

# Report spotlights persecution in ‘authoritarian triad’

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WASHINGTON (BP)—Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela form a Latin American “authoritarian triad” where leaders exert religious persecution to maintain governmental control, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom reported Nov. 18.

“In line with the authoritarian governance models of the three regimes, religious entities face persecution for any activity deemed to undermine state power and influence,” the commission wrote in an [update on persecution](#) there.

“In all three countries, the ruling party fully controls government functions and violates human rights to subdue opposition.”

Nicaragua and Cuba are the leading aggressors in the region, the commission report said, citing among many transgressions Nicaragua’s July arrest of evangelical Pastor Rudy Palacios Vargas and seven of his friends and family, one of whom died of unknown causes while in custody; and both nations’ weaponization of citizenship in stripping certain religious leaders of such status.

## Citizenship revoked

Nicaragua has stripped at least 450 perceived opponents of citizenship since early 2023, the commission said. That includes people affiliated with the evangelical Mountain Gateway ministry based in Texas, several Catholic laypeople and others.

Cuba was inspired by Nicaragua, the commission report said, in passing the 2024 Citizenship Law that allows Cuba to revoke the citizenship of those who engage in acts “contrary to the political, economic, or social interest” of the nation.

In Venezuela, the commission reported governmental threats to religious leaders not deemed supportive of President Nicolas Maduro, whose latest election the international community widely considers fraudulent.

In January, hooded Venezuelan state security members captured Carlos José Correa Barros, a Christian journalist and director of the human rights group Espacio Público, and held him in a hidden location for a week before releasing him after a nine-day confinement, the commission update said.

The commission also noted Maduro’s launch of a refurbishment program called “My Well Equipped Church.” The report described it as “an aggressive strategy to secure evangelical support,” complete with cash stipends to 13,000 pastors.

The move copied Cuba’s mode of cultivating relationships with religious leaders willing to support the government, the commission report noted.

## **Surveillance, detention and control of messages**

Broadly, the three nations persistently harass religious communities through surveillance, threats of imprisonment, arbitrary detentions and arrests, control of religious messages including sermons and public attacks.

The nations enact laws that unjustly restrict the activities and legal status of religious groups; practice favoritism in attempts to control messaging and deny religious freedom to prisoners.

The U.S. State Department in 2022 designated Cuba and Nicaragua Countries of Particular Concern for “engaging in or tolerating systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom” under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended U.S. governmental responses in its [2025 Annual Report](#), including sanctions of those culpable in violations.

The 2025 annual report does not address Venezuela, but violations there and in Nicaragua are so widespread many consider them crimes against humanity, the commission said in its update.