Colombia: Country Dossier

December 2019

World
Watch
Research

Contents

Introduction

World Watch List 2020

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	94	93	89	88
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.5	9.4	92	91	91	91	87
4	Libya	15.3	15.5	15.8	16.0	16.4	11.3	90	87	86	78	79
5	Pakistan	14.0	13.9	15.0	14.9	13.7	16.7	88	87	86	88	87
6	Eritrea	14.5	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	10.9	87	86	86	82	89
7	Sudan	14.2	14.6	14.5	15.7	16.1	10.4	85	87	87	87	84
8	Yemen	16.6	16.4	16.4	16.7	16.7	2.6	85	86	85	85	78
9	Iran	14.1	14.3	14.1	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	85	83
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	15.0	13.5	14.8	83	83	81	73	68
11	Syria	13.5	14.2	13.0	13.9	14.4	12.6	82	82	76	86	87
12	Nigeria	12.2	11.9	13.5	12.8	13.0	16.7	80	80	77	78	78
13	Saudi Arabia	15.1	14.9	14.1	15.5	16.5	2.4	79	77	79	76	76
14	Maldives	15.4	15.6	14.0	15.9	16.6	0.7	78	78	78	76	76
15	Iraq	14.0	14.6	13.9	14.5	13.6	5.6	76	79	86	86	90
16	Egypt	12.1	13.1	10.7	13.2	10.5	16.1	76	76	70	65	64
17	Algeria	13.5	14.3	10.4	12.8	13.2	9.3	73	70	58	58	56
18	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	3.0	73	74	73	71	70
19	Myanmar	11.8	11.9	13.5	12.5	12.2	10.7	73	71	65	62	62
20	Laos	12.8	9.9	14.1	14.4	14.9	5.6	72	71	67	64	58
21	Vietnam	12.3	8.5	12.9	13.6	14.5	9.8	72	70	69	71	66
22	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.2	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.9	70	69	68	67	66
23	China	11.6	8.4	11.6	12.8	15.1	10.2	70	65	57	57	57
24	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	13.0	13.7	13.4	0.2	68	67	57	55	50
25	Central African Republic	10.1	9.1	13.1	9.8	10.2	15.6	68	70	61	58	59
26	Morocco	12.4	13.3	10.8	11.7	14.1	4.1	66	63	51	49	47
27	Qatar	13.6	13.4	10.8	12.2	14.1	2.2	66	62	63	66	65
28	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	10.2	9.4	11.8	15.6	66	48	-	-	-
29	Mali	9.2	8.2	12.8	10.0	11.7	13.7	66	68	59	59	55
30	Sri Lanka	11.5	9.0	11.0	10.9	9.6	13.1	65	58	57	55	53
31	Tajikistan	13.9	12.3	11.9	12.4	13.1	1.1	65	65	65	58	58
32	Nepal	12.4	10.8	9.9	12.1	12.2	7.0	64	64	64	53	53
33	Jordan	13.1	14.1	10.7	11.7	12.5	1.7	64	65	66	63	59

34	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.3	10.8	12.3	5.4	64	63	62	61	58
35	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	10.7	12.4	14.0	1.7	64	63	63	56	55
36	Turkey	12.6	11.8	10.7	13.3	11.3	3.7	63	66	62	57	55
37	Brunei	13.8	14.3	10.7	10.3	13.5	0.6	63	63	64	64	61
38	Bangladesh	11.1	9.9	12.7	11.1	8.9	9.3	63	58	58	63	57
39	Ethiopia	10.0	9.2	10.6	10.8	10.4	11.9	63	65	62	64	67
40	Malaysia	12.1	14.6	12.7	12.0	9.6	1.5	62	60	65	60	58
41	Colombia	8.9	7.8	11.9	9.8	8.9	15.0	62	58	56	53	55
42	Oman	12.7	13.1	10.0	11.5	12.7	2.0	62	59	57	53	53
43	Kuwait	13.2	13.1	9.9	11.5	13.4	0.7	62	60	61	57	56
44	Kenya	11.7	10.5	10.9	8.3	10.9	9.1	61	61	62	68	68
45	Bhutan	12.8	10.9	11.8	11.6	13.9	0.0	61	64	62	61	56
46	Russian Federation	12.2	8.3	10.7	10.4	12.1	6.9	60	60	51	46	48
47	United Arab Emirates	12.9	13.0	9.5	11.1	12.6	1.1	60	58	58	55	55
48	Cameroon	8.8	7.2	11.6	7.0	10.4	15.0	60	54	38	-	45
49	Indonesia	10.9	11.1	11.6	10.2	9.5	6.5	60	65	59	55	55
50	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.1	9.3	60	52	45	47	53
51	Palestinian Territories	12.2	13.0	9.2	10.2	11.9	3.1	60	57	60	64	62
52	Mexico	8.4	6.8	12.2	10.6	10.0	11.5	60	61	59	57	56
53	Azerbaijan	13.0	10.0	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	57	52	57
54	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.9	57	56	56	56	56
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.1	9.4	11.9	1.1	57	56	54	48	46
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.2	56	56	56	57	58
57	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	10.6	7.4	10.4	15.6	56	55	33	-	53
58	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.9	56	48	40	-	51
59	Bahrain	12.1	12.3	9.1	10.1	10.5	0.9	55	55	57	54	54
60	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	7.0	55	52	53	59	57
61	Cuba	9.6	5.6	9.5	11.8	12.0	3.5	52	49	49	47	42
62	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	13.0	48	47	46	53	45
63	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.7	48	43	-	-	-
64	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	3.7	45	46	-	-	-
65	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.6	44	44	-	-	-
66	Mozambique	6.9	4.6	7.1	5.2	8.0	11.7	43	43	-	-	-
67	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.1	43	43	-	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	8.7	10.4	6.7	43	42	-	-	-
69	Venezuela	3.8	4.4	10.6	9.3	9.5	4.8	42	41	34	-	-
70	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.5	42	43	-	-	-
71	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	7.2	42	41	-	-	-

| 72 | Nicaragua | 5.8 | 4.2 | 8.5 | 9.8 | 9.0 | 4.1 | 41 | 41 | - | - | - |
| 73 | Togo | 8.6 | 6.7 | 8.5 | 7.1 | 8.4 | 1.1 | 41 | 42 | - | - | - |

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Brief note on 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). The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading "External links". The WWL 2020 reporting period was 1 November 2018 - 31 October 2019.

The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: "Any hostility experienced as a result of one's identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians".

This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the World Watch List Documentation page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Colombia

Brief country details

Pop 2019	Christians	Chr%
Colombia		
49,850,000	47,237,000	94.8

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).

World Watch List Colombia	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2020	62	41
WWL 2019	58	47
WWL 2018	56	49
WWL 2017	53	50
WWL 2016	55	46

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2016-2020 reporting periods.

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Colombia: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Clan and ethnic antagonism	Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Government officials
Organized corruption and crime	Organized crime cartels or networks, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Government officials , Political parties
Secular intolerance	Ideological pressure groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties, Government officials

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

Brief description of persecution situation

Church leaders are being threatened, harassed, extorted and even murdered as a result of the violence perpetrated by guerrillas and other criminal groups, especially in the most neglected areas in the country. In most cases, this violence is the direct result of Christians: a) denouncing corruption and violence, b) working for the defense of human and environmental rights; c) working among youth; and d) involved in any activity concerning the restoration of peace that might endanger the illegal activities of these groups. In indigenous communities, there is a significant opposition towards Christian missionaries and indigenous converts, who, as a result, face imprisonment, physical abuse and the confiscation of property, among other forms of punishment. In addition, because of the radicalization of secularism, there is an increasing intolerance to Christian references and religious opinions in the public sphere - especially about issues concerning life, family, marriage, and religious liberty - where Christians are targeted for supposedly being discriminatory and using hate-speech.

Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period

- August 2019: The [Constitutional Court](#) ruled that the scope of protection for the respect of Christian public personalities is not guaranteed in the same way as for those exercising the right to freedom of expression to criticize them. According to the ruling, freedom of expression must be protected even if the expressions aired diminish the reputation of Christians, just because they are publicly known. This ruling has affected one Christian YouTuber and a pastor.

- March 2019, Northern Colombia: According to Open Doors research, an indigenous community in northern Colombia arrested a young woman because of her Christian beliefs. The leaders aimed to force her to marry an indigenous man in order to prevent the spread of the Christian faith inside the indigenous community.

