FAITH-BASED EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

FINAL REPORT

JANUARY 2023

This publication was produced for the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by DevTech, Inc., under the LAC Education Support Contract (7200AAI18M00024). The authors’ views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.
FAITH-BASED EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
FINAL REPORT

JANUARY 2023

Submitted to
Nathaniel Haight, Contracting Officer's Representative
USAID/LAC

Submitted and prepared by:
DevTech Systems, Inc.
Contract GS-10F-0048L/7200AA18M00024

The Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child
Institute for Educational Initiatives
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN 46556

Authorship and contributors
Lead Author:
TJ D’Agostino, University of Notre Dame

Contributors:
Cristobal Madero, SJ, University Alberto Hurtado
Fabiola Lopez-Minatchy, Haiti
Patricia Mones, Dominican Republic
Pauline Martin, El Salvador
Marian Dolset Figueroa, Honduras
Veronica Spross de Rivera & Maria Isabel Bonilla Galich de Anzueto, Guatemala


DISCLAIMER
This report is made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of DevTech Systems, Inc. and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.
# CONTENTS

**ACRONYMS**................................................................................................................................. 2  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**................................................................................................................. 4  
**PROLOGUE**.................................................................................................................................... 9  
**INTRODUCTION**............................................................................................................................ 11 
  - **PURPOSE**.................................................................................................................................. 11  
  - **OBJECTIVES**............................................................................................................................ 11  
  - **USAID LINKAGES**................................................................................................................... 11  
  - **STUDY QUESTIONS**.................................................................................................................. 11 
**FRAMING AND RELEVANCE OF FAITH-BASED EDUCATION**......................................................... 12  
**HISTORICAL ROLE OF FAITH-BASED ACTORS IN EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**................................................................................................................................. 13  
**RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY**......................................................................................................... 18  
**REGIONAL LANDSCAPE FOR FAITH-BASED EDUCATION**.............................................................. 19  
  - **FAITH-BASED EDUCATION REGIONAL MARKET SHARE ESTIMATES**................................. 19  
  - **POLICY CONTEXTS**................................................................................................................ 23  
**METHODOLOGY**........................................................................................................................... 26 
**FINDINGS**....................................................................................................................................... 29  
  - **STUDY QUESTION 1: THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF FAITH-BASED EDUCATION**........ 29  
  - **STUDY QUESTION 2: CHALLENGES FACING FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS**............................ 40  
  - **STUDY QUESTION 3: COMPARING FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS TO STATE SCHOOLS**........... 44  
  - **STUDY QUESTION 4: PARTNERING WITH FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS AND ACTORS**............ 48  
**RECOMMENDATIONS**.................................................................................................................... 54  
**BIBLIOGRAPHY**............................................................................................................................ 60  
**ANNEXES**....................................................................................................................................... 66
**ACRONYMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACOES</th>
<th>Collaboration and Effort Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APROHU</td>
<td>Human Promotion Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASM</td>
<td>Mennonite Social Action Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEEC</td>
<td>Commission Episcopale des Écoles Catholiques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELAM (Spanish acronym)</td>
<td>Catholic Bishops Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFBNP</td>
<td>Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (CFBNP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGRA</td>
<td>Early Grade Reading Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EiCC</td>
<td>Education in Crisis and Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBOs</td>
<td>Faith Based Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBSs</td>
<td>Faith Based Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE-LAC</td>
<td>Faith-based Education in Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Foundation Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GC-DWC</td>
<td>Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICESCR</td>
<td>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHER</td>
<td>Honduran Radio Education Institute (Instituto Hondureño de Educación por Radio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JLI</td>
<td>Joint Learning Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRS</td>
<td>Jesuit Refugee Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KII</td>
<td>Key Informant Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LFC</td>
<td>Local Faith Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINERD</td>
<td>Dominican Republic Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPFS</td>
<td>Nos Petits Frères et Soeurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>Public-Private Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ</td>
<td>Research Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSD</td>
<td>Regional Sustainable Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT-Bayan</td>
<td>Tutorial Learning System - Bayán Association Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDHR</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UIS</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>U.S. Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YWFD</td>
<td>Youth and Workforce Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to research the role of faith-based actors in educational development in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The goal is to produce an overview of the role, contributions, challenges, and opportunities of faith-based education in the region and to inform future education programs and policies. The study places a particular focus on services for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth in the LAC region. The activity was co-designed with USAID’s Office of Regional Sustainable Development in the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC/RSD/EDU), USAID’s Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (CFBNP), and the research team contracted through the DevTech Systems, Inc.’s LAC Education Support Contract. The study was led by the University of Notre Dame’s Center for the Development of the Whole Child in collaboration with local research consultants supporting five country case studies.

OBJECTIVES

1. To inform USAID’s strategy, activity design, and implementation on faith-based education, particularly in the LAC region.
2. To contribute to the global knowledge of faith-based education programming and advance the evidence base for the USAID Education Learning Agenda.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The methodology for this study was primarily a synthesis of available literature and secondary data combined with a multi-case study drawing upon available literature/documents and key informant interviews. The inquiry functions at two levels: 1) a broad overview, synthesis of trends, and key themes from across the LAC region, and 2) a multi-case study that includes country-level cases (the Dominican Republic [DR], Haiti, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador), and illustrative mini-cases of policies or organizations from within these countries and across the region.

KEY STUDY FINDINGS

STUDY QUESTION 1: THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF FAITH-BASED EDUCATION

Answer: Faith-based educational actors fill critical roles in education systems, with modest market shares in most contexts (averaging approximately 15.5 to 19 percent, though ranging up to over 43 percent in Haiti), but outsized roles in serving vulnerable and marginalized populations, including migrants, minorities, the urban and rural poor, at risk-youth, and those affected by violence. Animated by their beliefs and views of the dignity of the human person, they tend to provide service to the most vulnerable in distinctive and effective ways, by focusing on whole child and integral development, grounding their service in communities and long-term relationships of trust, animated by a strong sense of mission, and supported by cross-national, voluntary, and philanthropic networks.

Affected by Context

1. The role and contributions of faith-based schools (FBSs) are contingent upon historical, political, social, and policy contexts, explaining much of the wide range of market shares.
2. There is a gradual trend toward more public-private partnerships and public funding of private and faith-based education in most country cases, suggesting a persistent and growing role for FBSs.
Role (Market Share)
3. The LAC average market share of FBSs is between 10 to 20 percent with an average of 15.5 to 19 percent in the selected country cases (ranging from an estimated 2.7 percent in Guatemala to 43 percent in Haiti).
4. Catholic and Evangelic schools make up the overwhelming majority of FBSs. While the market share of Catholic schools has been steady or declining, that of Evangelical schools has been growing, mirroring demographic trends.
5. Some FBSs in every context receive public funding, but in most contexts, the majority of FBSs are tuition-funded and low-fee, with a very small percentage of highly visible elite schools.
6. FBSs and faith-based organizations (FBOs) play large and important roles in providing alternative, vocational, and secondary education.
7. FBSs have a modest market share but make critical contributions to higher education, including sponsoring among the oldest and highest quality universities.

Distinctive Contributions
8. FBSs and FBOs support basic skills development, through schools and organizations regarded as safe, trusted, relational, and accountable institutions.
9. FBOs support alternative education models, especially for out of school youth and for school reintegration, leveraging well-established institutions and networks, creative models, and adaptive and responsive organizations.
10. FBSs and FBOs provide vital secondary and vocational education, serving at-risk populations with holistic models and nurturing communities.
11. FBSs and FBOs provide protection to highly vulnerable children and youth (e.g. migrants, those affected by violence, gang-involved or drug addicted youth, teenage mothers, victims of sexual exploitation), and in many cases, provide them with important support services.
12. FBOs play important roles currently and have high potential to make large future contributions in early childhood development (ECD).

STUDY QUESTION 2: CHALLENGES FACING FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS

Answer: The challenges facing FBSs and FBOs center on 1) financial resource constraints, which affect their ability to retain qualified teachers and provide resources and limit their capacity to serve vulnerable populations well and at greater scale; and 2) regulatory and political issues that relate to their degree of autonomy impacting their ability to live out aspects of their religious mission and affecting the handling of sensitive moral issues.

Financial Resource Constraints
1. While policies in each context allow public subsidy of some FBSs, the majority are privately-funded, which is linked to their most frequently cited challenges (see findings 2-4 below).
2. Fee-based (and low-fee) funding streams limit FBSs’ and FBOs’ sustainability and scope in some contexts, resulting in recent enrollment declines and school closures.
3. FBSs are reported to enjoy motivated staff and strong leadership, but often struggle to find and retain qualified teachers and to provide quality materials, both of which are linked to resource constraints.
4. Resource challenges were also noted as particularly constraining in efforts to effectively serve vulnerable populations, where commonly-reported needs included psycho-social support and the provision of basic needs.

Regulatory Issues
5. Regulations linked to public funding in some contexts constrain FBSs’ autonomy and faith-identity, requiring trade-offs between commitment to their religious mission/identity and
access to financial resources.

6. There are tensions between religious views and progressive social or policy trends, which some FBSs and FBOs associate with international influence and may pose barriers to partnership.

STUDY QUESTION 3: COMPARING FAITH BASED SCHOOLS TO STATE SCHOOLS

**Answer:** FBSs are distinctive from state-run schools in a number of ways, most notably their differing funding models in most contexts (public for state-run schools versus private for FBSs), though some FBSs in all contexts are also publicly funded. Perceived distinctive advantages of FBSs include personalized communities, safety, and high parental and community engagement, while their notable disadvantage is their challenge in providing competitive compensation to and retaining teachers. The situation is mixed and less clear in terms of FBSs accessibility and quality/learning outcomes compared to state-run schools.

1. Perceived distinctive advantages of FBSs compared to state schools include their **personalized communities, safety, and high parental and community engagement.**
2. Perceived disadvantages of FBSs compared to state-run schools include **tuition cost barriers, non-competitive salaries for teachers impeding retention of qualified staff, and limited access to resources.**
3. The sharpest distinctions between FBSs and state-run schools are those of financial resources and sources, where **FBSs have varied funding sources (often largely tuition), and state-run schools are free and primarily government-funded** with greater access to public donor support.
4. **The accessibility of FBSs and state-run schools is regarded as mixed.** While FBSs are constrained by tuition costs, they are enabled by a commitment to serving the poor, creative models, and philanthropic support. On the other hand, both state-run schools and FBSs struggle to provide access to students with disabilities.
5. **Comparative quality and learning outcomes of FBSs are uncertain due to data limitations** and results are mixed from the information reported and available. However, **there is some suggestive evidence of possible attainment effects.**

STUDY QUESTION 4: PARTNERING WITH FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS AND ACTORS

**Answer:** There are ample opportunities to expand and clarify existing public-private partnerships (PPPs) models with FBSs and FBOs for educational development, particularly through the expansion of subsidies and contracting in areas where FBSs and FBOs possess strategic capacity and advantages. However, expanding PPPs requires effective structures, frameworks, and political commitment.

