authorities often [endorse](#) criminal action at all levels, including violence exerted by criminal groups (Expediente Público, 3 May 2022). Many Hondurans are forced to obey to two forms of authority - the state and the MS13 criminal group. Both impose a way of life and a body of regulations and taxes.

The Social Forum on Foreign Debt and Development of Honduras has reported on the high [cost of corruption](#) (Expediente Público, November 2021): During the second administration of President Hernández, it is estimated that losses due to corruption amounted to 292 billion lempiras (approximately 12 billion USD), an increase of 55% compared to his first administration. Between 2018 and 2021, the amount lost represented 27% of the national budget.

During the run-up to elections in 2021, citizens experienced heavy pressure from organized crime, drug trafficking groups and gangs, which control large areas of the country (See below: *Security situation*). Despite the insecurity, Honduras was able to hold presidential and legislative elections in November 2021 without violent incidents; voter turn-out was high and the [results](#) were accepted (OAS, 30 November 2021). With Hernandez not running for a further term, the National Party's presidential candidate was Nasry Asfura. He was beaten by leftist Xiomara Castro (wife of Manuel Zelaya, a former president deposed in a 2009 coup), who won more than 50% of the vote and thus became the [first female](#) Honduran president (Americas Quarterly, 14 October 2021).

Xiomara Castro [asked](#) the United Nations for support in setting up an international office for tackling corruption in the country (CNN Español, 17 February 2022). Previously, an anti-corruption body of the Organization of American States (OAS) had operated in the country (since

January 2016) but its work [came to an end](#) in January 2020 (OAS, 17 January 2020). In December 2022, the Honduran Government and the UN signed an [agreement](#) for the International Commission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (CICIH) to begin its work (Criterio, 15 December 2022).

In the years before Xiomara Castro took up office, legislative reforms were implemented which strengthened the then ruling party's control over the different government offices and encouraged impunity:

- After the crisis surrounding the 2017 elections, reforms to the electoral law were promised to make future elections more transparent. Amendments to the law were approved in May 2021 but many observers consider the changes [superficial](#) and anyway excluded of minority parties (Contra Corriente, 27 May 2021). One positive aspect was the provision mandating the National Electoral Council to use digital technology for obtaining same-day vote tallies.
- In June 2020, a new penal code was approved which [reduced](#) sentences for corruption and other crimes linked to organized crime, thus encouraging impunity (Insight Crime, 29 June 2020). The new penal code also deals with crimes against honor, such as slander and insults, often used to criminally [prosecute](#) journalists. There were also provisions which endangered the exercise of the rights of assembly and protest (Artículo 19, 2 May 2020).
- In October 2020, penal reforms were also carried out that expanded the crime of usurpation and legitimized land eviction. In other words, it deepened the criminalization of the right to land to favor private companies and their mining operations. The OHCHR pointed out that the application of these reforms "would generate a [serious precedent](#) on the matter and could aggravate the situation of conflict over access to land, particularly for peasant groups and indigenous peoples" (Swissinfo, 5 November 2021).
- Decree 93-2021 reformed the Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Special Law against Money Laundering. The Public Ministry issued a statement indicating that the reform of the Penal Code relating to money laundering represented a [setback](#) in the fight against organized crime, specifically drug trafficking and corruption (Contra Corriente, 1 December 2021).

During the first months of Xiomara Castro's government, the repeal of many of these laws was expected. Most of all, though, concrete action was expected for dismantling the framework of corruption and impunity built by the previous government. For this purpose, the [position](#) of Minister Adviser on Transparency and Fight against Corruption was created (La Tribuna, 21 February 2022). Similarly, in March 2022, the National Congress [appointed](#) an Anti-Corruption Commission for the first time (Hondudiario, 8 March 2022). Also in March 2022, the National Congress revoked the Public Documents Classification Law, known as the Secrets Law, which shielded numerous state institutions from [declaring](#) public information (Criterio HN, 1 March 2022).

Also, the national Congress approved a Law for Reinstating Constitutional Rule of Law, which aims to [condemn](#) the 2009 coup d'état and eliminate legal proceedings against political prisoners and activists. This legislation also provides a "broad, absolute and unconditional" amnesty to officials of the Zelaya government who had been accused of acts of corruption and other crimes (Contra Corriente, 10 March 2022).

The US State Department issued a so-called "[Engel list](#)" in 2021 which named several individuals, including current and former government officials, suspected of corruption and antidemocratic conduct in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras (US State Department, Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors Report, July 2021). In the case of Honduras, there were 21 people listed. As of February 2021, the US-bill "Honduras Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Act" was [introduced](#) (US Congress, February 2021), which temporarily imposed sanctions and other penalties on Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez and the government of Honduras for systemic corruption and human rights violations, with particular focus on the Honduran police and armed forces. Currently, former President Juan Orlando Hernandez is being [charged](#) for drug trafficking crimes and has been extradited to the USA from Honduras. Hernández allegedly received millions of dollars so that he used his authority to make sure police and army units supported drug trafficking organizations in Honduras, Mexico and elsewhere (Justice, 21 April 2022). The start of the trial is [scheduled](#) for April 2023 and will be held in New York (DW, 16 November 2022).

Xiomara Castro has [resumed](#) relations with the USA. The vice president of the United States participated in her inauguration as president and is considered an ally for solving problems related to drug trafficking and migration (Esglobal, 21 February 2022).

Over the last years, church leaders have on more than one occasion denounced the injustices, [corruption](#) and the rampant impunity in the country (RFI, 9 October 2020). In the last elections, church leaders encouraged the public to make use of their [voting rights](#) and also encouraged the authorities to act within the framework of the law and guarantee the freedom and transparency of the electoral process (Vatican News, 15 October 2021). Leaders of both the [Catholic](#) (Aica, 26 October 2021) and [Evangelical](#) churches called on all parties to maintain peace in the elections and for the National Electoral Council to act with integrity (Hondudiario, 27 November 2021). With a new administration in place under Xiomara Castro, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Honduras has [pointed out](#) that a solid and realistic government plan is needed, in dialogue and consensus with all parties, guaranteeing an inclusive and progressive change, despite any criminal resistance it may encounter (Conferencia Episcopal Honduras, 11 February 2022). They have also called for [dialogue](#) to protect the rule of law in times of crisis (Conferencia Episcopal Honduras, 25 January 2022).

Religious landscape

Honduras: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christian	9,780,000	95.7
Muslim	14,700	0.1
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	6,100	0.1
Ethno-religionist	51,700	0.5

Jewish	400	0.0
Bahai	51,700	0.5
Atheist	21,900	0.2
Agnostic	204,000	2.0
Other	91,700	0.9
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Honduras is a Christian majority country; the Constitution guarantees the free exercise of all religions and beliefs without any preeminence, as long as they do not contravene the laws and public order. It also sets out in Article 77 that religious leaders may not hold public office or interfere in political processes. Despite this, it has become normal for church leaders to speak out about events of national interest and to [hold public office](#) (Criterio, 6 January 2022). In recent years, some [pastors](#) (Digital Evangelical, August 16, 2022) and government [authorities](#) (Efe, 21 November 2018) have raised the possibility of reforming Article 77 of the Constitution so that the participation of religious leaders in politics is formally allowed.