- December 2018, Antioquía: A priest of the diocese of Santa Rosa de Osos of the rural town of Cuturú was [threatened](#) with death for refusing to pay protection money to one of the armed groups in the area. The priest had to be transferred for security reasons.

External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Colombia

- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: Constitutional Court - https://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/comunicados/No.%2029%20comunicado%2006%20de%20agosto%20de%202019.pdf
- Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period: threatened - http://www.infocatolica.com/?t=noticia&amp;cod=33904

WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Colombia

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19390026.

Recent history

Colombia became independent from Spain after a period of struggle in 1810-1819. The Santa Fe Independence Act was signed in 1810 and there followed six battles in the war of independence. The most famous was Battle of Boyacá fought on 7 August 1819, won by the revolutionary forces under Simón Bolivar.

Current President Ivan Duque of the Democratic Center Party won the elections in June 2018, and is tasked with dealing with the many challenges arising in the implementation of the Agreement for the Final Termination of the Conflict between the Colombian State and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) signed on 24 November 2016, during the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos. Guerrilla groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN) and rebels from the FARC announcing to resume their five decades of armed conflict are still hindering the peace process.

The mass migration of Venezuelan refugees to Colombia is currently having a great impact on the economy, education and basic services in the country. As of September 2019, official figures state that over 1,488,373 Venezuelans are currently residing in Colombia (39% more than in 2018). Unofficially, the number is likely to be considerably higher.

Political and legal landscape

Two of the most prominent issues in the Colombian political and legal context are the implementation of peace agreements and the fight against corruption.

Regarding the first point, even though there has been some progress, only about 23% of the commitments set out in the peace agreement have been completely fulfilled (Kroc Institute Report 3, 2019). The main success is that the FARC has been transformed from a guerrilla group into a political party. However, there have been many setbacks: i) There has been a general lack of political will for the implementation of and follow-up of such mechanisms as the Special Jurisdiction for Peace - JEP; ii) There have been delays in protecting the legal stability of the agreement and in finishing the approval of pending laws and regulations; iii) The presence of armed groups such as the ELN and others have intensified the levels of violence in areas abandoned by the FARC and have jeopardized progress. Not to mention the return to war by leading FARC rebels (See Security situation below).

Concerning the second point: The legal framework and the policies to fight corruption are weak. According to the Colombia 2018 Human Rights Report, government security forces were accused of collaborating with or tolerating the activities of criminal gangs, which included some former paramilitary members. The report also stated that the judicial system was overburdened and there was evidence of corruption and the intimidation of judges, prosecutors and witnesses. Multilateral organizations, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the United Nations (UN) have called attention to the limited security measures and impunity for crimes that prevent guaranteeing the protection of community leaders and people who defend human rights in the country.

In the regional electoral process held in the WWL 2020 reporting period, Church-State separation has been a recurring theme and there was opposition to the participation of Christians candidates. At the same time, the political participation of Christians was misrepresented since it was argued that by having more political influence, they would seek to address the interests of their own religious groups using government resources.

In the international context: Colombia is no longer part of the Union of South American Nations – UNASUR. On the other hand, Colombia's partnership with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is still in the process of finalizing procedures for ratification to the OECD Convention and the deposit of its instrument of accession is pending. It is expected to be finalized in 2020.

Religious landscape

The Constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and states that every person enjoys the right to profess their own belief individually or collectively (Article 19). The State holds no official religion; all religious denominations are equal by law, nonetheless, the State maintains a concordat with the Holy See and an internal public law agreement (Decree 354 of 1998) with 13 Non-Catholic Christian Religious Entities, allowing them access the benefits granted by the decree (legally binding religious marriage recognition and the non-seizure of the properties destined to worship, among others). Churches that do not join those covered by the agreement may choose to request recognition of their legal status and be registered in the Public Registry of the Ministry of Interior. This will allow them to collect funds and receive donations, establish religious education institutions, and perform religious services (excluding marriages with civil effects) and directly enter into agreements with public or private entities, foundations, national and/or international organizations for the development of social and educational projects.

In the WWL 2020 reporting period, the Constitutional Court decided to uphold the prohibition of seizing property dedicated for the purpose of worship that is owned by the Catholic Church or churches that have signed agreements with the Government. According to the Colombia 2018 International Religious Freedom Report, unregistered entities may still perform religious activities without penalty but may not collect funds or receive donations. The situation implies a disadvantage for these churches since they do not enjoy the same benefits granted to recognized churches.

The State recognizes the religious sector as being an important element in establishing peace and has called for the active participation of churches and faith-based organizations. The significant role played by churches has placed them in particular danger.

In indigenous communities, Christians face opposition where they reject the syncretistic practices and customs of those communities. This has led to indigenous leaders seeing Christianity as a destabilizing element. Sometimes, local authorities/entities do not protect the religious freedom of indigenous people where it concerns a religion differing from the traditional one.

Religious Context: Colombia	Numbers	%
Christians	47,237,000	94.8
Muslim	26,000	0.1
Hindu	12,100	0.0
Buddhist	2,100	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	314,000	0.6
Jewish	11,000	0.0
Bahai	80,300	0.2
Atheist	136,000	0.3
Agnostic	1,509,000	3.0
Other	522,100	1.0

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019). OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Although Christians make up 94.8% of the population of the country, it is important to note that an estimated 3.3% of the population identify themselves as agnostic/atheist which reflects the strong secular tendencies which have emerged in recent years.

Economic landscape

Since June 2018, President Duque has pushed for austerity and responsibility in the management of public resources. In this context, according to the Center for Latin American Studies (CESLA), the economic activity of the country has had an ascending phase during 2019. Growth is led by sectors such as finance, mining and retail, while construction remains stagnant since 2017. Throughout 2019 there was a stabilization of inflation at 3.3%, and GDP is expected to expand 3.2% for the year full 2019.

Although in general terms the economy is recovering, it has not boosted employment. According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), the national unemployment rate As of October 2019 was 10.4% when in the same month of 2018 this rate was 10.2%. The apparent economic growth is not reflected in the generation of new jobs at the pace that the economy requires. Concerning poverty: The World Bank reported that the incidence rate of poverty based on the national poverty line corresponded to 27 % of the population (49,648.685) in 2018, while in 2017; the poverty line corresponded to 26.9% of the population (48, 901,066).

The economic dimension of the post-conflict situation is also significant. The expenditure on the implementation of the peace agreement implies a particularly great challenge for fiscal policy. The Government has opted for budget cuts but there are complications due to the effects of the Venezuelan refugee crisis. As of October 2019, the debate on new tax reforms has generated general discontent, especially after the Constitutional Court declared the Law on Financing to be unconstitutional.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the last National Population and Housing Census 2018 elaborated by The National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), Colombia's population is 51.2% female and 48.8% male. 77.1% of the population live in urban areas and 15.8% in rural areas. In addition, the census state the population that recognizes itself as indigenous in the country reaches 1,905,617 (distributed in 115 native villages), a growth of 36.8% compared to the previous census (2005), at that time, 1,392,623 indigenous people were counted. The consolidated data stated that while in 2005 the indigenous population was equivalent to 3.4% of the national population, the current proportion rises to 4.4%, which implies an increase of 1%. 3.4% of the Colombian population regard themselves as indigenous. On the other hand, civil society organizations report 102 of these communities - more than the 84 officially reported by state institutions.

The struggles with the peace process affects the basic economic, health, education and even infrastructure needs. The insufficient attention given by the authorities to the remaining armed groups and drug traffickers in the most neglected territories has led to a sharp increase in the numbers of murders. According to the Gini Index for 2017, Colombia scored 49.7 points (a Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality). In addition, 5% of the population is still illiterate.

Another worrying issue is the danger for community leaders. Indepaz, Marcha Patriótica and Cumbre Agraria stated in their joint-report published on September 2019 that 155 human right activists had been murdered in the period January- 8 September 2019 alone. Also, as mentioned by the 2019 United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC), illicit economies including drugs and illegal mining remain a source of violence in the country and a threat to the peace process. Families participating in the National Comprehensive Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops continued to be subjected to threats and killings. This is especially worrying considering that, according to the report "Monitoring of territories affected by illicit crops 2018" prepared by United Nations Office against Drugs and Crime (UNODC), coca cultivation decreased from 171,000 hectares in 2017 to 169,000 hectares in 2018. Nonetheless, there is more coca cultivation in less territory. The concentration of the area planted with coca implies that the problem is becoming increasingly complex in some specific territories, namely Cauca, Nariño, Valle del Cuca, Antioquia and Bolivar.

