

BIANNUAL REPORT

PERIOD

JULY - DECEMBER 2021





» About us

[OLIRE](#) is a research, training and advocacy program that monitors and documents the state of religious freedom in Latin America. We offer to be a space that allows the understanding and promotion of religious freedom from an academic, non-confessional and non-partisan perspective, which enables the strengthening of research on religious freedom and violations of this right in the region.

» Areas of work



Monitor:

We document, research, and analyze the state of religious freedom and its possible limitations in the different countries of the region. Especially the position of vulnerable religious minorities whose rights are being infringed.



Empower:

We train the public, political actors, and international institutions on the right to religious freedom and the range of hostilities and violations of this right in Latin America.



Influence:

We aim to participate and actively influence the social and public sphere, at the national and multilateral level to improve the protection of the right to religious freedom.





► Political and social context: a brief regional description

During the year 2021, following the catastrophic effects of the pandemic, efforts to reactivate the economy and enhance social inclusion have been varied, depending on the response capacity of the different countries in the region. In most cases, these measures have been insufficient due to ineffective fiscal strategies or monetary policies that have led to higher budgetary deficits and a substantial increase in public debt. Not to mention factors such as rising commodity prices, unemployment, and persistent restrictions in some economic sectors due to uncertainty caused by the emergence of new variants of COVID-19.

According to the Preliminary Balance of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL, 2021), “with the growth rates estimated for 2021 and 2022, less than half the countries in the region will have managed to recover the activity levels of 2019, before the crisis. This shows that the crisis caused by the pandemic has had lasting effects on economic growth in much of Latin America and the Caribbean and has aggravated the structural problems that already characterized the region before the crisis.”

This situation has brought about a profound social crisis in the region, which has required various emergency protection measures by the governments in power and international and multilateral organizations/agencies. Despite this, unemployment, school dropout, and poverty levels have significantly affected the lower-income strata. This panorama, together with the weakening of democracy and the rule of law, which is a consequence of corruption and impunity among government elites, has increased citizen dissatisfaction.

In the second half of the year, distrust in public institutions has persisted, influencing the results of electoral processes in the region. The presidential elections in Chile, Nicaragua, and Honduras, or the legislative, regional, and municipal elections in Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, to mention a few, were marked by political polarization. In some cases, the results of the polls have been discredited for lack of legitimacy and transparency and the repression of opposition parties or candidates.

Another phenomenon has to do with the use of social networks as a form of censorship and the manipulation of information in the official media of some governments through disinformation campaigns blocking access to the internet and social networks. New regulations on telecommunications and cybersecurity threaten the exercise of fundamental freedoms. In this context, attempts have been made to legitimize control strategies such as internet shutdowns, monitoring of emails, calls, etc., to monitor the population, including religious leaders and members of religious communities linked to leaders known or perceived as opposed to the party in power.

The voice and presence of religious leaders and communities have become stronger, demanding respect for human rights, an end to violence and corruption, an end to violence against women, independent justice systems, among others. Amid this panorama, religious communities and faith-based associations/organizations play an essential role in social reconstruction, justice, and peace dynamics. For example, in Mexico, ecumenical movements of religious organizations of different denominations and spiritual traditions and grassroots church communities have expressed their opposition to violence, discrimination, and

injustice. They called on various authorities to establish dialogue tables in the face of inter-religious dialogue conflicts or conflicts generated by the persecution suffered by communities due to the activities of criminal groups.

Another issue in which religious communities have played a vital role has been the migration crisis. Religious groups in Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico have committed to alleviating the basic needs of immigrants on their way to the United States. This assistance includes goods and services such as housing, food, clothing, education, medical care, and transportation. They have also been one of the first responders to the natural disasters that have struck Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Venezuela. Not to mention their role in denouncing abuses and lack of guarantees for human rights defenders and environmental defenders. For many of these groups, these activities have implied an increased risk to the human security of their members due to violence at the hands of organized crime, drug trafficking, guerrillas, and gangs.



In Chile, church authorities spoke out in favor of the presidential elections and the need to guarantee freedom of religion without discrimination in drafting the new constitution. In Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Honduras, despite the apathy of the citizenry regarding the elections, religious leaders managed to encourage the population to vote consciously and under what would most benefit the community. Likewise, they have taken a position to suspend dialogues with the opposition and other governmental acts that have put democratic institutionalism at risk. Countries with authoritarian tendencies such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela have led them to become the target of various reprisals, from episodes of physical violence and arbitrary arrests to defamation.



Sanctions of religious leaders or persons professing a particular faith are frequent under normative provisions of equality and non-discrimination. Also, in Mexico and Colombia, as well as in Argentina and Chile, to name a few, radical secular groups, often with the support of government authorities, seek or allow limitations on the free expression of religious actors in the public sphere. This has increased discrimination against those who identify with and live according to a particular doctrine, especially Christianity.

This environment has also influenced the continuity of intolerant actions against those

who profess the Christian religion (Catholic and non-Catholic), either through verbal attacks against religious leaders or attacks on places of worship, which on many occasions have included acts of desecration, not to mention the economic, historical and patrimonial cost and the affectation of the religious feelings of the parishioners. In this regard, it is essential to highlight that in its last report on the human rights situation in Chile, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights addressed the attacks to Catholic, Evangelical, and Jewish places of worship.