The Church, as an institution, has the "[greatest territorial presence](#)" in the country and enjoys the greatest levels of trust within the communities and the population (World Vision, 21 September 2021). The Roman Catholic Church is organized in 250 parishes throughout Honduras; the Episcopal Church has 38 congregations in total at the national level. Non-traditional church groups (referred to as 'evangelical') number more than 17,000 congregations in the country. Some of these belong to large denominations like the Assemblies of God and the Church of God, while many others have affiliations to smaller networks or work independently.

The previous administration under President Hernández had had a close relationship with the Evangelical Fellowship of Honduras (CEH). Thanks to the space granted to this organization, it enjoyed [influence](#) in various government institutions throughout the 12 years that the National Party was in power (Criterio, 6 January 2022). During the 2021 electoral campaign, the CEH signed an [agreement](#) with the presidential candidate of the National Party, Nasry Asfura, by which the latter pledged to adhere to 'Christian principles and values'. Representing independent evangelical churches, the Network of Evangelical Pastors and Leaders of Honduras, the Lucas Foundation for Health and the Latin American Theological Fraternity of Honduras all criticized this agreement harshly, calling it a form of ideological and partisan manipulation (Criterio, 18 November 2021). This was also the subject of criticism by secular groups and radical feminist groups. It remains to be seen whether the government's relationship with the CEH will continue to be close or not under Xiomara Castro's presidency.

The Episcopal Conference of Honduras suggested some [guidelines](#) for the new government in February 2022. In a public statement, the Catholic bishops emphasized the need for conflict resolution, and for respecting the republican system and the independence of the legitimately constituted powers of the state (Criterio, 11 February 2022).

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021), in 2021 the government required foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits and insisted that a local institution or individual should sponsor a missionary's application for residency and submit it to immigration authorities. President Hernández' government had agreements with the CEH, among others, to facilitate entry and residence permits for their missionaries. Groups with which the government did not have written agreement were required to provide proof of employment and income for their missionaries. Some religious organizations, including the 40 churches belonging to the evangelical Protestant umbrella organization, Inter-Ecclesiastical Forum (FIH), did not have a formalized agreement with President Hernández' government and claimed that the authorities gave preference to religious groups belonging to the 360 churches of the CEH.

Christians remained at risk of gang violence and police and army abuse in collusion with criminal groups; even more so due to gang members [entering](#) Honduras as a consequence of the State of Emergency in El Salvador (Criterio, 24 August 2022). Ordinary citizens are often coopted into helping gangs monitor church leaders and other prominent Christians to identify anything that could endanger the interests of the gangs. COVID-19 lockdown restrictions also helped gangs increase their [control](#) over communities, which affected many Christian families (AA, 15 May 2020). Some churches and Christian leaders dedicated to helping young people or who carry out evangelization in areas coopted by gangs can quickly appear to be gang collaborators and hence become targeted by the security forces. In other cases, church activities that can be perceived as opposing criminal activity or those involved in various environmental, education and [human rights initiatives](#) (CEV, 12 January 2022), face gang restrictions. (For more information, see below: *Security situation*)

Christian denominations continued to advocate for the rights of immigrants in the country and to denounce [abuses](#) (Univision, 18 July 2022). Christian organizations have also [criticized](#) the militarization of borders and the level of human rights abuses committed against those fleeing violence (Agencia EFE, 18 July 2021).

Finally, even though Honduras is a predominantly Christian country, there are radical secular and ideological groups that seek to remove the Christian voice from the public sphere. Citizens supporting ideological pressure groups show little or no tolerance towards the Christian faith. Church leaders and other Christians are frequently criticized and insulted when they defend their faith-based points of views on issues relating to family and marriage. Feminist organizations keep criticizing the 'harmful influence' of religious groups on public health issues; for instance, when the health authorities organize [consultations](#) with church representatives to discuss the possible ending of the ban on the use of the Emergency Contraceptive Pill (El Herald, 4 May 2022).

In general, church representatives have had a significant influence in the political arena during legislative discussions on issues related to same-sex marriage, abortion, and on issues related to the feminist movement. For this reason, many sexual minorities, civil society organizations and some citizens blame Christian religious leaders for the lack of progress in these issues. Given that the current administration under President Xiomara Castro is a left-wing government, some church leaders are concerned about the causes for which the president has expressed support, such as for officially being able to change one's name according to one's gender preference.

Some point out that this and other issues, if approved, could violate the right to conscientious objection or the right of parents to raise their children according to their own convictions. However, it is too soon to assess these situations, especially due to the urgency of other issues that the presidency is addressing, such as the economic and social crisis.

Economic landscape

According to UNDP's HDI profile:

- **Gross national income (GNI) per capita (2021):** 5,298.
- **GNI per capita for women (2021):** 4,271.
- **GNI per capita for men (2021):** 6,304.
- **Inequality in income (2021):** 34.9%
- **Poverty:** 22.2%. According to official records: "More than 73% of Honduras' 9.5 million inhabitants are classed as 'poor' and 53% live in extreme poverty" ([Swiss Info, 11 July 2022](#)).
- **Remittances:** According to the Central Bank, Honduras added 7,207.9 million dollars in remittances between January and October 2022, which represents an increase of 19.9% compared to the same period in 2021 ([El Economista, 14 November 2022](#)).

According to the World Bank country overview:

- "Poverty and inequality levels are likely to remain higher than pre-crisis levels and other development challenges persist for Honduras. Human development outcomes in the country are among the lowest in LAC. A child born in Honduras today will be 48 percent as productive when she grows up as she could be if she enjoyed complete education and full health."
- "Improving governance and the quality of institutions remains at the core and will require addressing issues of state capture and impunity. Further progress is needed in strengthening the independence of the judiciary and regulatory agencies, enhancing the capacity for citizens to hold public and elected officials accountable, improving transparency, and strengthening capacities for digital and open government, among others. Strengthening violence prevention and law enforcement also remains critical for reducing levels of crime and violence."
- "The country's economy rebounded to a 12.5 percent growth in 2021 and is expected to grow a 3.5 percent in 2022 and 3.1 percent in 2023. A new government took office in early 2022 and will have the opportunity to chart a course consistent with the recovery and reconstruction needs of the country and to address the critical constraints to growth."

According to World Bank's [Poverty & Equity Brief \(October 2022\)](#):

- "Honduras is among the poorest countries in the Latin America and Caribbean - LAC region and faces a challenging macroeconomic and social context."
- "By the end of 2021, the adverse effects of the pandemic on welfare were still visible. Despite a reduction in poverty of 4.4 percentage points, the poverty rate (US\$6.85) is estimated to remain higher than its pre-crisis level, at 53.3 in 2021. This means that more than half the country, 5.4 million people lived with less than \$6.85/day in Honduras in 2021. Moreover, the size of the vulnerable and middleclass population remained below pre-crisis

levels, at 27.9 percent (2.8 million people) and 18.6 percent (1.9 million people), respectively."

- "Also, according to the LAC High-Frequency Survey, which captures data from the end of 2021, while employment nearly recovered, the quality of the labor market worsened. By that time, the informality rate was up by 7 percentage points and the number of hours worked were lower by 17 percent relative to 2019. Food insecurity remained high, more than one-third of households ran out of food during the 30 days preceding the survey, particularly those with children (0-17 yrs.)."