Colombia also houses the region's largest number of internally displaced persons, as highlighted by the 2019 report of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Between 2015 and 2018, 8 million forced displaced persons were registered (98% within the country) and 118,100 were registered for the year 2018 alone. Most of these incidents occurred in Norte de Santander, Antioquia, Nariño and Chocó and were caused by armed confrontation.

The uncertainty and slow progress surrounding the implementation of the peace agreement (especially in rural and remote areas) puts the population at risk and especially Christians who speak out in defense of human rights.

Technological landscape

According to the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (MINTIC), at the end of the second quarter of 2019, the total Internet access reached 6.9 million and the total mobile Internet access reached 27.7 million. The World Bank reported that for the year 2017, 62.26 % of population used the internet. The Freedom on the Net 2019 report published by Freedom House, ranked Colombia as 'partly free' (Rank 67/100).

Poor infrastructure, low digital literacy and high costs still hamper widespread access to the Internet in Colombia. Concerns about illegal surveillance by certain sectors of the government and military persist. Several cyberattacks targeted news websites that reported on the corruption scandals. On the other hand, corruption, longstanding-armed conflict and associated surveillance, and the war against drugs are the greatest threats to freedom of expression in Colombia, although online journalists have not been attacked as often as print journalists.

The Government's new ICT policy states: "The digital future belongs to everyone". Hence there are moves to modernize the ICT sector, achieve Internet access for all Colombians, encourage the use of the digital environment and digitize the public and private sector.

Security situation

According to the 2019 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), there are currently five armed conflicts in the country. Four of these are between the Colombian State and organized armed groups, namely the ELN, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC) and FARC units that did not accept the peace process. The fifth is the conflict between the ELN and the EPL. In addition to these groups, there are criminal groups referred to as "Organized Armed Groups" (GAO - formerly known as BACRIM). The actions of all these groups revolve around territorial disputes over the destabilization of the "illegal order" that was generated with the exit of FARC. In addition, there are alliances with other foreign cartels, such as the Gulf cartel. This has led to increased attacks on the public and harsher social control through violence, threats, extortion, abductions and disappearances etc. During 2018/2019, the number of homicides and internal displacements (IDPs) was disturbingly high, as was the harassment and killing of community leaders and of those involved in the implementation of the FARC peace agreement, especially in rural areas.

Violence often increases during elections - particularly targeting political candidates - as happened during the local election process in October 2019. Electoral violence affected 230 people in 28 of the 32 Colombian departments, according to Peace and Reconciliation Foundation. Among the acts of violence against candidates were murders, persecutions, kidnappings, threats, disappearances and attacks. However, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) reported that only 24 acts of violence were recorded, including threats, kidnappings and attacks.

Assessment

One of the first steps taken by guerrillas or criminal groups (when they take possession of a town or community for drug trafficking or plantation use) is to exert their authority over the local population. Additionally, these groups seek to recruit young men and women and even children, especially those located in the poorest and neglected areas of the country.

Guerrillas and other criminal groups controlling territory constantly try to silence those who represent an obstacle to their illegal activities. Community leaders, including church leaders, hence become victims of violence. The risk is greater the more such leaders are involved in the promotion of the defense of human rights, the denunciation of corruption, their participation in politics or in activities that seek to influence the population and especially young people.

Trends analysis

The implementation of the FARC peace agreement has been a slow process. Difficulties persist for its full implementation at the political, economic and social level. This ineffectiveness has worsened to the extent that armed groups are regrouping and FARC leaders are returning to war. This situation increases the vulnerability of Christians (particularly religious and social leaders) and also leads to the neglect of other populations at risk, such as indigenous communities. Within such communities, Christian converts continue to be targeted without the authorities addressing the issue sufficiently.

Also, despite the recognition of the religious sector as being a valuable element in the peace process, those holding public Christian views continue to be regarded with suspicion both in rural and urban areas. This was evident in the latest regional elections and has also been common during the first year of government led by a president who is considered conservative. This has not prevented further criticism against the political influence of the Church in the country.

External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Colombia

- Link for general background information: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19390026. - http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-19390026
- Recent history: signed - http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/procesos-y-conversaciones/Documentos%20compartidos/24-11-2016NuevoAcuerdoFinal.pdf
- Recent history: impact - https://harvardpolitics.com/world/venezuelan-migrant-crisis/
- Recent history: Venezuelans - https://migracioncolombia.gov.co/infografias/231-infografias-2019/especial-asi-ha-sido-la-evolucion-de-la-crisis-migratoria-venezolana-corte-agosto-31-de-2019
- Political and legal landscape: some progress - https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/10/1048981
- Political and legal landscape: Kroc Institute - https://kroc.nd.edu/assets/333273/190610_resumen_ejecutivo_final_seminario_dc_3_.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: JEP - https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/uncertainty-colombia-s-special-jurisdiction-peace-jep

- Political and legal landscape: Human Rights - https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/COLOMBIA-2018.pdf
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WWL 2020: Church information / Colombia

Christian origins

Christianity came to Colombia through Spain's conquest and colonization in the period after 1492. The Roman Catholic Church was able to establish itself as the sole Christian denomination. After Colombia gained independence in 1810, the Vatican in Rome established formal relations with the new state in 1835. The Roman Catholic Church took on an increasing political presence in the country which caused much friction with the political leaders of the time. As a result, the Church was persecuted and religious communities such as the Jesuits were expelled from the country in 1851 and 1861.

In 1877 the radical government's attempts to establish a "neutral" educational system degenerated into civil war with the active participation of several bishops and clerics. In 1886 the relationship between Church and State was settled in a new constitution which recognized the Catholic Church as the basis for national unity.

The loss of Catholic hegemony began with the arrival of the Presbyterian Church in the middle of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century Baptists and other Protestants arrived. In the 1960s the religious landscape began to change visibly due to social, economic and cultural changes caused by modernization, urbanization and literacy. Pentecostalism came from the USA and became very popular and this new Christian diversity was recognized in 1991 in the new Constitution of Colombia.

Church spectrum today

Church networks: Colombia	Christians	%
Orthodox	10,400	0.0
Catholic	43,641,000	92.4
Protestant	1,468,000	3.1
Independent	1,960,000	4.1
Unaffiliated	515,000	1.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-357,000	-0.8
Total	**47,237,400**	**100.0**
(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)		
Evangelical movement	1,067,000	2.3
Renewalist movement	15,535,000	32.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).

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

WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 62 points, Colombia ranked 41 in WWL 2020.

Colombia rose 4 points compared to WWL 2019, retaining the upward trend of the last 3 reporting periods. The most significant factors have been the presence of the ELN, the regrouping of the FARC together with the presence of other criminal groups in an unstable socio-political context which has caused both squeeze and smash to increase. Clan and ethnic antagonism and Secular intolerance also played a part in this increase.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Colombia	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Clan and ethnic antagonism	CEA	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Medium
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):

The Corruption Perception Index 2018 ranks Colombia 99th out of 180, with a 36/100 score (0= highly corrupt and 100= very clean). Despite a certain amount of progress in the implementation of the FARC peace agreement, FARC dissidents, members of the ELN and other guerrilla groups (referred to as "Organized Armed Groups") fight for control of entire regions to carry out their illegal activities. This context has led to both church leaders and Christian groups being victims of relentless harassment, abduction, threats, extortion and killings, as well as there being attacks against Christian buildings. These measures are especially addressed to those who actively disagree with their practices, speak out defending human rights, preach to combatants and civilians, carry out prayer days in particularly violent areas or prevent young people from joining their ranks. Criminals groups also retaliate against former guerrilla members who decide to abandon criminal life as a result of their conversion to Christian faith. All of this is possible due to the corruption and impunity caused by the alliances established between the leaders of these groups and some state authorities.

While indigenous communities are [often](#) most affected by organized crime since their territory is commonly co-opted by drug traffickers and guerrillas, some indigenous leaders rely on criminal members to intimidate indigenous Christian converts to force them to return to the community's syncretistic practices. Further, the level of violence in such places is also very high as a result of clashes between government troops and criminal groups and due to fighting between criminal groups.