1. Donors and governments can better capitalize on **strategic opportunities for partnership with FBSs and FBOs** to leverage their distinctive advantages to better meet the needs of vulnerable populations, particularly in the areas of: 1) violence reduction and mitigation; 2) ECD and parental support; 3) secondary school completion and youth workforce development; 4) support for basic skills development; and 5) integrated service provision for vulnerable children (rural, indigenous, violence affected, girls, migrants).
2. **More PPPs with states and donors would enhance FBSs and FBOs impact and accessibility** through expanded subsidies to FBSs and contracting of and grants to FBOs for service delivery.
3. For FBSs and FBOs to gain greater access to donor funding, they need **greater political recognition as strategic partners (with greater unity and visibility as a sub-sector) and capacity strengthening.**
4. There is a lack of a clear framework for PPPs grounded in human rights norms to guide decision-making, particularly on contested moral issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following set of ten recommendations are directed to states, donors, and FBSs and FBOs. Most recommendations apply to each of these groups, some are to specific actors. The recommendations are all derived from multiple findings from the study and generated through the cross-case analysis (see Table 5 on page 54 for how the findings link to recommendations).

**Recommendation 1:** Document more systematically the work of FBSs and FBOs by country and sub-sector, including indicators of quality and capacity, to identify promising partners for development interventions.

**Recommendation 2:** Engage FBSs and FBOs by prioritized sub-sectors and/or development challenges through diagnostic assessment processes—this may include systems thinking workshops in collaboration with other key stakeholders—to identify creative solutions, opportunities for partnership, and new directions that can leverage FBSs and FBOs contributions.

**Recommendation 3:** Facilitate platforms for sustained policy dialogue between FBOs, government, private sector, and international partners with the aim of fostering greater collaboration around shared commitments to the most vulnerable.

**Recommendation 4:** Support efforts to refine and clarify frameworks for public-private partnerships in accordance with human rights instruments and norms.

**Recommendation 5:** Recognize and support FBSs and FBOs as integral partners within the sector, especially in areas of FBOs’ and FBSs’ strengths and insufficient state capacity.

**SUB-SECTOR SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Recommendation 6:** Develop a strategy related to FBSs and FBOs and violence reduction and mitigation, addressing root causes of violence with a particular focus on youth and workforce development and violence prevention, mitigation, and rehabilitation services, while supporting regional networking, research, and the sharing of effective practices.

**Recommendation 7:** Expand efforts to engage FBSs and FBOs in ensuring persistence to and through secondary school and entry into the workforce with a focus on strategies to strengthen secondary school persistence, supplemental and alternative programs, reentry programs for out of school children, and workforce development programs.

**Recommendation 8:** Invest in quality ECD and parenting programs that seek to more fully engage and utilize church social, pastoral, and physical infrastructure to expand ECD offerings, engage parents and families, and augment the co-location of services for children to thrive.

**Recommendation 9:** Support FBSs and FBOs to implement evidence-based interventions and support models within and beyond their networks (e.g. after-school, summer camps, and distance learning) to strengthen foundational skills acquisition for all.
**Recommendation 10:** Support FBOs to deliver integrative, locally-led child protection and educational services for vulnerable children, including those in poverty, indigenous communities, those affected by violence, migrant or displaced children and youth, and girls.
PROLOGUE

Some of the most impressive charitable organizations working in the most violent and desperate places in the world are faith-based. In early discussions about the need for and scope of this study, a question arose: *Is there something about faith-based organizations that makes them particularly effective at working in violent contexts and with marginalized communities?*

Our research suggests that there are characteristics of faith-based organizations that make them both inclined to and effective at serving the most vulnerable in difficult contexts. By way of an initial framing and introduction, we offer a brief description of one such organization, the St. Luke’s Foundation in Haiti, to illustrate some of the themes that will be explored further in this report. The work of St. Luke’s Foundation is also indicative of the efforts of faith-based organizations in challenging contexts throughout the region.

The St. Luke’s Foundation was founded by Fr. Rick Frachette, an American Catholic priest and medical doctor who belongs to a religious community called the Passionists. He has lived and worked in Haiti for roughly the last 30 years during which time St. Luke’s emerged as a local affiliate of Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos/Nos Petits Frères et Soeurs (NPFS) (Our Little Brothers and Sisters), a Catholic organization that serves children in need in Mexico, Central and South American, and the Caribbean.

St. Luke’s runs a network of 36 schools throughout the country, a set of hospitals and clinics, and various economic development and outreach programs. The central compound of St. Luke’s/NPFS spans multiple city blocks nestled in a neighborhood of Port au Prince called Tabarre, between Haiti’s Toussaint Louverture International Airport and the U.S. Embassy. This compound houses St. Damien’s, a major children’s hospital for the poor founded by Fr. Rick under NPFS; St. Luke’s Hospital, an adult teaching hospital with an ER and intensive care unit (one of the very few in Haiti); an obstetrics center that handles hundreds of deliveries per month; a school for children with disabilities (deaf, blind, mute and those with intellectual disabilities); a high school for peace and justice with a major focus on the arts; a vocational and technical post-secondary school that provides nursing, medical tech, and science and technology tracks; and an array of social enterprises. These social businesses range from a tilapia farm, a pasta factory, and an industrial bakery to a brick-making plant and an oxygen tank production facility (which sells oxygen back to the hospitals), among others.

This compound is also not far from Cité Soleil, a violent, gang-ridden shanty town built on a garbage dump on the coastal edge of Port au Prince, and located just on the other side of the airport from the St. Luke’s compound. St. Luke’s runs a community development program there, a medical clinic, and various outreach efforts, including the delivery of clean water six days a week and a child protection program for children to prevent gang involvement. This work in and near Cité Soleil has brought Fr. Rick into contact with gang members, many of whom he has counseled out of the gangs over the years.

*Photos from St. Luke’s Foundation Annual Reports, 2018 and 20121. Used with permission.*
Fr. Rick often says: “At least 8 out of 10 people in a gang do not really want to be there. They want a job.” This is why St. Luke's has founded so many businesses, to provide jobs to orphans and former gang members. Many of these young men become more than just citizens, they become champions of social service, filling the ranks of St. Luke’s and NPFS’ staff. Many also volunteer in a unique ministry of St. Luke’s: the ministry to the dead.

For well over a decade, Fr. Rick and a group of volunteers go roughly once a month to the public morgue to claim the unclaimed dead. These bodies are otherwise collected along with hospital trash and discarded in landfills. Among the most consistent volunteers are former gang members. The poor refrigeration systems and processing of the bodies makes this work horrendous. The volunteers sometimes turn to swigging rum and smoking cigarettes to fight the smell. They place each body into a body bag with flowers and a rosary, lay them in a coffin, and bring them to an open place near the sea, where they pray over them and bury them.

Asked once by a journalist why he spends so much time and energy ministering to the dead, who will never know the mercy he showed, Fr. Rick responded: “If the dead are garbage, then the living are walking garbage” (Labash, March 1, 2010). This starts to illuminate the animating principle of St. Luke’s and of Fr. Rick and his team of Haitian men and women that co-lead this mission. Rooted in their beliefs, they have a profound regard for the dignity of every human being, even the dead, and this animates everything they do in the face of immense violence and poverty. In doing this work, they are also aware of being a countersign of hope, peace, and goodness for people in a place that has been descending deeper into violence and chaos due to gang violence. In this way, beyond its direct operational output, their work conveys meaning and purpose to those they serve. This meaningfulness, and the affective and behavioral responses it elicits, appears to be a vital part of St. Luke’s organizational character and social contribution.

Fr. Rick and St. Luke’s are noteworthy, but also in many ways, indicative of the work of faith-based organizations in poor and violent contexts throughout the LAC region. Many people and organizations of faith go to the margins, stay there among those in need, do effective and often very difficult work, and seek to foster healing, hope, and meaning amidst brokenness.

This study seeks to highlight some of these organizations and to better understand the size, contributions, and potential of the faith-based education sector in the region, something that is underdocumented and poorly understood. We offer this report as an initial response to some of these questions.
INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to research the role of faith-based actors in education development in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. The activity was co-designed with USAID’s Office of Regional Sustainable Development in the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC/RSD/EDU), USAID’s Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships in the Local, Faith and Transformative Partnerships Hub (DDI/LFT/FBNP), and the research team contracted through the DevTech Systems, Inc.’s LAC Education Support Contract.

The goal for the research was to produce an overview of the role, contributions, challenges, and opportunities of faith-based education in the LAC region and to inform future education programs and policies. From this lens, the research focused on evaluating the access, safety, and quality of education services for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth in the LAC region over the past 30 years.

Marginalized and vulnerable children and youth include those experiencing extreme poverty, affected by irregular migration and/or violence, with disabilities, living in rural and urban environments, as well as ethnic and linguistic minorities and others relevant to each local context. Local stakeholders engaged include educators, family and community members, religious actors, development practitioners, government officials, academics, and researchers—to provide an analysis of the role and contributions of faith-based educational institutions on education development. This research explored schools and education programs from various faith-based backgrounds.

OBJECTIVES
1. To inform USAID’s strategy, activity design, and implementation in faith-based education, particularly in the LAC region.
2. To contribute to the global knowledge of faith-based education programming and advance the evidence base for the USAID Education Learning Agenda.

USAID LINKAGES
Working in partnership with local organizations and using evidence and data to drive decision-making is a key principle for U.S. policy to advance education outcomes. The U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education (2019-2023) and the USAID Education Policy emphasize the need to engage and partner with local stakeholders, including faith-based organizations, to understand the local context, strengthen local systems, and leverage local resources. Moreover, understanding education systems in LAC is critical today as the U.S. addresses the root causes of migration from Central America. The U.S Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America discusses enhancing educational opportunities and increasing access to quality education as a key tactic for addressing many of the challenges to development in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. For the U.S. government to successfully achieve this strategy and its policy objectives, it is essential for policymakers to understand the history, access, and contributions of faith-based educational institutions in LAC.

STUDY QUESTIONS
1. What is the role and contributions of faith-based education actors and institutions in providing education services, especially for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth (e.g. those experiencing extreme poverty, affected by irregular migration, affected by violence, girls and boys, those with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural and urban, etc.)?
2. What are the challenges faith-based schools face in regards to achieving education outcomes, especially in communities affected by insecurity, poverty, and migration?
3. How do faith-based schools compare to state-run schools in terms of resources (and sources), accessibility (urban/rural), safety, parental and community engagement, perceived advantages and disadvantages, quality and learning outcomes, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations, and adaptability to shocks (e.g. COVID-19, violence, migration), and curricular differences?

4. What are effective ways and opportunities for donors and the public education sector to engage religious communities and partner with faith-based organizations to leverage/improve education outcomes?

FRAMING AND RELEVANCE OF FAITH-BASED EDUCATION

With 85 percent of the world’s population identifying as religious (Pew Research, 2020), religious beliefs and participation touch numerous aspects of people’s lives and affect the behaviors of individuals and families (Marshall, 2013). Additionally, religious networks have made enormous and proportionally significant contributions to social infrastructure in many contexts in the form of schools, hospitals, and social services (Calderisi, 2013; Olivier and Wodon, 2012; Wodon, 2019a,b). Faith communities and religious leaders support, both formally and informally, the health, well-being, and holistic development of children, especially the most vulnerable (Wessells, 2015; Wilkinson, Mierlo and Trotta, 2019). In low-income countries and fragile state contexts, formal systems related to child development are usually weak or nonexistent, and faith-based organizations (FBOs) often play a central role in what is available; however, the specific contributions of FBOs are poorly documented and have rarely been the subject of systematic scholarly inquiry (Marshall and Mui, 2016; Robinson and Hanmer, 2014).