Finally, religious services continue to be dependent on the degree of impact of the coronavirus and the prior authorization granted for a gradual reopening of activities, often at the sole discretion of mayors, governors, or other local authorities. In some cases, even when religious leaders have the power to determine the protocols to be followed in each place of worship, they must necessarily adapt their decisions to the guidelines approved by the authorities. In other cases, the authorities have exceptionally engaged in dialogue with some religious leaders to jointly determine the measures to be adopted in places of worship. However, in most cases, the government unilaterally and often arbitrarily determines which activities remain or are suspended, including religious activities.

There is no doubt that the region's political, social, and economic context affects, or in any case dramatically influences, the promotion and guarantees for the whole exercise of human rights, including the right to religious freedom. Below we will describe in greater detail how the multiple dimensions of this right have been affected according to the contexts in which the different religious communities are immersed.



► Latin America: the state of religious freedom

This report will present the different challenges religious communities face in the region. To this end, we will analyze the conditions that have affected the enjoyment and exercise of their right to religious freedom, taking into account the following categories:

1

1. Regulation of religion by organized crime

As pointed out in the previous report, the de facto power exercised by leaders of criminal groups entails implementing a structure in which the government or state security forces have little or no interference. Local governments often have to negotiate with gangs to perform essential functions, including paying fees to enter certain areas. In other cases, it is the same authorities that make it possible for their activities to continue in collusion with these criminal groups.

These activities have led to disputes over the control of territories, transportation, and distribution routes in the case of actions linked to drug trafficking or human trafficking, recruitment of minors, installation of antipersonnel mines, threats to leaders and communities, selective assassinations, displacements, confinement, and sexual abuse. These confrontations influence the high level of insecurity, which also causes the massive displacement of families and entire communities.

As a common practice, in these contexts, the authorities have entrusted state security to the armed forces through strategies or public policies that have given the military a greater scope of action. However, these measures, far from reducing violence, have increased the level of insecurity and criminality and the increase in violations of the human rights of citizens. In specific contexts, violence has been reported as a result of abuses by the national police and military in cases of disproportionate use of public force recorded in some social mobilizations.

In Colombia, congregations, churches, national faith communities, and international solidarity networks are constantly speaking out in response to the serious events that indigenous, Afro-descendant, and peasant communities are suffering from the armed conflict. In Mexico, corruption continues to be endemic, giving rise to greater impunity for the actions of criminal groups. Dioceses in the country's most troubled areas have issued statements in response to the spiral of violence. Community leaders belonging to religious communities and missions have been assassinated or are victims of delegitimization, defamation, and constant discredit for their human rights activities and are at risk. Some religious figures have played

a fundamental role in the conflict between cartels, as they link all the characters involved: victims, hired killers, and the government. In Honduras and El Salvador, coalitions of religious groups, religious representatives, and laypeople have also condemned murders and abuses against indigenous leaders. During these scenarios of violence, religious communities, as well as religious leaders with more significant influence and political or social participation, who act as social leaders in defense of human rights, justice, the environment, and land rights, have been threatened, kidnapped, or murdered for their critical voice, for having denounced corruption or for having tried to stop the criminal activities of criminal groups.

For their part, the economic crisis, the increase in the population living in extreme poverty, and the closure of schools have led to a greater number of young people joining the ranks of criminal groups. It means that educational or rehabilitation programs run by religious groups are at risk of being dismantled. Religious leaders also worry for their children and their survival as they risk being recruited or forced to obey the demands of organized crime groups.





Likewise, religious leaders continue to be subjected to extortion, kidnapping, and death threats. These incidents lead to the cancellation of worship activities or limitations relating to specific schedules in many cases. Many churches in rural areas have changed the schedule of their services so that parishioners can attend the houses of worship without risking their human security. It is common for these groups to impose an unofficial curfew in which no one in the community may be out of their homes after a particular time of night.

In addition to the abovementioned, as another form of economic income for criminal groups, the theft of parishes and other places of worship in various countries in the region continues to be frequent, substantial, and even violent. Criminal groups continue destroying and stealing goods or images of high economic value and donations and collections that would be destined to meet some of the needs of both the religious denomination in question and the communities to which they belong. In the process, desecration of images or objects of profound symbolic/religious value for the parishioners is common. These events occur even during religious celebrations, putting the integrity of the attendees at risk. Although communities and religious leaders make efforts

and calls to the authorities to pay attention to this problem, when responses have been provided, they have been insufficient. Even the work of religious groups focused on humanitarian assistance aimed at alleviating the ravages of the pandemic is at constant risk of criminal responses such as robberies or armed attacks, not to mention that in many cases, religious leaders require the permission of cartel, gang, or guerrilla leaders to continue their activities in certain areas.

In this context, the right to religious freedom is limited, especially in its collective dimension as violence and insecurity prevent the full enjoyment of dimensions related to worshipping or gathering in connection with a religion or belief, establishing and maintaining premises for these purposes, teaching a particular religion, and even celebrating religious festivals or rites. All this without mentioning the limitations to the right to security and integrity of those who seek to act following their faith, when this implies being considered by criminal groups as obstacles that must be eradicated or at least controlled by any means possible.



