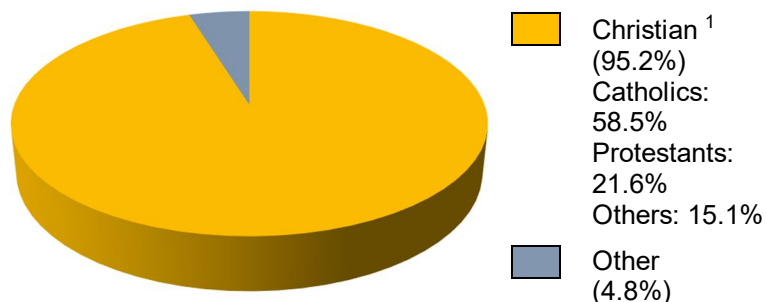


NICARAGUA



Area: 120,254 km ²	Population²: 5.9 million	Political system: Democracy ³	Major Language(s): Spanish
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Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In its preamble, the constitution says that the document was produced in the name of the Nicaraguan people, parties, men and women, as well as Christians whose faith in God led them to help the oppressed.

The State of Nicaragua has no official religion. Everyone is equal before the law and no discrimination is admissible on the basis of birth, nationality, political beliefs, race, sex, language, religion, opinion, origin, economic status, or social status. Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience and thought and the right to profess a religion or not. No one can be subject to coercive measures that compromise these rights, nor can anyone be compelled to declare their creed, ideology or belief.

Religious groups have the right to set up organisations to realise their aspirations.

Everyone, individually or collectively, has the right to express his or her religious beliefs in private or in public, through worship, practice and teaching. No one can avoid upholding the law in the name of religious beliefs or norms.

Education is secular. Private schools have the right to be religious in orientation and teach religion as an extra-curricular subject.

No minister of religion can run for President, Vice-President or Member of Parliament, unless they waive their right to exercise their ministry at least 12 months before the election.

Communities on the Caribbean Coast are guaranteed the right to develop in accordance with their historical and cultural traditions and preserve their cultures, languages, religions and customs.⁴

Incidents

In October 2015, the authorities detained Pastor Javier Sanchez, leader of the Cuerpo místico de Cristo (Mystical Body of Christ) religious sect or movement. His followers consider him "the anointed of the Holy Spirit" tasked with leading Christians to the divine rapture of the Church which they claim will take place in spring 2016 in North America. As a result, more than 600 people,

including 330 children, have moved to a particular area, waiting for the event. Reports indicate that the adults, mostly Nicaraguan nationals with some foreigners, have not allowed their children to attend school or receive medical care, and that they sold all their assets to achieve “salvation”.⁵

In February 2016, different pastoral movements and ministries in the diocese of Estelí initiated a number of activities in the context of the Jubilee of Mercy, one of which consisted of a pilgrimage to the cathedral in order to enter through the Holy Door.⁶

Prospects for freedom of religion

Research showed that no incident of intolerance, discrimination or persecution was recorded in the 2014-2016 period. Unlike the previous period under review, relations between religious groups and the government have been more peaceful and free from conflict. Hence, it would seem that the situation has improved with regards to freedom of religion.

¹ http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_164_1.asp#S_1 accessed on 16 March 2016.

² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19735631> accessed on 7 May 2016.

³ Nicaragua is striving to overcome the after effects of dictatorship, civil war and natural calamities, which have made it one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere,
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1225218.stm

⁴http://www.bcn.gob.ni/publicaciones/periodicidad/anual/nicaragua_cifras/nicaragua_cifras.pdf accessed on 4 March 2016.

⁵<http://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/nacionales/372661-detienen-lider-secta-religiosa-chinandega/> accessed on 16 March 2016.

⁶ <http://www.cen-nicaragua.org/noticias.html#pere> accessed on 4 March 2016.