

WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

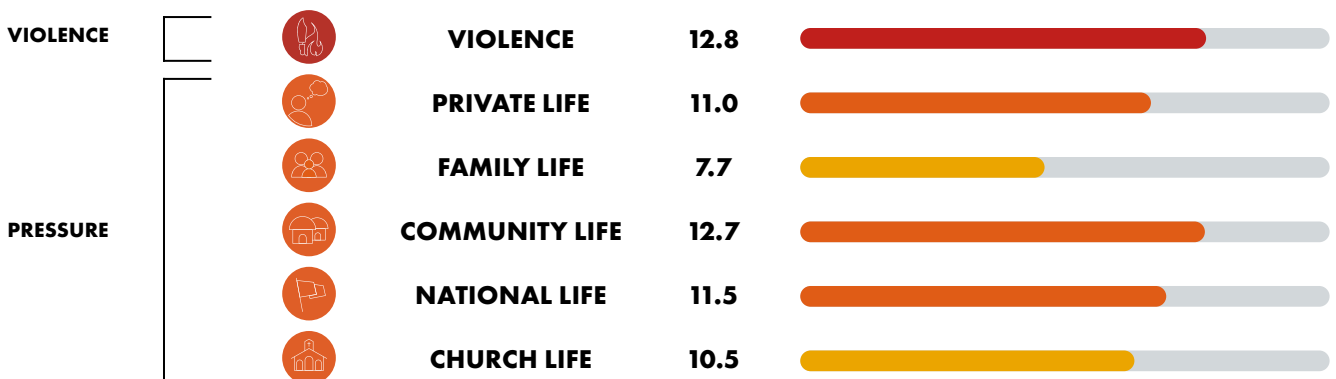
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

COLOMBIA

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
47



LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

In Colombia, Christian leaders are frequently targeted with threats, extortion, and even murder, especially in regions controlled by guerrilla or criminal groups. Those engaged in peacebuilding, humanitarian work, youth outreach (including rehabilitation of former gang members), or defending human and environmental rights are seen as undermining the interests of armed actors. In some indigenous territories, Christian converts and missionaries often face hostility, including threats, physical violence, imprisonment, or exclusion from basic rights. In certain secular contexts, some Christians are occasionally accused of inciting hate speech, discrimination, or of violating the secular nature of the state, which can result in reputational damage or legal complaints. Consequently, some Christians choose to self-censor to avoid retaliation, stigmatization, or exclusion from public platforms.

Quick facts

LEADER

President Gustavo Francisco Petro Urrego

POPULATION

52,611,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

49,876,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Christianity

GOVERNMENT

Presidential Republic



Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	49,876,000	94.8
Agnostics/Atheists	1,738,000	3.3
Ethnic religionists	339,000	0.6
Others	658,000	1.3
	Total	100%

Source²

Since Gustavo Petro's 2022 election ([BBC, 20 June 2022](#)), Colombia has undergone political reconfiguration under a reformist agenda ([Gustavo Petro Presidente, 2022](#)). While some reforms, such as pensions and education, have advanced, the administration faces protests, corruption allegations, and declining public approval. Regional election setbacks and a fragile congressional majority have further weakened its position. Implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement remains weak: as of May 2024, only 33% of its provisions had been fully implemented, 37% minimally, and 20% remain in an "intermediate" state ([Atlantic Council, 12 November 2024](#)). Armed violence continues to escalate, especially in departments like Cauca, Antioquia, Nariño, Valle del Cauca and Chocó. Clashes between guerrilla groups (ELN, AGC, FARC dissidents), criminal organizations, and state forces have caused massacres, forced displacements, child recruitment, and increased insecurity. Ethnic communities—particularly Indigenous and Afro-Colombians—are

disproportionately affected. On January 2025, President Petro suspended peace talks with the ELN after attacks in Catatumbo ([Reuters, 17 January 2025](#)), near the Venezuelan border, where the group resumed hostilities with a FARC dissident faction.

Colombia's 1991 Constitution guarantees religious freedom and legal equality for all faiths. The Roman Catholic Church retains a special status through its Concordat with the Holy See. Protestant and Evangelical churches, particularly large urban mega-churches, have grown rapidly. Decree 354 grants legal recognition to some non-Catholic Christian groups, but others must register with the Ministry of Interior for similar protections. The government promotes partnerships with religious entities for social work ([Infobae, 31 March 2024](#)) and has moved to recognize them as victims of armed conflict ([Senado, 18 October 2023](#)). Secular sectors have criticized this engagement, and courts have increasingly emphasized state neutrality, ordering removal of religious symbols from public institutions and limiting religious expression in official settings ([Corte Constitucional, 27 February 2024](#)).

In some indigenous territories, religious freedom is restricted by cultural norms and reinforced by the 1998 Constitutional Court ruling SU-510 which affirms that indigenous town councils can define "traditional" beliefs and sanction those who refuse to follow them, effectively prohibiting "non-traditional" religions on reserves. ([CSW, 07 December 2022](#)). Evangelical and Protestant Christians rejecting traditional rituals face discrimination, threats, or displacement.

