

World
Watch
Research

Honduras: Full Country Dossier

March 2024



OpenDoors

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	35	34	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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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 2024 reporting period was 01 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Honduras

Brief country details

Honduras: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
10,379,000	9,925,000	95.6

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



Honduras: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	55	66
WWL 2023	53	67
WWL 2022	48	68
WWL 2021	46	67
WWL 2020	39	-

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 groups, 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. The migratory phenomenon has caused foreign gang members (mainly Salvadorian) to settle in the country trying to flee from the authorities and consequently, not only has tension between local and foreign criminals increased, but there have been more extortion and violent actions against Christians who are not aligned with their illicit interests. 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 criminal interests.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **May 2023 – Olancho:** Pastor Carlos Muñoz, of Nicaraguan origin, was killed as he left a church service held at the Cristo Pentecostal Church. He was [shot several times](#) by assassins on a motorbike (Nicaragua Actual, 6 May 2023).
- **May 2023 – Tegucigalpa:** Radio Progreso (a Jesuit radio station) suffered a series of smear campaigns in 2022 and 2023 through social media and mainstream media networks; it has also been targeted for threats, extortion and hacking. Father Ismael Moreno, the director of Radio Progreso has also personally been the victim of disinformation campaigns and [threats](#). The radio station is an initiative to serve the most impoverished and vulnerable groups in society (ADN Celam, 5 May 2023).
- **February 2023, Comoyagüela:** The leader of the Pentecostal church Iglesia Dios de la Profecía, Pastor Amado Hernández, was [shot dead](#) in the capital of Honduras. According to witnesses, the victim was parking his vehicle in front of the church when he was shot in the head. He was known for working with the youth in the area (La Prensa, 19 February 2023).

Specific examples of positive developments

- During 2023 churches were [involved in government debates](#) surrounding the content of the Comprehensive Education Law for the Prevention of Teenage Pregnancy (Government of the Republic, 29 June 2023). There was unity between the Catholic and Evangelical church leaders and other sectors of civil society when questioning and [rejecting](#) the contents of the law particularly when considering the forms of sexual education with which parents did not agree (Infobae, 22 July 2023). Due to widespread rejection, the law was later vetoed by President Xiomara Castro.
- The Episcopal Conference of Honduras (CEH) has shown its [solidarity](#) and support for the Christians in Nicaragua and has made public its rejection of the injustices and abuse that the Catholic Church has been facing from the authorities and various state entities (Hondudiario, 13 February 2023).

External Links - Situation in brief

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: shot several times - <https://nicaraguaactual.tv/sucesos/77890-pastor-nicaraguense-asesinado-culto-honduras/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: threats - <https://adn.celam.org/jesuitas-de-honduras-denuncian-amenazas-contra-el-director-de-radio-progreso/>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: shot dead - <https://www.laprensa.hn/fotogalerias/honduras/honduras-matan-joven-pastor-asesinado-comayagua-AD12227799#image-1>
- Specific examples of positive developments: involved in government debates - https://www.se.gob.hn/media/files/articles/29_06_NP_Desarrollan_conversatorio_sobre_la_Ley_de_Educacion_Integral_de.pdf
- Specific examples of positive developments: rejecting - <https://www.infobae.com/america/agencias/2023/07/23/miles-marchan-en-honduras-contra-la-ideologia-de-genero-y-la-ley-de-educacion-integral/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: solidarity - <https://hondudiario.com/nacionales/conferencia-episcopal-de-honduras-se-solidariza-con-la-iglesia-nicaraguense-tras-ultimos-hechos/>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Honduras

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Honduras country report	AI Honduras 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/central-america-and-the-caribbean/honduras/report-honduras/	13 September 2023
BBC News Honduras profile - updated 31 March 2023	BBC Honduras profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18954311	13 September 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 Honduras report	BTI Honduras report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/HND	13 September 2023
Crisis24 Honduras report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Honduras report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/honduras	13 September 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Honduras summary 2023	EIU Honduras summary 2023	https://country.eiu.com/honduras	13 September 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 Honduras	FSI 2023 Honduras	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	13 September 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Honduras not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – Honduras	Global Freedom Index 2023 Honduras	https://freedomhouse.org/country/honduras/freedom-world/2023	13 September 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries, Honduras not included	Freedom on the Net 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – Honduras	GIWPS 2021 Honduras	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/honduras/	13 September 2023
Girls Not Brides Honduras report	Girls Not Brides Honduras	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/honduras/	13 September 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Honduras country chapter	HRW 2023 Honduras country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/honduras	13 September 2023
Internet World Stats 2023 Honduras	IWS 2023 Honduras	https://www.internetworldstats.com/central.htm#hn	13 September 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – Honduras	World Press Freedom 2023 Honduras	https://rsf.org/en/honduras	13 September 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – Honduras report	CPI 2022 Honduras	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/hnd	13 September 2023
UNDP Human Development Report Honduras - data updates as of 8 September 2022	UNDP HDR Honduras	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/HND	13 September 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Honduras	IRFR 2022 Honduras	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/honduras/	13 September 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Honduras not included	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank Honduras data – 2021	World Bank Honduras data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=HND	13 September 2023
World Bank Honduras overview - updated 4 April 2023	World Bank Honduras overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/honduras/overview	13 September 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Honduras - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Honduras	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/e408a7e21ba62d843bd90dc37e61b57-0500032021/related/mpo-hnd.pdf	13 September 2023
World Factbook Honduras - updated 5 September 2023	World Factbook Honduras	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/honduras/	13 September 2023

Recent history

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

The previous president, Juan Orlando Hernandez, belonging to the National Party of Honduras, had been 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 then 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). At the end of his term, the ex-president Orlando was accused of crimes related to drug trafficking and possession of weapons. In April 2022 he was [extradited](#) to the USA (Justice Gov, 21 April 2022). The trial was first [adjourned](#) until September 2023 (Voz de América, 10 January 2023) and later until [February 2024](#) (El Tiempo, 30 June 2023).

To flee violence and poverty in Honduras, there has been a wave of migration heading for Mexico and the USA which is part of the phenomenon known as the "migrant caravan". According to information reported by the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, [247,000](#) people were internally displaced in Honduras as a result of violence between 2004 and 2018 (UNHCR, October 2023). Honduras also acts as a [transit country](#) for 'foreign migrants', mainly Haitians, Venezuelan and Cuban nationals who often attempt to enter the country illegally on their way to the US border (UNHCR, October 2023).

Honduras continues to be a country vulnerable to natural phenomena. In November 2020, Hurricanes Eta and Iota 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). In October 2022, the intense rains caused by Tropical Storm Julia [left](#) 188,000 people affected, 835 houses damaged and 100 thousand hectares of crops damaged (OCHA, 13 October 2022). Between January and May 2023, forest fires affected around 83,604 hectares. The causes range from high temperatures, the burning of the land for agriculture and criminal activity (El Heraldo, 22 April 2023). This, coupled with the ongoing economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, worsened the country's humanitarian crisis.