In recent years, international organizations and scholars have begun to pay greater attention to the role of faith-based actors in supporting children’s wellbeing. For example, UNICEF and the Joint Learning Initiative (JLI) network have made significant progress in synthesizing the extant research on a number of sub-topics related to faith-communities’ support of children. Associated authors and scholars have completed literature reviews or scoping studies on faith-leaders and social and behavioral change for children (Wilkinson, Mierlo, and Trotta, 2019), child protection and violence prevention (Rutledge and Eyber, 2019), and partnering with local faith communities for children (Hanmer and Robinson, 2012). A recent scoping study (D’Agostino, D’Sa, & Boothby, 2021) explored the current and potential role of faith-communities in children’s development and learning in low-and-middle income and fragile contexts. This scoping study found a number of strategic assets of faith actors that made them potentially valuable partners for supporting education and child development.

- The beliefs and values of faith-based actors generally align with the aims of healthy child development, care for the vulnerable, and with the communities they serve (Robinson, 2010).
- The social infrastructure and long-term presence of many faith-actors are often assets in supporting child development (see Fitzgibbon and French, 2017; Robinson, 2010; Robinson and Hanmer, 2014; Rutledge and Eyber, 2019), including their service-provision in hard to reach areas and their existing networks and services, which are particularly valuable in conflict affected areas (Robinson, 2010).
- Faith actors tend to enjoy the trust of local communities and have a significant influence in people’s lives, especially in personal matters of family and child rearing practices (Fitzgibbon and French, 2017; Rutledge and Eyber, 2019; Robinson, 2010).
- Faith actors often possess unique skills and capacities linked to their moral authority, their ability to engage communities in reflection and dialogue, their disposition to care for the vulnerable and provide holistic care, their capacity to influence attitudes and actions, and their tendency to have mission-driven organizational cultures (D’Agostino, 2017; Osario & Wodon, 2014; Wilkinson, Mierlo, and Trotta, 2019).
Throughout the LAC region, faith-based educational institutions play an important role in supporting children and youth to grow and learn skills to be successful in life. However, unlike Europe (Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, among others) or the United States, research on faith-based actors and education is weak. There is a scarcity of research centers, academic journals, and collaborative research agendas focused on these topics in LAC compared to other regions. Yet faith-based organizations have played and continue to play a large role in the region, contributing to the education of millions of children. It is, therefore, important to advance knowledge of the contributions of faith-based actors in LAC. Better understanding the current and potential roles and contributions of faith-based educational institutions should also be of particular relevance to policy leaders and development partners, as their size and influence in communities can make them meaningful partners in advancing development aims related to quality education for all. This strategy of partnering with faith-based actors has been more fully embraced, for example, within the global health sector, with significant benefits, but has been less embraced within education, despite the robust involvement and contributions of faith-actors in education and child development (D'Agostino et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2012).

The remainder of this section will summarize the historical role of faith-based actors in education in the LAC region, track the region’s shifting demography, summarize the regional market share estimates based upon available secondary data, and then synthesize the comparative policy contexts as it relates to the role and engagement of faith-based educational provision. Following this introductory section, we will summarize the study methodology and then report on the research findings for each of the study questions. Finally, we offer a set of recommendations based upon these findings.

HISTORICAL ROLE OF FAITH-BASED ACTORS IN EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

To summarize the historical context and contributions of faith-based education in the region, we describe major periods that mark key trends in terms of religious influence, public policy, social movements, and demographic shifts. These are the Pre-Colonial Period, the Colonial Period, the Post-Independence Period, the twentieth century, and recent shifting demography.
PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

The religious history of LAC begins well before the Colonial Period and the introduction of Christianity. Prior to colonization, the native peoples of the Americas and the Caribbean had diverse worldviews and educational practices that reflected local community values and priorities. The native peoples of Central Mexico, Central America, and the Andes (principally the Aztec, Maya, and Inca) had highly organized societies and complex religious systems. There were also hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of smaller “hunter-gatherer” groups, each with their own religious systems (Schwaller, 2011).

The Incan Empire’s systems, for example, illustrate the interconnected relationship of religion, governance, and education in pre-colonial systems. The majority of the Incan population received a basic education, which was intertwined with religious traditions, culture, and agriculture. Though the Incan Empire is recognized for its advanced engineering, agriculture, and architecture, few citizens received specialized education or training, resulting in a stratified society in terms of educational provision. The small ruling class and those determined (usually via lineage) to lead the military and religious sectors were the only that received specialized training linked to their role in society (Juif & Baten, 2013).

COLONIAL PERIOD

The Spanish conquest of the Americas was political, military, and spiritual, where “the imposition of Christianity was an essential part of the establishment of Spanish political hegemony” (Schwaller, 2011, p. 57). As the period of military conquest ended in the early sixteenth century, a different mode of evangelization began in the colonies, one in which Catholic missionaries sought to spread the gospel through education and cultural adaptation of the Christian story. Missionaries spread out to the remote areas of the region, learning local languages, and starting churches and schools (Schwaller, 2011). Some have argued that this missionary activity was the beginning of global mass education (Valencia Caicedo, 2019a) and noted its profound contributions to human development (Caldirisí, 2010).

The Franciscans were the first missionaries to travel to the mainland of the Americas, arriving in Mexico in 1524. They were soon joined by the Dominicans (1526), the Augustinians (1533), the Jesuits (1570), the Carmelites (1585), and the Mercedarians (1594) (Schwaller, 2011). A similar process and period of evangelization by Catholic missionaries took place in the Andean regions. “In the period from 1544 to 1550, no less than 117 Franciscans arrived in Peru from Spain... There were sufficient Dominicans in the region that in 1539 they created the Province of San Juan Bautista. By the end of the century New
Granada (modern day Colombia), Quito (Ecuador), and Chile would, in turn, become independent provinces” (ibid., p. 67). In Brazil, the first governor, Tomé de Sousa, came to Salvador da Bahia in 1549 to organize the government along with six Jesuits, who began to evangelize throughout the region. “By 1550 a second group of four Jesuits landed, followed by more in the subsequent years…While focusing their efforts largely on the coastal native population, the Jesuits also set out for the interior of what would become São Paulo. There, the order not only founded a settlement but also a school to educate local native children” (ibid., p. 68).

Understanding the foundational role of religion and education in Latin America also requires understanding the intertwined history of the Catholic Church with Spanish and Portuguese colonization. At the core of this relationship was the Patronato system. The “Royal Patronage” was a set of rights and privileges granted by the Pope to the Spanish and Portuguese kings (Schwaller, 2011). Through this arrangement, the Church legitimized Spanish and Portuguese colonial and imperial aims in exchange for a privileged role in the new colonies. The Church was granted a religious monopoly in the new colonial territories (including in operating schools), in exchange for conferring their support, granting the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns the power to name Bishops, and allowing the Crowns to tax religious collections (Dussel, 1981). This led to a deep entwinement of the Church and colonial governments in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of Latin America.

Catholic leaders, however, also challenged and critiqued elements of the colonial enterprise. Priests and bishops challenged inhumane and unjust treatment of indigenous peoples. Among the most influential was the Dominican priest, Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566), who for 50 years fiercely defended the rights of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and argued against the evils of slavery and other injustices of the colonial governments (Calderesi, 2010; Lantigua, 2020). This pattern would continue later among Protestant missionaries, who helped catalyze democratic movements throughout the region (Woodberry, 2012), and would later be reflected in Catholic leaders’ opposition to violent state repression (Brenneman, 2014).

The Catholic Church played a dominant role in the spiritual and cultural lives of the colonies. The Church structured community life through spiritual guidance and religious celebrations and was the primary institution responsible for caring for the poor and establishing and operating schools (McFarlane, 2004). For example, in Mexico, the Franciscans initially established schools to train the sons of the native nobility in Christianity, assuming this would lead to widespread conversion of local communities, in line with what occurred in European history. “Some of the students became fluent not just in Spanish but in Latin and Greek as well. The role of these young men was to return to their villages and towns and serve as an example” (Schwaller, 2011, p. 63).

Leading the educational charge by the Catholic Church in Latin America were various groups of vowed communities of religious priests, brothers, and sisters. None were as influential or prolific as the Jesuit missionaries. Jesuits arrived in Latin America by the end of the sixteenth century, and developed a presence in the Andean region between the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. They adapted their process of the educational formation and training of Jesuit priests into a model of formal schooling for the masses and were eager to develop a centralized framework for the schooling infrastructure in the colonies (Ramirez & Boli, 1987; Thröler, 2009). The suppression of the Jesuits by the Catholic Church and their removal from the colonies of France, Spain, and Portugal from 1773 to 1814 significantly disrupted their otherwise profound educational influence (Valencia Caicedo, 2019b).

Although there was limited access, the education of girls was also provided by the Catholic Church in the Colonial Period. In the sixteenth century, schooling revolved around domestic and homemaking skills. Girls with demonstrated aptitude were also taught to read. Many convents offered extended opportunities for girls to learn from female teachers and religious sisters or nuns. Reading instruction took precedence so that girls could read religious texts. In the eighteenth century, formal education for
upper-class girls became more widespread, with the primary aims of moral formation and preparation for domestic roles. A mixture of convent and lay schools also began to extend education to poor girls during this period (Socolow 2015).

As a result of this missionary activity and the work of Church leaders, throughout the colonial period, schools and universities were founded and schooling gradually expanded throughout the region. The Catholic Church was generally the exclusive provider of education during this period throughout most of the region. In the wake of the American and French Revolutions, however, new ideas and models of governance set the stage inhabitants of the LAC region to challenge both colonial power and the place of the Church in society.

POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Following independence movements, which occurred throughout the region between 1804 and 1826, church-state questions emerged as a central political issue. How these debates were resolved and how church-state arrangements were eventually configured in different countries led to divergent paths in terms of the size and importance of the faith-based school sector and the attendant policy landscapes in different countries in the region as it relates to faith-based education.

Conservatives sought a strong role for the Catholic Church in society and a continued monopoly for Catholic religious practice. This position tended to include a continued dominant role for the Catholic Church in the running of schools. Liberals, influenced by Enlightenment ideas, the French Revolution, and the U.S. constitutional protections of religious liberty and a secular state, sought a reduced role for the Church in society and advocated for religious pluralism. Most liberals dominated independence movements, which tended to result in more liberal constitutions throughout the region. However, in many countries, liberals and conservatives traded power in successive regimes throughout the early post-colonial period, leading to various shifts in power resulting in the suppression of the Church and the confiscation of Church land by liberals, only to shift back to the return of a dominant role for Catholic institutions. Thus, the role of the Church in developing education systems was non-linear and varied across contexts (Imbarack & Madero, 2019). When the dust settled, different countries landed in different places with regard to the role of the Catholic Church in society. The institutional and policy environment in many of these contexts depended on which group had the “last word” as the political and policy environment settled and became more stable (Schwaller, 2011).

As liberal influence gained traction in many countries throughout the region, most societies pluralized and opened the door to religious diversity. This meant that many Catholic schools were nationalized throughout the region. It also ushered in initial openness to Protestant, often American, missionaries. Throughout the post-Independence period, Protestant missionaries were intermittently welcomed into gradually pluralizing contexts in Latin America, where they began churches and schools (McGreevy, 2021).