2

Religious restrictions motivated by an antireligious political ideology (communism) and by the totalitarian control of the government

In countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, the health crisis provoked by COVID-19 intensified the already excessive concentration of power and the disappearance of democratic controls at the expense of the fundamental freedoms of their citizens. The political use of religion to achieve legitimacy among citizens is common in these contexts. The approach to some evangelical Christian groups (not representative of the entire evangelical community) depends on the affiliation of these groups or their leaders to the regime and the interests of the party. However, it is essential to note that, despite this, more and more religious leaders have had more significant participation in denouncing the abuses of the different regimes, even when this situation has made them targets of reprisals by the government, sympathizers of the party in power and even groups related to the government.

During the latest social protests, historic in Cuban territory, various limitations to the right to religious freedom were observed in the Cuban case. This period made the escalation

of repression even more evident against any dissident voice. Peaceful protests were subject to harassment and attacks by members of state security. Religious leaders exercising their right to protest or accompanying young people who came out to protest were also victims of arbitrary detentions and even physical violence, not to mention the subsequent monitoring and harassment by authorities and sympathizers towards them and their families. Similarly, it was reported that the Office of Assistance to Religious Affairs directed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba threatened religious leaders who were considering demonstrating in the November 2021 protests, the Civic March for Change in Cuba.

Threats included risks of eviction from their homes due to fear instilled in landlords as sanctions were directed even at property owners, to prevent them from renting or donating their space as a domicile or for holding religious services or meetings of members of churches known or perceived to be critical of the government.



In addition to this, acts of repudiation and vandalism against places of worship, defamation campaigns by the authorities, unfounded and arbitrary summons of pastors to the headquarters of the National Revolutionary Police, with the risk of arrest for those who do not show up, have been identified. We can also mention the prohibition of some religious leaders to enter hospitals, with the consequent denial of religious services to the sick and the ban of some religious leaders openly critical of the regime or those who support the opposition to leave the country. In addition to continuing hostilities, all these applied, especially to unregistered religious denominations.

In Venezuela, religious leaders have stated that some civilian and National Guard authorities have at times impeded the distribution of humanitarian aid to victims of natural disasters and some of the populations hardest hit by COVID-19. This is due to the absolute control that the government seeks in distributing goods and services to subject the citizenry to follow party orders and guidelines. Following this line, the government provides more significant benefits to those churches allied to the regime, both in terms of facilities for developing their activities, such as registration, issuance of permits, authorizations, and use of services.

In Nicaragua, as long as the line of religious groups or leaders diverges from the regime's interests, they have also become targets of

repressive measures. Due to the material and spiritual care and attention that the Church has provided to the protesters of the 2018 marches and their families, the state has labeled and treated its members as cassock devils, coup plotters, terrorists, and enemies. Notably, the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua, through the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of the Archdiocese of Managua, has been concerned with promoting calls for peace, justice, and respect. In the last electoral context, some members of the Church have assumed to encourage the population to fulfill their civic duties but following their conscience. Some others urged the citizens not to vote given the lack of transparency and due process.

Similarly, there are evangelical groups that, despite not agreeing with the government's repressive actions, do not openly declare themselves against the regime. This has led them to be labeled - in some cases erroneously - as party sympathizers. Evangelical church leaders noted that, due to this mistaken impression, many of the participants of the 2018 protests felt afraid to come to them. While during the April 2018 crisis and to date, the work of the Catholic Church in defending those who went out to protest against the government is highlighted, it is important to mention that some evangelical churches that provided humanitarian assistance to the population were also and continue to be the target of attacks and repression.

Among the hostilities deployed against religious leaders, we can mention arbitrary detentions and abuses directed at believers during their time in prison. Beyond physical abuses against them or their families, there are cases of limitations on the possession and use of religious materials and the prohibition of spiritual assistance to detainees. Similarly, foreign religious leaders have experienced the revocation of their visas or have been prevented from returning to the country after several years working in national territory without adequate explanation. In other cases, their immigration permits were renewed only temporarily and were at risk of being canceled at any time.

On the other hand, religious leaders openly critical of the regime continue to be monitored. Preaching or teachings both inside and outside the Church are monitored by the national police and by sympathizers of the regime. Another tactic used by the government is the defamation of religious leaders to diminish their credibility in their communities.

In these governments, schools still indoctrinate children and adolescents under the ideological guidelines of the political party in power. Parents who express their disagreement or denounce discrimination cases either by teachers or fellow students against their children because of the

faith they profess are threatened and silenced. Similarly, teachers are forced to participate in political activities of the government in power, even when this contradicts their beliefs, under threat of suspension or dismissal.

Finally, we can also mention Honduras and El Salvador as risk scenarios for developing the activities of religious denominations. Although there is no marked line of oppression against religious communities or, in general, against the right to religious freedom, some actions - as a result of corruption and the desires of those in power to perpetuate themselves in power - have limited certain dimensions of this right. In the case of Honduras, some Christian organizations were unable to deliver aid directly to those affected by the COVID-19 crisis or by the natural disasters that struck the country because the authorities demanded that they provide it themselves on behalf of the government. In the case of El Salvador, some religious leaders have expressed that, although there is no confrontation with the Church, the path of the authoritarian and populist government and the evident attacks on critics or those who denounce irregularities of public institutions or the same party and especially of the president suggests that at some point there could be signs of intolerance against an increasingly critical church.