In March 2023, the Honduran government [ended](#) diplomatic relations with Taiwan and established them with the People's Republic of China (El País, 26 March 2023).

Political and legal landscape

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 Xiomara Castro (wife of Manuel Zelaya, a former president deposed in a 2009 coup) The election of Xiomara Castro, from the left-wing Libertad y Refundación (Libre) party, [ended 12 years of a conservative government](#) (CNN, 25 January 2023).

Prior to the elections - and with the objective of defeating the National Party - the opposition parties 'Libre' and 'Salvador de Honduras' (PSH) formed an [alliance](#) to guarantee a unified front in the presidential elections, which would place Xiomara Castro in the office of president and

Salvador Nasralla as vice president (El Heraldo, 13 October 2021). However, a year later, with pro-government initiatives in Congress stagnating, the PSH officially confirmed the [breakup](#) of this alliance (Proceso, 19 October 2022).

Castro took over as president a country steeped in corruption, violence and drug trafficking. The former president had undermined the rule of law through the appointment of political allies to public office, including the judiciary. Thus there had been a significant [deterioration](#) in the democratic development of the country (CADAL, 6 May 2020). According to the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Honduras experienced a decline of [6%](#) in terms of corruption control (MCC Honduras scorecard FY2023). Violence is an additional factor caused by corruption in the country: Government authorities regularly [endorse](#) criminal action at all levels, including violence exerted by criminal groups (Expediente Público, 3 May 2022). Many Hondurans are forced to obey two forms of authority - the state and the MS13 criminal group. Both impose regulations and taxes.

In November 2021, the Social Forum on Foreign Debt and Development of Honduras 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.

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 April 2023, Castro [ratified](#) the installation of the CICIH, expressing her willingness for it to start investigations (La Prensa, 12 July 2023). Honduras and the United Nations [extended](#) the memorandum of understanding until June 2024 (Swissinfo, 18 December 2023). Nevertheless, by the end of 2023, the commission had [not yet been installed](#) since the minimum legal guarantees and requirements of the commission (among other details) for putting the memorandum of understanding into practice had not been established (La Vanguardia, 22 November 2023).

In the years before Xiomara Castro took 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 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 dealt 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, favoring private companies' rights to land 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). 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).

As another way of dealing with corruption, in September 2022, the National Congress [approved](#) the Special Law on the Organization and Operation of the Nominating Board for the Proposition of Candidates for Supreme Court Justices, aiming to guarantee the legitimacy and suitability of those serving in the Supreme Court (TSC, 2022). With this new regulatory framework, in February 2023, parliament [elected](#) 15 new magistrates of the Supreme Court of Justice (DW, 17 February 2023).

However, the breakdown of the alliance between Libre and the PSH party has [meant](#) in practice that further legislative reform proposals made by President Castro have not achieved the necessary support. For this reason, the executive has sought to govern through decrees and prioritize policies where it has greater powers, such as security (Idea, 14 July 2023).

In the WWL 2024 reporting period, the institutional crisis has worsened due to the [failed attempts](#) to elect prosecutors. Through a commission dominated by the ruling party, the Honduran Congress elected an interim attorney general, a decision described by the opposition as violating the Constitution and an attack on the rule of law and democracy. For the election of the new attorney general and the deputy prosecutor, the votes of at least 86 of the 128 deputies of Congress are required. The ruling party only has 50 votes and the five opposition parties have 78, however a consensus has not been achieved to appoint the two officials who will serve five years in office (Voz de América, 1 November 2023).

A survey by Datoworld showed that, as of September 2023, [51%](#) of the population disapproved of Xiomara Castro's management of the country (Tiempo, 7 September 2023).

Regarding the security situation, since 6 December 2022 the government [introduced](#) a state of emergency in 123 municipalities, suspending some constitutional guarantees such as freedom of movement, the right of association and assembly, as well as the inviolability of the home. Additionally, the [militarization of security](#) has become a government strategy (IPS Noticias, 7 July 2023). Civil society organizations [complained](#) about the disproportionate use of force and even acts of torture or mistreatment by the authorities (CONADEH, 17 March 2023). For more details, see below: *Security situation*.

US-Honduran relations

As of February 2021, the US-bill “S.388 - Honduras Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Act of 2021” was [introduced](#) in the USA (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. 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.

Xiomara Castro has [resumed](#) good relations with the USA. The US vice president participated in her inauguration as president and is considered an ally for tackling problems related to drug-trafficking and migration (Esglobal, 21 February 2022). Nevertheless, bilateral relations have been [strained](#) by some policy disagreements. Members of the US Congress expressed particular concern about the Castro administration’s efforts to forge closer ties with the People’s Republic of China, economic reforms that could negatively affect US businesses and investors, and government actions that could further weaken Honduras’s democratic institutions (Congressional Research Service, 30 November 2023).

Church leaders

The Constitution sets out in Article 77 that religious leaders may not hold public office or interfere in political processes. Despite this, it has become accepted practice for church leaders to [speak publicly](#) on matters of national interest (Le Grand Continent, 27 January 2023). 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.

In February 2022, the Catholic Episcopal Conference of Honduras issued some [guidelines](#) for the attention of the new government. 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). In past years, church leaders had on more than one occasion denounced the injustices, [corruption](#) and the rampant impunity in the country (RFI, 9 October 2020). In the 2021 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 (Hondudiaro, 27 November 2021). With a new administration in place under Xiomara Castro, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Honduras [declared](#) that a solid and realistic government plan was now 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 also called for [dialogue](#) to protect the rule of law in times of crisis (Conferencia Episcopal Honduras, 25 January 2022).

In recent months, Catholic and Evangelical church leaders have expressed concern about the [breakdown](#) of the alliance between political parties (Radio America, 17 October 2022), the [legitimacy](#) of the authorities involved in the election of the members of the Supreme Court (Tu Nota, 11 October 2022) and the rights violated through the imposition of the [state of emergency](#) (Vatican News, 27 June 2023). More recently, the Episcopal Conference of Honduras (CEH) expressed concern about the "political crisis" in Parliament over the election of a new State Attorney General and asked that "a sincere dialogue" be established to seek a solution (Swissinfo, 8 November 2023).

Religious landscape

Honduras: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	9,925,000	95.6
Muslim	14,800	0.1
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	6,400	0.1
Ethno-religionist	49,700	0.5
Jewish	400	0.0
Bahai	53,100	0.5

Honduras: Religious context (continued)	Number of adherents	%
Atheist	22,600	0.2
Agnostic	215,000	2.1
Other	91,600	0.9
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Honduras is a Christian majority country. According to WCD 2023 figures, 70.4% of the Christians in the country are Roman Catholic. However, a Gallup survey carried out in September/October 2022 showed that [44%](#) of the Honduran population consider themselves evangelical (CID Gallup 9 November 2022). 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.

