



OSAC Country Security Report

Nicaragua

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This report is intended to supplement the U.S. Department of State Nicaragua Travel Advisory and [Nicaragua Country Information Page](#).

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OSAC Country Chapter

The Managua Country Chapter is not currently active.

Contact [OSAC's Americas team](#) with any questions.

Nicaragua Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses that travelers should reconsider travel due to arbitrary enforcement of laws, the risk of wrongful detention, and limited healthcare availability. Travelers should exercise increased caution in Nicaragua due to crime.

Crime

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Managua as being a **HIGH**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. The U.S. Department of State has included a Crime "C" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Nicaragua, indicating that there may be widespread violent crime and/or organized crime present in the country, and/or that local law enforcement may have limited ability to respond to serious crimes.

There is serious risk from crime in Nicaragua in general. Reported crime rates are low, but many crimes go unreported and anecdotal information suggest that crime is increasing. Robberies have increased in Managua in 2024, with observers highlighting the high cost of living and unemployment as contributing factors. Theft from vehicles, pick-pocketing, and occasional armed robbery occurs in store parking lots, on public transportation, and in open-air markets. In Managua, street crime is more prevalent during hours of darkness, late at night, or early in

the morning. The trend of crimes being conducted with weapons and violence continues. Criminals often carry weapons such as knives and guns.

While U.S. citizens have been victims of murder in Nicaragua, it remains very rare. The most frequently reported crime is theft. U.S. citizens have also reported sexual assaults and other violent crimes while in Nicaragua. Several U.S. citizens have been the victims of sexual assault in beach locations and at hotels. Violence against women continues to be a concern.

According to the Government of Nicaragua's most recent official crime statistics, the overall homicide rate was 6 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants – a marginal decrease over 2022 and 2023. However, given issues with government transparency and data collection, these numbers are difficult to verify. The homicide rate in the Southern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region remains above the national average. Other areas with homicide rates significantly above the national average were the "Mining Triangle," composed of the three Northern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region municipalities of Siuna, Rosita, and Bonanza; Jinotega; and the Northern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region as a whole.

The U.S. Embassy does not permit off-duty U.S. government personnel from entering the Oriental Market (El Mercado Oriental) due to high levels of crime and illicit activities. Other higher risk areas in Managua include Reparto Shick, Jorge Dimitrov, Ciudad Belén, Américas 1 and Américas 2, and Barrio Camilo Ortega. Street crime is also common in Puerto Cabezas Bluefields, San Juan del Sur, Popoyo, El Transito, and the Corn Islands. Municipalities with the highest rates of criminal complaints include Managua, León, Matagalpa, Masaya, Estelí, Chinandega, Carazo, Granada, Rivas, and the Northern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region.

Given the geographic isolation of the Caribbean coast and autonomous regions, the Embassy's ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens who choose to travel there is severely limited. The U.S. Embassy does not permit U.S. government employees to drive at night, with the exception of to and from the Augusto C. Sandino International Airport (MGA) and to and from Granada.

Public transportation is not permitted by the U.S. Embassy for U.S. government employees. Public transportation often lacks proper safety equipment (e.g., lights, seatbelts, seats, handholds). Avoid buses. Bus accidents on roadways in Nicaragua often result in injury and death. Criminals will steal backpacks, purses, and other personal items from overhead and below-seat storage onboard buses.

Only use licensed taxis endorsed or recommended by major hotels or other trusted sources. Before taking a taxi, make sure that it has a red stripe across the top and bottom of the license plate and that the number is legible. Choose taxis carefully and note the driver's name and license number. Check that the taxi is properly labeled with the company name and logo. Instruct the driver not to pick up other passengers, agree on the fare before departing, and have small bills available for payment, as taxi drivers often do not make change. There have been reports of taxi driver complicity in robberies and assaults. The rideshare application known as Ray is permitted for U.S. government staff.

In the past, there have been reports of pickpocketing and other simple theft while in airport waiting areas, but not recently. Airports in remote locales often have short airstrips, minimal safety equipment, and little boarding security.

Armed individuals in civilian clothes or “voluntary police” have been perpetrating violence throughout the country since April 2018. Reports suggest that the voluntary and official police have taken part in this violence. Police have arbitrarily detained and searched people in an effort to identify and arrest those who have participated in protests or who oppose the government. In January 2025, the Ortega government formalized the existence of these groups into a voluntary police force which is thought to have more registered members than the formal Nicaraguan National Police (NNP).

Drug trafficking and the criminal elements associated with it operate in Nicaragua. Nicaraguan government officials have been implicated in organized crime organizations.

Kidnapping Threat

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Kidnapping “K” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Nicaragua.