3

Hostility towards religious expressions by state and non-state actors

The participation and influence of the religious sector in the public sphere are accepted to a certain extent when it is involved in peace processes or humanitarian assistance. However, the situation becomes more complex in other scenarios, especially those related to education or health sector regulations promoted by sexual minorities. In Argentina and Chile, attempts to intervene in schools with a confessional religious ideology have been identified when their curricula or form of administration do not meet the requests of such minorities. In Cuba, religious denominations that have taken a stand against the teaching of sexual and reproductive rights in the national education system for violating the right of parents to educate their children according to their beliefs have also suffered acts of vandalism.

On the other hand, while there is a normative framework that recognizes the right to religious freedom and freedom of expression, attempts have been made throughout Latin America to limit or censor the manifestations of religious leaders in the public sphere.

It is increasingly common to identify attempts to censor the views of confessional actors and anti-discrimination norms that limit or jeopardize the freedom to express one's convictions, especially when the content contradicts or criticizes issues such as abortion, sexual diversity, gender identity, same-sex marriage, among others. Specifically, the presence of the phenomenon of self-censorship has also been identified in the case of Christians as a consequence of the "chilling effect." This phenomenon occurs when a person cannot or does not feel free to express their faith or convictions openly, or when they cannot express their views based on their beliefs due to fear of sanctions from laws and policies that indirectly reduce freedom of religious expression if it goes against the prevailing culture. Another critical aspect continues to be the indiscriminate use of social networks as a mechanism to attack confessional viewpoints. For some time now, virtual platforms have become the main scenarios of hostility against expressions of faith.

Likewise, we continue to witness attacks against religious temples, especially Christian ones. In the context of International Women's Day, radical feminist groups continue to make vandalism and attacks on places of worship the slogan of their demands and a sign of rejection of the Church and its stance against abortion. In Argentina, Mexico, and Colombia, to mention a few, the level of intolerance has also caused continuous graffiti and desecration of places of worship, whether the protests originate among radical feminist groups or other anarchist groups that target the Church during their social protests. In Bolivia, sites such as the headquarters of the Episcopal Conference have also been attacked, and other places of worship have been vandalized during religious services. In Chile, the burning of evangelical temples and Catholic churches persists in the areas of Araucanía, Bío Bío, and the country's capital. Ordinary citizens, not necessarily affiliated with ideological groups, have also attacked temples. During the last social protests, vandalism, desecration, and attacks on churches have been a way of expressing social discontent and rejection of religious doctrines, particularly Christian ones, whose content is understood by some sectors as the cause of structural inequalities in society. Usually, there is a lack of response from the authorities in the face of this type of event.

It is also worth mentioning the permanent intention to eliminate all religious references from the public sphere under a radical understanding of church-state separation. In Mexico, this premise is still very much in force.

In the second half of the year, several efforts were reported by various government offices to sanction under the charge of violation of the principle of secularism and separation of church-state, not only religious leaders, especially Catholics, for the emission and dissemination of political-electoral messages through their social networks but also politicians, for disseminating or replicating messages from ministers of worship. Statements from a minister of worship motivated the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary to annul the election of the mayor of Tlaquepaque. Similarly, the State Electoral Tribunal of Guanajuato (TEEG) imposed a public reprimand sanction against the political party Morena for using religious expressions during its campaign. The Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Power of the Federation (TEPJF) confirmed the lawfulness of withdrawing two television advertisements of the Solidarity Encounter Party that criticized abortion and homosexual marriage during the electoral campaign period. All this in addition to the sentence of the Superior Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Power of the Federation (TEPJF), in which it resolved that ecclesiastical authorities allegedly transgressed the principle of separation Church-State by assuming that the locutions of the ministers of worship referred directly and expressly against a political party, something forbidden according to Mexican regulations.





The right to conscientious objection has also been particularly limited in this period. In Argentina, health personnel have been threatened and sanctioned for not carrying out procedures that went against their beliefs. The pursuit of approval of euthanasia in Argentina and Uruguay and the expansion of the cases in which euthanasia can be requested in Colombia bring to the table how the right to conscientious objection of medical personnel is protected in the region. This right has been seriously limited in Mexico, where the Supreme Court declared invalid an article of the general health law that enshrined conscientious objection because it is imprecise and affects the rights of patients, especially women and pregnant women. In other words, it delimits the right to conscientious objection in the medical field so that it may be regulated and does not produce violations of the right to health, particularly reproductive and sexual health.

Finally, amid the arrival of the various variants of COVID-19, the return to quarantine, immobilization, or limitation of the capacity for certain activities still depends on the degree/increase of contagion in each country

or state and affects the development of religious services. Religious celebrations are one of the first activities to be limited or totally prohibited to prevent the spread of COVID-19, despite each religious group's implementation of the corresponding security protocols. In some countries in the region, such as Argentina, Christian denominations expressed their disagreement with denying entry to worship to not vaccinated people, as this would limit their right to religious freedom. In some cases, authorities sought to prevent religious activities or services from coinciding with election days under the pretext of avoiding chaos or some kind of disorder. In Cuba, the official pretext for canceling religious services in some territories was the COVID-19 pandemic, but for many religious leaders, the background of the prohibition was related to the government's fear that the crowds would lead to demonstrations such as those of July 11. Even the Association of Free Yorubas of Cuba presented a complaint to the authorities because they are not free to carry out their activities and ceremonies due to the restrictions.