Church communities have the "[greatest territorial presence](#)" in the country and have enjoyed high levels of trust among the population (World Vision, 21 September 2021). The Roman Catholic Church is organized into 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. According to the Celam Pastoral Observatory, church [relations](#) with the Honduran state, which are not governed by a Concordat, are cordial, respectful and promote mutual collaboration. However, differences have arisen where certain laws concerning family and life contradict traditional church doctrine.

The previous administration under President Hernández had had a close relationship with the Evangelical Fellowship of Honduras (CEH), which as a result enjoyed a certain amount of [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'. However, the Network of Evangelical Pastors and Leaders of Honduras (representing independent evangelical churches) as well as 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. Under Xiomara Castro's presidency, a close relationship with the CEH has not been observed, although evangelical churches [supported](#) some of the president's initiatives, such as, for example, the veto of the Comprehensive Education Law for the Prevention of Teenage Pregnancy (Tu Nota, 30 July 2023).

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Honduras):

- "The government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits, and mandates that a local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for

residency and submit it to immigration authorities. The government has agreements with the Evangelical Fellowship of Honduras (CEH), El Salvador Church of Jesus Christ and Seventh-day Adventists, among others, to facilitate entry and residence permits for their missionaries. Groups with which the government does not have written agreement are required to provide proof of employment and income for their missionaries."

- "Catholic representatives noted concerns with the issuance of new entry and residency permits for foreign missionaries seeking to stay in the country for longer than six months and delays in processing application requests for tax exemption. ... The FIH [Inter-Ecclesiastical Forum] continued to state the government did not approve or respond to an application for a tax exemption or for residency permits from certain religious groups associated with the FIH, which does not have a formalized agreement with the government."
- "In addition, representatives of the Catholic Church stated that resentment by Zelaya supporters against the church continued due to perceived church support for the 2009 coup. The resentment was reflected in negative social media messages in response to Episcopal Conference of Honduras' statements or messages that did not align with political ideologies of the ruling LIBRE Party.

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 (Swissinfo, 22 March 2023). Ordinary citizens are often co-opted into helping criminal groups 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 co-opted 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](#) face gang restrictions (CEV, 12 January 2022). For more information, see below: *Security situation*.

Both Catholic and evangelical church leaders continued to advocate for the rights of immigrants in the country and to denounce [abuses](#) (Proceso, 23 December 2022). In 2023, the Catholic Church [expressed](#) disagreement with the government's new security strategy, the level of violence and human rights abuses committed against those fleeing violence (CEH, 26 June 2023). Christians have also advocated for the [situation of prisoners](#), to urge the government to improve their living conditions and respect their human rights and safety (HCH, 6 July 2023).

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 claiming that religious groups have a 'harmful influence' 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 Contra-

ceptive Pill (El Heraldo, 4 May 2022). In the WWL 2024 reporting period, various church leaders expressed their [disagreement](#) with the proposed Comprehensive Education Law for the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy (Valle de Sula, 22 July 2023), as it potentially violates the right of parents to educate their children based on their own convictions regarding sexuality. A number of civil society organizations, the Catholic Church, and other religious denominations called a series of [marches](#) under the title: "March in favor of children and the family," with the aim of expressing their rejection of this law (Vatican News, 25 July 2023). The law was approved by parliament, but later [vetoed](#) by President Castro (Swissinfo, 29 July 2023).

In general, church representatives have had a significant influence in the political arena during legislative discussions on issues related to SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) postulates and abortion. For this reason, some civil society organizations promoting those topics and some citizens blame Christian church leaders for the lack of progress in these issues.

Economic landscape

According to UNDP HDR Honduras:

- **Gross national income (GNI) per capita (2021):** 4.271 for women and 6.304 for men
- **Inequality in income (2021):** 34.9%
- **Multidimensional poverty index (2019):** 0.051
- **Remittances:** Honduras received 6,853.8 million dollars from remittances during the first nine months of the year, which represents an increase of [5.7%](#) compared to the same period in 2022 (Swissinfo, 17 October 2023).

According to the World Bank Honduras overview:

- "Honduras' economic growth is expected to slow to 3.2 percent in 2023. This is explained by slower growth of exports and especially of remittances, as they normalize following the exceptionally high 2022 inflows, in addition to low private investment and weak budget execution"
- "Since February 2023, the inflation rate has been declining and is currently at 5.7% in August, helped by the decrease in international food inflation"
- "In 2022, the poverty level is estimated to have decreased to 52.4 percent, although this is still above pre-COVID levels. Extreme poverty (measured under the US\$2.15, 2017 PPP line) is estimated at 13.3 percent for the same year, and the Gini Index, which measures inequality, is at 47.5".}
- "In 2022, Honduras saw a reduction in the fiscal deficit to 0.24 percent of GDP from 3.7 percent in 2021. This was mainly due to lower budget execution (42.1 percent) and an increase in corporate income tax revenues. However, there was a slight increase in public debt from 51.6 percent in 2021 to 52.3 percent of GDP in 2022 as a result of the recognition of previously unaccounted domestic debt".

According to World Bank's [Poverty & Equity Brief \(October 2023\)](#):

- "Honduras continues to be one of the poorest countries in Latin America, despite robust economic growth in recent years. The country is characterized by social exclusion and regional disparities, which have continued to widen over the years. "

- "There is an ample urban-rural poverty divide, reflecting important gaps in access to basic services (such as electricity, water and sanitation, and internet usage), as well as disparities in the labor market. While as of 2019 half the population was living under the poverty line (US\$6.85 per day, 2017 PPP), this figure reached 70 percent in rural areas. Moreover, extreme poverty, measured by the US\$2.15 per day (2017 PPP) line, reached 12.7 percent. At the same time, inequality, measured by the Gini Index, was 48.2 in the same year. In 2021, food insecurity affected close to 35 percent of the population."
- "The labor market lacks dynamism and faces structural problems such as a high concentration of employment in the informal sector (nearly 80 percent as of 2019) and marked gender and geographical disparities. Although unemployment has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels, it declined from 8.7 in 2022 to 7.4 percent in March 2023. Unemployment is higher in urban areas, where it reaches 9.1 percent compared to rural areas, where it is 4.9 percent. In addition, the unemployment rate is twice as high for women (10.7 percent) than for men (5.3 percent)"

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

- "The growth of the Honduran economy for 2023 has been slightly revised downwards as it has been influenced by the lower growth prospects of our main trading partners, as well as by less dynamism in external demand (exports) and the flow of family remittances".
- "For 2023, the deceleration with respect to the estimates of the MP, would be explained mainly by the deceleration of private consumption, as well as of the exports of goods and services, due to the lower prospects for world economic growth, which would reduce the demand for coffee, offset partly due to higher sales of textiles, palm oil and bananas, due to the recovery of productive areas and expectations of new investments by the maquiladora sector".