Some scholars have noted, however, that liberal leaders tended to suppress the Catholic Church without necessarily promoting Protestant groups, constraining their growth and influence (Woodberry, 2012). Yet the emphasis of Protestant missionaries on literacy development and schooling, so as to enable individual reading of the Bible, has been well-documented by scholars as a major contributor to economic, social, and political developments throughout the region and globally (Woodberry, 2012). Despite the introduction of Protestantism in LAC during this period, most populations remained overwhelmingly Catholic through the middle of the twentieth century.

THE 20TH CENTURY

Given the opposition and oftentimes hostility directed at the Catholic Church from liberals versus conservative support for the institutional and political role of the Church, Church leaders tended to
align politically with Conservative elites throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. While it is an oversimplification to suggest that the Church was not serving the poor throughout the region, it tended to politically align with conservative interests through the middle of the twentieth century, including oppressive military regimes that suppressed popular movements that advocated for human rights, and workers’ and peasants’ rights (Serrano, 2008; Morello, 2007; 2015). Protestant leaders, in contrast, tended to be more supportive of social movements and democratization during this period (Woodbury, 2012).

This dramatically changed in the 1960s and early 1970s with the influence of Liberation Theology and the Catholic Church’s radical turn to solidarity with the poor. Liberation Theologians preached that God had a special concern for the poor, and that societies too should have a “preferential option for the poor.” They critiqued unjust social structures that oppressed the poor and advocated for radical solidarity and social mobilization. These ideas came to predominate throughout the Latin American Catholic Church and significantly influenced many Protestant leaders in the region. The ideas of Liberation Theology were institutionalized and promulgated through a series of regional meetings of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM for its Spanish acronym) over a 40 year period, including meetings in Medellin (1968), Puebla (1979), Santo Domingo (1992), and Aparecida (2007).

Liberation Theology also placed a particular focus on a liberating education, that is, the idea that education should free the human person to be the protagonist of their own development and to be united in communities seeking the common good; additionally, education should free the poor of unjust social structures and ideologies that maintain their submissiveness in the face of oppression. Liberation Theologians were connected with Paulo Freire, the most influential pedagogue and philosopher of education from the Latin American region. Freire once reflected: “Since I was a child, I have never been able to understand how it could be possible to reconcile faith in Christ with discrimination on the basis of race, social class, or national origin. How is it possible to ‘walk’ with Christ, but refer to the popular classes as ‘these stinky people’ or ‘riffraff’” (Freire, 1996, p.87). These ideas led to a “turn toward the poor” in practice and in terms of the social activity of the Catholic Church and Christianity more broadly throughout the region (Madero, 2019). This resulted in a renewed vigor with which Catholic and Christian institutions sought to “go to the margins” and serve the most vulnerable populations that still influences the character of much of the Christian religious practice and social engagement in the region today.

This period was also defined by continued and growing missionary activity from Protestant communities, and particularly, the growth of Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestantism. Mesner (2017) writes: “Mainline Protestant denominations such as Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists made some inroads, especially among the elites. It was, however, the arrival of Pentecostal missionaries in the twentieth century, with their focus on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that marked the beginning of the embrace of Protestantism by the masses. Over the course of the twentieth century, Pentecostalism grew exponentially throughout the region. Even more than Roman Catholics, Protestants insisted on an all or nothing commitment to the Christian faith.”

Other religious denominations also established a presence in the region at this time, including Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Mennonites, and Jehovah’s Witnesses, with all of them establishing schools. But it is Evangelical Protestantism that has significantly transformed the religious demographic composition, and increasingly the faith-based educational landscape, throughout Latin America during the latter half of the twentieth Century.
Religious affiliation in the Latin American and Caribbean region remains overwhelmingly Christian, at 90 percent of the population, and primarily Catholic. Religious demographics, however, have begun to shift significantly over the past 70 years. Throughout much of the twentieth century over 90 percent of Latin America’s population was Catholic, but as of 2014, only 69 percent of Latin American adults identified as Catholic (Pew, 2014).

The decline in Catholic affiliation is linked to the growth of Protestant adherence and those that identify as religiously unaffiliated. While nine percent report being raised Protestant, 19 percent identify as Protestant as adults (Pew, 2014), suggesting that many are switching from Catholic to Protestant religious affiliation. Scholars offer a range of hypotheses for these changing demographic trends, but prominent among them is the widespread appeal of Evangelical forms of spiritual expression to lower income populations in many countries.
In terms of religious practice among those that identify with a religious group, Protestants tend to be more religiously observant than Catholics in the region, with 83 percent of Protestants reporting attending church services at least once a month compared to 62 percent of Catholics (Pew, 2014).

In addition to its primarily Christian religious adherence, the LAC region also includes indigenous creeds and rituals, especially in the Andean region, and various Afro-Latin American traditions, including Santería in Cuba; Candomblé, Umbanda, and Macumba, primarily in Brazil; and Vodou in Haiti. Adherents tend to be small minorities of the population without significant programmatic activities in education systems. Finally, the region has also been increasingly pluralizing, and includes smaller Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Bahá’í, and Shinto religious participation, with Bahá’í organizations having been particularly involved in educational activities in some contexts (see issue, “Religion in Latin America,” Hemisphere, 2010).

SECULARIZING TRENDS

Though the LAC region remains predominantly Christian, there are indications of growing trends towards secularization. The number of unaffiliated has grown substantially in the last 40+ years and represented eight percent of the population as of 2014 and has likely risen since. Additionally, while only four percent of the population reports being raised as religiously unaffiliated, this number reaches eight percent by adulthood, suggesting many are leaving religious practice.

Most Latin Americans that report being religiously unaffiliated indicate that they do not adhere to any particular religion. Rather, they identify as Atheist or Agnostic. The most secular countries in terms of religious affiliation are Uruguay, the DR, Chile, and El Salvador, where Uruguay is a major outlier (Pew, 2014).

REGIONAL LANDSCAPE FOR FAITH-BASED EDUCATION

FAITH-BASED EDUCATION REGIONAL MARKET SHARE ESTIMATES

The role of faith-based schools has been under-studied and efforts to understand their impact are impeded by the absence of clear data. Ministries of education often do not distinguish between private and faith-based schools or collect data on schools’ religious denominational affiliations. This makes estimating the market share of faith-based and denominational schools very difficult. The picture is further obscured by definitional concerns about what constitutes a faith-based school. For example, is a state school that teaches confessional religious education a faith-based school? Is a school sponsored by a religious entity that receives public funding, but is legally required to be secular in its mission and prohibited from teaching confessional religious education, a faith-based school? What about a school
founded by an individual with a religious name that offers some religious activities, but does not have a formal connection to a church or religious organization?

These are all scenarios common in Latin America and in the country cases from this study. While sound arguments could be offered for various approaches to categorization, we have sought to categorize non-state schools with a religious mission and/or affiliation as faith-based schools. Thus, we do not include state-operated schools that teach confessional religious education, common in the Dominican Republic (DR) and Chile (and also England, Poland, and Italy, for example), as faith-based schools, but a state school with a religious education course. We treat faith-based actors running public schools, even if required to be secular or constrained in their mission, common in Honduras and the DR, as a faith-based school, given the sponsorship by a religious organization, even if the operations are not explicitly religious. The last case, independent private schools with a possible religious inspiration, ethos, or culture, is extremely difficult to categorize accurately in the absence of high quality data. This is also common for private schools in many countries, especially with the recent growth of low-cost private schools globally (UNESCO, 2021), but requires more precise data than we have available in this study for an accurate categorization. Accurately categorizing private schools in Haiti and the DR was particularly challenging. We have sought to estimate the numbers or total enrollment in faith-based schools (FBSs) from various sources (Ministry data, faith-based network data, etc.), and to offer a range when precise data is unavailable.

Furthermore, while some initial attempts have been made to describe the legal landscape (Elacqua, et al., 2018; Glenn & De Groof, 2012), no systematic mapping of Latin American countries’ legal and policy contexts as it relates to the funding and regulation of faith-based schools is currently available (though one is underway and forthcoming by Nicole Garnett and Ana Maria Celis Brunet).

To attempt to identify a range for an average regional market share, we use data from two sources: 1) estimates of the trends and market share of private schools (see Figure 4 below for the global data published in the GEM 2021 Report on Non-State Actors in Education using UNESCO UIS data); and 2) data collected by the Catholic Church and published through the Annual Statistical Yearbook, which has provided the total number of Catholic schools and enrollment in Catholic schools annually since 1973, from which the Catholic school market share and trends can be derived (as a share of total enrollment using UIS data). Given the large number of unregistered private schools in many countries and the definitional issues already discussed that also affect the Catholic Church’s own data collection efforts, both of these sources are likely imperfect. That said, they provide a reasonable basis for a lower and upper bound range of the approximate market share of faith-based schools in the region.

The LAC region has private school enrollment of 21 percent at the primary level (2019), the second highest proportion globally after Southern Asia. Enrollment in private schools at the primary level has been growing steadily over the last 30 years, up from approximately 12 percent in 1990. At the secondary level, private school enrollment has been relatively constant with a market share of 19 percent.
The market share of Catholic schools, in contrast, has been declining in the region over the past 45 years and currently stands at 10 percent (this breaks down to 12 percent at the primary level and 8 percent at the secondary level). Secondary enrollment, for example, has declined from 16 percent to 8 percent during this time period. The declining market share in Catholic schools is likely attributable to a combination of factors, including shifting religious demographics, growth in the number of Evangelical schools, and the rising costs of education in contexts where public funding of faith-based schools is not available.

**FIGURE 4:** The market share of Catholic school, in contrast, has been declining in the region over the past 45 years and currently stands at 10 percent (this breaks down to 12 percent at the primary level and 8 percent at the secondary level). Secondary enrollment, for example, has declined from 16 percent to 8 percent during this time period. The declining market share in Catholic schools is likely attributable to a combination of factors, including shifting religious demographics, growth in the number of Evangelical schools, and the rising costs of education in contexts where public funding of faith-based schools is not available.

**FIGURE 5: CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL MARKET SHARE IN LATIN AMERICA (1972-2014)**

Taken together, Figure 4 and Figure 5 present the upper and lower limit of estimated faith-based school enrollment in the region as a share of overall school enrollment, which for primary school lies between 21 percent private and 12 percent Catholic and for secondary school lies between 19 percent private and 8 percent Catholic. If we assume, for example, that 50 percent of the remaining private enrollment is faith-based, (which we suspect a conservative assumption), this would imply a rough estimate of a 16.5 percent market share for FBSs at the primary level and a 13.5 percent market share for FBSs at the secondary level.

Furthermore, while we lack data on the market share of faith-based schools by country throughout the region, we have data for Catholic schools by country (refer to Table 1). Based on knowledge of a number of these country cases, we posit that higher Catholic market share tends to be an indicative measure of higher private and higher faith-based market shares. This association is likely due to institutional or historical factors associated with each context that explain relatively larger roles for non-state school provision.

**TABLE 1: CATHOLIC SCHOOL PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL MARKET SHARE BY COUNTRY (2020)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary MS</th>
<th>Secondary MS</th>
<th>Avg. MS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>36.55</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aruba</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominica</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>25.45</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>20.95</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>19.35</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>16.55</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Lucia</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>16.55</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>12.65</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suriname</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>11.05</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.35</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caiman Islands</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antigua</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Kits</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St-Vincent</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bermuda</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turks and Caicos</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin Islands (U.S.)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guyana</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data reported in Imbarack & Madero, 2019 based upon data from Annual Church Statistics and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) database.
POLICY CONTEXTS

The policy contexts, as it relates to the role of faith-based educational providers, vary widely throughout the region. Though religious education was foundational throughout the region and enjoyed both funding and political support in the Colonial Period, the Post-Independence Period resulted in a range of different policy landscapes. However, the legal and policy landscapes throughout Latin America have not been fully detailed in the research literature to date, preventing a full treatment here.