4

Hostility towards religious conversion in indigenous communities

A particular shared worldview governs indigenous communities. By this worldview, different for each indigenous community, essential aspects for indigenous life in society can be understood. This includes political, economic, and cultural elements, including the relationship with the environment and religion. Since the religious aspect within indigenous communities largely determines their life in society, those who decide not to continue with the syncretic practices of the population due to religious conversion may become victims of hostilities.

Syncretic practices in these indigenous communities are often related to the Catholic religion. In other words, it is self-styled Catholic tribal leaders who constantly harass indigenous members that have converted to another Christian denomination, usually evangelical. However, these attitudes of intolerance are

typical of traditional indigenous leaders and do not represent the Catholic Church as an institution.

Some incidents related to this phenomenon have been identified in Mexico and Colombia. Converts to a non-syncretic or non-majority religion on the indigenous reserve are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations. They face various forms of harassment and discrimination, including exclusion from essential services, arbitrary arrests, threats, forced labor, sexual harassment, and even violence. Religious freedom is also severely restricted, as any religious activity contrary to the rites of the people is prohibited. This has led to the forced displacement of entire families, the destruction of their property, or pressure to leave the community.

These incidents are linked to personal disputes or between communities and certain members in many cases. The authorities do not always recognize the elements surrounding religious intolerance; however, this should not be an obstacle to addressing the issues around this problem. Forced displacement is perhaps one of the most severe consequences since it not only implies the uprooting of the convert and his family but also the beginning of a whole cycle of violations of fundamental rights such as the right to life, personal integrity, freedom of movement, personal safety, housing, work, health, food, etc.

In any case, recognizing religious intolerance as one of the causes will help to design and implement affirmative measures that address the causes of the problem and, in the best of cases, to implement preventative measures that protect the right to religious freedom of the members of the reserves or indigenous communities, respecting as far as possible the uses and customs of these groups, in accordance with the human rights of all of the inhabitants.



News Monitoring

OLIRE's main activity is monitoring the state of religious freedom in the region, which can be divided into two large areas:



The first one corresponds to incidents of physical violence as violations of freedom of religion. The tool used by OLIRE to document these incidents is the [Violent Incidents Database-VID](#), following specific [reference criteria](#).¹



The data presented in this section have been obtained with the collaboration of the Latin American Research Unit of Open Doors International.

Table 1: **Incidence of violence in Latin America** (July - December 2021)

Country	Killings	(Attempts) to destroy, vandalize or desecrate places of worship or religious buildings	Sentences	Arrests / detentions	Kidnappings	Other forms of attack / death threats	Forced to leave home	Forced to leave the country
Argentina	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bolivia	0	5	0	0	0	10	0	0
Brazil	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0
Chile	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Colombia	1	12	0	24	4	20	11	0
Cuba	0	3	0	21	0	4	0	0
El Salvador	3	3	0	0	2	10	0	4
Haiti	1	0	0	0	18	0	0	0
Honduras	1	3	0	0	0	5	0	0
Mexico	3	11	0	4	0	12	0	0
Nicaragua	0	13	0	0	0	10	1	1
Venezuela	0	9	0	5	0	0	0	5

Source: OLIRE, Violent Incidents Database – VID.

¹ It is important to note that the Observatory team does not have the resources to validate each reported incident. If, after an incident has been entered, the users or our collaborators detect that the information provided is not entirely correct or is incomplete, it may be eliminated and/or modified.

The updating of this database is continuous, so the total number of incidents may vary as new cases are registered/identified. To view the updated data, enter [here](#)



The forms of *physical violence* considered are those violent actions that endanger the human security of confessional actors, religious communities, and their members, either through physical abuse, kidnappings, murders, robberies, etc.; or through vandalism or other acts that affect both places of worship and their property (businesses, residences, etc.).

For illustrative purposes, here is a brief list of some of the incidents reported and identified by OLIRE in the period from July to December 2021. The complete list of identified incidents is available in our [Violent Incidents Database-VID](#):



- The walls of a temple of the Evangelical Church of Río de la Plata, in the province of Entre Ríos, were vandalized with [graffiti](#) with the symbol of a swastika.
- The San Maron Cathedral of the Maronite community in Buenos Aires was vandalized with the theft of elements of great commercial and religious value, having been [profaned](#) the tabernacle and stolen relics of saints.
- The walls of a temple of the Evangelical Church of Río de la Plata, in the province of Entre Ríos, were vandalized with graffiti with the symbol of a swastika.
- The San Maron Cathedral of the Maronite community in Buenos Aires was vandalized with the theft of elements of great commercial and religious value, having been profaned the tabernacle and stolen relics of saints.
- The Metropolitan Cathedral of Buenos Aires was vandalized by anarchists during demonstrations [painting the walls](#) with phrases such as: "The only church that illuminates is the one that burns."