According to the [International Monetary Fund](#) (IMF news - Honduras, 10 November 2023):

- "Growth has been picking up since May [2023] and is expected to close 2023 somewhat above 3 percent. Inflation has been coming down during most of this year [2023], despite recent increases in global oil prices Fiscal policy has remained prudent with incipient signs of higher budget execution, in particular on capital spending".

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). A study carried out by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Cepal) revealed that tropical storm Julia, which struck in October 2022, caused [losses](#) of 8,061.4 million lempiras in Honduras (Tu Nota, 19 December 2022). According to the World Bank, based on historical growth and natural hazard risk patterns, in the absence of any further climate or policy changes, the combined impact of productive capital destroyed through excess rain (flooding), tropical cyclones (strong winds), and earthquakes is expected to result in a [cumulative loss](#) of around 5.4 percent of annual GDP by 2050 (relative to

the hypothetical scenario without impacts caused by natural hazards). This would limit income opportunities, and therefore reduce the consumption of the population by 6.8 percent. Lower growth, foregone revenue, and the diversion of productive resources toward reconstruction and relief efforts also limit the private sector's profitability and stress the government's fiscal capacity, and it is projected that, by 2050 public debt levels will rise by around 6.2 percentage points of GDP, compared to a hypothetical scenario with no impacts from natural hazards (World Bank Group, 2023).

In times of such disasters, church communities have continued to be trusted institutions for channeling international aid for humanitarian purposes, and for providing spiritual assistance. They have repeatedly insisted that international aid be provided [without conditions](#) and with no hidden political agendas (Tiempo, 27 July 2023).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Honduras:

- **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 World Bank Honduras data:

- **Population aged 15-64:** 66% (2022)
- **Education:** Pre-primary - 34% (2021); Primary - 84% (2021); Secondary - 64% (2012)
- **Compulsory school education:** 12 years (2022)
- **Gender Parity Index (GPI):** 0.716 (2022)
- **Unemployment (modeles ILO estimate):** 7.1 (2022).
- **Refugee population by country or territory of origin:** 64, 976 (2022)

There have been continual deficiencies in education, health, safety and essential public services, and 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 situation caused by COVID-19, but also due to the national shortage of medicines and high levels of corruption (Expediente Público, 29 May 2023).

According to the UNDP HDR Honduras:

- **HDI score and ranking (2021):** 0.607 for women and 0.633 for men.
- **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 GII value of 0.431, ranking it 107 out of 191 countries in the 2021 index

- **Children/Youth:** Prior to COVID-19, approximately 1 million girls, boys and adolescents were in a vulnerable situation; either due to dropping out of school, at risk of immigration or being recruited by gangs. The report '[Two years after, saving a generation](#)' (UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank) estimates that school attendance in the country decreased by 22% in the last 2 years, meaning that 1 in 5 students abandoned their studies (UNICEF, 3 June 2023). On the other hand, according to UNICEF, during the first six months of 2023, more than 135,000 migrants crossed into Honduras irregularly, 19% of whom were children and young people under 20 years. This population faces difficulties in accessing economic resources and due to their pressing needs, protection risks such as sexual exploitation, trafficking and abuse can be exacerbated. Unaccompanied children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations and situations of exploitation. Needs are also identified for accessing key protection information and legal aid. Additionally, health issues are evident and therefore there is a need for primary health care services (UNICEF, 29 August 2023).
- **Internally Displaced People - IDPs:** According to UNHCR, forced displacement in Honduras keeps on affecting different sectors of the population. More than [247,000](#) people have been internally displaced in Honduras as a result of violence between 2004 and 2018. The causes that drive displacement are (i) social and territorial control by criminal or armed groups, (ii) extortion, (iii) forced recruitment, use and association, (iv) the dispossession, usurpation and destruction of housing, land and property; (v) gender-based violence; (vi) political violence; (vii) human rights violations, as as (viii) the effects of the climate change. (Reliefweb, 17 October 2023).

To tackle these problems, a bill for the Prevention, Care and Protection of IDPs became law in 2023 with Reliefweb stating ([Reliefweb, 25 April 2023](#)): "Almost three years after its first delivery, on 21 December 2022, the National Congress of Honduras approved the Law for the Prevention, Care and Protection of Internally Displaced Persons. The process concluded with the presidential sanction and the promulgation of the Law in the Official Gazette 'La Gaceta' published on 20 March, 2023. This is the first legal framework adopted by the Honduran State to offer a comprehensive response to internal displacement caused by generalized violence in a context of organized crime. ... The Law contemplates a series of comprehensive measures to prevent internal displacement, through early warning systems, prevention and contingency plans; humanitarian assistance and protection of affected rights, such as education, housing, abandoned or dispossessed land and property; as well as seed capital and access to justice to achieve lasting solutions."

Human rights

There is a culture of human rights violations in the country by both state and non-state agents. According to a February 2023 [UNHRC](#) report, there were at least 173 attacks against human rights defenders and journalists in 2022, resulting in a total of 242 victims, of which 191 were human rights defenders and 51 journalists. It is noteworthy that 3 out of 4 attacks were against those active in defending rights concerning land, territory and the environment. This high number clearly shows how activists operate under great risk. Of concern is the recurring practice of misuse of criminal law against such activists, as well as against those who publicly oppose

large-scale business activities and/or development projects (Reliefweb, 6 March 2023). The conclusions of an on-site visit by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights show that social, environmental and agrarian conflicts persist in the country, as well as [situations](#) of violence against human rights defenders, and violations to the rights of indigenous, Afro-Honduran and Garífuna people, women, children etc. (CIDH, April 2023).

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 lockdown measures, no major protests occurred. In November 2021, the government incorporated [changes](#) which could affect the right to protest (OAS, 16 November 2021). The [misuse](#) of criminal law continues to be a method of retaliation to obstruct advocacy activities. Rights activists have frequently been charged with criminal offenses such as “incitement to violence”, “usurpation”, “insults” and “slander” and even “forced displacement” (CIDH, April 2023).

Migration

Widespread violence from gangs has compelled entire families to flee their homes, increasing the number of migrants seeking refuge in other countries. UNHCR’s Global Trends 2022 publication [indicates](#) that Honduras ranks eight in the list of countries with the highest number of new asylum applications in the world. The number of applications increased from 59,800 in 2021 to 79,700 in 2022. However, not all Hondurans who leave the country succeed in applying for asylum and are repatriated. By July 2023, a total of 27,719 Hondurans were returned to the three Assistance Centers for Returned Migrants located in the department of Cortés. Some of these returnees have significant protection needs, face discrimination and experience other unmet needs (UNHCR, August 2023).