Incidents of kidnapping could occur, but normally under avoidable circumstances and in specific geographic areas such as the autonomous regions.

Terrorism

The U.S. Department of State has assessed POST as being a **LOW**-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. The U.S. Department of State has not included a Terrorism “T” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Nicaragua.

Nicaragua has no indigenous terrorism. No known terrorist organizations are identified as operating in Nicaragua.

Political Violence and Civil Unrest

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Managua as being a **MEDIUM**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Civil Unrest “U” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Nicaragua. Civil unrest can develop quickly without prior notice, often interrupting logistics and services. Avoid demonstration activity, as even those planned to remain peaceful have the potential to turn violent.

Elections/Political Stability

Nicaragua has a highly centralized, authoritarian political system dominated by President Daniel Ortega Saavedra and his wife, Co-President Rosario Murillo Zambrana. Ortega's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) party exercises total control over the country's executive, legislative, judicial, and electoral functions. Including at the national and local levels.

President Ortega has maintained power since winning reelection in 2007, with multiple subsequent elections being condemned as fraudulent and featuring the arbitrary jailing of scores of opposition figures, barring all credible opposition political parties from participating, blocking legitimate international observation efforts, and committing widespread electoral fraud. Independent observer groups and international organizations characterized the electoral process as seriously flawed, lacking credibility, and defined by historically low voter turnout. The last election was held in 2021 and was not seen as free, fair or transparent, and lacked democratic legitimacy. The next election is set for 2027, after Ortega submitted a constitutional reform in January 2025 to extend presidential terms to six years.

The 2021 elections expanded the ruling party's supermajority in the National Assembly, which previously allowed for changes in the constitution that extended the reach of executive branch power and eliminated restrictions on re-election of executive branch officials and mayors. Observers noted serious flaws in municipal, regional, and national elections since 2008.

Protests & Demonstrations

The risk of widespread unrest in Nicaragua has decreased significantly since the 2018 protest movement that saw hundreds killed and arrested. Intense repression and persecution of opposition groups have continued, lessening the likelihood of large, disruptive unrest.

In the past, demonstrations involved demands for transparent elections, opposition to the proposed building of an inter-oceanic canal, women's rights, and excessive use of force by security forces. Previous demonstrations began peacefully, but the presence of counterdemonstrators, voluntary police, and/or riot-police would lead to an escalation in tension and violence. Typically, protests in Managua take place at major intersections and traffic circles (rotundas), and near shopping malls. Outside of the capital, they often take the form of road/highway blockades.

The 2018 protests featured student groups, anti-canal groups, and a large cross-section of the Nicaraguan people participated. Protests in the form of marches and demonstrations in main intersections, strikes, road barricades, looting, and social media campaigns erupted. Government-aligned voluntary police and pro-Ortega groups countered protests, often with violence and intimidation. Deaths directly related to the violence surrounding these protests, as well as extrajudicial deaths and disappearances, occurred; human rights organizations put these numbers between 300-500 persons. Between April and August 2018, there were daily to weekly static protests and marches throughout the country. Protest group sizes ranged from a handful to hundreds of thousands on the streets. Universities were frequent locations of protests due

to widespread student support. The police used live ammunition against peaceful protesters and demonstrators.

Police presence continues, especially in major traffic circles in Managua and near universities. At times, police presence increases significantly throughout Managua, such as the yearly anniversary of the 2018 civil unrest, to dissuade potential protesters.

Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

The Government of Nicaragua has often expressed antagonism to U.S. interests and uses anti-U.S. rhetoric in domestic and international fora and events. This rhetoric continues to be used during public addresses made by the Ortega Administration.

Law Enforcement

The Nicaraguan National Police (NNP) is the sole law enforcement agency, and is responsible for public safety and security, all types of criminal investigations, and traffic control. The army is responsible for external security, but also has some domestic security responsibilities. Each reports directly to the president.

Voluntary police are non-uniformed, often masked, armed, and have tactical training. They operate in coordination with government security forces, under the direct control of the government. These groups were formalized in 2025. Civilian authorities maintain effective control over police and voluntary police forces. Members of the security forces have committed numerous abuses.

The police emergency line in Nicaragua is **118**, ***118** from cellular phones, or 505-2249-1925. The Tourist Emergency Hotline, available only to cell phones on the Claro system, is **101**. The NNP tourism police unit deploys to tourist areas and maintains the 24-hour hotline for emergencies.

Dial **128** for Cruz Blanca (White Cross) ambulance service (Spanish only). Ambulances take individuals to the nearest hospital that will accept a patient. This is usually a public hospital unless the patient or someone acting on his/her behalf indicates they can pay for a private hospital.