- Radical feminists of the collective "Mujeres Creando" [disrupt the celebration](#) and vandalize the Cathedral Basilica Minor de San Lorenzo by throwing paint. Bolivian indigenous women of the Guarayo people expel the demonstrators from the surroundings of the Church.
- The faithful gathered at the entrance of the Maria Auxiliadora Church were [attacked](#) with buckets of paint, feces, bottles, and other objects. The aggressions came from demonstrators of the march for the International Day of Non-Violence against Women.
- Masked people in biosecurity suits set off a [homemade bomb](#) at the entrance of the headquarters of the Bolivian Episcopal Conference.
- Ombudsman (Nadia Cruz) is identified as part of a group of officials of the Ombudsman's Office and radical feminists who [vandalized](#) with posters and graffiti the door of the headquarters of the Bolivian Episcopal Conference.



Source: Bolivian indigenous people confront feminists who attacked a cathedral, Panam Post.



- A priest of the Apostolate of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Family was the victim of [attempted murder](#) with a machete by an unknown person.
- In the diocese of Campos, several chapels have been victims of desecration, among them the new Chapel of San Amaro, where thieves [desecrated](#) the tabernacle and stole religious and electronic items.



- Offices of the Bishopric of Talca were [vandalized and set](#) on fire by unknown people, damaging the offices of the Vicariate of Youth, the Vicariate of Social Pastoral, the Department of Tithes, the Pastoral for Migrants, and the Foundation of University Students' Homes.
- A Catholic church and an evangelical temple were set on fire by unknown people during an [attack](#) in the province of Arauco. It is presumed that the fire responded to the onset of the new state of emergency in the territory known as Macro Zona Sur.



Source: They burn an evangelical temple and a Catholic church during attacks in the province of Arauco, Bio Bio Chile.cl.



- Pastor Alape Lascarro denounces that a humanitarian mission of peace signatories in La Sombra in the Yari Plains, traveling from the province of Meta to Caquetá, was [attacked](#) by men armed with rifles.
- Young Christian man from a traditional indigenous community of the Arhuaco ethnic group was forced to marry an older woman to "return to traditional customs." Similarly, a young Christian indigenous woman from a traditional Arhuaco community was forced to marry an older man (internal sources).
- [Radical female protesters](#) arrived at San Ignacio de Loyola church square, started painting graffiti on the Church, ripped off railings, and set fire to the wooden doors. A group of parishioners tried to intervene and close the doors of the Church, injuring one of them.



Source: Some peaceful and dialoguing feminists set fire to a Catholic church... with faithful inside, during a Eucharist!, Hispanidad.

- Members of the National Liberation Army [attacked](#) a church, the parish house, and the priest's vehicle in the city of Hacari. A person entered the National Marian.
- Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Rosary of Chiquinquirá, violently [assaulted](#) and stole part of the jewels of the Virgin's Canvas.



- The priest Rolando Montes de Oca denounces that his parish has been the victim of an [act of repudiation](#) by unknown people that threw eggs at the parish house and left a sign saying, “filthy worm.”
- During the [July 11](#) protests, Yarian Sierra and Yéremi Blanco Ramírez, of the William Carey Bible Seminary, and Pastor Yusniel Pérez Montejo, a member of the Eastern Baptist Convention of Cuba, were arrested and kept in solitary confinement. Although they have been released, some are under house arrest and remain facing criminal charges.
- Several young people were arrested for sharing information on the networks after the protests. Catholic media correspondents, youth ministry members, the son of a deacon, and members of the Christian Liberation Movement were [forced out of their homes](#) by State security forces.



Source: They denounce arrests of young Catholics for reporting on networks about the protests in Cuba, Martí.

- Jorge Naranjo, an active member, and pastor of the First Evangelical Church of Las Tunas, was [arrested](#) by the Revolutionary Police during the peaceful marches of July 11. His location is unknown.
- The Catholic priest, Carlos Alvarez, stands up for a group of young people against police repression during the peaceful march on July 11. For confronting the authorities, Alvarez was beaten and arrested on [charges](#) of public disorder.
- Luis Alberto Salazar Campos, the pastor of the Missionary Church of Cuba, his wife, and three small children, were victims of an [attack with stones](#) on the parsonage roof. These attacks are recurrent, and it is presumed that they are individuals incited by State Security.
- Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo, pastor, and leader of the Monte de Sion Independent Church in Palma Soriano, was [arrested](#) by State Security agents during the peaceful protests of 11J. He was detained for a month in a detention center and later transferred to the Boniato maximum security prison on charges of crimes such as “disrespect” and “public disorder.”
- Cuban priest Rolando Montes de Oca and Sister Nadieska Almeida Miguel denounce having been [harassed and persecuted](#) in two different places and circumstances while on the move during the repression of the peaceful march of 15N.
- Seminarian Raudel Morales Montero, priest Eduardo, and nuns of the Daughters of Charity, dressed in cassock and habit during the 15N march, [were harassed and persecuted](#) by repressive agents and state security, threatening them with alleged evidence to arrest them.



EL SALVADOR

- Thieves enter and [desecrate](#) the Parish of San Cayetano and steal the image of the Virgin of the Rosary. The image has a significant historical and religious value.
- Reinaldo Ayala and Óscar Pérez, two former gang members and a third person were killed while [praying](#) in the evangelical Church 'Cristo Te Llama.' This community is known for sheltering converted gang members.