Clan and ethnic antagonism (Strong):

Within indigenous communities the religious factor is an important component of their culture and identity and shapes their relationships with other people and even natural resources. As in many indigenous communities in Latin America, the religious practices are mostly related to syncretistic Catholic practices. Although they cannot be identified as Roman Catholics (in the real sense of the word), there is a tendency for the community leaders to be more tolerant towards the Roman Catholic Church than with Christians from other churches. However, this does not mean that indigenous Catholics who abandon these practices will not be persecuted and become victims of antagonism.

Since there is a strong religious presence in these communities due to the indigenous influence of their worldview on daily life, the introduction of an idea or custom contrary to these ancient beliefs is seen as a threat to their traditions (cultural or religious) and is consequently banned by local authorities and most indigenous community leaders. Measures against indigenous converts to Christianity (and also against their families and missionaries) can be imprisonment, physical abuse, denying access to basic goods and the confiscation of property. It is hardly possible for persecuted indigenous Christians to request protection from the Government since the indigenous authorities - which are almost always biased against Christians - are commonly the only authorities with jurisdiction in the area.

Secular intolerance (Medium):

Although the religious sector is considered an important element for supporting the implementation of FARC peace agreement, when it comes to issues related to abortion, same-sex marriage/adoption, freedom of conscience, and the participation of Christian in the public square, Christians face verbal attacks and discrimination as a result of their Christian faith-based opinions or actions, especially when it contradicts the demands of pressure groups such as the LGBTI and radical feminist movements. In addition, religious intolerance among private institutions and ordinary citizens remains problematic: Anyone openly expressing their Christian faith is liable to face verbal abuse and be accused of discrimination and intolerance, particularly if they hold public positions.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: Colombia	IO	RN	CEA	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	-	-	STRONG	VERY WEAK	-	MEDIUM	-	STRONG
Government officials	-	-	Medium	Very weak	-	Medium	-	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	Very strong	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	-	-	Strong	-	-	Very weak	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	-	-	Weak	-	-	Very weak	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	-	-	Medium	Weak	-	Medium	-	Weak
One's own (extended) family	-	-	Strong	Very weak	-	Very weak	-	Weak
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	Strong
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	Very strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	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 or networks (Very strong):*** There is a strong link between crime cartels and revolutionary and paramilitary groups; their motives for targeting Christians are very similar and they act mainly in rural areas where the State's presence is weak. These groups target Christians and Christian organizations that carry out activities promoting peace since they represent a threat to the interests of criminal networks such as Los Rastrojos, Los Paisas, Los Urabeños, the Gulf Clan and Caparrapos.
- ***Government officials (Strong):*** Some authorities are in collusion with organized crime cartels and have directly and indirectly allowed criminal action against Christian leaders and churches in areas under gang control. Both the authorities and criminals can then act with impunity.

- *Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Strong)*: Examples are: FARC dissidents, the ELN and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia. These groups threaten, displace and attack religious leaders for working in support of the FARC peace agreement, for promoting human rights, for assisting displaced persons and for assisting with land restitution claims and discouraging coca cultivation.
- *Political parties (Medium):* Corruption among members of the political class helps promote the cover-up of criminal group activities. Their decisions reinforce impunity, allowing organized crime cartels to continue with their illegal activities and exert violence against Christians in the most neglected areas of the country.

Drivers of Clan and ethnic antagonism:

- *Ethnic group leaders (Very strong):*These leaders remain loyal to their ancestral beliefs and restrict any spreading of Christian faith among their tribes through harassment, cutting basic services, arrests, threats, violence or by reporting Christians to the local/tribal authorities. Ethnic religious leaders sometimes portray Christians as abusive.
- *Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):* Shamanism, ethno-religions and similar cults, although no strictly classified as religions, are manifestations of a kind of "spirituality" that rejects Christianity and adherents will attempt to impede Christian activities in some areas.
- *One's own (extended) family (Strong):* Belonging to the indigenous community is expected to have a higher priority than family ties, thus any family member abandoning the religious syncretistic practices of the community to become a Christian is liable to be labeled as a traitor and face rejection from their wider family.
- *Citizens (Medium):* Members of indigenous communities must be faithful to the tribe and their customs. Therefore, they are bound to denounce any practice that may hinder the stability of the community, including the activities or practices of Christian converts.
- *Government officials (Medium):* The authorities collaborate by either allowing or ignoring discrimination and violence aimed at Christians who refuse to follow the syncretistic practices of the community. The authorities regard pastors as enemies of the cultural traditions.
- *Revolutionary or paramilitary groups (Medium):* Guerrillas have teamed up with indigenous leaders to harass converted Christians. This collusion aims to defend ethnic group leaders' interests and to force Christians to stop practicing their faith in the community.
- *Organized crime cartels or networks (Medium):* Organized crime cartels have acted in complicity with indigenous leaders to intimidate Christians in the communities on a few occasions. The collusion aims to defend ethnic group leaders' interests and to put Christians under pressure to stop practicing their faith in the community.

Drivers of Secular intolerance:

- *Ideological pressure groups (Strong):* LGBTI and radical feminist groups seek to eradicate religion from the public square by demanding Church/State separation. These groups harass, ridicule and censor Christians when they speak publicly and manifest faith-based points of view that disagree with the interests of these groups. On some occasions, they have colluded with the media to present biased information about Christians. Some of these groups also try to infiltrate religious groups and churches in order to promote a "more open theology towards the LGBTI community".

- *Government officials (Medium):* In general, the State authorities, including some ministries and the Constitutional Court of Colombia, support the interests of ideological pressure groups (such as LGBTI, radical feminist and secularist groups). They are known to push for the adherence to the views of these groups and actively react against the points of view of Christian leaders, Christian parents and those who disagree with them. Christians are at a disadvantage when they manifest their faith-based points of view since the judicial authorities tend not to give Christians the same protection as to other groups when it comes to protecting the right to freedom of expression..

- *Political parties (Medium):* Political parties (such as the Alternative Democratic Pole or the Colombian Liberal Party, Green Party and Progressive Party) hinder efforts coming from Christian politicians or that are supported by Christian groups, demanding Church/State separation and promoting non-discrimination and hate-speech initiatives that could undermine the free expression of Christians.

- *Citizens (Medium):* Many citizens are intolerant, reject the participation of Christians in the public sphere; they want there to be no connections between the State and the Church and will often ridicule, insult and discredit Christians.

Geographical hotspots of persecution

- *Hotspots for Organized corruption and crime:* According to the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation ([Pares](#)), as of August 2019, areas with the presence of criminal organizations and illegal armed groups where their domain is concentrated or where there is a dispute could be grouped into five: i) The Paramillo Nudo region, which includes southern Córdoba, Bajo Cauca, North and Northeast Antioqueño ii) The Catatumbo region and part of the metropolitan area of Cúcuta. iii) The Pacific Nariñense and Caucano. iv) The south of Meta, Guaviare and part of Caquetá and v) The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

- *Hotspots for Clan and ethnic antagonism:* Although especially in the most traditional communities, with less acceptance of western customs other than those of their ethnicity, those who abandon the syncretic practices of the tribe face persecution. It may vary depending on the area in which it is presented; the [youngest](#) indigenous population has a presence, mostly, in departments such as Arauca, Chocó, Magdalena, Vaupés, Vichada and Guainía. While the oldest indigenous population is in departments of the Andean region: Bogotá, Cundinamarca, Caldas, Santander, Tolima and Nariño. In these communities,

- *Hotspots for Secular intolerance:* This Persecution engine depends i) on the public policies implemented by the national government, and ii) on social attitudes within society. It is present throughout the country, especially in urban areas such as Bogotá, Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda, Quindío, Nariño, Valle, Cauca, Boyacá, Santander, Cundinamarca, Tolima and Huila. Little by little it is reaching more indigenous zones depending on the degree of acceptance of the "Western customs" of each ethnic group.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation. These communities are therefore not scored as a separate category in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: This category consists mainly of Roman Catholic churches and small Orthodox and Protestant communities. These groups are in danger of attack in areas controlled by drug cartels and by other forms of organized crime and guerrillas. They also struggle with the increasing religious intolerance in society, not to mention the obstacles and risks of church work within indigenous communities (particularly as experienced by Protestant Christians). In sporadic cases some Protestants experience rejection from other traditional churches (such as the Catholic Church).