Churches have developed various programs to serve the most vulnerable in society. These activities include trauma care, the distribution of [humanitarian aid](#) (Contracorriente, 21 December 2022), the promotion of human rights and [protection](#) for migrants (Vatican News, 21 March 2022) and the coordination of [shelters](#) to care for migrants who are passing through the country (El Heraldo, 25 September 2023). 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 2023 Honduras):

- **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 2022, the measures had still not yet been [implemented](#) (Proceso Digital, 3 January 2022).

According to [Statista, Digital and Connectivity Indicators - Honduras](#) (accessed 15 March 2024):

- The number of households with internet access at home in Honduras is forecast to amount to 1.09m in 2024.
- The number of mobile Internet users in Honduras is forecast to amount to 2.63m in 2024.
- The number of internet users in Honduras is forecast to amount to 6.40m in 2024.
- The Internet penetration in Honduras is estimated to amount to 59.52% in 2024.

According to the World Bank Honduras data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 74 per 100 people (2022).

According to [BuddeComm](#) Research (Publication date: March 2024):

- "Honduras is among the poorest countries in Central America and has long been plagued by an unstable political framework which has rendered telecom sector reform difficult. This has created real difficulties for telcos as well as consumers. 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 centres. Nevertheless, the demand for broadband is steadily increasing and there has been some investment in network upgrades to fibre-based infrastructure".
- "Government provides free internet to around 75,000 households in Honduras".

According to Reporters Without Borders (World Press Freedom 2023 Honduras):

- "Journalists have continued to face challenges similar to those encountered under previous governments – disparaging comments by officials, access to information denied to journalists who do not support the government, and a lack of protection against threats."
- "A new penal code, adopted in 2020, contains draconian provisions, such as the criminalization of the right to demonstrate and assembly. They affect the entire chain of information by imposing fines and prison sentences not only on journalists, but also on those who reproduce their content."
- "Journalists and community media – especially those covering drug trafficking, organized crime, major business projects, social polarization and violence against women – are often subjected to harassment campaigns and intimidation, persecution, death threats and physical violence, and many are forced into exile. Most of the time, abuses and violence against the press are committed by security forces, and more particularly by the military police and the 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 the November 2021 elections, the new systems [had not yet been implemented](#) (Criterio, 20 Decem-

ber 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). For now, initiatives are emerging to bridge the digital gap in the [educational field](#) (La Prensa, 14 August 2023) and to achieve the [empowerment](#) of women (Swissinfo, 20 April 2023).

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.

In 2022, the post of General Directorate of Information and Press was created and attached to the Secretariat of Strategic Planning. Some see this as a [potential threat to press freedom](#) (Divergentes, 15 October 2022).

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 March 2024). Both MS13 and Barrio18 work together with other criminal networks to dominate cocaine distribution. Their main criminal activity is however extortion. According to the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ), in 2023, extortion reached its highest level, with [11.1%](#) of Hondurans affected, especially in Cortés, La Paz, Colón, Yoro and Francisco Morazán (ASJ, December 2023). Foreign criminal gangs are also active, for instance from Colombia and Mexico, which tend to focus on drug processing and trafficking, among other criminal activities. Salvadoran gang members fleeing from President Nayib Bukele's anti-crime measures also [slip across the border](#) into Honduras (El Heraldo, 16 May 2022).

Additionally, Global Initiative's [Global Organized Crime Index 2023](#) 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. Bribery and corruption play a significant role in organized crime groups' operations, with deep political ties to local law enforcement and public officials facilitating their activities. Corrupt officials at different levels of government create opportunities for organized crime and are even known to construct infrastructure and supply transportation requirements for criminal entities.

The wave of violence in Honduras [includes](#) killings, coercion, threats, attacks and kidnappings. Many citizens continue to face gang 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, 26 June 2023). 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 (UNHCR, 24 January 2022). Some teachers become victims of [extortion](#), intimidation and threats from gang members, who are sometimes their own students or a student's parent (Tiempo, 31 October 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers were also [victims](#) of cyber violence and online extortion. Gang members, for instance, demanded that they pay for the costs of their children's internet connection or top-up credit cards (El País, 9 June 2022).

Corruption

Criminal networks have also [infiltrated](#) the government system through corruption which allows them to act with impunity. As Human Rights Watch points out, efforts to reform public security institutions have stalled (HRW, 9 June 2023). 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 (Pressreader, 16 June 2022).

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, between January and June 2023 all incidents [decreased](#) compared to the same period in 2022. Homicides show a 13.7% reduction (261 fewer victims). Ten municipalities accounted for 43% of the violent deaths, with the Central District and San Pedro Sula being the municipalities with the highest percentages of homicides (UNDP, 14 September 2023).

In general, violence in Honduras causes humanitarian consequences linked to internal displacement, migration, and forced disappearance, not to mention the special vulnerability of certain groups, such as human rights defenders. The IACHR recently [condemned](#) the assassination of defenders of land and territory rights in the country (CIDH, 20 October 2023). 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).

The most significant measure has been the implementation of the [state of emergency](#) (Policía Nacional, 20 May 2023) which was [extended](#) into January 2024. There are 158 municipalities in Honduras where legal regulations have been installed to combat organized crime (Policía Nacional, 20 November 2023). Through this measure, some constitutional guarantees have been suspended such as freedom of movement, the right of association and assembly, as well as the inviolability of the home. This policy allows the National Police and the Military Police for Public Order (PMOP) to carry out operations in the most dangerous municipalities to maintain order, peace and national security. The IACHR received information indicating that only 25 of the 1,348 arrests made in the first period of the state of emergency were directly linked to the crime of extortion or related crimes; there were also inconsistencies in the arrest record (OAS, April 2023). Linked to this, a pattern of police abuse, arbitrary arrests and irregular judicial processes have been [reported](#) (Contracorriente, 24 February 2023).

In general, violence [continues](#) unabated in the country (Insight Crime, 5 June 2023). Some analysts consider that replicating the security strategy of the neighboring country of El Salvador is not entirely appropriate because the dynamics of violence in Honduras involve corruption networks which are much more [complex](#) (Insight Crime, 28 June 2023).

In areas co-opted by gangs, Christians who oppose criminal activities are likely to face harassment and hostility, either in the form of extortion, beatings, death-threats, and even [killings](#) (Radio HRN, 23 June 2023). Christian leaders who work as human rights activists are particularly often victims of [violence](#) (ADN Celam, 5 May 2023). Churches are also targets for [robbery](#) (El País, 14 March 2023) 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) Concern for the continuity of democratic practices in the country

The concentration of power in the hands of the Executive and the questioning of the lack of transparency in government management, has increased both domestic and international concern about a tendency to abandon democratic rules. There are growing signs of the government showing little openness towards critical and opposing voices, even when they come from church leaders. Church leaders have spoken out both in defense of the Rule of Law and the most vulnerable, and in defense of traditional Christian doctrine regarding respect for life and the biblical model of family.