According to the November 2022 [Economic Report](#) of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tegucigalpa:

- "In a less favorable international context, the growth of the Honduran economy for 2023 has been revised slightly downwards as it is influenced by the lower growth prospects of the main trading partners, as well as by less dynamism in external demand (exports) and the flow of family remittances. The monthly variation of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in November 2022 was 0.98%, mainly the result of higher prices of food of agricultural origin, influenced – in part – by the loss of crops due to hurricanes; in addition to the increases in the prices of foods with the highest consumption in the end of the year season; as well as fuels, which registered weekly increases in the month in question, associated with higher international prices of refined oil. Derived from the above, year-on-year inflation was 10.44%, below the maximum rate reached in July 2022 (10.86%). Meanwhile, accumulated inflation reached 9.39%."

An important feature of the Honduran labor market is the high incidence of informality. In addition, the [evaluation](#) of the effects of the tropical storm Eta and hurricane Iota carried out by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Inter-American Development Bank concluded that the disaster brought a total cost of approximately 52,099 million lempiras (CEPAL, May 2021).

This context of economic crisis explains why Honduras is a country receiving international aid. However, cases of [corruption](#) and diversion of funds by President Hernández' administration deterred humanitarian aid from being channeled through the government (WPR, 26 January 2021). It remains to be seen if this will be maintained or changed now that a new administration under Xiomara Castro is in place.

National strikes and demonstrations, made worse by widespread vandalism and looting, have all negatively impacted the country's economy in recent years. In this scenario, churches continue to be one of the most trusted institutions for channeling international aid for humanitarian purposes.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European) 90%, Amerindian 7%, African descent 2%, white 1%.
- **Main language:** Spanish. There is presence of Amerindian dialects.

- **Urban population:** 60.2% of total population (2023)
- **Literacy rate:** 88.5%

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Population aged 15-64:** 65% (2021)
- **Education:** Pre-primary - 34%; Primary - 97%; Secondary - 64% (2021)
- **Compulsory school education:** 12 years (2021)
- **Gender Parity Index (GPI):** 1.07 (2021)
- **Unemployment:** 8.5% (2021). Young people between 15 and 29 years of age represent the highest unemployment rate (13.2% in 2021), while people between 30 and 59 years old account for 5.4% and those over 60 years old, 6.7% ([COHEP, May 2022](#)).
- **Refugee population:** 51,687 (2021)

According to the UNDP's HDI profile:

- **HDI score and ranking (2021):** Honduras' HDI value for 2019 is 0.621
- **Life expectancy (2021):** 72.5 for women and 67.9 for men
- **Expected years of schooling (2021):** 10.4 for women and 9.9 for men
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII):** Honduras has a GI value of 0.431, ranking it 107 out of 191 countries in the 2021 index
- **Children/Youth:** Since 2020, the school [dropout rate](#) has skyrocketed; approximately 40% of students dropped out of school in 2020, due to violence, social insecurity and the increase in poverty. This has influenced young people to leave the country (El País, 9 June 2022). According to official Mexican statistics, between January and September 2021, 9,585 children and adolescents were registered [traveling alone](#) (Forbes Centroamérica, 22 February 2022) and the main countries from which they came were Guatemala (4,815), Honduras (3,480) and El Salvador (1,033). The main causes of migration were violence, insecurity, family reunification and the effects of natural disasters. The [impact](#) of the COVID-19 pandemic also played a role (ReliefWeb, 10 June 2021). Faced with these problems, in October 2020, a draft bill for the Prevention, Care and Protection of IDPs was officially submitted to the National Congress of Honduras but there has been [no progress](#) since then (UNHCR External Update 8, March-May 2022).
- **IDPs:** According to UNHCR, more than 247,000 people were internally displaced in Honduras as a result of violence between 2004 and 2018. The Association for a More Just Society (ASJ) estimates that more than 200,000 households in Honduras or 847,154 people (9% of the population) were victims of extortion in 2022, generating up to \$737 million in extortion payments annually ([UNHCR, Country Office Factsheet, November 2022](#)). In addition, around 67,000 individuals were affected by the hurricane season's effects ([Reliefweb, External Update for September 2022](#)). Many families, victims of both violence and the effects of natural disasters, often choose to leave the country.

In general, deficiencies in education, health, safety and essential public services have been constant. These failures became even more evident with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Faced with the food crisis, the National Institute of Statistics and the World Food Program [made an agreement](#) for cooperation in health projects for the period 2022-2026 (INE,

19 April 2022). The [health crisis](#) is currently worsening, not only as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also due to the national shortage of medicines and high levels of corruption (Criterio, 20 July 2022).

Human rights

There is a culture of human rights violations in the country by both state and non-state agents. According to a [2021 OHCHR report](#), as of October 2021, the Public Ministry had received 49 complaints for torture, 70 for cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and 34 for forced disappearance (Reliefweb, 4 March 2022). The OHCHR has documented cases of possible human rights violations involving members of the security forces, particularly in the context of checkpoints and detentions, including the death of three people. It also observed that there is no favorable and safe environment for citizen participation, especially in the environmental field, negatively affecting the exercise of the rights to participate in the conduct of public affairs, peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, access to information and freedom of association.

The regulatory framework, public policies, and various institutional practices continued to restrict civic space. In 2021 at least 302 human rights activists and journalists (209 activists and 93 journalists) were victims of attacks, from threats and harassment to murder. Of the people affected, 119 belong to indigenous or Afro-Honduran peoples and 169 are dedicated to defending the land, territory and the environment. Of the 302 victims, ten were murdered (seven men and three women, two of them transgender; two Afro-descendants and one indigenous). At least seven people had faced previous incidents, and two were beneficiaries of protection measures from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the National Protection Mechanism since 2014 and 2018, respectively. Of the population that does not have sufficient access to adequate food (which increased from 41.6% in 2016 to 45.6% in 2020) indigenous and Afro-Honduran peoples are the most affected.

Violence

The government has a history of quelling protests harshly; this was particularly the case in 2018 and 2019. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 confinement measures, no major protests occurred. In November 2021, the government incorporated [changes](#) which could affect the right to protest (OAS, 16 November 2021). In general, the [penal system](#) has been regularly manipulated to allow the harassment of human rights activists (OAS, 27 July 2021). In addition, widespread violence from gangs has compelled entire families to flee their homes, increasing the number of migrants seeking refuge in other countries ([Proceso Digital, 29 October 2022](#)). According to UNHCR statistics, during the first six months of 2022, new asylum applications in the Americas region increased by 146 per cent to 435,600 compared to the same period last year. In the USA, new individual asylum claims more than trebled to 245,200 in the first half of 2022 from the same period in 2021. More than half of all new applications were lodged by nationals of just five countries: Venezuela, Cuba, Honduras, Guatemala and Haiti ([UNHCR 2022 Mid-year trends report](#)).

Churches have developed various programs to serve the most vulnerable in society. These activities involve [trauma care](#) and the distribution of humanitarian aid (World Vision, September 2021) as well as the promotion of human rights and [protection](#) for migrants (Vatican News, 21

March 2022). In areas with a high presence of gangs, criminal groups [oversee](#) the distribution of humanitarian assistance (Acaps, 28 June 2022), including aid supplied by church groups and organizations. Christians daring to oppose gang interference risk becoming a target for reprisals. (For more information on gang violence, see below: *Security situation*.)

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 49.1% of the population – survey date: March 2021 (Latest available survey at time of writing.)
- **Facebook usage:** 49.1% penetration – survey date: December 2021

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

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 74 per 100 people (2021).