¹ Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

² Other refers to all the rest to make up 100%: Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

Church leaders involved in peacebuilding or rights advocacy are frequent targets of violence and intimidation by armed groups ([Telesur, 14 January 2025](#)). Despite this, churches remain active in humanitarian relief, education, and reconciliation.

How the situation varies by region

In areas like Antioquia, Bolívar, Cauca, Chocó, César, Córdoba, Guaviare, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, Tolima, and Valle del Cauca, widespread violence and weak state protection severely limit religious freedom. In indigenous territories in Cauca, Magdalena, Cesar, Huila, Chocó, and Boyacá, people who diverge from local spiritual norms often face discrimination and exclusion. In urban centers, including Bogotá, Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda, Quindío, Valle, and Cundinamarca, religious expression, especially on social issues like life, family, or sexual ethics, is increasingly restricted by institutional and societal pressures.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

This category mainly covers Roman Catholic churches and smaller Orthodox and Protestant communities. They face violence, rising social intolerance, constraints on ministry in indigenous areas, and occasional pushback from historic churches (Christian denominational protectionism).

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

This category covers converts across denominations and from indigenous, guerrilla, or criminal backgrounds. In some indigenous settings they face harassment, restricted services, and expulsion for leaving the majority faith, under criminal control and threats often force displacement.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Mainly Baptist and Pentecostal communities face pressure and violence from criminal-groups; they often lack benefits accorded to historic churches, face opposition when engaging politically from secular authorities or institutions, and encounter restrictions or elevated risks when practicing their faith.

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CRIME

Dissident FARC factions, ELN members, drug cartels, and other armed groups control vast regions to protect illegal economies and, in some cases, advance political agendas. Christian leaders and communities who denounce violence, defend human rights, or evangelize among combatants face surveillance, threats, extortion, displacement, and killings. Church buildings are also targeted. In areas of heightened violence, churches are sometimes targeted and pressured by armed groups to lend legitimacy or consolidate control through their social influence. These dynamics threaten religious neutrality and expose communities to further harm. Converts abandoning criminal life due to faith also face retaliation. Across Colombia, escalating violence continues to generate increasingly alarming levels of insecurity, particularly in regions most affected by armed conflict.

CLAN OPPRESSION

In indigenous communities, an animistic worldview is deeply tied to identity. The introduction of non-traditional beliefs is often perceived as disruptive. Indigenous converts to Christianity may face punishments by local authorities, including imprisonment, fines, abuse, denial of basic services, and, in some cases, forced displacement.

SECULAR INTOLERANCE

Christians increasingly report verbal attacks, social tension, and forms of discrimination linked to opposition toward faith-based expressions. A strict interpretation of secularism can place religious freedom and conscience rights in tension with anti-discrimination norms. In the public sphere, Christian officials who express their beliefs or church affiliation may face criticism or pressure to remain neutral.

How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Young women and girls remain under constant threat. In gang-held territories, some girls are ‘bought’ from their families on pain of death. Other young Christian girls are targeted for seduction, with criminal group leaders gifting items such as motorcycles or expensive cell phones. Families are put under enormous pressure to surrender their young women (targeted for their perceived purity and obedience) to cartel leaders for sexual purposes. This dynamic puts pressure on the wider Christian community. Within some indigenous communities, Christians who refuse to follow indigenous rites and customs may face pressure and community ostracization.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Targeted seduction
- Violence – physical
- Violence – sexual
- Violence – verbal

MEN

Christian men face high levels of threats and violence, particularly in regions of armed conflict. As family providers, they can face extortion and death. Illegal armed groups pose one of the greatest threats to Christian men and boys, who are exposed to abduction, forced recruitment and violence. Church leaders are at particular risk, especially if they speak out against criminal groups. Several Church leaders have disappeared within the past reporting year, and/or been killed. As a result, many have fled. Within some indigenous communities, converts face pressure, physical punishment, ostracism, threats and forced labor.

Male typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Denied access to social community/networks
- Discrimination/harassment via education
- Economic harassment via fines
- Forced out of home – expulsion
- Forced to flee town/country
- Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
- Trafficking
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – verbal



WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	47	66
2025	46	66
2024	34	68
2023	22	71
2022	30	68

The overall score decreased by one point. This small drop led to a drop of 8 ranks in the list. While average The overall WWL score for Colombia remained unchanged, with average pressure stable at 10.7 points. The violence score did rise very slightly to 12.8 points, but this was offset by a small reduction in pressure in the Family sphere of life, due to fewer reported obstacles to registering Christian-related civil events (such as births or marriages) in certain indigenous settings. Nonetheless, in other dimensions, hostility against them, particularly converts, persists in some indigenous communities, where social exclusion, threats and other forms of intimidation continue to be reported. Criminal groups continue to control large parts of the national territory, and, during the reporting period, violence further intensified. The officially recorded killings of Christian leaders caused public shock and highlight that the Organized Corruption and Crime engine remains the main threat to the Church in the country. In addition, in the secular sphere, an environment of increased intolerance towards faith-based expressions in the public space persists, affecting Christians who seek to articulate their convictions on social, ethical or political issues.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- 01 July 2025:** Seven Christian believers kidnapped on 4 April were executed by FARC dissidents under “Iván Mordisco” ([Religion Unplugged, 08 July 2025](#)). Their bodies were recovered from a mass grave during operations. They were interrogated about alleged rival armed group presence before an execution order from senior command.
- 20 January 2025:** The facade of Holy Trinity Parish in Manizales was vandalized with the phrase “All Christians are bastards” ([La Patria, 20 January 2025](#)). The priest declined to comment, noting that acts of vandalism against the church and its visitors are recurrent.
- 29 March 2025:** In Boyacá, a church was vandalized by ethnic leaders opposing the gospel. Water pipes were cut, keys stolen, and kitchen facilities damaged. According to the pastor, the attack followed threats and targeted a space used to serve Christians attending worship from remote areas.