2) Political instability does not allow serious progress in the fight against violence and corruption

The weakening of the state structure and the continuous accusations of corruption among political actors and public officers foster a situation of instability and hinder government attempts to eradicate violence and punish corrupt practices. In this context, the general public

continue to suffer most in all the political ups and downs, and church activities that involve youth and humanitarian assistance continue to be risky.

3) Criminal networks are the main threat to the country

The context of political and humanitarian crisis is conducive to the strengthening and advancement of criminal groups (national and foreign) that are fighting for greater control of the population, in the midst of a disorderly government strategy that is overshadowed by deep-rooted practices of corruption. Criminal networks continue to act with impunity, gaining greater control over community life and placing those social actors who oppose their illegal interests and threaten their stability in a situation of vulnerability, as is the case with the Church and its members.

External Links - Keys to understanding

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- Social and cultural landscape: protection - <https://www.vaticannews.va/es/iglesia/news/2022-03/caritas-abre-la-casa-de-migrante-en-la-frontera-con-honduras.html>
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- Technological landscape: BuddeComm - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Honduras-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Technological landscape: delayed - <https://expedientepublico.org/bloqueo-al-presupuesto-para-organo-electoral-ensombrece-proceso-de-elecciones-en-honduras/>
- Technological landscape: had not yet been implemented - <https://criterio.hn/voto-masivo-y-acciones-del-cne-evitaron-nueva-crisis-politica-en-honduras-reconoce-sociedad-civil/>
- Technological landscape: challenges - <https://www.bnamericas.com/es/noticias/los-desafios-en-tic-del-nuevo-gobierno-hondureno>
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- Technological landscape: Conexion, 6 November 2019 - <http://conexihon.hn/2019/11/06/ley-de-ciberseguridad-de-honduras-significa-censura/>
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- Security situation: condemned - https://www.oas.org/fr/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2023/248.asp#
- Security situation: restructuring - <https://criterio.hn/gobierno-transforma-fuerza-anti-maras-y-pandillas-creada-por-joh-como-estrategia-para-enfrentar-crimen-organizado/>
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- Security situation: extended - <https://www.policianacional.gob.hn/noticias/26888>
- Security situation: reported - <https://contracorriente.red/2023/02/24/el-verdadero-estado-de-excepcion-en-honduras-capturas-arbitrarias-abusos-y-49-casos-judicializados/>
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WWL 2024: 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 arriv-

ed 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	10,100	0.1
Catholic	6,988,000	70.4
Protestant	1,676,000	16.9
Independent	759,000	7.6
Unaffiliated	546,000	5.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-54,400	-0.5
Total	9,924,700	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,195,000	12.0
Renewalist movement	1,806,000	18.2

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

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 70.4% Christians according to WCD 2023 estimates. Evangelical denominations in the country continue to grow fast and have also achieved significant recognition in the social and political arena.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Main areas for Organized corruption and crime

The areas where this Persecution engine was influential during the WWL 2024 reporting period were Atlantida, Choluteca, Colon, Comayagua, Copan, Cortes, El Paraiso, Francisco Morazan, Gracias a Dios, La Paz, Lempira, Olancho, Santa Barbara 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 and other criminal groups (drug traffickers, migrant traffickers, illegal extractors, smugglers), especially when these 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 those illegal actors. As a consequence, historical Churches have been victims of threats, displacements, extortion, church attacks, abductions, murders, etc. In addition, they also are targeted with insults and criticism from some 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 and stigmatized 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, various Great Commission churches, among others. 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 and social stigmatization 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

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

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Honduras

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Honduras: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	55	66
WWL 2023	53	67
WWL 2022	48	68
WWL 2021	46	67
WWL 2020	39	-

The overall rounded score rose by 2 points. This was caused by a rise in violence scores from 11.9 to 12.6 points and by pressure rising in the Private, Community, and Church spheres of life. There were 11 killings and 9 church attacks as a consequence of the active presence of national and Salvadorian gangs and other criminal groups (human traffickers, smugglers, narco-traffickers). Other 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 and other criminal groups, or even persevered in youth work involving former gang members.

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 2023), the country ranks 154/180 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 homicides in Honduras (ASJ, 2023 - accessed on 25 July 2023). These corruption networks aim to make sure that perpetrators (some of Salvadorian origin) strengthen 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. Currently, with the government of President Castro, the announced government strategies do not effectively eradicate these corrupt practices and therefore achieve significant progress in the fight against criminal violence. This made the whole country vulnerable to the control of gangs and other criminal networks dedicated to drug traffic, smuggling, illegal extraction of natural resources, human trafficking, and extortion, among others. Since many areas of the country are controlled by gangs and other criminal groups, Christians living there who oppose criminal activities are likely to face harassment, either by extortion, abductions, 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	-	Very weak
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-

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

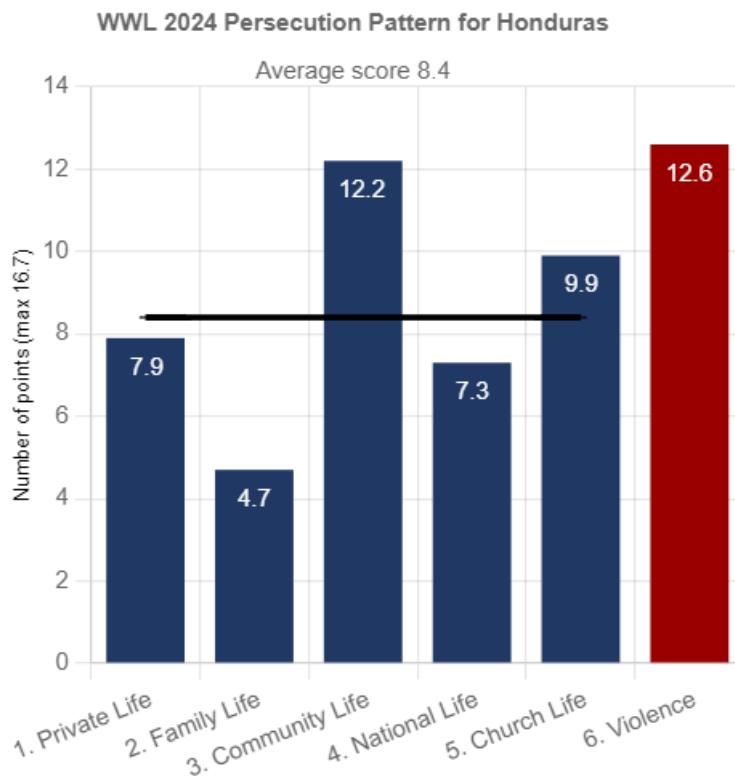
Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- 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 - both including members of Salvadorian origin -, 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.