Converts: This category includes cross-denominational converts (for instance, those who leave so-called "mega-churches" to join smaller Christian churches and vice versa), converts within indigenous communities and converts to Christianity from guerrilla groups and criminal organizations. Especially in the indigenous context, converts are victims of harassment, expulsion, death-threats and other physical and psychological forms of violence for abandoning the majority belief-system within the community to which they belong. Converts are also affected by criminal networks in the same way as Historical Christian communities.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category is mainly made up of Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations. They are affected by organized criminal groups and guerrillas, in the same way as Historical Christian communities. Although the government has recognized their important role in the implementation of the peace agreement in the most neglected areas of the region, these denominations do not receive the same government benefits granted to the country's historical churches and those churches which signed a covenant with the State.

The Persecution pattern

WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Colombia
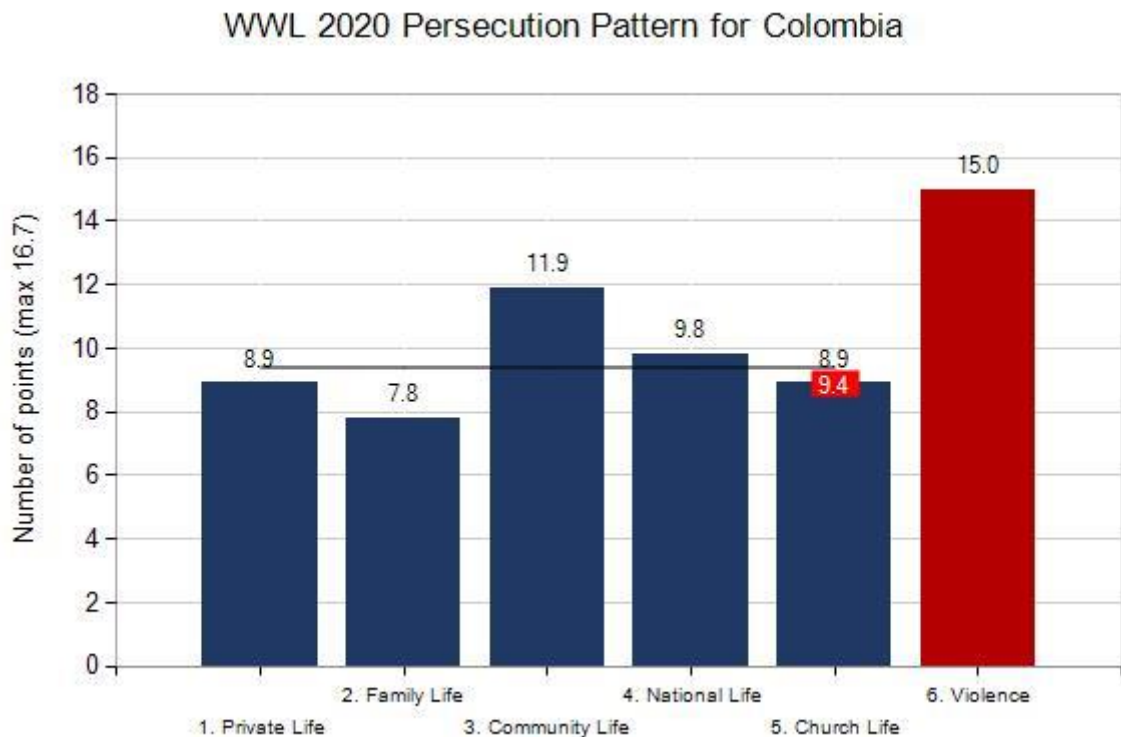
The WWL 2020 Persecution pattern for Colombia shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Colombia remains at a high level, rising from 9.0 points in WWL 2019 to 9.4 points in WWL 2020. This is mainly due the pressure from the criminal and ethnic groups.
- All spheres of life scored above 7.8 points or above out of the maximum of 16.7 points and thus pressure is at a high level throughout. Pressure is highest in the Community sphere (11.9 points).
- The score for violence is extreme. It went up from 12.5 points in WWL 2019 to 15.0 points. The reason is related to the increase of Christians killed and church buildings attacked as a consequence of the ineffectiveness of the FARC peace agreement implementation.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, details are shown from four of the highest scoring block questions, with those items scoring highest listed first. 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 0 – 4 points, please see the "WWL Scoring example" in the WWL Methodology, available at: http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/, password: freedom).

Private sphere:

- ***It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians (Block 1.9 / 2.5 points):*** This is the case when individuals are identified as Christians in indigenous communities or in territory controlled by organized crime. Such Christians are quickly accused of not following community norms (i.e. regarding the abandonment of syncretistic practices or of not complying with curfews or other rules imposed by gangs). Such restrictions prevent meetings (and prayers and worship) with other Christians, even if the meeting is not for worship purposes.

- ***It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials (Block 1.3 / 2.5 points):*** Within indigenous communities, the tribal authorities do not allow the possession of material that supports Christian faith or could be used for evangelization. However, the economic value of particular Christian materials is often regarded as high; criminal groups may attack in order to gain possession of such goods and at the same time discourage evangelistic work in the area.

- ***It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.) (Block 1.2 / 2.25 points):*** In the indigenous context, any Christian practice among converts is a personal and material risk and is not tolerated by the community and tribal leaders. In addition, Christian worship is also a risk in areas co-opted by criminal groups. Christians and converts to Christianity identified by their behavior become targets since they are considered the most likely to leave the group, or report them, thus potentially threatening their illegal activities.

- ***It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the internet (Block 1.7 / 2.25 points):*** In indigenous communities, access to Christian media is difficult. When it is possible and a Christian uses it to spread the Christian faith, the Christian may be punished. In areas coopted by criminal groups, accessing or using Christian material with contents that may affect the interests of these groups, whether for the denunciation of their illegal activities or for encouraging the conversion of members, will be punished.

In general, conversion to Christianity within indigenous communities causes opposition (sometimes violent) from the tribal leaders and immediate/extended family. Christians cannot use religious symbols otherwise they run the risk of threats, harassment, physical torture, imprisonment, isolation and exile. Christian converts are also seen as "natural enemies" of criminal groups, some of these offer "assistance" to indigenous non-Christian leaders to violently subdue indigenous converts. Although it is now less frequent, there is still some opposition or criticism by families when members move from Catholicism or from some "mega-church" to a new, smaller church group. In addition, as part of society's growing intolerance towards religion, those who are recognized as Christians or reveal their faith-based points of views in public tend to be criticized, insulted and bullied. This situation encourages self-censorship.

Family sphere:

- ***Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs (Block 2.7 / 3 .25 points):*** In order to prevent any "destabilization of indigenous identity", the tribal authorities in indigenous communities use threats or force to stop Christian parents from transmitting their faith to their children. Sometimes tribal authorities arrange that children of Christians be raised by other relatives or other members of the indigenous community that follow the tribal customs. Within the areas controlled by criminal networks, Christian parents can hardly prevent their children from being indoctrinated by ELN and dissident FARC guerrillas because any opposition could lead to their assassination. The intention of these groups is to influence the youth so that a criminal attitude becomes embedded in society. Elsewhere in Colombia, parents face some difficulties raising their children according to Christian convictions, sometimes even if they choose a Christian school for their children, especially concerning issues relating to sexuality in the educational field.

- ***Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education (Block 2.8 / 3.25 points):*** Education within indigenous communities aims to maintain the cultural identity of the ethnic group. In this context, community beliefs are taught, even those which are clearly anti-Christian and contradict the religious convictions of Christian children and their parents. The only way out for parents is to take their children out of the community or the school, increasing in most cases, the illiteracy rate of the community. Elsewhere in Colombia, the content approved for education has a significant secularist influence and promoting attitudes that consider religious beliefs to be discriminatory and intolerant. Pressure is exerted on Christian children and parents to accept educational content related to sexual diversity etc. which contradicts their Christian faith and values. State schools do not always provide alternative religious classes for those Christians that are not Catholic.

- ***Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution (Block 2.10 / 3 points):*** Christians expelled from indigenous communities are forced to separate from their families (wives and children) as a punishment for not giving up their faith. Also, the number of IDPs continues to increase due to violence in areas controlled by criminal groups and guerrillas. Christians (especially church leaders) who are targeted by criminal groups because they are considered a threat, are forced to flee without their families so as not to raise suspicion and reduce the risk for those who remain at home.