According to [BuddeComm](#) Research (Publication date: January 2023):

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

According to Reporters Without Borders (World Press Freedom 2022):

- "Media pluralism is endangered by multinational corporate ownership of major media and political class ownership of smaller media."
- "Journalists are regularly subject to unfounded prosecution. Prison terms for defamation are common, in some cases coupled with prohibitions on continuing to work in journalism."
- "Journalists are regularly assaulted, targeted for harassment and intimidation campaigns, subjected to death threats, and forced into exile. Most of the abuse and violence comes from security forces, especially the military police and army."

On 25 May 2021, parliament approved a new Electoral Law to use digital technology for making voting and counting more reliable. However, the approval of budget resources for acquiring the necessary equipment was [delayed](#) (Expediente Público, 14 June 2021) and at the time of November 2021 elections, the new systems [had not been implemented](#) (Criterio, 20 December 2021).

Some of the [challenges](#), which the new administration under Xiomara Castro will need to solve, involve digital transformation, the closing of the digital gap and the adoption of technologies in productive environments, in addition to the economic recovery of the state operator Hondutel (Bnamericas, 29 November 2021).

Many Christians in the country have made use of the technological resources at their disposal for church work, whether in the form of streaming church services or in providing spiritual support to isolated Christians, especially during the time of the COVID-19 restrictions.

The final approval of the "National Law on Cybersecurity and Protection Measures in the Face of Hate and Discrimination Acts on the Internet and Social Networks" was a matter of concern for Christians and all Internet users ([Conexion, 6 November 2019](#)). The initiative was harshly criticized - for instance by Human Rights Watch ([HRW, 9 April 2018](#)) as it is considered a tool to promote and legalize censorship and control of freedom of expression. Christians expressing views contrary to the government can thereby be denounced for acts of hate or discrimination.

Security situation

Organized crime: The main criminal groups [responsible](#) for the levels of violence and insecurity in the country are the MS13 and Barrio18 gangs. Other groups linked to drug trafficking are Los Lorenzanas, Los Perrones and El Cartel de Taxis, which operate along the country's border (UNODC, last accessed February 2023). Global Initiative's Global Organized Crime Index shows that Honduras is a [hub](#) for human and arms trafficking, as well as being one of the main drug trafficking corridors in Central America (Global Initiative, 2021). In this scenario, both the MS13 and Barrio18 work together with other criminal networks to dominate cocaine distribution. Their main criminal activity is however extortion.

Foreign criminal gangs are also active, for instance from Colombia and Mexico and El Salvador, which tend to focus on drug processing and trafficking, among other criminal activities. Criminal networks have also [infiltrated](#) the government system through corruption (La Tribuna, 16 August 2021) which allows them to act with impunity. As Human Rights Watch points out (HRW 2022 country chapter), efforts to reform public security institutions have stalled. Marred by corruption and abuse, the judiciary and police remain largely ineffective. Weak state institutions and abuses by security forces have contributed to persistent gang violence. There have been repeated allegations of collusion between security forces and criminal organizations.

Political violence: In the run-up to the most recent elections in 2021, there was political violence in the country affecting candidates and other people involved. The OAS Electoral Observation Mission [condemned](#) the acts of violence perpetrated during the election period, particularly the assassinations (OAS, 14 November 2021). According to official figures, there were approximately 64 victims of [political violence](#) in Honduras in the period 23 December 2020 - 25 October 2021 (IUDPAS-UNAH, November 2021).

Homicides: According to the [report](#) by the Undersecretary for Security in Police Affairs of the Security Secretariat (UNDP, 4 August 2022), during the first quarter of 2022, homicides decreased by 13.3% compared to the same period of the previous year. Multiple homicides registered an increase of 2.5% (2 more victims) in the first six months of 2022 compared to the same period of the previous year, 9 out of 10 victims of multiple homicides are men and 6 out of 10 multiple homicides occurred in urban areas. Young people between the ages of 18 and 30 continue to be the main victims of homicide (41.4% of the total number of victims) and firearms continue to be the main weapon used. Despite the reduction in homicides nationwide, 6 municipalities accounted for 32% of all homicides: Central District, San Pedro Sula, Choloma, Catacamas, La Ceiba and Danlí.

Other forms of violence: In addition to killings, gang violence includes coercion, threats, attacks and kidnappings. Citizens continue to face restrictions on mobility, extortion, forced recruitment, violence, and the confiscation of property, often [forcing them](#) to move home either within the country or as refugees to other countries (VOA, 10 May 2021). At times, criminal networks [use schools](#) as safe houses to stash illicit drugs or weapons. Teachers are forced to pay bribes to get to work every time they cross the invisible borders that separate one gang's territory from another's. Some teachers become victims of extortion, intimidation and threats from gang members, who are sometimes their own students or their students' parents (UNHCR, 24 January 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers were also [victims](#) of cyber violence and online extortion. Gang members demanded that they pay for the costs of their children's internet connection or top-up credit cards (El País, 9 June 2022).

Faced with this whole scenario, the new government under Xiomara Castro has taken steps to combat gang violence, for instance, by [restructuring](#) the national police force, which aims at dismantling criminal networks (Criterio HN, 15 July 2022), and by entering an agreement with the FBI to [create](#) a Transnational Anti-Gang Unit (US Embassy Tegucigalpa Tweet, 8 February 2022).

In areas co-opted by gangs, Christians who oppose criminal activities are likely to face harassment, either by extortion, beatings, death-threats, and even [killings](#) (La Prensa, 13 March 2022). Christian leaders who work as human rights activists are particularly often victims of [violence](#) (Agenzia Fides, 12 January 2022). Churches are also targets for [robbery](#) (HCH, 23 March 2022) and vandalism. During the COVID-19 pandemic, gangs took advantage of the lockdown and other measures to strengthen their territorial control. Christian leaders found themselves subjected to carrying out their activities, including humanitarian assistance, under the authorization of these groups.

Most Christians living in these circumstances do not have any government institution to turn to for protection, due to the widespread corruption of the authorities.

Trends analysis

1) Political instability has weakened the state

The social, economic, security, health, migratory and humanitarian impact of the political instability generated by the previous government administration has affected the very roots of all state institutions. Despite the political changes, with greater transparency and fewer signs of corruption since Xiomara Castro took over the presidency, there are no quick solutions to the challenges facing the country and churches will be needed to continue caring for the most vulnerable in society.

