



Nicaragua Country Report 2024 By Lea Gruber

In 2007, Daniel Ortega won Nicaragua's presidential elections. In 2009, the Supreme Court removed the constitutional prohibition on presidential re-election. Ortega was re-elected in 2011. In 2016, opposition Members of Parliament were dismissed. In 2018, police and armed pro-government vigilantes [violently attacked](#) demonstrations against the government, killing at least [328 protesters](#), injuring 2,000 more, and detaining hundreds. Detained protesters faced torture and sexual assault. Since 2018, the political crisis has deepened.

The government has persecuted both its real and perceived [adversaries](#). Hundreds of political prisoners have been detained. Although many have been released, others were exiled and stripped of their nationality and property. [141 political prisoners remain](#) in Managua jails. In February 2023, the Nicaraguan government [revoked the citizenship](#) of 317 individuals, leaving most of them stateless. Those arrested include many [key figures in the opposition](#), former presidential candidates, human rights defenders, social and religious leaders, journalists, and media professionals, academics and artists.

Nicaraguan officials have actively [persecuted religious leaders](#), targeting churches in violation of the right to [freedom of religion](#). Many Catholic masses have been prohibited. The government and pro-government media have labelled priests of the Catholic Church as "coup plotters," "terrorists," or "agents of evil" in response to their criticisms of human rights abuses.

The Ortega regime has [incited violence and discrimination](#) against the Roman Catholic Church. It has also harassed and arrested many evangelical and Protestant leaders. In 2023, the regime revoked the registrations of over 340 Christian organizations and confiscated their properties. On January 14, 2024, Nicaraguan authorities [expelled nineteen Catholic priests](#) to Rome, silencing some of the last dissenting voices in the country. Those deported included [Bishop Rolando Alvarez](#) of Matagalpa, who was detained for 514 days starting August 19, 2022, and sentenced to 26 years in prison for allegedly "undermining national integrity" and "spreading fake news."

Human rights advocates and journalists face death threats, assaults, harassment, arbitrary detention and stripping of their nationality. By November 2023, the government had shut down over [3,500 NGOs](#). From 2018 to 2023, at least 57 media outlets were closed, severely curtailing [press freedom](#). Since January 2024, 23 more journalists have fled the country, increasing the number in exile to 208 since 2018.

There has been a sharp rise in [violent attacks on Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities](#) since 2018. The attacks particularly target activists critical of the government or advocating for land rights. State repression has included harassment, arbitrary detention, and property confiscation. Many minority leaders have gone into hiding or exile. Armed white settlers have attacked racial minorities, particularly in Mayangna Sauni As, resulting in 46 deaths and others tortured or raped. Settlers have forcibly taken [21,000 hectares](#) from the Miskitu, displacing 1,000 people. Indigenous leaders have been driven into exile and barred from returning. After detaining the party's leaders in September 2023, the government dissolved the [Indigenous party, YATAMA](#) for "undermining national integrity," under a vague statute.

Genocide Watch categorizes the Nicaraguan government's suppression of freedom of movement, expression, and religion as **Stage 3: Discrimination**. Dissolution of the Indigenous party YATAMA, and the rise in hate speech targeting religious leaders characterize **Stage 4: Dehumanization** and **Stage 6: Polarization**. Arbitrary imprisonment and exile of political opponents, stripping of their citizenship, expropriation of their property, and confiscation of the land of Indigenous and Afro-American communities place Nicaragua at **Stage 8: Persecution**.

Genocide Watch recommends that the OAS, US, EU, and UN should:

- Expedite political asylum for stateless exiles from Nicaragua, including their families.
- Apply Global Magnitsky sanctions on Nicaraguan officials responsible for crimes against humanity.
- Arrest and try Nicaraguan torturers who enter the US under the Torture Convention's universal jurisdiction.
- Charge Nicaragua in the Interamerican Court of Human Rights for violating Article 9 of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, for Nicaragua's deprivation of nationality on racial, ethnic, religious, or political grounds.
- Demand the unconditional release of all political prisoners, opposition leaders, journalists, religious and human rights activists.