- **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.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Honduras shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a high level (8.4 points), rising very slightly from 8.3 in WWL 2023.
- Pressure is strongest in *Community Life* (12.2 points) and *Church Life* (9.9 points), which is typical for a situation mainly dominated by *Organized corruption and crime* engine but also influenced by the less prevalent engines of *Secular intolerance* and *Christian denominational protectionism*.
- The score for violence is extremely high at 12.6 points, a rise from 11.9 in WWL 2023, caused mainly by the higher number of Christians abducted and forced to leave the country, and a higher number of attacks on Christian buildings.

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 2024 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. (3.25 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 – they face two kind of risks: a) from other criminal groups that suspect they are collaborating with the rival gang or with other criminal group; and, b) from the police that suspect they are threatening public order, belonging to a gang or of collaborating with Salvadorian criminal groups.

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 links to the previous government administration and its high levels of corruption. This led to a certain amount of polarization among family members.

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

In the context of criminal groups, there are some cases when 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.). (2.50 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 occurred sporadically when initiatives for public policies have been discussed, particularly where the new government administration has been influenced by the ideological pressure groups and political parties supporting it.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.25 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 some sporadic attempts from ideological pressure groups and government initiatives to restrict parental rights and 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 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (3.25 points)

In areas with the highest rates of violence generated by organized crime, Christians (especially church leaders and activists) who become targets of threats by criminal groups, have very 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 their children 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 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents’ faith. (3.00 points)

In the areas dominated by criminal groups, this situation is highly likely to occur against children if Christian parents are perceived as being a risk to the stability of those 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, or transporting and storing illicit merchandise). In this context, 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.

Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (2.75 points)

In departments like Cortes or Francisco Morazan, there have been cases in which gangs threaten, monitor and try to prevent the families of those they considered their enemies to perform Christian funeral rites for them, even when it was a Christian leader assassinated by them. Criminal groups see burials as an opportunity to exert violence and pressure. They know attendees are in a state of vulnerability and take advantage of the situation to intimidate the community and the Christian family of the deceased. Additionally, this is highly likely to happen also if this person was a former gang member converted to Christianity, as a way to send a message and discourage others to abandon the criminal group.

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, since 2021, Christian activists 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 3.12: 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 gangs and other criminal groups and enjoys high levels of impunity in the country. Christians - including those dedicated to commerce - 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 higher than usual, 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 or compelled to pass on information about personal and church activities that could be perceived as a danger of 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.

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

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 aim to 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 consequently hindering both access to educational services and the continuity of basic education. Additionally, according to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Honduras), university students belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist Church suffered disadvantages when teaching activities were scheduled for Saturdays, which is quite a usual occurrence.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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 in the communities under their territorial control, 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, according to IRFR 2022 Honduras, 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. As a result of the strengthening of criminal networks during the COVID-19 crisis, criminal groups might prevent anyone considered a threat or enemy from fleeing the country.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.00 points)

In general, the Constitution guarantees the freedom of expression. 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. Several reporters and news outlets covering sensitive topics (or who are perceived as being critical of the government) have faced assaults, threats, blocked transmissions and general harassment. These intimidatory actions by state and non-state actors curtail open and free discussion in society. In this scenario, Christians, who express their opinions whenever they criticize leaders or authorities involved in corruption scandals, may be punished by law or by actions perpetrated by illegal groups. According to the Constitution, in general, religious leaders are also prohibited from making any kind of political statement.

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, criminal groups 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 those groups. This means that those actively opposing Christian values and activities are seldom punished by law.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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 being killed or forced into displacement. In previous years, some criminal groups accepted conversions occurring under certain conditions. However, conversion and leaving a criminal gang has now become more difficult than in the past. Additionally, as an effect of the State of Emergency decreed by the government to combat crime, pastoral work with former gang members converted to Christianity has been stigmatized and is treated with suspicion of being a cover for criminal activities. These levels of suspicion also generate difficulties for pastors making regular visits to preach in prisons.

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

Despite the payment of protection fees, criminal gang members will often stand in church doorways to intimidate Christians during services. The purpose is to check that the teaching is 'acceptable' and to report if something is mentioned that could be disadvantageous for the gang's criminal activities. This may be something which aims to dissuade the youth from being recruited by gangs and from participating in illicit activities. Sometimes the monitoring of Christian preaching and materials can also come from the police or other state agents who: a) view with suspicion any churches working among active and former gang members; or, b) act in collusion with criminal groups and inform them about any content that could put their illicit activities at risk.

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 criminal presence. Church leaders cannot freely conduct their activities without being monitored or targeted by criminal leaders, especially when they promote a culture of peace and try to prevent young teenagers from joining criminal groups. The families of Christian leaders 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.

Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (3.50 points)

Church-affiliated organizations involved in, for instance, youthwork, humanitarian assistance, action against illegal activities, corruption and impunity, the rehabilitation of young drug-addicts and care for migrants, are frequently targeted by criminal groups since they see such programs as a threat to their illegal businesses in the area and do not hesitate to prevent the normal functioning of these organizations. The modus operandi of gangs is not to allow any other organization or institution to influence the community where they are present since they want to be the only ones controlling the day to day affairs of the community in all aspects and at all levels. It is also the case that the local authorities, acting in collusion with these groups, cause such disruption that the church groups are forced to abandon their activities. Thus, even the humanitarian work of churches and charities are subjected to the rules imposed by the gangs. In such a way, they can prevent churches from providing help to all members of a local community and instead benefit only those that the criminal leaders have chosen.

Violence

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

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

Possible reasons for this may be:

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

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons

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

3. 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 scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	11	14
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	9	8
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)?	4	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	2	5
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?	2	5
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?	0	8
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	2	1

In the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- **Christians killed (11):** The work of Christians in poor neighborhoods or projects involving youth is frequently seen as challenging the control by criminal groups in those territories. This has cost Christians their lives.
- **Christian buildings attacked (9):** Most of the cases were related to acts of vandalism and robberies perpetrated by criminal groups as a way of intimidating local Christians and pressurizing them into adhering to their rules and paying the extortion fees required.

- **Christians abducted (4):** Kidnappings are usually a consequence of not paying extortion fees or are simply carried out as a method of intimidation. The victims were church leaders and their children who risked reprisals for refusing to follow criminal rules or for being perceived as threat to their illicit interests.
- **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.

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.