2) Criminal gangs have capitalized on the crisis

The active presence of criminal groups throughout the country for so many years is a destabilizing factor for society and the state. This is particularly the case where impunity is still being guaranteed by their links with corrupt authorities that are still in power at various levels. This causes general mistrust as well as an increase in the levels of violence. The corruption networks also represent a threat to churches where church activities are viewed as attacking criminal interests.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: controversy - <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/honduras/2017-12-20/election-crisis-honduras>
- Recent history: ruled - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/24/honduran-judges-throw-out-single-term-limit-on-presidency>
- Recent history: state of emergency - <https://www.thedailybeast.com/honduras-declares-state-of-emergency-amid-violent-clashes>
- Recent history: curfews - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-42261076>
- Recent history: 2017 report - https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/HN/2017ReportElectionsHRViolations_Honduras_EN.pdf
- Recent history: calls to annul - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-42297201>
- Recent history: recommendation - http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-090/17
- Recent history: deeply entrenched - <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1248036/download>
- Recent history: OHCHR/ACNUR External Update for November 2022 - <file:///C:/Users/rossanar/Downloads/Honduras%20-%20External%20Update%20-%20November%202022.pdf>
- Recent history: transit country - <https://reliefweb.int/report/honduras/datos-migraci-n-honduras-revisi-n-datos-secundarios-documentos-y-notas-de-prensa>
- Recent history: damage - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/12/devastating-impact-hurricanes-eta-iota-honduras/>
- Recent history: evacuated - <https://www.msf.es/actualidad/honduras/huracanes-honduras-casi-400000-personas-han-sido-evacuadas-sus-hogares>
- Political and legal landscape: collapse - <https://voices.transparency.org/honduras-how-a-surge-of-corruption-scandals-has-fueled-political-crisis-85af16ceac85>
- Political and legal landscape: deterioration - https://bti-project.org/content/es/downloads/press/Honduras_BTI2020_ES.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: decline - <https://www.expedientepublico.org/ocho-anos-de-corrupcion-del-gobierno-de-juan-orlando-hernandez/>
- Political and legal landscape: endorse - <https://www.expedientepublico.org/pobreza-y-corrupcion-policia-alimentan-las-extorsiones-en-honduras/>

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WWL 2023: Church information / Honduras

Christian origins

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

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

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

Church spectrum today

Honduras: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	9,900	0.1
Catholic	6,928,000	70.8
Protestant	1,616,000	16.5
Independent	739,000	7.6
Unaffiliated	539,000	5.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-52,700	-0.5
Total	9,779,200	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,175,000	12.0
Renewalist movement	1,770,000	18.1

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

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

The main Christian denomination in Honduras is the Roman Catholic Church, representing 70.8% of all Christians according to WCD 2022 estimates. Nonetheless, evangelical denominations in the country continue to grow fast and have also achieved significant recognition in the political arena.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Main areas for Organized corruption and crime

The areas where this engine was influential during the WWL 2023 reporting period were Atlantida, Choluteca, Colon, Comayagua, Copan, Cortes, El Paraiso, Francisco Morazan, Gracias a Dios, Intibucá, Islas de Bahias, Lempira, Ocotepeque, Olancho, Santa Barbara, Valle and Yoro.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians

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

Historical Christian communities

This category consists mainly of Roman Catholic churches and small Orthodox and Protestant communities. These communities are targeted by gangs, especially when the latter see them as opposing their activities and impose a higher extortion quota on them, because the “more traditional” Church doctrine is considered to be more harmful to the lifestyle proposed by the gangs. As a consequence, historical Churches have been victims of threats, displacements, extortion, church attacks, murders, etc. In addition, they also are targeted with insults and criticism from ideological groups, who wish to try to impose their non-Christian values on society; attempts are regularly made to reduce their presence in the public arena under the pretext of defending the principle of Church/State separation. Some of the Protestant churches in this category, do not enjoy the same benefits granted to the Catholic Church and have been highly criticized for their close relationship with the past administration under President Hernández.

Converts

These are either former gang members who have converted to Christianity or are so-called 'cross-denominational converts'. They face the same kind of persecution as traditional historical communities. In the case of former gang members (called “calmados”), they are likely to suffer persecution from their original gangs, rival gangs and security forces. They will be monitored to ensure that their conversion does not affect the interests of criminal groups, especially when they are part of a church considered unfriendly towards gangs. A conversion may be tolerated by gang leaders, but only if it is regarded as genuine according to gang criteria. If not tolerated, former members may be put under pressure to make them return to criminal activities. Additionally, ever since some Salvadorian gang members tried to evade the Honduran police by pretending to be evangelical pastors, there has been a growing intolerance towards such converts, both from the government and from society. In the case of 'cross-denominational converts' (i.e., those who have switched allegiance from an historical church to join a non-traditional church group), the Christians might face some signs of rejection from the rest of their family or the local community. This occurs mainly in rural areas.

Non-traditional Christian communities

This category is made up of neo-Protestant churches such as the Church of God, Assemblies of God, Abundant Life Church, Living Love Church, International Christian Center, and various Great Commission churches. By being a minority, they do not have the same representation at a social or political level, although some have had to face fierce criticism for having a close relationship with the previous administration under President Hernández. In areas co-opted by criminal groups, they are likely to be more vulnerable to criminal activities (including groups of foreign origin), especially because most gang converts are associated with non-traditional churches.

Additionally, their ministry is under increased social and government scrutiny because some of the church communities are falsely accused of harboring Salvadorian gang members. These communities are also criticized when publicly defending Christian values regarding marriage and family, and in some rural areas where the Catholic Church is particularly dominant, they face rejection as a consequence of *Christian denominational protectionism*. There are also sporadic reports about indigenous leaders refusing to accept the presence of non-traditional church groups in their territories (although this can also be a challenge for historical church communities as well).

External Links - Church information

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WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Honduras

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Honduras: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	53	67
WWL 2022	48	68
WWL 2021	46	67
WWL 2020	39	-
WWL 2019	38	-

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Honduras' rise in total score was due, in large part, to an increase in violent incidents compared to WWL 2022, particularly in the categories of killings, Christian buildings attacked, Christian's houses and Christians forced to leave the country. The new government (which took over power in January 2022) seems to be following a more democratic line than its predecessor, but this has not stopped the rejection of Church participation in public debate becoming increasingly evident. *Organized corruption and crime (Strong)*: The country's main problem is the territorial control exercised by criminal gangs and the constant threat they represent to anyone who does not submit to their rules and methods of extortion, especially when it comes to Christians who refuse to be part of their illegal activities and corruption networks.

Persecution engines

Honduras: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Very weak
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Very weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

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

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

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

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

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

Drivers of persecution

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

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

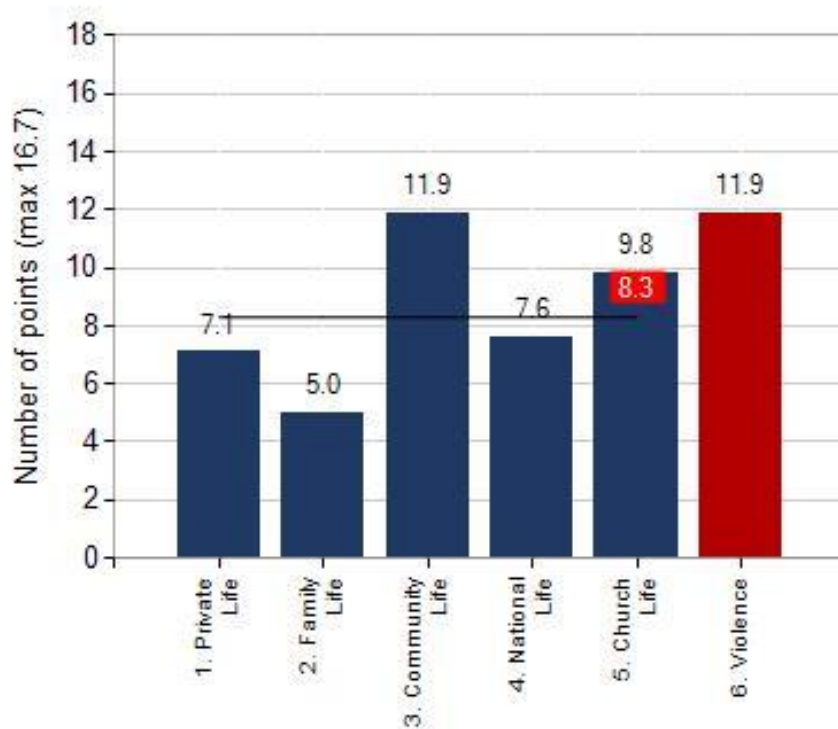
Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