Below is an approximate typology of three kinds of policy landscapes with respect to faith-based schools and the degree of educational pluralism in each context. We define educational pluralism as the degree to which an “education system embraces a diversity of forms of educational provision beyond the exclusive role of state-provided schooling and that embraces and allows for distinctive philosophical, cultural, and religious perspectives in alignment with parental choices in the provision of education” (D’Agostino & Grau, 2021, p. 366). The degree of educational pluralism pertains to both the degree of autonomy enjoyed by faith-based schools to provide a distinctive educational project, as well as the degree of non-state supply offered in the context or the total market share of private actors. This latter criterion is also related to the degree to which non-state providers receive public subsidies, which reduces financial barriers to enrollment (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 6: EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM SPECTRUM

We offer three broad categories into which countries can be placed: 1) high educational pluralism, 2) moderate educational pluralism, and 3) low educational pluralism. Countries with high educational pluralism have a comparatively high market share of private and FBSs and tend to embrace various forms of public-private partnerships (PPP) or public funding with non-state provision. Many of these countries appear to have a long legacy of church-state partnership in education. Countries with moderate educational pluralism tend to have an average market share of private or FBSs. Many have recently adopted or expanded PPP policies. Finally, countries with low educational pluralism tend to have a comparatively low-market share of private and FBSs and little or no PPP policies.

We offer below an approximate and preliminary attempt at categorizing national contexts, based upon limited data and policy mapping that remains incomplete at this time.
High educational pluralism

Countries with high educational pluralism include Grenada, Belize, Aruba, Dominica, Bolivia, Chile, Haiti, Saint Lucia, and Argentina. These all have above average market shares of Catholic schools (above 10 percent). Many are also countries that maintained public funding of FBSs since early in the Post-Independence Period. Rather than exclusively providing public funds to state schools, these countries continued to publicly subsidize faith-based providers and eventually pluralized funding, opening up public funding to non-Catholic schools at a certain point in their history. Later policy reforms reinforced or institutionalized these arrangements.

For example, since the 19th century, Chile has subsidized FBSs. This policy was reinforced in 1951 under the Minister of Education, Bernardo Leighton, when he institutionalized and regularized the subsidy of Catholic schools at the level of half of the State’s per pupil allocation to public schools (Arellano, 2001). In 1981 the Pinochet regime increased the public subsidy of private schools, opened subsidies up to all private schools, and made it easier for new schools to be founded and become subsidized. While often credited with beginning Chile’s policy of subsidizing private schools, Pinochet’s expansion instead built upon a longstanding policy history of subsidizing FBSs in Chile. Belize has a similar policy history, where the public funding of faith-based providers has been more or less continuous since the founding of the educational system. This policy history, and the accompanying financial accessibility of FBSs over generations in these countries, also explains the relatively higher market share of FBSs in these contexts.

Here, Haiti is an outlier in that the high market share of private schools in the country (equivalent to 85 percent of schools, most of which are faith-based), has grown more by necessity and in response to weak state capacity rather than by design or due to a favorable policy context with widespread FBS access to public funding.

Moderate Educational Pluralism

Countries with moderate levels of educational pluralism have a slightly below average to average market share of FBSs—as indicated by their Catholic school market share of 5 to 10 percent—and often have more recently adopted or expanded policies allowing some funding of FBSs. These include Colombia, the DR, Suriname, Puerto Rico, Ecuador, and Trinidad, and may also include Uruguay, the Caiman Islands, Jamaica, Venezuela, Paraguay, the Bahamas, and El Salvador. Good examples include Colombia, Ecuador, and the DR, each of which have a moderate market share of FBSs and have recently broadened public policies enabling public funding of FBSs. Brazil might also fit within the moderate pluralism category. Though it has a relatively low Catholic school market share at 2.25 percent, and in recent decades hasn’t publicly funded private schools, there is a relatively high and growing number of private schools in the country—representing 21 percent of primary schools in 2017—and the legal context for PPPs has recently changed (Adrião and Silva, 2020). In 2015, a Federation Supreme Court ruling expanded opportunities for public schools to be privately managed, and a law enacted in 2017 allows non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to receive public funding to support school operations (Adrião and Silva, 2020).

Low Educational Pluralism

Countries with low levels of educational pluralism include Nicaragua, Saint-Kits, St-Vincent, Bermuda, Mexico, Panama, Turks and Caicos, Honduras, Costa Rica, Barbados, the Virgin Islands, Guyana, and Cuba. For example, in Mexico, Catholic schools represent 3.3 percent of schools and there is no public funding for FBSs. Some of this links back to the turbulent history between Mexico and the Catholic Church. The Mexican Constitution went from establishing Catholicism as the official and sole religion in 1824 to outlawing Catholic teaching in 1917, leading to violent conflict. This hostility continued until explicit anticlericalism was removed from the constitution in 1991 (Calderisi, 2010). Guatemala has a similar, if less violent, history. The liberal reforms of between 1871 and 1885 led to the breaking of the
monopoly of the Catholic Church, but also the expulsion of Catholic religious orders that ran schools, including the Jesuits, Dominicans, and Franciscans; the expropriation of Catholic properties; and conversion of Catholic schools into public schools (McCleary & Barro, 2017). This history likely accounts for the relatively low market share of Catholic schools in Guatemala. Importantly, however, as will be discussed below, Guatemala has a growing market share of Evangelical Protestant schools and in 2016 adopted a PPP policy allowing approved private schools to receive public subsidies, though only 14 have been approved for funding since 2016 through this new policy. Finally, there are countries like Cuba, with no educational pluralism, and Nicaragua, which has a historically lower Catholic school market share—in 2020, it stood at 5.45 percent. The country is also suppressing religious and faith-based actors under the autocratic regime of Daniel Ortega, with 2,315 NGOs (237 faith-based institutions) closed between Oct. 2018 and Oct. 2022.

In summary, there is a wide diversity of policy contexts and a wide range of faith-based educational contexts across the region, generally linking back to historical political circumstances dating back to independence movements and the conservative versus liberal political debates that ensued in the years after independence.
METHODOLOGY

Design

The research design for this study was a qualitative multi-case design that functioned at two levels: 1) within country cases of faith-based organizations, schools, and school networks; and 2) through five primary country cases that synthesized information from the organizational cases along with secondary data and a synthesis of evidence from desk reviews. Finally, the information from both levels were synthesized across country cases and supplemented by research from the region to comprise a final regional analysis and synthesis of evidence from the multi-country inquiry.

Sample

The first unit of analysis for this study is faith-based actors in education systems and the relevant opportunities, challenges, partnership arrangements, and policy contexts that affect their role, contributions, and opportunities for engagement. We define faith-based actors as non-state entities with a direct or indirect religious sponsorship or affiliation. This can include local faith communities (LFC) (e.g., churches, temples, mosques), church-sponsored or religious entity-sponsored schools or networks of schools (e.g., a school sponsored by an LFC or another religious group), international or local NGOs with a direct or indirect religious affiliation and identity (e.g., World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, Caritas), and religiously sponsored higher education institutions (HEIs). We considered education as including early childhood education and development, pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools, youth engagement, and child protection. Some basic information is provided about faith-based HEIs, but this was not the primary focus of the study.

The selected sample of country cases focuses on populous, lower-income countries in Central America and the Caribbean. Additionally, the broad regional focus is meant to fill a gap in the available literature while also benefiting from the specificity of a set of country cases and an illustrative set of mini-cases of policies, organizations, or examples of faith-based educational providers.

Participants were identified for key informant interviews (KII) based upon their roles as faith-based education network leaders, key stakeholders with expertise or significant knowledge of faith-based actors (e.g., a ministry position responsible for liaising with faith-based or private actors), or due to their leadership position in an illustrative mini-case study organization. KII participants were selected in dialogue with study-team leaders, based upon the desk review, and through snowball sampling techniques drawn from other KII.

The team aimed to use a diversity sample across multiple faith-traditions, areas of the education sector, and kinds of organizations. To the extent possible and relevant, the study sought to explore the inclusion of minority and non-traditional groups.

Country cases

| Dominican Republic | Guatemala | El Salvador | Haiti | Honduras |
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- |

USAID.GOV
TABLE 2: SAMPLE OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FBS</th>
<th>FBSs Network</th>
<th>FBO / NGO</th>
<th>Gov.</th>
<th>Total KIIs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

The study used three sources of data: 1) secondary data sources, 2) documents from the desk review and gathered from KIIs, and 3) qualitative data from KIIs.

For secondary data collection, local research team leaders worked to identify secondary data on the scope and involvement of faith-based education actors in their national context from sources including the Ministry of Education (e.g. Education Management Information Systems [EMIS] data), administrative data or previous school census data of faith-based networks (e.g. data collected annually from the Office of Church Statistics for Catholic schools), and previous studies of the role of non-state actors in participating countries. To the extent that cross-national datasets existed and could be identified (e.g., data from the Office of Church Statistics for Catholic schools), regional and cross-national trends were examined where and to the degree feasible.

A second source of data was a desk review of relevant scholarly and grey literature. These sources were collected for each of the country case studies and the broader regional inquiry by engaging in a search of the scholarly literature and available reports and other relevant documents. Additionally, documents and reports were collected from key stakeholders and online materials reviewed to inform mini-case studies.

Finally, direct data collection included 54 KIIs across the five country cases and through a set of regional case studies. These were semi-structured interviews based upon a set of standard protocols for both system-level leaders and faith-affiliated organizational leaders. Interviews with system-level leaders inquired about the scope and market share of FBSs, governance and support systems, relationships with the State, service to marginalized populations, perceived comparative advantages and limitations, key strengths, challenges, and priorities, and possible opportunities to deepen PPPs and engagement with international partners. Interviews with faith-affiliated organizational leaders sought to profile particular mini cases of illustrative and effective faith-based actors working in the education and child development sectors. The interview content depended on the nature of the case, but included the organizations' history, scale and scope of services, populations served, unique contributions, the role of faith-affiliation.
in shaping the mission, identity, and character of the service provision, access to resources, strengths, challenges, priorities, and growth opportunities.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study occurred during two phases and at two levels. At the level of the country case studies, local research consultants summarized findings from the desk review, KIIs, and available secondary quantitative data, drawing upon and including multiple illustrative case studies of FBOs and educational providers. These were then synthesized and analyzed to respond to the respective research questions at country level. This included, in some circumstances, indications of gaps in the available literature and secondary data. Additionally, the study concurrently synthesized evidence from a broad regional desk review and from a targeted set of interviews related to illustrative regional mini cases.

During a second phase of analysis, findings from the country-level and the regional-level synthesis and mini cases were analyzed, interpreted, and synthesized together at a cross-national level. This analysis and these findings comprise the basis of the key findings and recommendations for this final report.

**Limitations**

There are three primary limitations of the study design: 1) reliance upon available data, 2) utilization of existing literature, and 3) diversity within the LAC context.

