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A demonstrator holds a crucifix during a protest against Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's government in Managua May 15, 2018. Since that year, the U.S. State Department says, at least 3,600 nonprofits in Nicaragua, including religious congregations, have had their legal status stripped in the country. (OSV News/Reuters/Oswaldo Rivas)



David Agren

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Managua, Nicaragua — September 4, 2025

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Attacks on the Catholic Church in Nicaragua have fallen in 2025, but a report on church persecution in the Central American county attributes the decline to few priests and religious reporting the crimes and harassment committed against them and church property.

A total of 1,010 aggressions have been committed against the Nicaraguan church since 2018, when protests demanding the ouster of the ruling Sandinista regime erupted, according to Martha Patricia Molina, a Nicaraguan lawyer in exile, who tracks church persecution. That number fell to just 32 so far in 2025 — down from a high of 321 attacks in 2023 — Molina said in the seventh edition of her report, "Nicaragua, a Persecuted Church."

"The decline in numbers seen in 2025 does not mean that a cordial relationship is being established between the (Nicaraguan) dictatorship and the Catholic Church, but rather that in this stage of repression the church is decimated," Molina said.

"Under no circumstances can the clergy report the abuses and daily surveillance to which they are subjected. They don't publicly express their suffering due to the threats they receive from members of the National Police," she said in the report, now in its seventh edition.

The Catholic Church has faced intense persecution since 2018, when parishes and universities sheltered protesters in the premises from police and paramilitaries, later accompanying the families of political prisoners. The Nicaragua bishops' conference convened a national dialogue seeking new elections as an exit from the crisis but

withdrew due to bad faith by then-President Daniel Ortega — now co-president with his wife, Rosario Murillo.

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Schools, universities and charitable projects have been seized or shuttered, while spying on clergy and church services is rife. Some 16,564 processions and expressions of popular piety have been prohibited.

Molina counted 302 clergy and religious living outside Nicaragua — having fled, been exiled or denied readmittance upon returning from foreign trips — though she cautioned the number could be larger as not all have gone public with their stories.

Four bishops are among those living in exile. Pope Leo XIV received three of the exiled Nicaraguan bishops Aug. 23 for a private audience, Bishop Carlos Herrera of Jinotega, Bishop Isidoro Mora of Siuna, and Auxiliary Bishop Silvio José Báez of Managua.

Observers say the audience reaffirms papal support for prelates appointed by his predecessor in the country.

"What is the significance of this visit by these three bishops? This is extremely important for Nicaragua, because the pope is reaffirming that he confirms the bishops that he and the Church have appointed," said Fr. Nils de Jesús Hernández, a Nicaraguan priest and pastor of the Queen of Peace Parish in Waterloo, Iowa.

No details on the meeting were released to the media other than Vatican confirmation of the pope welcoming Herrera, who was welcomed into a Franciscan community in Guatemala after his expulsion.

Báez said on X afterward, "We spoke at length about Nicaragua and the situation of the Church in particular. He encouraged me to continue my episcopal ministry and confirmed me as Auxiliary Bishop of Managua. I sincerely thank you for your fraternal welcome and your encouraging words."