- *Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith (Block 2.9 / 2.75 points):* Children of Christian indigenous parents can face pressure not to follow their parent's faith. Sometimes they are subjected to indigenous rites, they are punished or sent away to live with other (traditional) indigenous family members so they are not raised by their convert Christian parents; at other times they are excluded from community activities to prevent them spreading any Christian influence. In areas co-opted by organized crime, it is common that guerrilla members recruit children from an early age, especially children from Christian families. This is done to pressure them into ceasing their Christian activities and their resistance to the local criminal "authority". Elsewhere in Colombia (especially in urban areas), due to the growth of intolerance towards Christianity in society, some Christian children are criticized or mocked (because Christian faith is seen as being unnecessarily radical) and because they refuse to be part of secular celebrations or to participate in activities supporting ideological pressure groups. In some cases, Christian children of certain Christian denominations suffer bullying because of the clothes they wear.

Especially in indigenous communities, any religious practice different from the traditional/tribal custom is prohibited as well as the use of public space to perform them. In consequence, Christian families and Christian converts face struggle when it comes to carrying out baptisms, Christian weddings and burials. Sometimes, they can only be carried out outside the territory and are not normally recognized internally in the community.

Community sphere:

- *Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events (Block 3.5 / 3.25 points):* Christians are expected to participate in community events and take part in religious rites in indigenous communities, otherwise they are punished. Similarly, leaders of criminal groups can call on the local community to make announcements or impose "new rules" and Christians are expected to participate; if they refuse they can quickly become victims of reprisals. Elsewhere in Colombia, Christian workers are forced to participate in activities organized by their companies relating to questions of gender and discrimination even when they state that such activities are contrary to their faith.
- *Christians have been hindered in sharing their community resources because of their faith (Block 3.4 / 3 points):* In some indigenous communities or rural areas coopted by criminal groups, Christians are excluded from basic services, such as health, or financial benefits, as a way to put pressure them to stop their activities.
- *Christians have been fined for faith related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money) (Block 3.12 / 3 points):* Indigenous authorities use a system of fines (either money or harvest products) for Christians who refuse to collaborate or participate in community practices and festivities that contradict their faith. Criminal groups demand protection money from pastors, priests and other Christians in exchange for not exercising violence against them and for allowing them to carry on some of their religious activities.

- ***Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons (Block 3.13 / 3 points):*** Tribal authorities make use of control mechanisms within the indigenous communities to monitor the activities of Christians. Criminal groups often function as the de facto local authorities in areas where there is hardly any State presence and force Christians to inform them of their activities.

In the indigenous context, it is common practice for converts to Christianity to be monitored, threatened, pressured, excluded from communal activities, punished by means of forced marriage (especially for girls) and restricted from doing business with other members of the community. In areas co-opted by criminal networks, since these groups hold power and authority, they monitor and harass Christians and will abduct anyone who represents a threat to them. Elsewhere in Colombia, LGBTI groups and radical feminists attend meetings or events organized by Christians as "infiltrators" with the purpose of distorting reports on any speeches held to make them appear intolerant.

National sphere:

- ***Christians have been subject to smear campaigns or hate speech (Block 4.11 / 3.25 points):*** Given that the State has given autonomy and self-determination to indigenous communities, indigenous populations themselves establish and regulate their norms of coexistence. Hence, tribal leaders attempt to impose a lifestyle regulated by their ancestral customs, acting as the only authority in the area. Bearing this in mind, tribal leaders promote rejection of anyone abandoning tribal practices and converting to Christianity. Christians are also held responsible for whatever negative thing happens to the community. Elsewhere in Colombia, sometimes the media and civil society defame Christians, and stigmatizes them socially, especially when the church speaks on issues related to life, family, electoral processes or peace agreements. The goal is to create divisions within the Church so that it loses credibility in the eyes of society. In the recent electoral context, citizens criticized the relationship between some Christian groups and political candidates harshly.
- ***Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions (Block 4.3 / 3 points):*** Within indigenous communities, the "law" is the custom imposed by the ethnic group and is used to force Christians to act against their religious convictions. In general in Colombia, exemptions from military service based on religious grounds are not always granted. Some medical personnel are pressured into acting against their conscience regarding the practice of abortions or euthanasia (both procedures allowed by the Constitutional Court. Other professionals, such as teachers and lawyers, can be pressured into acting against their Christian faith while performing their duties.

- ***Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public (Block 4.8 / 3 points):*** According to indigenous customs, anyone whose faith differs from the community one, has no right to express themselves before the community. The reason is that such people might encourage other indigenous people to follow their religious convictions. Also, Christians in areas co-opted by a criminal group or guerrillas are not free to express any faith-based opinions which contradict the group's philosophy or which concern the implementation of the peace agreement, the defense of human rights or the environment. During the latest regional elections, Christians who supported candidates representing a danger to the interests of criminal groups, were harassed. In public debate on sensitive issues (such as the FARC peace agreement, elections, biological life and regulation of marriage and adoption, etc.) known Christians participating or supporting Christian candidates were ridiculed and quickly accused of breaching the separation of Church and State.

- ***Those who caused harm to Christians deliberately have been left unpunished (Block 4.14 / 3 points):*** In indigenous communities, the discrimination or mistreatment against Christians goes unpunished because the tribal leaders or local authorities are the instigators. Elsewhere, impunity is a widespread phenomenon due to links between criminal leaders and corrupt officials. If a criminal investigation is carried out, the authorities anyway often fail to take into account that Christians are much more vulnerable to criminal attacks because their religious convictions are considered a threat by criminal groups. Also, in contexts related to radical secularism, signs of intolerance that trigger attacks against churches and Christians have not been properly investigated and restricted. The authorities have denied due guarantee to the integrity of church leaders arguing that, because they are public figures, a critic's right to freedom of expression must prevail.

In some areas, criminal groups act as the sole authority and harass Christian organizations running drug rehabilitation centers, tor working for the defense of human rights and the implementation of the peace agreements. In indigenous communities, tribal leaders forbid Christians to leave or missionaries to enter certain areas. It is hardly possible for persecuted indigenous Christians to request protection from the government since the indigenous authorities - which are almost always biased against Christians - are the only authorities with jurisdiction in the area. In addition, sometimes, it is hard for Christian public officers to act according to their faith while performing their public duties because they quickly become targets for criticism and smear campaigns by citizens and the media and this could affect promotion possibilities. Christian civil society organizations involved in matters of public interest are accused of non-adherence to the State's secular principle.

Church sphere:

- ***Pastors or other Christian leaders, or their family members, have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons (Block 5.11 / 3.5 points):*** Christian leaders and their families are targeted in particular in indigenous communities and territories co-opted by criminal groups. They are the most frequent victims of fines and special taxes, especially if their activities are related to the defense of human rights, the environment, the implementation of the peace agreements and they refuse to collaborate with the criminal groups. Church leaders also suffer verbal and sometimes physical abuse in the public sphere, especially concerning topics related to marriage, family and the sanctity of life.

- ***Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations (Block 5.18 / 3.25 points):*** The activities of Christian organizations are not allowed in indigenous communities. Christian indigenous schools are forbidden both by indigenous authorities and by the Colombian government, which allows only indigenous traditional education within the community. Church-affiliated organizations helping rehabilitate young drug-addicts are frequently targeted by criminal groups (since they see such youth-work as an "attack" on their economic interests). Also, due to the high level of insecurity in the border areas, some Christian organizations cannot carry on their activities in safety there. Elsewhere, educational institutions run by both the Church and other Christian organizations can sometimes be put under pressure - via threats of closure or fines - to accept the guidelines established by the Ministry of Education in matters related to sexual education.

- ***Christians have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier (Block 5.3 / 3.25 points):*** In order to discourage the increase of Christians within indigenous communities and in territories controlled by gangs, the construction of churches or meeting places is not allowed. In addition, in areas co-opted by organized crime, Christian leaders are pressured into building or renovating churches as a facade for money laundering. When Christians in charge do not accept, they are harassed. Finally, the Territorial Ordinance Plan is the legal norm commonly used for restricting the construction of new churches in urban areas.