HAITI

- Seventeen Christian Aid Ministries missionaries were [kidnapped](#) in Port-au-Prince by the "400 Mawozo" gang during a visit to an orphanage in Ganthier.



Source: Kidnapped Haitian Missionaries Describe Daring Escape, News.

- Rogerio Mossimann da Silva, a Jesuit priest, was [kidnapped](#) for four days by armed gangs controlling the movements of the novitiate in Port-au-Prince.
- Father André Silvestre, a 70-year-old parish priest in one of the country's most populated cities, is [murdered](#) by members of armed gangs.
- Churches in Port-au-Prince are suffering because of the [fear sown](#) by armed gangs; parishioners are afraid of approaching the churches and being the target of kidnappings.



MEXICO

- In the state of Veracruz, the Xalapa Cathedral was vandalized by feminists with [graffiti and posters](#) related to abortion in the context of its decriminalization by the local congress.



Source: Feminists vandalize Cathedral after approval of abortion in Veracruz, Aciprensa.

- During the march for the global day of action for abortion, a mob of women vandalized the cathedral of Mexico City, [burning and destroying](#) the security fences and writing on the walls slogans such as "legal abortion" "pedophiles."
- José Guadalupe Popoca Soto, a Catholic priest, was [found dead](#) with gunshots on his body inside his parish in the state of Morelos. He was known in the community for his pastoral work rehabilitating young gang members.
- Simón Pedro Pérez López, a catechist in Pantelhó, Chiapas state and moral leader in the region, was murdered after denouncing the harassment by [criminal groups](#) that have forced the displacement of families in the area.
- Archdiocese of Durango denounces consecutive [fire attacks](#) on churches in the state capital. Among them, the door of the Church Santísima Trinidad, which was seriously damaged by a Molotov cocktail bomb.





- Internal sources indicated that in Carazo, the San José school and chapels were ransacked. Religious images were destroyed.
- According to information provided by Catholic bishops, they and their families have been constantly threatened with death for not supporting the government and denouncing the injustices of the regime. Some bishops mentioned a “list of names” prepared by the Sandinista police to eliminate all opponents, including at least 20 bishops, priests, and active lay Catholics.
- The Chapel of Las Esquinas, which belongs to the Parish of San Caralampio, was [vandalized](#). The perpetrators desecrated the Eucharist.



Source: Sacrilege in Las Esquinas Chapel. DIRIAMBA, Facebook Católica Nicaragüense.

- Thieves were caught [stealing](#) in St. Judas Tadeo Parish. The priest, Mario Alonso Palacios, reported that the thieves entered after cutting the perimeter fence. They also opened a church van.



- Evangelical pastor Américo González, was victim of an attempted murder by [two hitmen](#) in San Juan de Miraflores.
- Pastor Carlos Castrejón Cueva of the Jesus Christ Evangelical Church in Túcume was [brutally murdered](#) inside the facilities of his congregation. The murder was apparently in revenge against the pastor for appearing as a witness in an investigation.



Source: A pastor is brutally murdered in Peru, Mundo Cristiano.



- Due to constant [vandalism and threats](#), the parish community decided to remove all religious symbols from the Church.
- Parishes of the Metropolitan Church of Caracas denounced the violent detention of Jairo Pérez and Oraima Guillén, [lay social](#) activists of the community by the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) and the Military Counterintelligence Directorate (DGCIM).
- Father Eduardo Daboin, the parish priest of the San José de Paraguaipoa church, denounced that believers of a Christian movement intolerant to other denominations [burned an image](#) of St. Juan Bautista inside a chapel.



The second field of research corresponds to the monitoring and subsequent analysis of other forms of non-physical violence, such as discrimination, social exclusion, and various forms of pressure.

For illustrative purposes, here is a brief list of some of the incidents reported and identified by OLIRE in the period from July to December 2021. The complete list of identified incidents is available in our [Violent Incidents Database-VID](#):



ARGENTINA

- Two nurses were suspended at a private clinic in San Juan after exercising their right to [conscientious objection](#) and refusing to perform an abortion. The authorities accused them of “patient abandonment.”



Source: San Juan: two nurses were sanctioned for refusing to attend an abortion and there is controversy, Clarín.

- A family denounced an evangelical Christian educational institution in Salta before the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI) on the charge of [discrimination](#) for conditioning the admission of students and treatment according to their biological sex.



BRAZIL

- Christian influencer denounces [death threats](#) for defending biblical principles. She claims that she has received many attacks because of her faith in God. Organizations have considered her a person who “incites hatred.”



COLOMBIA

- The Atheists Association of Bogotá filed a [tutelage action](#) and stopped the purchase of 720 bibles by the National Police for their chapels throughout the country.
- In Natagaima (Tolima), members of the LGBTIQ + community demand the intervention of the authorities to [sanction and transfer](#) to another municipality the priest Ricardo Zabala, accused of giving a “homophobic” sermon.
- Constitutional Court rejects an action of tutela filed by a member of the Seventh Day Church against the University of Boyacá for [not respecting](#) his Sabbath rest day.