The first limitation has to do with variability in the available secondary data. Available datasets generally do not include specific information about the faith-affiliation of schools. This makes it difficult and labor intensive to try to generate estimates of the total market share of faith-affiliated schools or to conduct any thorough comparisons between FBSs and state-runs schools. In order to address this, in many circumstances, secondary datasets were hand-coded to estimate the faith-affiliation of schools, or estimates of key school subnetworks (e.g. Catholic and Evangelical) were used to attempt to generate a total estimated number / market share of schools. Additionally, comparisons between state schools and FBSs (e.g. regarding learning outcomes) are impeded by methodological issues related to potential selection effects that would require robust datasets (which are lacking) to make any strong empirical claims.

The second limitation is the significant reliance on extant literature, which is not extensive on this topic in the study contexts. To address this limitation, the study engaged local researchers familiar with the local context and language to search not only published and peer reviewed literature in English, but published and unpublished reports and documents in Spanish or French, including those gathered directly from system-level leaders in the country case contexts. Additionally, targeted KIIs supplemented what was available from the desk review. Finally, similar techniques at the regional level were used to search the regional literature on these topics to supplement the country case material and provide data for the regional mini cases.

The third limitation is the diversity of the LAC context, which makes a synthetic report and themes complex. This was addressed by careful analysis of both the key themes and similarities from across the country cases and regional analysis, as well as careful attention to distinctions and differences across contexts to avoid overgeneralization.
FINDINGS

STUDY QUESTION 1: THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF FAITH-BASED EDUCATION

1. What are the role and contributions of faith-based education actors and institutions in providing education services, especially for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth (e.g. those experiencing extreme poverty, affected by irregular migration, affected by violence, girls and boys, those with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural and urban, etc.)?

Answer: Faith-based educational actors fill critical roles in education systems, with modest market shares in most contexts (averaging approximately between 15 to 23 percent, though ranging up to 40 to 85 percent in Haiti), but outsized roles in serving vulnerable and marginalized populations, including migrants, minorities, the urban and rural poor, at risk-youth, and those affected by violence. Animated by their beliefs and views of the dignity of the human person, they tend to provide service to the most vulnerable in distinctive and effective ways by focusing on whole child and integral development, grounding their service in communities and long-term relationships of trust, animated by a strong sense of mission, and supported by cross-national, voluntary, and philanthropic networks.

Affected by Context

1. The role and contributions of FBSs are contingent upon historical, political, social, and policy contexts, explaining much of the wide range of market shares.

2. There is a gradual trend toward more PPPs and public funding of private and faith-based education in most country cases, suggesting a persistent and growing role for FBSs.

Role (Market Share)

3. The average market share of FBSs in the LAC region is between 10 and 20 percent. The average market share of FBSs in selected country cases is between 15.5 and 19 percent (ranging from 2.7 percent in Guatemala to 43 percent in Haiti).

4. The market share of FBSs is overwhelmingly made up of a mix of Catholic and Evangelical schools. While the market share of Catholic schools has been steady or declining, the market share of Evangelical schools has been growing, mirroring demographic trends.

5. Some FBSs in every context receive public funding, but in most contexts, the majority of FBSs are tuition-funded.

6. FBSs and FBOs tend to play large and important roles in providing alternative, vocational, and secondary education.

7. FBSs have a modest market share but make critical contributions to higher education, including sponsoring among the oldest and highest quality universities.

Distinctive Contributions

8. FBSs and FBOs support basic skills development through schools and organizations regarded as safe, trusted, relational, and accountable institutions.

---

1 We refer to the role of faith-based actors as their level and type of service provision and how they fit within the system, including estimates of the scope of service delivery, market share, total impact, and if possible, proportion accessible to low-income families. We use the term contribution as meaning the “distinctive contribution” of faith-based actors and consider any unique direct or indirect benefits they have provided to the system and any affordances of their faith-based orientation.
9. **FBOs support alternative education models, especially for out of school youth and for school reintegration**, leveraging well-established institutions and networks, creative models, and adaptive and responsive organizations.

10. **FBSs and FBOs provide vital secondary and vocational education, serving at-risk populations** often with holistic models and nurturing communities.

11. FBSs and FBOs are making essential contributions providing **care and child protection for the most vulnerable children and youth** (e.g., migrants, those affected by violence, gang-involved youth, pregnant teens, sexually exploited).

12. FBOs play important roles currently and have **high potential to make large future contributions in early childhood development (ECD).**

**Affected by Context**

FBSs’ role and contributions are **contingent upon historical, political, social, and policy contexts**, explaining much of the wide range of market shares. For example, the low market share in Guatemala is likely explained by the expulsion of Catholic religious orders for 50 years from the late 1800s to the 1920s and the state nationalization of all Catholic schools. New Catholic schools have gradually emerged but comprise a smaller market share than neighboring countries. Haiti has the highest market share, largely explained by its weak state, which failed to respond to educational demand, leaving non-state actors to do so. Haiti may also have been influenced by its early concordat (a treaty with the Vatican City State), which privileged the role of Catholic schools as key providers of education.

There is a **gradual trend toward more PPPs** and public funding of private and faith-based education in most country cases, suggesting a persistent and growing role for FBSs. Guatemala, Honduras, and the DR have all recently added or expanded PPP models; Haiti has experimented with new models; and both Haiti and El Salvador have public funding of Catholic schools through their concordats. So, in every case there is some public funding of FBSs, ranging from common and growing in the DR to minimal in Haiti and Guatemala. Notably, however, in Honduras, any public funding requires schools to secularize their programming, which creates trade-offs for FBSs. Nonetheless, many still partner with the State to better serve the poor.

**Role (Market Share)**

Data on FBSs are inadequate and not systematically collected, which, along with definitional ambiguities, impedes data quality. None of the governments in the country case studies systematically collect data on the faith affiliation and sponsorship of schools. This made estimating market share difficult. The only country in the region that we know collects this data with reasonable effectiveness is Chile, though even Chile’s data has various data quality problems.

The issue is further complicated by the absence of clear definitions for what constitutes a FBS or faith-based actor. For example, FBOs in Honduras can manage schools, but if they receive public funding, they are required to be secular in their operations. We opted to count these as a form of FBS. In the DR, it was impossible within the scope of this study to accurately estimate how many of the non-state schools are faith-based. Many private schools are formally affiliated with a church or a religious organization. A large subset is also founded by individuals or community members. Of these “independent” private schools, some use names with a religious connotation, sometimes because they have a strong faith-orientation due to the vision of the founder (e.g. teach religious education, regularly pray, etc.), but sometimes they are reported to do so for branding reasons or because it is common in the context. Finally, the definitional concerns are further complicated in a context where state schools may teach confessional religious education. This raises questions about the appropriate criteria for determining what can be considered a FBS.
As such, data needed to be triangulated from multiple sources and was often likely significantly undercounted, particularly in Haiti and the DR. When a specific estimate was not possible, we have opted to show a range, such that the DR FBS market share is estimated to be between 9 and 27 percent.

**FIGURE 7: FAITH-BASED SCHOOL MARKET SHARE BY COUNTRY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country case</th>
<th>Estimated FBS Market Share</th>
<th>Notes on sources and level of evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>~43%</td>
<td>Available data confirm at least a market share of 43 percent for FBSs, triangulating from Ministry of Education (MOE) data and Catholic school data, but may undercount Protestant schools. There is an estimated 85 percent market share for non-state schools, and it is likely that the percentage of FBSs falls somewhere between 43 percent and 85 percent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>9-27%</td>
<td>MOE data indicate that 11 percent of publicly-funded schools are faith-based, accounting for 9 percent of all schools. We lack data on the share of private and semi-official schools—which account for 18 percent of total market share—held by FBSs (Dominican Republic Ministry of Education [MINERD], 2021).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average market share of FBSs in the LAC region is between 10 and 20 percent. The average market share of FBSs in selected country cases is between 15.5 and 19 percent (ranging from 2.7 percent in Guatemala to 43 percent in Haiti). We know with reasonable confidence the regional market share of Catholic schools, which represents 10 percent, because the Catholic Church collects annual data. We also know that 20 percent of schools in the region are private (UNESCO, 2021). As the vast majority of FBSs are considered private, we can assume a lower limit of 10 percent and an upper limit of 20 percent, and can reasonably assume an estimate of around 15 to 17 percent for the market share of FBSs. The average market share for the country cases based upon our best available estimate is conservatively between 15.5 and 19 percent. This breaks down as follows:

**TABLE 3: ESTIMATED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY MARKET SHARE FOR COUNTRY CASES**
This suggests a range of between 9 percent and 27 percent for faith-based enrollment.

El Salvador 13.4% Best available estimate based upon a hand-coded analysis of available MOE datasets.

Honduras 8% Based upon MOE datasets from 2021.

Guatemala 2.7% Based upon datasets or estimates from the Catholic Church and Evangelical Schools, which account for 98 percent of religious adherents.

Average 15.5-19% Based upon the lower- and upper-bound average of the estimates from each country case.

The overwhelming majority of the market share held by FBSs is composed of a mix of Catholic and Evangelical schools. While the market share for Catholic schools has been steady or declining, that of Evangelical schools has been growing, mirroring demographic trends. Market share at all levels and in each context is split between Catholic and Evangelical schools, with the market share for Evangelical/Protestant schools representing the majority of the FBS market share in primary and secondary levels in Haiti and Honduras. Meanwhile, Guatemala has more Evangelical schools but a similar total enrollment between Catholic and Evangelical schools, and in El Salvador, 60 percent of FBSs are Catholic and 40 percent are Protestant. Data is not available for the DR. At the level of HEIs, market share tends to be higher for Catholic HEIs in all country cases for which data is available (the DR, El Salvador, Honduras), with data not available for Haiti and Guatemala.

Some FBSs in every context receive public funding, but in most contexts, the majority of FBSs are tuition-funded. The average share of FBSs that are publicly-funded in the country cases is around 24 to 28 percent, but with wide variance that ranges from .4 percent in Guatemala (equivalent to six schools) to nearly 50 percent of faith-based school enrollment in El Salvador and Honduras, and likely the DR.

In Haiti and El Salvador, some FBSs are funded due to a legacy from the concordats. Public funding of FBSs is currently limited to some Catholic schools, accounting for 11 percent of Catholic schools in Haiti and 22 percent of FBSs in El Salvador, but making up 47 percent of the FBS enrollment. Since the 1970s, the DR has built upon the historical precedent of subsidizing Catholic schools through its concordat, and has recently negotiated agreements with other private and FBS networks (Catholic and Evangelical), such that a total of 529 schools now receive public funding. In Honduras, 22 percent of FBSs (equivalent to 196 schools) are publicly-funded, accounting for 43 percent of total FBS enrollment. In Guatemala, since a new law allowed similar models in 2015, 14 non-state schools have received public funding, of which six are FBSs, which comprises .4 percent of all FBSs.

The overwhelming majority of the market share held by FBSs is composed of a mix of Catholic and Evangelical schools. While the market share for Catholic schools has been steady or declining, that of Evangelical schools has been growing, mirroring demographic trends. Market share at all levels and in each context is split between Catholic and Evangelical schools, with the market share for Evangelical/Protestant schools representing the majority of the FBS market share in primary and secondary levels in Haiti and Honduras. Meanwhile, Guatemala has more Evangelical schools but a similar total enrollment between Catholic and Evangelical schools, and in El Salvador, 60 percent of FBSs are Catholic and 40 percent are Protestant. Data is not available for the DR. At the level of HEIs, market share tends to be higher for Catholic HEIs in all country cases for which data is available (the DR, El Salvador, Honduras), with data not available for Haiti and Guatemala.