- ***Churches, Christian organization or institutions have been hindered in expressing or putting into practice their convictions on marital and family arrangements (Block 5.17 / 2.25 points):*** These organizations have to deal with frequent criticism, rejection and stigmatization. Arguing for the protection of the secular state, it is alleged that churches (or organizations with a Christian ethos) should not be allowed to express themselves publicly on sensitive issues. Also, when Christian organizations express or put in practice their views on the sanctity of life and sexual and family matters, ideological pressure groups can distort their messages/actions and present them to society as being hate-speech and discriminatory. Indigenous communities refuse to allow Christian organizations to express themselves in favor of marital or family arrangements contrary to those of their customs. They argue that it damages children and the identity of the tribe and that the rejection of marriages of minors or the search for equality between men and women within the family (according to Christian doctrine) undermines their syncretistic beliefs.

Within indigenous communities and territories controlled by criminal networks, interaction with foreign Christian visitors is often deemed too risky; church preaching, teachings and activities are monitored and restricted both inside and outside churches. This includes work with youth and children, as well as the selling or distribution of Christian material. Criminal leaders prevent Christians from using local radio or media as a platform in order to avoid any Christian influence spreading. In all cases, Christians opposing these restrictions are likely to be subjected to verbal and/or physical violence.

Violence

In the WWL 2020 reporting period, religious intolerance, criminal violence, corruption and insecurity in the country have all contributed to the murder of religious leaders, the robbery of churches and death threats aimed at Christians. Particular targets are those involved in the implementation of the peace agreement, the defense of human rights and those who assumed a leadership role within the most violent areas. Violence against Christians has also intensified in indigenous communities, where Christians have experienced discrimination, expropriation of property, deprivation of liberty and physical abuse.

The following table is based on reported cases as much as possible. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (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 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure.

Colombia	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2020	01 Nov 2018 - 31 Oct 2019	16	71	6	40	6
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	7	169	17	26	7
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	5	274	6	32	13

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

In the WWL 2020 reporting period:

- *Christians killed:* 16 Christians, among them church leaders and indigenous Christian leaders, were killed at the hands of criminal groups in places such as Cauca, Meta, Antioquia, Valle del Cauca, and Chocó. The Christians were known for their opposition to the criminal activities of these groups.
- *Christians attacked:* The many attacks on Christians were carried out as a way to put pressure on the Church. The incidents occurred in Antioquia, Huila, Bogotá, Cármen de Bolívar, Arauca, and Nariño. In areas with little or no State presence, Christians are vulnerable to intimidation and death-threats if they speak out against human rights violations, activities that threaten the environment or that denounce corruption and criminal groups,
- *Christians arrested:* 6 cases were identified in the Colombian indigenous communities. Indigenous authorities often punish converts to Christianity for having abandoned the syncretistic rites of the tribe. Reports came mostly from the Arhuaco's ethnic group.
- *Churches attacked:* Around 40 churches or Christian buildings were attacked. The incidents occurred in states such as Bogotá, Arauca, Antioquía, Tumaco, Nariño and Chocó.The attacks were carried out as a way to pressurize Christians into ceasing activities related to the defense of human rights and the eradication of violence in areas with little or no State presence. Similarly, some churches were vandalized as a sign of Secular intolerance against Christianity.
- *Christian homes/shops attacked:* Around 6 cases were reported, mainly due to the actions of organized criminal groups. The incidents happened in Northern Colombia.
- *Other*: There were around 295 cases of Christians being forced to leave their homes or go into hiding either in-country or abroad - again related to *Clan and ethnic antagonism* and *Organized corruption and crime*. Displacements occurred in Matapiña, Rio Molino, Antioquía, Uraba, San Sebastian, Guaviare, Córdoba and Chocó. It is important to keep in mind that Colombia has the largest number of IDPs in the region (UNHCR, 2019); however, there is no separate data regarding the number of Christian IDPs and there will anyway be many unreported cases.

5 Year trends

The following three charts show the scores for pressure and violence in Colombia over the last five reporting periods.

Chart 1:

The chart below shows that the average pressure on Christians has consistently been above 8.4 points over the last five reporting periods, coinciding with the final stages of the signing of the FARC peace agreement in 2016 and the challenges involved in its implementation.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Colombia	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2020	9.4
2019	9.0
2018	8.9
2017	8.6
2016	8.4

Chart 2:

In general, the most significant rise in pressure can be seen in *Private life* and *National life*. This is due to the context of violence and insecurity at various levels, involving, for instance: Criminal groups in areas with no State control; FARC fighting units being re-established; and newer criminal groups emerging. The rise in pressure is also influenced by the persecution of Christians within indigenous communities via the Persecution engine *Clan and ethnic antagonism* and by the increased opposition (in society in general but also in some government authorities) to public manifestations of Christian faith. The pressure in Family life and Community life has been more or less stable, which means that, in living out their faith, Christians continue to face significant challenges from the local authorities and citizens in their neighborhoods.

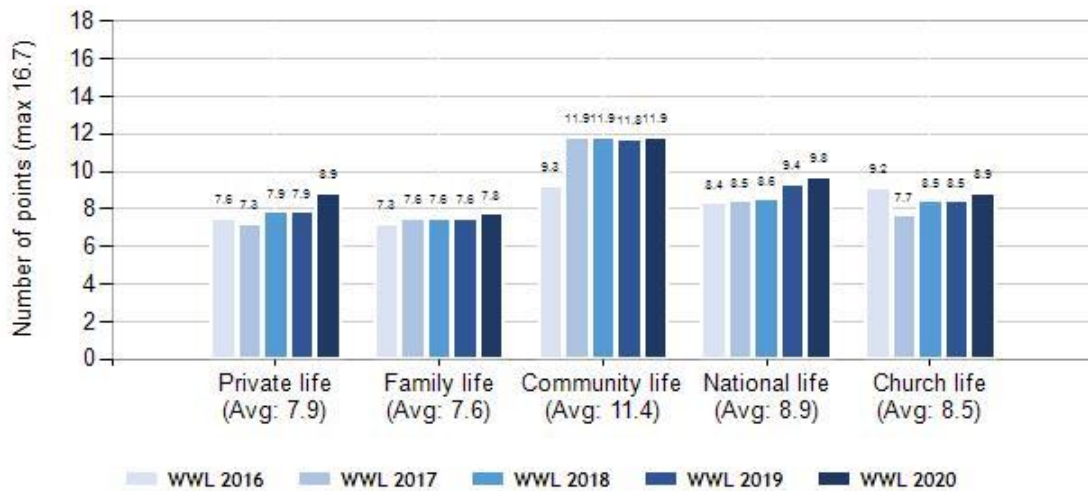WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Colombia (Spheres of life)

Chart 3:

In the chart below, the scores for violence show a progressive increase during the last 4 reporting periods. This is the result of the delays and failures in the complex implementation of the peace agreements, as well as the resurgence of criminal groups and guerrillas in those places abandoned by the FARC, in addition to violent repression against Christian converts in indigenous communities.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern for Colombia (Violence)
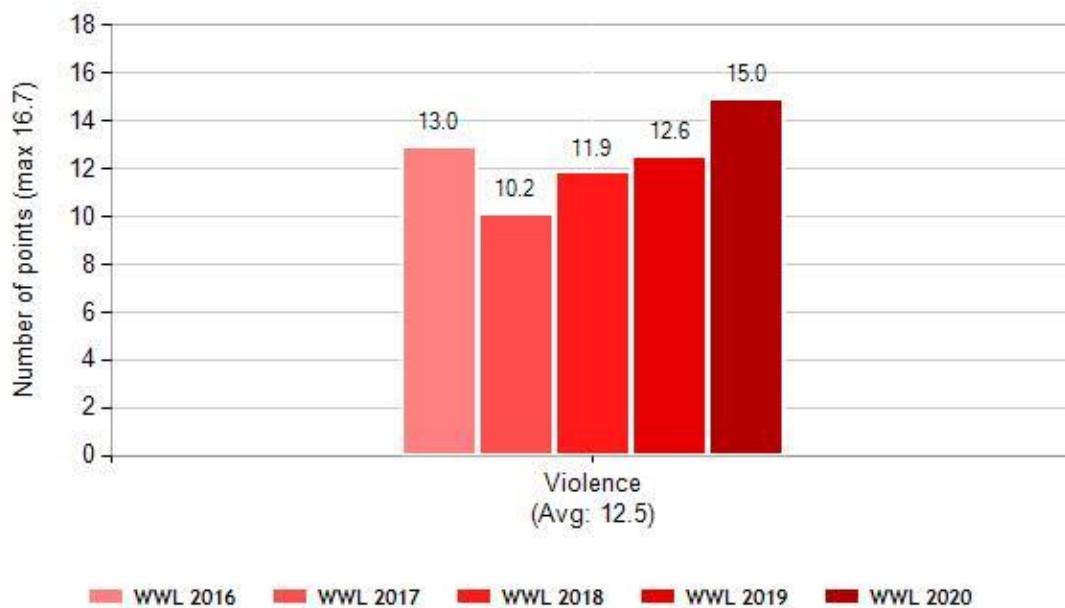
Gender profile of persecution

Female Pressure Points:

- *Abduction*
- *Forced marriage*
- *Forced to flee town/country*
- *Trafficking*
- *Violence – physical*
- *Violence – sexual*

Although there is no particular law that puts girls/women in specific danger, in practice, there are situations in which Christian women have to overcome challenges in order to live their faith without fear. For instance, within indigenous communities, since the tribal authorities oppose Christian faith, it is common for Christian women to be either forced into marriage with a non-Christian indigenous man or be abandoned by their husbands, separated from their children and ostracized by the community.