Source: Through a guardianship, an atheist citizen prevented the National Police from buying 720 bibles with state resources, Infobae.

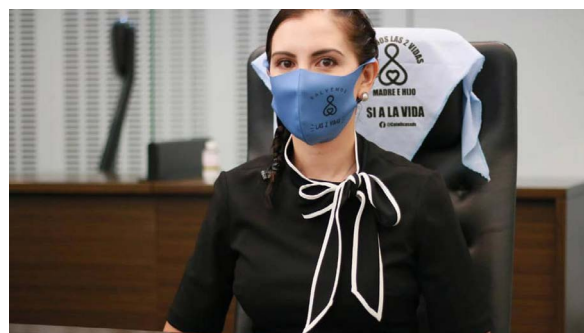




- Pastor Alain Toledano claims that he and his community have been [forced to leave](#) their place of worship. They claim that government officials are manipulating alleged accusations against them to close the community's house-temple.
- Father Jorge Luis Perez, who responded to the request of a Catholic woman in critical condition, was [denied access](#) to the hospital by the chief on duty at the Hermanos Aimejiras Hospital in Havana. The doctor argued that the refusal was because faith is lived "strictly in the private sphere."
- Yoan Rodríguez, a young member of the Methodist Church of Ariza, is threatened by authorities to [lose his job](#) if he does not participate in the mandatory military service where young people are forced to join repressive groups.
- Julio Pernús, editor and network manager of the Vida Cristiana Digital media, was summoned on two occasions to be [questioned](#) about his relations with civil society organizations.
- Father Kenny Fernandez, one of the signatories of a letter and video for pacifism and brotherhood, is summoned by State Security agents and [threatened](#) that "any activity outside the temple" on 25N will be paid with the "law" as a counter-revolutionary.
- The Office of Attention to Religious Affairs identifies and [threatens](#) priests in Camagüey of being arrested if they participate in the march for change in Cuba on November 15.



- The Supreme Court of Justice [invalidated](#) art. 10 of the General Health Law on conscientious objection, ruling that it is not an absolute right and cannot be invoked in every case or modality.
- Congresswoman Elsa Méndez from the state of Querétaro suffers [political and judicial persecution](#) as she is accused of "discrimination" for speeches and initiatives that defend life and the family according to Christian principles.



Source: Mexico | Pro-life deputy Elsa Méndez suffers political and judicial harassment for her ideas, Evangélico Digital.

- The Specialized Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal of the Judiciary ruled that two cardinals, an archbishop and other ministers, [violated the Republic's principles of equity and secularism](#) in the past elections by calling their parishioners not to vote for the current government for going against Catholic values and principles.
- The Mexican Episcopal Conference warns of the presence of criminals [usurping](#) the name and photos of supposedly sick bishops and priests to extort parishioners.
- The Evangelical Network of the State of Veracruz claims educational institutions to respect the right of [non-Catholic students](#) not to participate in the day of the Dead celebrations because it goes against their beliefs.

- The Electoral Tribunal [sentenced](#) that it is licit to withdraw the television announcements of the Encuentro Solidario Party, of Christian inspiration, for being considered discriminatory and exceeding the limits of freedom of expression.
- The Archbishop of Yucatan, Monsignor Gustavo Rodriguez Vega, is [denounced](#) before the National Council to Prevent discrimination for delivering a homophobic hate speech in the context of the approval of equal marriage in the state.
- The president of the Board of Directors of the Jewish Community in Merida, Alejandro Rabinovich Noé, is the target of "[Judeophobic](#)" attacks by phone and physical attacks at his home.



- The General Direction of Migration and Foreigners [denies](#) the renewal of residency of Friar Damian Muratori, an Italian religious with legal residence for 40 years.



Source: Migration doesn't renew residence to Franciscan priest, rector of the sanctuary El Tepeyec, Artículo 66

- Immigration officials at the Managua Airport [arbitrarily retain](#) Monsignor Silvio Fonseca's passport, preventing his free transit and departure from the country.
- Archdiocese of Managua [denounces threats](#) by the government of Daniel Ortega with limitations on the visa or residence of foreign priests.

Government authorities [confiscate and prevent](#) the Archdiocese of Managua from taking possession of goods and buildings donated by the diplomatic mission of Taiwan after the sudden break in diplomatic relations.

The bishop of Matagalpa, Monsignor Rolando Alvarez, the auxiliary bishop of Managua,

- Monsignor Silvio Baez, and Father Edwin Roman, parish priest of the San Miguel de Masaya church, are victims of a [defamation campaign](#) sponsored by the regime in a documentary called "Political Priests." They are accused of "meddling" in political life, promoting government changes, and even coups d'état.



Source: Ortega propaganda launches "black campaign" against priests, Nación.

- Sandinista congressman Wilfredo Navarro accused the Catholic Church of Nicaragua of [electoral crimes](#) for the statement issued by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Managua expressing that "Nicaraguans cannot vote" and that "there are no conditions for elections."



- Priest denounced on social networks have been [receiving threats](#) from unknown individuals, finding envelopes with bullets inside, and having his social networks hacked.



*To report other cases/news, please
contact us at info@olire.org or enter
our online [form](#)*



OBSERVATORY OF
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
IN LATIN AMERICA