Police Response

Police often lack resources to respond effectively to crimes in progress. Victims often must go to a police station to file a report, as police will often not come to the scene of a crime. At times, police refuse to file reports. Copies of receipts or other proof of ownership of high-value items often assist in completion of police reports. Police coverage is extremely sparse outside major urban areas, particularly in the autonomous regions. During periods of political unrest, police forces focus attention on protests and demonstrations. As a result, responses to counter street crime can suffer.

During questioning by the authorities, a defendant who does not understand Spanish is entitled to assistance from an official government interpreter. The defendant is entitled to an oral translation of any statement they are required to sign. Defendants are not required to incriminate themselves. A defendant should answer questions pertaining to identity, age, address, occupation, citizenship, and other non-incriminating personal data.

The Constitution does not condone physical violence against prisoners (except in cases of self-defense). Despite the rights granted under the law, in practice, the legal, judicial, immigration, and penal systems often operate in an arbitrary manner, subject to corruption and political influence. It is difficult to predict how the local legal system will work in any particular case, which can result in prolonged detentions without charges or due process. Should authorities violate your rights, immediately inform the consular officer or a representative, who will bring your case to the attention of the government if you so desire.

Police will take drivers into custody for driving under the influence of alcohol/drugs. Police will also usually take into custody the driver involved in any accident resulting in serious injury/death, even if the driver has insurance and appears not to have been at fault. The minimum detention period is 48 hours. However, detentions frequently last until a judicial decision (often weeks or months) or until the injured party signs a waiver (usually the result of a cash settlement). To avoid liability, consider hiring a professional driver through a reputable hotel. Transit police conduct most enforcement stops on foot at static locations; these are sometimes marked by traffic cones at which officer(s) will signal to a driver to pull over. Police vehicle enforcement stops are less common.

After a traffic violation, the normal process involves police confiscating the driver's license until the driver pays a fine. After paying the associated fee at a bank, the driver must go with proof of payment to Transit Police Headquarters (or a police station if it occurs outside of Managua) to recover the license and show proof of payment. In practice, however, foreigners are rarely able to recover their licenses, even after paying their fees, due to delays in transferring the license from the place of detention to the Transit Police office. Most foreigners leave the country before the transfer takes place.

Transit police have been known to demand on-the-spot bribes in lieu of fines. If this happens, request a receipt and the officer's name and badge number. To report mistreatment by police, file a complaint with Nicaragua's National Police and forward your complaint to the U.S. Consular Section in Managua. Also, advise your rental car agency if police say their vehicles do not meet transit regulations. The Nicaraguan National Police give information (in Spanish) about the process to pay or appeal tickets and recover confiscated licenses.

Travelers with Special Considerations

For [specific traveler concerns](#) in Nicaragua, review the local laws and circumstances on the Department of State's Country Information Page.

- [Women Travelers](#)

- [LGB Travelers](#)
- [Travelers with Disabilities](#)
- [Student Travelers](#)
- [Faith-Based Travelers](#)

Rule of Law, Arbitrary Detention, Official Harassment, Corruption, & Transparency

The U.S. Department of State has included a Risk of Wrongful Detention “D” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Nicaragua, indicating that there is a continued risk of the wrongful detention of U.S. nationals by Nicaraguan authorities.

It is not uncommon for U.S. citizens accused of having broken Nicaraguan law, whether legitimately or not, to be expelled from Nicaragua. In these cases, Nicaraguan authorities have regularly detained, passed judgement, and sentenced the accused within a few days before deporting them from Nicaragua. Nicaraguan authorities normally only notify U.S. officials of the expulsion shortly before or after it occurs.

Furthermore, the Nicaraguan government has exercised, at their own discretion, a willingness to deny entry to into Nicaragua whomever they want. Nicaraguan officials review each airlines’ passenger manifest and examine travelers’ social media accounts, may review their backgrounds, and social connections. If officials find something that they view as objectionable, they alert the airline to deny that passenger a boarding pass for their flight.

Arbitrary arrests occur regularly, particularly of those the government deems to be active opposition members. OSAC members have shared instances where visas have been denied, or groups have been monitored by government authorities while in Nicaragua. The government has detained members of the opposition for extended periods using Law 1055 (Law for the Defense of the Rights of the People to Independence, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination for Peace). The statute does not specify sentencing guidelines, and the individuals were eventually charged under other statutes. The Ortega government has also utilized broad anti-terrorism and cybercrime laws to justify arrests of individuals.

Detainees are often not allowed to choose their own legal counsel and are arbitrarily assigned a public defender for their initial pretrial hearings. In some cases, opposition figures have been held incommunicado for months, before the government has permitted them to choose their own legal counsel.