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

of fear of being attacked. The prominent gangs are Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13) and Mara 18, whose members force Christians to be accomplices in their criminal activities, regardless of their faith; if they refuse, they become victims of extortion, threats, and possibly even killings. However, they are not the only criminal groups active in the country that contribute to the violence against Christians: There are networks specializing in trafficking drugs and contraband, as well as groups of Salvadoran origin. These also endanger church activities when Christians are considered an obstacle to their criminal interests.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Honduras



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Honduras shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a high level (8.3 points), rising slightly from 8.0 in WWL 2022.
- Pressure is strongest in *Community Life* (11.9 points) and *Church Life* (9.8 points), which is typical for a situation mainly dominated by *Organized corruption and crime* but also influenced by less prevalent *Secular intolerance* and *Christian denominational protectionism*.
- The score for violence is extremely high at 11.9 points, a noticeable rise from 8.7 in WWL 2022, caused mainly by the higher number of Christians killed, and a higher number of attacks on church buildings and Christians' private property.

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 2023 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.50 points)

To go against the rules, curfews and other restrictions imposed by gangs is very risky for Christians, especially for those known for refusing to support the illegal interests of those criminal groups. In addition, when Christians meet up with others - especially if they are youth - the police are likely to suspect them of threatening public order, belonging to a gang or of collaborating with Salvadorian criminal groups.

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

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

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (2.75 points)

In the context of *Secular intolerance*, Christian opinions are sometimes targeted, threatened with censorship and harshly criticized where they touch upon biblical views of family, life and marriage. This has increased due to the promises and initiatives of public policies made by the new government administration (influenced by the ideological pressure groups and political parties supporting it).

In the context of *Organized corruption and crime*, in areas coopted by gangs, Christians who reveal their faith and encourage others through social media (or other means) to abandon all contact with crime, are likely to become the target of reprisals by local gangs.

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

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

Within traditional families in rural areas, there are sporadic cases where Christians who have joined other church denominations have been criticized harshly by their relatives and hindered from sharing more about their faith in the family circle.

In other cases, members of evangelical denominations were questioned for their closeness to the previous government administration and its high levels of corruption. This led to polarization among family members.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

In Honduras, the Constitution of the Republic establishes freedom of worship and ensures the right of parents to choose the school institution that best suits their Christian beliefs (despite ideological pressure groups claiming that parental religious beliefs obstruct the free development of children). In areas co-opted by gangs, children run the risk of being recruited by criminal groups at an early age and forced to be part of the so-called “Hitman schools” (“escuelas de sicarios”). They also run the risk of being recruited by Salvadorian gangs in the country. Parents can hardly do anything about such recruitment - they are threatened if they try – and consequently, if their children do join up, parents are denied any opportunity of educating them and passing on their Christian values and beliefs.

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

This situation is highly likely to occur if Christian parents are perceived as being a risk to the stability of criminal groups. Usually, children are targeted as a means of intimidating Christian parents with the aim of making them give up any influence they may have in the community or to force them to collaborate with criminal activities (for instance, making space for them in homes, as happened with Salvadorian gang members in the WWL 2023 reporting period). It is a risk for children to be known as being good at sports (especially good runners) or to have some special quality that is useful for criminal life (for instance, being good at mathematics) because it makes them more likely to be pressed into gang membership.

Additionally, according to the US State Department (IRFR 2021), some Seventh-Day-Adventist children were discriminated against concerning their parents' faith teaching about Saturdays.

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

In areas with the highest rates of violence generated by organized crime, Christians - especially church leaders or activists - who become targets of threats by criminal groups, have few options. Most will flee their homes (and sometimes country) to safeguard their lives and that of their family. Sometimes, if the children of Christian parents suffer from gang harassment, their parents decide to send them to other cities or out of the country in order to keep them safe. This situation inevitably breaks up the family unit, even when all members try to leave together; sometimes that is simply impossible, so as not to arouse the suspicion of those who issued the

threats.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.75 points)

There have been reports of sporadic cases where some denominations have put pressure on students to attend certain religious events in order to get graduate certification, as reported by the US State Department (IRFR 2021). However, the state youth-program “Guardians of the Fatherland”, which was still in operation at the beginning of the WWL 2023 reporting period, has been far more dangerous. It was known that members of the national police and armed forces used this youth-program with its military uniform to encourage school children to adopt a war mentality, especially in areas of the country such as Ocotepeque, Atlantida or Gracias a Dios.

Additionally, the progressive inclusion of SOGI postulates in the school curriculum has generated some pressure on Christian students in state schools when such content has contradicted their faith.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

Converted gang members are monitored to make sure they do not have any contact with rival gangs and that they live a true Christian life. Ordinary Christians also face constant monitoring by these groups because it is important for them to know if their message of peace and non-violence is becoming influential and could become a possible threat to their territorial control. Gangs are also known for implementing security systems - for instance, in San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa - to keep an eye on the local population and the police with the acquiescence of the local authorities. Additionally, during the November 2021 elections, Christian activists opposing Hernández' ruling party, ran the risk of their communications being intercepted and monitored under the application of a regulation that legalized this practice to safeguard the interests of the government.

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

In general, access to education is free for all, and religious education is allowed at all levels, including universities. However, especially in rural areas, criminal groups more or less control all access to schools/universities through extortion schemes and surveillance for recruitment purposes, also affecting academic freedom. As a result, several schools in the country have been forced to shut down. This process involves teachers, students, and also parents (as gang collaborators) who threaten (and retaliate against) Christian students who defy criminal group interests. Additionally, according to IRFR 2021, university students belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist Church suffered disadvantages when teaching activities were scheduled for Saturdays, which is quite a usual occurrence.

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

The main business of gangs is based around extortion, fees that in the country are called "war taxes". This is a method of financing criminal groups and enjoys total impunity in the country. Christians must often pay a fee to carry on their daily activities or to be allowed to enter specific areas of the country. When it is about church affiliation or activities which a gang opposes, the fine will be high, as a way of intimidation intended to discourage such activities and impose a culture of terror in the area, since the collection of the "fee" is associated with a death threat or irreparable damage. Since the pressure to pay the extortion fees is very strong and often comes from more than one criminal group with a presence in the community, this situation influences the high rates of displacement.

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

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

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

In general, the Constitution guarantees the free exercise of all religions as long as they do not contravene laws and public order. However, due to the fact that in the previous administration under President Hernández some opposition censorship was legalized, content regarded as slander and defamation on social networks can also be understood as a criminal offence. This means that any criticism of leaders and political authorities involved in corruption scandals mentioned in a church sermon can put preachers at risk of facing legal charges. According to the Constitution, in general, religious leaders are also prohibited from making any kind of political statement.

Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (3.25 points)

Christians are not forced by law to do military service; however, there is no legal provision for conscientious objection. Christian journalists run the risk of being threatened, harassed, prosecuted, arbitrarily arrested, abducted, etc. when they denounce human rights abuses, corruption networks or criminal activities. The aim is to force them not to publish opinions/investigations that could endanger the interests of criminal groups and authorities involved with them. In addition, due to the influence and pressure exerted by criminal groups, the population is forced to fit into their rules and collaborate with their purposes.