WWL Year	Christians physically/mentally abused	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country
2026	100*	8	22	100*
2025	121	6	46	262

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period – for full results see the violence section of the country’s corresponding WWL Persecution Dynamics. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100* or 1000*) is given which in reality could be significantly higher. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*.*

PRIVATE LIFE

Christians, especially converts, face rejection, threats, and surveillance in some indigenous territories and areas controlled by criminal groups. Meeting with other believers or sharing Christian content may be punished, especially if perceived as opposing local authority. In some regions, Christian materials are restricted or banned. Conversion may lead to family rejection and accusations before ethnic or criminal leaders. Christians may face hostilities from ideological pressure groups when they defend their faith-based opinions, particularly on digital platforms.

FAMILY LIFE

Christian parents might face different challenges when raising their children according to their faith. In criminal-controlled areas, opposition to indoctrination or recruitment can result in threats, separation, or displacement. In the indigenous context, schools aim to maintain the cultural identity of the ethnic group, so Christian students are forced to participate in animist activities. In both indigenous schools and government-run schools, the right of parents to raise their children according to their religious beliefs can be violated through compulsory classes that contradict their Christian principles.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Christians, especially in some indigenous territories or areas under criminal control, often face denial of basic services (drinking water, education, healthcare), surveillance, and community exclusion. Refusing to join traditional rituals or pay fines may result in violence, restrictions, or forced labor. Criminal

groups impose quotas and extort church members to maintain dominance. In regions with limited state presence, these groups act as de facto authorities, using interrogations and threats to intimidate, extract information, and suppress Christian activity.

NATIONAL LIFE

Christians face obstacles to justice in some Indigenous communities, where ethnic leaders act as both instigators and judges. In criminal-controlled regions, impunity prevails due to corruption and fear of reprisals. Freedom of movement is restricted in these regions. Meanwhile, faith-based expressions, especially those challenging secularist ideologies, are met with hostility in public and online spaces. All this has led many Christians to self-censor their beliefs to avoid retaliation.

CHURCH LIFE

Christian leaders and churches are frequently targeted in areas under criminal control or indigenous regions rejecting them. Surveillance, threats, and fines are common, especially when defending human rights, promoting peace, or working with youth. Families, including children, may be targeted. In some indigenous areas, preaching outside accepted traditions is punished, and Christian projects are banned as threats to cultural identity. In criminal zones, church initiatives are often restricted. Reporting abuse increases the risk of retaliation, heightening church vulnerability. Faith-based schools also face pressure to conform to state sexuality guidelines, limiting Christian expression.



International obligations & rights violated

Colombia has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under the following international treaties:

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ([ICCPR](#))
2. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ([ICESCR](#))
3. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ([CAT](#))
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#))
5. Convention on the Rights of the Child ([CRC](#))

Colombia is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christians are targeted by militias for expressing their faith ([ICCPR Art. 18](#))
- Christian children are harassed because of their parents' faith ([ICCPR Art. 18](#) and [CRC Art. 14](#))
- Christians face restrictions in employment in the public sector and experience discrimination in the private sector ([ICCPR Arts. 25 and 26](#), and [ICESCR Art. 6](#))
- Christians face harassment and violence if they discuss their faith or engage in proselytization ([ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19](#))

Situation of other religious minorities

In September 2024, the U.S. Embassy, echoing Special Envoy Deborah Lipstadt, warned that President Gustavo Petro's repeated comparisons of Israel's actions in Gaza to Nazi atrocities risk normalizing anti-Semitism ([El Economista, 21 September 2024](#)).



Open Doors in Colombia

Open Doors provides targeted assistance to strengthen the Church in the face of persecution, including:

- Biblical training and materials development
- Trauma counseling
- Legal advice
- Community development, biblical worldview training, and agricultural tools management
- Improvement of church infrastructure
- Support for productive projects
- Education programs, including children's centers and scholarships
- Emergency aid for victims of persecution



ABOUT THIS DOSSIER

- The content of this Country Dossier is based on detailed analysis carried out by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. This dossier may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2026 Open Doors International.
- All 50 Country Dossiers – along with the latest update of WWL Methodology – can be accessed [here](#).
- The WWL 2026 reporting period was 01 October 2024 - 30 September 2025.

A few of the photos this dossier are for illustrative purposes.