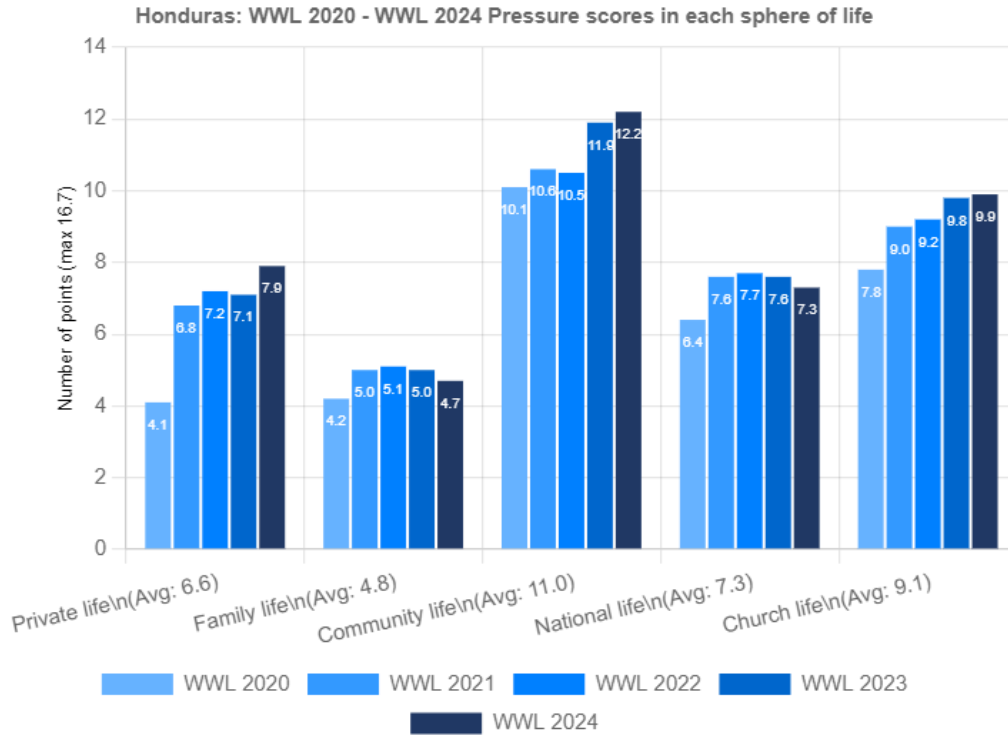
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Honduras: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	8.4
2023	8.3
2022	8.0
2021	7.8
2020	6.5

Due to Christians being affected by violence perpetrated by criminal groups, from local and foreign origin, 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 6.5 points in WWL 2020 to 8.4 points in WWL 2024. In the last five WWL reporting periods, the influence (to a lesser extent) of other persecution engines such as *Christian Denominational Protectionism* 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 almost all *spheres of life*, although in the last two reporting periods (WWL 2023 and WWL 2024), the pressure in *National* and *Family spheres of life* decreased slightly due mainly to a reduction in the impact of *Dictatorial Paranoia*. Pressure remains at the highest levels in the *Community* and *Church spheres*, mainly due to the continuous influence of diverse criminal groups operating as de facto authorities and acting with impunity throughout the country, especially using extortion as a main method to apply pressure.



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 an increase in the territorial control enjoyed by criminal gangs and by 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; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied/restricted healthcare; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Irrespective of religion, it is dangerous to be a woman in Honduras. Based on 2021 data from the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Honduras has the highest rate of femicide — defined as “the killing of a woman by a man in the context of unequal power relations between men and women” — in Latin America. The Centro de Derechos de Mujeres, a Honduran NGO that monitors media, counted 317 femicides from January through September 2023 ([HRW 2024 Honduras country chapter](#)). 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, accessed 21 February 2024](#)). An expert disclosed that Pastors live in constant distress over 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 many households in Honduras are 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”; a country expert explains that in the past, “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 missional activity occurring in gang territory. Some girls have been abducted and killed for refusing to engage in sexual relationships with gang members. Survivors are left both physically and psychologically traumatized.

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

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

High rates of criminal activity and the presence of notorious gangs such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 also pose daily security threats to Christian men and boys ([BBC News, 14 February 2020](#)). Church leaders are particularly vulnerable to attacks and threats, especially those involved in evangelistic activities or those seeking to stop the trafficking of narcotics. Extortion through fines and threats are commonplace. There are also frequent reports of pastors being violently abducted and killed.

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, 1 November 2018](#)).

Some gang members are permitted to leave gangs upon conversion to Christianity (particularly Evangelical Christianity), however they will come under close scrutiny and monitoring from both their old gang as well as rival gangs. Any signs that they are not actively living out their faith can result in their death. Ex-gang member converts additionally face assimilation challenges; police and security officials who identify them as former gang members – typically by tattoos or scars – can 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 remain vulnerable while displaced. As a country expert explained: “Even when Christians flee the country – because there are no safe zones inside the national territory – they continue under the mercy of the same, or different criminal groups involved with the trafficking of migrants.”

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Honduras):

- A Muslim representative said his community faced difficulties in holding Friday prayers. The representative said he encouraged his community to comply with the country's laws and social norms, including treating Friday as a workday, while encouraging members of the community to gather for prayer and a shared meal during lunch hour on Fridays.
- Muslim community representatives reported an increase in incidents in which members of the evangelical Protestant community posted derogatory messages on social media and made various threats, including to cause physical harm to members and to set fire to places of worship. The representatives said they had increased security measures at their places of worship because they feared the threats could materialize into actions against them.
- Representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ [of Latter-day Saints] said they experienced problems with the processing and issuance of residency permits for long-term missionaries.

Future outlook

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

Organized corruption and crime

Although the new government is trying to follow neighboring country El Salvador's model for combatting violence caused by criminal organizations, it has not achieved good results. Despite certain improvements in some areas of crime, one of the main obstacles to eradicating violence in the country is the high level of corruption among public officials who allow impunity, strengthening and diversification of criminal structures operating in the country. The continued proliferation of criminal groups (of national and foreign origin), to the extent that it is not effectively addressed by the state in collaboration with civil society (media, human rights defenders, religious groups), will almost certainly continue to cause security risks to church leaders and Christian communities in areas dominated by these groups. As such, obstacles to the development of church activities will remain, especially of those activities related to humanitarian assistance and the fight against violence.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: impunity - <http://biblioteca.asjhonduras.com/?docs=estado-de-pais-2023-seguridad-y-justicia>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW 2024 Honduras country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/honduras>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: ASJ, accessed 21 February 2024 - <https://www.asj-us.org/learn/honduras-violence>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Honduras - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/honduras/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: La Prensa, 5 March 2017 - <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1050121-410/mareros-obligan-a-mujeres-a-tener-relaciones-sexuales-sino-las-matan>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: BBC News, 14 February 2020 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-51501103>

- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: El Confidencial, 1 November 2018 - https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2018-11-01/mara-o-muerte-palizas-violaciones-formar-jefes-pandilleros-honduras_1638674/

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

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

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

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