This puts them in a particularly vulnerable situation since they are exposed to forced displacement and possibly criminal groups involved in trafficking and sexual exploitation. In cases where Christian women remain in the community, they have to comply with community practices, despite their faith.

In areas under criminal control, the guerrilla indoctrination of children also affects Christian girls, since they not only have to accept the violent ideologies imposed despite their faith, but their vulnerability increases because it is also highly likely that they become victims of rape and sexual harassment. In addition, in the most neglected areas, government programs are sponsored by multilateral organizations to insist on "family planning" resources being used that most often involve contraceptives and abortion. This is particularly disturbing because in some places there is pressure to use these methods in exchange for receiving government help or having full access to health treatment. In addition, this pressure is carried out more aggressively in schools in rural areas, where pupils are pressured into the use of contraceptives despite their parents' disagreement. This interferes with their right to educate their children according to their principles and beliefs. Additionally, the ease of access and use of contraceptive methods makes women more vulnerable especially in areas co-opted by organized crime, since rape is less likely to result in pregnancy, thus encouraging both rape and impunity for the rapist.

On the other hand, with regard to the situation of women in the country, according to the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2019 Global Report, elaborated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the State has a very low level of discrimination. The study focuses mostly in the legal framework and social norms regarding health, education and economic participation. In a similar way, the SDG Gender Index states that Colombia scores 67.9 in the global ranking (a score of 100 reflects the achievement of gender equality). That is, the situation of women is not as serious as in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, Chad, etc. Nonetheless, the concluding observations in the CEDAW 2019 Report highlighted the many challenges still faced by women in the country. Examples are: Recruitment of young girls in conflict zones; attacks against women leaders working to implement the FARC Peace Agreement at local level; the lack of inclusion of women in politics, education and/or employment; female genital mutilation in some indigenous communities; feminicides and violence against women, as well as trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Male Pressure Points:

- *Abduction*
- *Discrimination/Harassment via education*
- *Forced to flee town/community*
- *Incarceration by government*
- *Military/militia conscription/service against conscience*
- *Violence – death*
- *Violence – physical*
- *Violence – psychological*
- *Violence – verbal*

Christian men have always faced a higher level of threat and persecution, partly because they represent the head of the family (or of the church, if they are pastors or priests). Both men and boys are in particular danger in regions of armed conflict. Household heads face being extorted to provide finances for armed groups; non-church leaders face the risk of being killed; pastors or priests may be physically assaulted or forced to leave their regions.

Children and young people are exposed to recruitment and violence by armed groups. However, in the areas controlled by criminal groups or drug cartels, young men are the main target for recruitment purposes and are exposed to indoctrination and mandatory participation in the activities of these groups which may include abductions, sexual abuse, trafficking, etc.. According to an investigation conducted by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) regarding recruitment and sexual violence against girls and boys in the context of armed conflict, of the total 8,839 child victims (counted from 1971 to date), 32 % were women and 67% men. Due to their economic and social environment, some young men accept this and join up. However, there are others who refuse - whether on grounds of faith or otherwise - and these are then commonly threatened, persecuted and often abducted along with their families.

There is a noticeable lack of trauma management and resocialization programs for men. Gender-based policies promoted by the government do not give men the same opportunities to educate themselves or to participate in programs for managing and overcoming vulnerability. Statistically, the majority of resocialization or prevention programs are focused on women.

In some indigenous communities, as a result of the rejection of the conversion of indigenous parents to Christianity, children are forced to marry older women of the same ethnicity, in order to prevent the spread of Christianity among other members of community.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department's 2018 International Religious Freedom report, the Jewish community reported continual antisemitism appearing on some social media sites, including aggressive action by "Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions Colombia" (BDS Colombia), an anti-Israel protest movement that used anti-Semitic slogans such as "Jews control the media".

The Colombian Confederation of Jewish Communities (CJCC) also reported instances of demonstrations in front of the Israeli embassy that were sometimes accompanied by antisemitic comments on social media. In particular, the CJCC expressed concern over the BDS Colombia's aggressive promotion of the boycott on Israeli products, artists, culture and travel.

Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

- **_Organized corruption and crime:_** The return to arms of two former FARC commanders is a step back that will definitely influence the security context of the country and increases the difficulties in implementing the FARC peace agreement. This will make it even more difficult to stop the de facto power exercised by armed groups in many areas of the country, especially considering the high levels of corruption and impunity. As part of this worrying context, Christians pushing for peace and the respect of human rights are likely to continue being targeted and become more vulnerable to attack. This situation could deteriorate further if protests against the current political situation become violent.

- **_Clan and ethnic antagonism:_** As it stands, the State does not provide an effective solution for protecting the individual dimension of the right to religious freedom of indigenous members who decide to convert to Christianity and not follow the traditional ethnic rites. If this does not change, their persecution will only increase. This is especially the case where criminal groups have already formed alliances with indigenous leaders to repress conversion to Christianity.

- **_Secular intolerance:_** Intolerance towards the political participation of committed Christians and towards public expressions of faith do not show signs of diminishing in the near future. Despite the recognition of the religious sector as an important element of society, Christian leaders will probably continue to be neglected by the government and ideological groups, when decisions on issues related to the sanctity of life, marriage and family are made. The recent election of local authorities with a political agenda leaning in favor of ideological groups, is likely to influence regulation of the religious freedom of citizens.

External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines: Corruption Perception Index - https://www.transparency.org/country/COL
- Persecution engines: Organized Armed Groups - https://www.laopinion.com.co/colombia/los-grupos-armados-han-crecido-en-colombia-176710#OP
- Persecution engines: alliances - https://www.rcnradio.com/colombia/antioquia/salvoconductos-criminales-en-medellin-la-base-para-descubrir-corrupcion-en-la
- Persecution engines: often - https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-50233674
- Geographical hotspots of persecution: Pares - https://pares.com.co/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Que%CC%81-paso%CC%81-con-la-seguridad-a-un-an%CC%83o-de-Duque-final-_compressed-Final.pdf
- Geographical hotspots of persecution: youngest - https://id.presidencia.gov.co/Paginas/prensa/2019/La-poblacion-indigena-en-Colombia-es-de-1905617-personas-segun-Censo-del-Dane-190916.aspx
- Violence: murder - https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/08/12/press/4429/article.htm
- Violence: robbery - https://conexioncapital.co/tercera-vez-que-roban-iglesia-en-engativa/

- Violence: death threats - https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/amenazan-de-muerte-a-sacerdote-y-disponen-su-salida-temporal-de-diocesis-13466
- Violence: UNHCR - https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/
- Gender profile of persecution: challenges - http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/COLOMBIA-Compound-structural-vulnerabilities-facing-Christian-women-2018-FINAL-WITH-PREFACE.pdf
- Gender profile of persecution: SIGI - https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/sigi-2019-global-report_bc56d212-en#page156
- Gender profile of persecution: 67.9 - https://data.em2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EM2030_2019_Global_Report_English_WEB.pdf
- Gender profile of persecution: CEDAW - https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/COL/CO/9&amp;Lang=Sp
- Gender profile of persecution: JEP - https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/jep-colombia/las-investigaciones-en-la-jep-sobre-reclutamiento-de-ninos-por-parte-de-las-farc-432252
- Persecution of other religious minorities: antisemitism - https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/COLOMBIA-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf

Additional reports and articles

WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/ (password: freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

Articles are available at: https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/colombia.

Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Colombia (password: freedom).