In this context, Christians report being compelled:

- not to denounce acts of corruption in the institution where they work;
- to provide confidential information for criminal purposes;
- to collaborate with the financing of illicit activities;
- to make their teaching 'crime-friendly';
- to encourage children in getting to know gang-life.

Finally, as already mentioned above, some teachers and other workers belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist Church have not been allowed to observe their Saturday Sabbath because a Saturday is officially part of the working week.

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

Criminal groups (in collusion with government officers at various levels) basically have the authority to decide who can enter or leave the territories under their control. Christians who for whatever reason try to move from one area to another are thus faced with having to pay fees, to be forced to collaborate with criminals or in other cases, they are not allowed to leave the area in reprisal for their pastoral work in the community. This situation becomes worse if Christians who try to travel, do so between areas that are dominated by rival groups or when their churches are not tolerated by the groups dominating the territory. The COVID-19 context exacerbated this problem, with gangs even gaining control of national borders to prevent anyone considered a threat or enemy from fleeing the country.

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.00 points)

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

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Officials at all levels are often in collusion with criminal groups, thus making it risky to report illegal activities and threats. The simple fact of trying to do so generates a lot of mistrust and reprisals. At the beginning of the WWL 2023 reporting period, during the former government administration under President Hernández, it was risky for church leaders to advocate for justice, for respect for democracy and the rule of law, for transparency in elections, and for human rights, because attempts would be made to silence them in the criminal world.

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

Considering that the usual recruitment age for gangs is 10 -14 years old, anyone daring to prevent recruitment (either through education, social programs or evangelization), represents a threat to the gangs and their stability. It must be borne in mind that gangs terrorize neighborhoods throughout the country, often dictating to young people an impossible choice - join or die! Pastoral work with young people has become more difficult of late since gang recruitment has intensified to cover a greater variety of operations: Many gangs are diversifying; they not only engage in extortion but also need recruits for smuggling, drug production and trafficking, illegal arms trade, migrant smuggling, etc.

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

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

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

Church leaders are particularly vulnerable to gang operations (e.g. extortion and threats), because of their prominent position in society and their ongoing presence and work in areas with minimal state influence and strong and active criminal presence. Church leaders cannot freely conduct their activities without being monitored or targeted by gang leaders, especially when they promote a culture of peace and try to prevent young teenagers from joining criminal gangs. The family of Christians also become targets for threats and reprisals, as a way of putting pressure on them to stop their activities in the area. Christian leaders who manage donations for church work are often forced to collaborate by paying a 'protection fee' (called a quota or rent), so that local churches can carry out their regular activities with minimum disruption. Additionally, religious leaders sometimes face intolerant communities a) in some rural locations that do not accept new non-traditional denominations, and b) where certain ideological pressure groups influence society to oppose the public presence of the Church.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

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

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

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

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

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

Honduras: Violence Block question	WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	14	13
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	8	3
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	1
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	5	7
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	100
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	5	0
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	8	9
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1	0

In the WWL 2023 reporting period:

- **Christians killed (14):** The work of Christians in poor neighborhoods or with youth frequently defies the control of criminal groups in those territories. This has cost Christians their lives.
- **Christians sexually harassed (5):** The reported cases are of daughters of pastors who, as a way of reprisal against church work of their Christian parents' and their refusal to collaborate with Salvadorian gangs located in the country, were victims of attempted rape, sexual harassment and coercion to engage in pornographic activities.

- **Christian attacked (100*):** Most attacks involved death-threats against pastors and their families when they refused to pay extortion fees or collaborate in criminal activities, or when they insisted on carrying out humanitarian work in territory controlled by gangs, or even persevered in youth-work involving former gang members.
- **Christians forced to leave their homes (8):** Members of a young church were extorted by local and foreign gang members and threatened if they refused to cover up for them before the police authorities. Due to the pastors' refusal to give in to criminal interests, they were forced to leave the area to save their lives.

5 Year trends

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

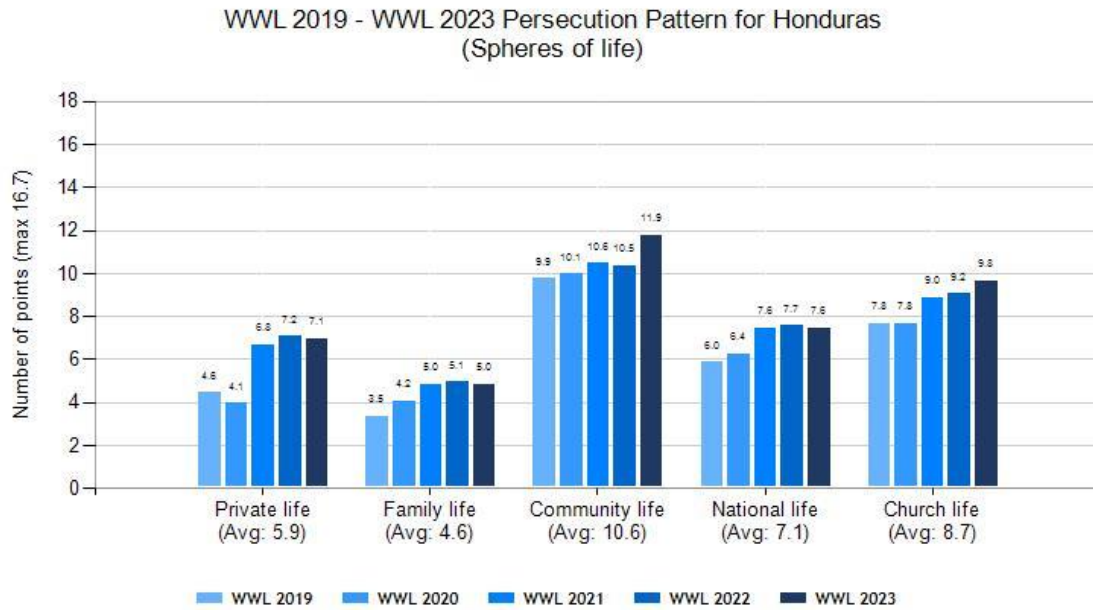
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Honduras: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	8.3
2022	8.0
2021	7.8
2020	6.5
2019	6.3