In August 2024, Nicaraguan authorities forced the closure of over 1,800 NGOs. Many of these NGOs were religious organizations, including both Catholic and Evangelical Christian denominations. However, it also included charitable organizations, sports associations, indigenous groups, educational organizations, groups for military retirees, art foundations, and police associations. The closures related to a law passed on August 16, 2024 that requires NGOs

to share financial information with the Nicaraguan government and form "alliances" with the state.

This new law essentially states that no NGO can operate without state approval and must be associated with an approved state entity. Organizations had only days to comply and most failed to do so, giving the state justification to force the organizations to shut down. In early September, the Nicaraguan legislature passed a second law, proposed by President Ortega, that allows the government to charge individuals and organizations in absentia. This gives the government further leverage to prosecute critics of the regime who currently operate in exile and seize their assets if convicted. Over 5,600 NGOs have been shuttered in Nicaragua since 2018 due these laws or similar measures.

In response to the Government of Nicaragua's violations of human and civil rights, the U.S. Treasury Department has levied sanctions against many members of the Ortega administration and private entities that corruptly support the Ortega regime. U.S. persons may not engage in transactions with OFAC (Office of Foreign Assets Control) designated persons or entities.

The law provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, but the government does not respect this right. Restrictions on press freedom, the absence of an independent judiciary, and a nondemocratic political system combine to inhibit freedom of expression, including for the press. Although the law provides that the right to information may not be subjected to censorship, the government and actors under its control retaliate against the press and radio and television stations by blocking transmissions, impeding the import of ink and paper, and committing violence against journalists. Some independent media outlets also report they were victims of cyberattacks.

There have been credible reports that the government monitors private online communications without appropriate legal authority, and in some cases restricts or disrupts access to the internet or censors online content. The government repeatedly denied broadcasting licenses and other permits for independent media.

The government uses reprisals to restrict the ability of individuals to criticize the government. Persons who criticize the government, the ruling party, or its policies are subjected to police and voluntary police surveillance, harassment, imprisonment, and abuse. Pro-government supporters consider the use of the national flag and the national colors of white and blue as acts of defiance, and attack opposition activists flying the flag or national colors. In January 2025, Ortega passed constitutional reforms that established the FSLN's flag and colors as a national symbol.

Domestic NGOs, Catholic Church representatives, journalists, and opposition members alleged the government monitored their email and telephone conversations. Church representatives have stated their sermons are monitored. As part of a continuing social media campaign against prodemocracy protests, ruling party members and supporters use social media to publish personal information of human rights defenders and civil society members.

Progovernment supporters marked the houses of civil society members with derogatory slurs or threats and then published photographs of the marked houses on social media. On several occasions the markings were accompanied by or led to destruction of private property. Although the law prohibits the use of drones, some members of the opposition claim FSLN supporters use drones to spy on their houses.

Cybersecurity

Independent media reports the government provided logistical support for “troll farms” that routinely carry out cyberattacks against opposition media websites and social media accounts. Trolls and bots reportedly track opposition and pro-government social media accounts to retaliate against users deemed opponents to the ruling party and amplify pro-government messaging.

Several NGOs claimed the government monitored their email and online activity without appropriate legal authority. Paid government supporters used social media and website commentary spaces to harass prominent members of civil society, human rights defenders, and well-known journalists.

Refrain from criticism of Nicaragua online, prior to arrival, or while in the country. Refrain from interacting with online content that could be perceived as problematic by state authorities – this includes liking content and subscribing/following certain pages. Consider previous online interactions with content related to Nicaragua. Utilize “burner” phones and laptops when traveling to Nicaragua. Social media sites have had numerous security breaches. Set your profiles to private. Even when set to private, threat actors may still be view your content. Have no expectation of privacy in hotels, offices, or public places. Hotel business centers and phone networks may be monitored and hotel rooms searched.

Import/Export Restrictions

Satellite phones are illegal and may be confiscated. Several U.S. citizens have reported electronic equipment confiscated upon entry and never returned. Drones are also illegal and may not be imported. U.S. citizens have reported Nicaraguan authorities not allowing them entry to the country with camera drones and other electronic equipment, and/or that the equipment was subject to inspection and held until the citizen departed the country.

To confirm whether you may enter Nicaragua with specific items, check with the airline, the Nicaraguan Embassy in Washington, D.C., or Nicaraguan Immigration authorities before travel.

A country-specific listing of items/goods prohibited from being exported to the country or that are otherwise restricted is available from the U.S. International Trade Agency [website](#).

Additional resources and reports can be found in the [OSAC Traveler Toolkit](#).