Some FBSs in every context receive public funding, but in most contexts, the majority of FBSs are tuition-funded. The average share of FBSs that are publicly-funded in the country cases is around 24 to 28 percent, but with wide variance that ranges from .4 percent in Guatemala (equivalent to six schools) to nearly 50 percent of faith-based school enrollment in El Salvador and Honduras, and likely the DR.

In Haiti and El Salvador, some FBSs are funded due to a legacy from the concordats. Public funding of FBSs is currently limited to some Catholic schools, accounting for 11 percent of Catholic schools in Haiti and 22 percent of FBSs in El Salvador, but making up 47 percent of the FBS enrollment. Since the 1970s, the DR has built upon the historical precedent of subsidizing Catholic schools through its concordat, and has recently negotiated agreements with other private and FBS networks (Catholic and Evangelical), such that a total of 529 schools now receive public funding. In Honduras, 22 percent of FBSs (equivalent to 196 schools) are publicly-funded, accounting for 43 percent of total FBS enrollment. In Guatemala, since a new law allowed similar models in 2015, 14 non-state schools have received public funding, of which six are FBSs, which comprises .4 percent of all FBSs.

**TABLE 4: ESTIMATED PUBLICLY-FUNDED FBSs AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL FBSs BY COUNTRY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage publicly-funded out of total FBSs**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>.4% of schools (6 schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Percentage publicly-funded out of total FBSs**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>3.2% of FBSs (246 schools)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>22% of schools; 43% of FBS enrollment (196 schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>27.6% of schools; 47% of FBS enrollment (182 schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>30+% of FBS enrollment (526 schools)³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>~24-28% of FBSs are publicly funded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Calculating the exact estimates of the total number of FBSs in the DR with precision was not possible given data limitations.

FBSs and FBOs play large and important roles in providing alternative, vocational, and secondary education. FBSs and FBOs play an outsized role in technical and vocational schools, with 34 percent of the market in the DR, 33 percent in El Salvador, 34 percent in Haiti (figure represents the Catholic market share only as the total FBS technical-school market share is unknown), and with notable contributions in Guatemala and Honduras (but no market share data available). Regarding secondary education, FBSs contribute to a higher proportion of the total secondary market share across all contexts for which data is available than at the primary level, including over 75 percent of secondary schools in Haiti (compared to 42 percent overall and 10 percent of primary), 41 percent of secondary schools and 68 percent of all secondary enrollment in Honduras (compared to 4 percent of all schools and 8 percent of total enrollment), 13 percent of publicly-funded secondary schools in the DR (compared to 7.4 percent of primary schools), and 28.6 percent of secondary schools in El Salvador (compared to 20 percent of the market-share at all levels), with no data available for Guatemala.

FBSs have a modest market share but make critical contributions to higher education, including sponsoring among the oldest and highest-quality universities. The faith-based HEI market share is 20 percent in Honduras, 22.5 percent of HEI graduates in El Salvador, 11 percent in the DR and data is not available for Haiti or Guatemala.

² For Haiti, the publicly funded FBS market share was calculated using the census data from Catholic schools, which found that 246 of 2,315 Catholic schools (11 percent of Catholic schools) received some public funding. With an estimate of 7,538 FBSs, this indicates 3.2 percent of FBSs receive some public funding.

³ The publicly-funded FBS market share for the DR serves approximately 186,000 students in 526 schools. With 418,921 students enrolled in private and semi-official schools, for which we lack accurate estimates of FBS market share. This suggests that publicly-funded FBSs account for a minimum of 30 percent of the FBS market share.
Role and Distinctive Contributions

FIGURE 8: KEY ROLE AND PERCEIVED DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS BY SUB-SECTOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Roles</th>
<th>Distinctive Contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Support for basic skills (after school, materials, delivery) (FS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Alternative edu - reintegration, out of school, distance edu (FS, YWFD, EiCC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Secondary, vocational and technical, scholarships (YWFD, EiCC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Migration, child protection, violence-affected (EiCC, YWFD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Other - ECD, Democratic backsliding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: FS = foundational skills; YWFD = youth and workforce development; EiCC = education in crisis and conflict

FBSs and FBOs tend to place a large focus on serving and empowering vulnerable populations. While FBSs and FBOs run some elite and high performing schools, they make a disproportionate commitment to serving the poor and vulnerable and are regarded as doing so in particularly effective and empowering ways. For example, data from Guatemala’s Association of Christian Schools International (2022) suggests that, of the 893 Protestant schools in their network, 447 (50 percent of total) served “mid-low” and 178 (20 percent of total) served low socio-economic status populations, with only 45 schools (5 percent) serving high income and 223 (25 percent) serving middle-high. The other country cases similarly reported high proportions of low-fee private and publicly subsidized FBSs, suggesting high proportions that are accessible to low-income communities.

The data from the country cases indicates that the following service areas were regarded as particular strengths or present unique opportunities in light of FBOs’ organizational characteristics. It is also notable that many of these service areas have direct or indirect influence in addressing, preventing, or mitigating the effects of violence, which is a major underlying development challenge in Central America and the Caribbean. These areas are: 1) support for basic skills development, 2) alternative education especially for out of school youth, 3) secondary and vocational education, 4) care for the most vulnerable children and youth (e.g. migrants, violence-affected, and gang-involved youth), and 5) important current/potential roles in ECD. In each of these areas, FBSs and FBOs are reported to have distinctive organizational attributes.

1. FBSs and FBOs **support basic skills development** through schools and organizations that are regarded to be safe, trusted, relational, and accountable institutions. For example, FBOs in the DR make important contributions through after-school and Saturday literacy programs, and in Haiti through after-school small group tutoring and summer reading camps that have been shown to close literacy gaps for struggling learners there and in many low-income contexts (see Smart Buys, 2021). Distance education programs by FBOs in Honduras, Haiti, and the DR also have supplemental learning benefits, and these organizations were faster and more resilient in adapting to the challenges of COVID-19 than state institutions. Large local and international FBOs in Haiti, including Protestant (Fédération des Ecoles Protestantes d’Haiti [FEPHI]) and Catholic schools (Commission Episcopale des Écoles Catholiques
networks, which have also played major roles in service delivery for the most effective early grade reading programs, including supporting teacher training, school-based monitoring and coaching, materials development, and leading early grade reading assessment (EGRA) data collections (Guzman et al., 2021).

To this work, FBSs and FBOs bring a number of distinctive advantages. FBSs tend to have a reputation for safer learning environments and benefit from rootedness in local communities with whom they enjoy significant social capital and networks. Additionally, FBSs and FBOs are reported to enjoy considerable trust and legitimacy linked to their religious sponsors and leaders, and a reputation for running quality programs, often in difficult, poor, and remote communities.

2. **FBOs support alternative education models, especially for out of school youth and for school reintegration**, leveraging well-established institutions and networks, creative models, and adaptive and responsive organizations. In the country cases in this study, these are particularly important both for improving educational outcomes and for violence prevention by reducing the risk of youth participation in gangs. Schools are vital in providing a healthy and protective environment that support children’s learning and cognitive development, psychosocial growth and wellbeing, and protect children from violence (Alexander, et al, 2010; Patrinos, 2022; World Bank, 2018). This protective role becomes more difficult, but all the more essential, in contexts of conflict and violence, where the breakdown in social cohesion exacerbates various risks to children and youth, from recruitment into violent groups to sexual exploitation, as well as exposure to trauma and displacement (Alexander, et al, 2010).

For these reasons, engagement in school is a vital protective factor for children and youth, and efforts to support out of school youth through alternative learning and reintegration programs are important responses to supporting vulnerable children. Innovative programs like the Honduran Institute for Radio Instruction (IHER) and the Tutorial Learning System - Bayán Association Schools (SAT-Bayán) in Honduras, and the Caminante Education Project and La Merced Foundation in the DR, provide educational services for out of school children and youth, especially in under-served rural and remote locations where lower-secondary and upper-secondary schooling is not provided by the State. These services are provided to all children regardless of religious affiliation. Through radio classes (IHER) and learning in community spaces (IHER and SAT-Bayán), tutors and volunteer teachers in these alternative programs supported the learning of 35,272 Honduran students enrolled in secondary education in 2020 (Ministry of Education of Honduras, 2020, p. 8; IHER, 2021; Bayan Association, 2021).

Similarly, FBOs in both Haiti and the DR provided rapid responses to COVID-19 and did so prior to the government, ensuring materials and distance learning were made available after schools shut down. This is indicative of the entrepreneurial spirit, benefits of international partnerships, and the adaptiveness of many FBOs in seeking to fulfill their mission. FBOs often serve and support the public sector in addition to faith-based networks, as noted in multiple country cases. For example, Fe y Alegria in El Salvador provides training and services to state schools. Finally, the orientation of many FBOs to serving the needs of the whole child incline them to developing innovative programs like the implementation of fish-basins to support income and school lunches, and new socio-emotional learning programming supported by the Catholic school network of the CEEC and their partners in Haiti. Additionally, there is the example of the provision of clothing and food in under-resourced schools sponsored by the Christian Love Brigades in Honduras.

3. **FBSs and FBOs provide vital secondary and vocational education**, serving at-risk populations with holistic models and nurturing communities. In addition to supporting practical skills for workforce entry, which is an effective means of violence prevention, vocational training is often used in efforts to remediate the involvement of youth in gangs, especially in programs sponsored by the Catholic Church (Brenneman, 2014). Examples of work with youth and gangs include the efforts of international faith-based NGOs, like Catholic Relief Services’ in El Salvador, and the efforts of local FBOs, like the St. Luke’s Foundation in Haiti and the Christian Love Brigades’ Project Victoria in Honduras.
The Victoria Project is an example of an integrated educational, vocational, and psycho-social response in Honduras. The project runs two rehabilitation centers that support educational, technical, counseling, and spiritual engagement in efforts to rehabilitate young men aged 12 to 38 who were formerly involved in gangs or struggling with alcohol and drug addictions. The rehabilitation centers are located outside of Honduras’ two-largest and most violent cities in terms of homicide rates, Tegacigalpa and San Pedro Sula.

Additionally, high dropout rates have been noted as a vital concern for the region and have critical links to youth development, various social outcomes, and human capital gains as well as critical risks for increased youth vulnerability, including recruitment into gangs and teen pregnancy among others (Adelman & Szekely, 2016). Brenneman (2014) suggests that time is a key factor in gang prevention, where youth who are positively engaged and active in school, church, or other pro-social activities are less likely to join gangs. Youth are thus at particular risk. This is particularly true for young men.

Research using household surveys indicates that a primary reason for youth dropping out of school is related to “not being interested in studying” or “dislike[ing] school” (Adelman and Szekely, 2016). This suggests that the affective engagement of students is a key driver of student retention. Scholars have identified the culture of care and community in schools as linked to student engagement and pro-social outcomes, especially for low-income and vulnerable youth. Schooling, especially for youth, is profoundly voluntary, and students tend to engage when they feel that they are cared for and supported by adults they trust. Finally, students tend to engage more in schools where they feel a sense of belonging, which is a factor both of school culture and opportunities to participate, such as through extra-curriculars (see Murphy & Torres, 2014 for a synthesis of research).