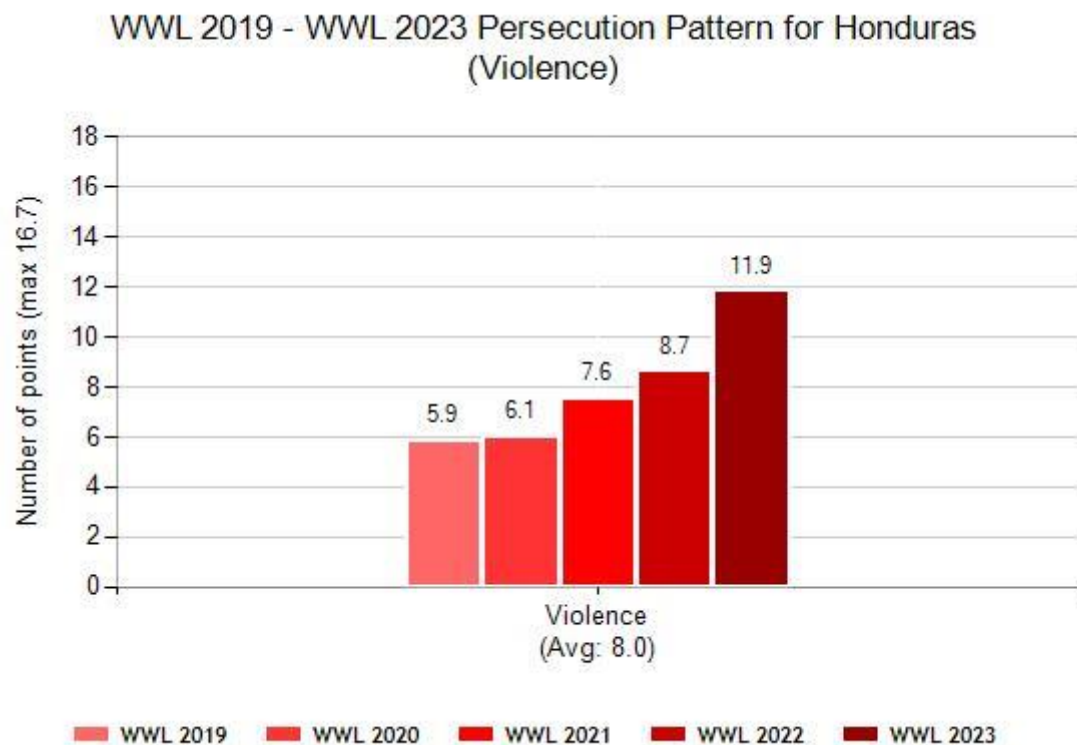
Due to Christians being affected by violence perpetrated by criminal groups, particularly local gangs, as more territorial control has been gained, pressure against the Church has increased over time as is reflected in the constant rise from the average pressure from 6.3 to 8.3 points. In the last five WWL reporting periods, the influence (to a lesser extent) of other persecution engines such as *Dictatorial Paranoia* and *Secular Intolerance* has also become apparent.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

The chart below shows a general trend over the years of increasing pressure in all *spheres of life*, although in the WWL 2023 reporting period, the pressure in some spheres decreased slightly due to a reduction in the impact of the engine *Dictatorial Paranoia*. Pressure remains at the highest levels in the *Community* and *Church spheres*, mainly due to the increased influence of criminal groups operating as de facto authorities and acting with impunity throughout the country.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



In the chart above, the scores for violence show a progressive increase during the last five WWL reporting periods. This reflects the danger that Christians face in living out their faith freely caused by the greater territorial control enjoyed by criminal gangs and the lack of efficient government measures to confront the culture of violence that they foster.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

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

Irrespective of religion, it is dangerous to be a woman in Honduras. According to the 2022 report on Violence against Honduran Women by the Women's Rights Center (CDM), there were 240 reported violent deaths and homicides in 2022 ([CDM, accessed 26 January 2023](#)). Rape and domestic violence are widespread, although women are slow to report abuses due to high rates of impunity granted to perpetrators – only about 13% of homicide cases end with a conviction ([ASJ, April 2020](#)). A country expert reported that pastors live in constant worry about their daughters “because as the gang members are looking for a way to continue fleeing to the north (United States), they want to take the girls to prostitute or sell them and thus obtain some financial gain.”

Increasing numbers of women and girls are fleeing Central America amid reports that criminal gangs are systematically targeting young girls for sexual enslavement ([US Department of State, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Honduras](#)). However, the majority of migrants fleeing Honduras are men, meaning that many households in Honduras are now being led by women.

Within this context of violence and instability, Christian women and girls can face additional challenges on the basis of their faith. There have been several reports of teenage daughters of pastors being victims of rape, sexual harassment and coercion to engage in pornographic activities at the hands of [gang members](#) (La Prensa, 5 March 2017). “Christian girls are the object of greater attention,” an expert explained; In the WWL 2023 reporting period, “7 cases of girls and adolescent daughters of pastors were reported who were victims of attempted rape, sexual harassment, acts of lust and coercion to engage in pornography activities. Pastors think they were chosen because of their obedience and purity, and as way of reprisal for the pastoral work of their parents.” They are systematically targeted as a means of blackmailing or intimidating their families, in order to stop evangelistic activity occurring in gang territory. Some girls have been abducted and killed for refusing to engage in sexual relationships with gang members. Survivors are left both physically and psychologically traumatized.

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

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

High rates of criminal activity and the presence of [notorious gangs](#) such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 also pose daily security threats to Christian men and boys (ABC News, 24 November 2022). Church leaders are particularly vulnerable to attacks and threats, especially those involved in evangelistic activities or seeking to stop the trafficking of narcotics. Extortion through fines and threats are commonplace. In the WWL 2022 and 2023 reporting periods, there have been several reports of pastors being violently abducted and killed (For example, see: [El Heraldo, 10 August 2022](#); [Vatican News, 4 March 2022](#)). In February 2021, Edwin Arellano, a pastor of a youth group in an evangelical church was shot dead. His family suspect he was targeted for his outreach work among gang members ([La Prensa, 8 February 2021](#)).

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

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

In light of such pressure and cycles of violence, many Christian men and boys choose to flee Honduras, although they remain vulnerable while displaced. As a regional expert explained: “The harassment and terror that being chosen by the gangs means, and not wanting to do so, is a little-explored phenomenon, but it not only implies leaving the place where one lives alone or with the family, but also sometimes not being able to continue studying, being insulted in the streets, being isolated, in the case of Christians, not even having the opportunity to go out to congregate because it can be a risky act.”

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- Muslim leaders reported incidents where individuals who self-identified as evangelical Protestants made offensive remarks regarding their community on social media, such as “stop infesting our country with false doctrines”.
- Representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church continued to express concerns that some schools and other public and private institutions did not grant them leave to observe their Sabbath on Saturday because Saturdays were part of the official working week. They cited specifically the public Francisco Morazan National Pedagogical University and the Catholic University of Honduras in La Ceiba.

Future outlook

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

Organized corruption and crime

The change of government has meant a fresh look at the crisis in the country and has given signs of hope for the improvement in the political climate. Although the roots of the structural problems that have affected the country are very deep, it is nevertheless necessary for the state authorities to take firm action to eradicate the violence caused by the influence of criminal groups. However, such government action needs to be carried out with careful respect for human rights, to avoid making the same mistakes made by some of the neighboring countries in the region. An important dimension is to attack the corruption of officials who promote impunity, making it possible for criminal acts to continue unabated, thus causing levels of fear in the population to be so high. Government measures to curb violence and insecurity will have a positive impact on the freedom of churches and their humanitarian activities. It is hoped that these will be carried out in increasing safety even when the churches are known for opposing the interests of local criminal groups.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: impunity - <https://www.asj-us.org/learn/honduras-violence>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: CDM, accessed 26 January 2023 - <https://derechosdelamujer.org/project/2022/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: ASJ, April 2020 - <https://www.asj-us.org/learn/honduras-violence>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: US Department of State, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Honduras - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/honduras/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: gang members - <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1050121-410/mareros-obligan-a-mujeres-a-tener-relaciones-sexuales-sino-las-matan>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: notorious gangs - <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/honduras-declares-state-emergency-gang-crime-93970638>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: El Heraldo, 10 August 2022 - <https://www.elheraldo.hn/sucesos/pastor-evangelico-fue-asesinado-cuando-regresaba-culto-taulabe-MA9516925>

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Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Honduras>