Respondents indicated that a sense of community, pastoral care, and high expectations are particular strengths of faith-based schools, suggesting there may be unique affordances of secondary FBSs in retaining students. While the data available in this study could not explore comparative dropout rates of FBSs and non-FBSs, research on Catholic schools and private school choice programs in the U.S. do find retention and attainment effects (Neal, 1997; Cowen et al., 2013). Additionally, schools are often linked to churches, which function as much more than places of worship. They are also community and activity centers, with high potential to offer various pro-social activities for youth (e.g. youth-groups, clubs, sports). Finally, research from the U.S. on Catholic school effects suggests that school-church overlapping social networks create tight social capital bonds that serve as social safety nets for children (Coleman et al., 1982). Moreover, teachers in Catholic schools tend to have “extended roles” based upon their sense of professional identity as a ministry, not just a job, leading them to assume more
mentorship roles beyond the classroom (Bryk et al., 1993). It is not possible in this study to determine if there are retention effects associated with FBSs in LAC, and if so, whether they are attributable to the character of FBSs or to other factors, like selection effects (enrolling higher socio-economic status students who are more likely to persist in school) and school compositional effects (having larger proportions of higher income students, which affects various student outcomes, including persistence in school).

There are also vital contributions of Protestant and Catholic schools at the secondary and technical level that serve other marginalized populations, such as the rural, indigenous Q’eqchi population served by the Bealeel Q’eqchi Mennonite School and the Don Bosco Catholic School, both in Tzulhaim, San Juan Chamaleco, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala.

The Bezaleel Q’eqchi Mennonite School is a bilingual, multicultural primary, secondary, and vocational boarding school serving 90 percent indigenous students, founded by the Q’eqchi Mennonite communities and supported by international Mennonite networks. It serves a particularly valuable role at the secondary level, as its boarding program allows youth from outlying rural areas to attend the school despite transportation barriers, particularly vital for enhancing girls’ educational access and attainment at the secondary level among indigenous populations (Richardson et al., 2019; Vuri, 2008). Additionally, the linguistically and culturally responsive curriculum allows indigenous students access to a quality secondary education while addressing potential learning barriers.

4. FBSs and FBOs provide protection and support services to highly vulnerable children and youth (e.g. migrants, those affected by violence, gang-involved or drug-addicted youth, teenage mothers, victims of sexual exploitation). Evidence from the country cases indicate that many FBOs, motivated by their sense of mission and commitment to the most vulnerable, deliberately seek to be of service through schools or other child protection and counseling services in the most challenging, violent, and poor contexts and populations. For example, this was evident with a number of FBOs in Honduras (Collaboration and Effort Association [ACOES], Fe y Alegría, and the Christian Love Brigades Association Schools), in Haiti (St. Luke’s Foundation), and in the DR (World Vision, and the Caminante Education Project), where services range from whole child development in schools to services to prevent teen pregnancy or second pregnancy, drug rehabilitation, and counseling for victims of commercial sex exploitation. Their long-term commitments to local communities tend to engender trust and often a degree of protection from violence.

FBSs and FBOs also frequently seek to serve vulnerable children with holistic models of integrated service delivery. These are often deeply relational and community-driven and include care for basic, educational, and the spiritual and social-emotional needs of the populations they serve. Examples include
the holistic care provided by the Christian Love Brigades in Honduras, the work of the St. Luke’s Foundation and ECD efforts of Catholic schools in collaboration with the Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child (GC-DWC) in Haiti, as well as the communally driven and culturally responsive approach of the Bezaleel Q’eqchi Mennonite School in Guatemala noted above. This kind of integral approach to education is supported by research advocating for whole child development and the benefits of socio-emotional learning alongside the academic aims of education (Durlak et al., 2011; Huebner et al., 2016). It is also consistent with research suggesting the protective benefits of spiritual and religious practice, especially in the face of traumatic experiences (Goek-Morey and Cummings, 2017; Brewer-Smyth and Koenig, 2014).

Churches and FBOs are also particularly important in working with youth involved in gangs. Scholarly research and journalists from throughout the region emphasize the importance of entering a church as the way out of a gang (Brennaman, 2012; 2014). Scholars note that participation in gangs is transitory with 60 percent of current gang members in El Salvador surveyed desiring to exit their gangs, and over half of these respondents indicating that entering a church as a devoted and practicing believer is the way out of the gang (Cruz & Rosen, 2022). Other recent research, however, indicates a significant degree of entanglement between Evangelical churches and gangs. Offutt’s (2020) analysis of El Salvadorian gang and evangelical church connections notes family linkages, shared community governance, gang infiltration of congregations, and evangelical ideas permeating gang life. Finally, some religious leaders have called for more ecumenical collaboration between Catholic and Protestant organizations in opposing gang violence (Díaz Mejía, April 13, 2022).

Scholars also note that religious leaders have long-played important roles in speaking out against violence, but that recently developed forms of gang violence present new challenges for religious leaders’ efforts to combat violence. Evangelical churches have primarily pursued “gang-rescue” through spiritual conversion, and scholars note that the spiritual and sociological characteristics of Evangelical religiosity makes them well suited to the kinds of total conversions that are regarded as being adequate to justify a gang exit without reprisals (Brennaman, 2012; 2014). Other efforts pursued by Catholic actors, in addition to gang-remediation work and workforce development, include efforts to try to broker peace agreements between gangs and between gangs and government. The deep-seated anger within society against gang members makes both of these efforts, “rescue” and peace negotiations, fraught.

In a number of country cases, the work of FBOs with migrant children and families was also noted as particularly important. For example, various FBOs and FBSs in the DR noted large influxes of unaccompanied Haitian migrant children. Data from Honduras and Haiti indicated that internal displacement due to violence, seasonal migration, and disruption from immigration attempts to the U.S. and repatriation left many families and children vulnerable. FBOs in Honduras work to support school reintegration for migrant children and youth who have temporarily dropped out of school. This is the case of the Mennonite Social Action Commission (CASM), which leads a humanitarian response project focused on education for migrants.

In the LAC region, the international Jesuit-run NGO, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), is another example of an FBO caring for the most vulnerable children and youth. JRS’ mission is to serve, accompany, and advocate for refugees, asylum seekers, and forcibly displaced people around the world. Founded in 1980 by inspiration of the then superior general of the Jesuits, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, JRS operates in over 50 countries and serves people of all faiths and backgrounds. Since 1998 it has done so in four countries in the region: Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Mexico. One of the key areas of focus for JRS is education. The organization provides access to education for refugee children and youth, who are often denied this basic right due to their displacement. By providing education, JRS helps refugees to break the cycle of poverty and gives them the tools they need to build a better future for themselves and their communities. In Guayaquil, Ecuador, Techo para el Camino, a JRS program, seeks to accompany and support migrant youth by providing for their direct needs (food, hygiene, etc.) as well as human rights advocacy, psycho-social support, and school integration efforts. Similarly, the sensitization programs
targeting principals, teachers, and parents in public schools in host communities in Tapachula, Mexico; Arauca, Colombia; and Huaquillas, Ecuador speak to their concern around education as a means for assuring a better future.

5. Finally, FBOs play important roles currently and have **high potential to make large future contributions in early childhood development (ECD)**.

With regard to ECD programming, country cases like the DR demonstrated a priority of the government to expand ECD coverage for three to five-year-olds. The orientation of the government to partner with civil society organizations in operating ECD centers, and strong interest by faith-based groups to expand their roles in these partnerships, suggests this is a potentially important role for FBSs and FBOs. Similarly, efforts in Haiti through the Catholic Church seek to leverage the unique affordances of local church communities connected to schools to engage and support parents through existing pastoral structures to improve parenting practices, strengthen ECD program quality, and enhance school readiness. A research review on this topic has noted the paucity of scholarly evidence as well as the significant opportunities to more fully engage FBOs in ECD programming given their strong connections to families, influence upon values and behavior, and existing social and physical infrastructure (D’Agostino, et al., 2021).

A final area of influence worth noting, but somewhat tangential to the focus on educational outcomes, is in regard to the role of faith-based actors in preventing or mitigating democratic backsliding, both through churches, religious leaders, and educational institutions. Democracy can be undermined by violence and social dissolution, on one side, and by authoritarianism, on the other. Religious organizations can offer alternate paths.

Scholars note the high degree of legitimacy enjoyed by religious organizations in Central America, namely the Catholic Church and Evangelical Churches, both of which are regarded more highly than any government institutions measured (Brenneman, 2014). Historically, Catholic religious leaders have often used their moral authority and public voice to challenge state violence, repression, and human rights abuses. This was especially true of Catholic leaders in the 1970s through 1990s, where Church leaders challenged the violence of the military-aligned conservative governments and Marxist-inspired guerrilla groups. This condemnation of violence led to the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador in 1980 as well as the brutal murder of six Jesuit priests by the military in 1989. Bishop Juan Gerardi of Guatemala was murdered two days after delivering the Recovery of Historical Memory report, which detailed human rights abuses (Brenneman, 2014).
This role of religious organizations as checks on state violence and oppression have long been understood and were a reason for protecting their role and religious liberties, including in education, within foundational human rights instruments following the Second World War (D’Agostino and Grau, 2022). Scholars have noted that the role of religious organizations and leaders has shifted in recent years in many contexts, however, with the primary threat of violence shifting from state governments to gangs that do not seek legitimacy (Brenneman, 2014). Given the State’s tendency to respond to gang violence with the greater assertion of state power, often limiting human rights protections, there are risks of authoritarian and anti-democratic responses to gang violence (Hume, 2007; Krause, 2014).

Nicaragua remains a context where the historical pattern of civil society and religious leader defense of democracy and autocratic regime repression is more extreme. For example, 287 FBOs have been closed by the government of Nicaragua in the last three years, including two faith-based universities, Universidad Católica del Trópico Seco and Universidad Paulo Freire. As of October 2022, at least six Catholic priests, including the auxiliary Bishop of Managua, Monsignor Silvio Jose Baez, have been forced to leave Nicaragua or forbidden from returning from abroad (Beltran, Oct. 21, 2021). Priests, seminarians, lay people, and journalists associated with the Catholic Church have also been taken as political prisoners, including Monsignor Rolando Alvarez, the Bishop of the Diocese of Matagalpa. He faces charges of "conspiracy to undermine national integrity and spread false news" (Benavides, Jan. 23, 2023).

**STUDY QUESTION 2: CHALLENGES FACING FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS**

2. What are the challenges faith-based schools face in regard to achieving education outcomes, especially in communities affected by insecurity, poverty, and migration?

**Answer:** The challenges facing FBSs and FBOs center on 1) financial resource constraints, which affect their ability to retain qualified teachers, provide resources, and limit their capacity to serve vulnerable populations well and at greater scale, and 2) regulatory and political issues that relate to their degree of autonomy to live out aspects of their religious mission and the handling of sensitive moral issues.

**Financial Resource Constraints**

1. While policies in each context allow public subsidy of some FBSs, the majority are privately-funded, which is linked to their most frequently cited challenges.

2. Fee-based (and low-fee) funding streams limit FBSs’ and FBOs’ sustainability and scope in some contexts, resulting in recent enrollment declines and school closures in some countries.

3. FBSs enjoy motivated staff and strong leadership, but often struggle to find and retain qualified teachers and to provide quality materials, both of which are linked to resource constraints.

4. Resource challenges were also noted as particular constraints in efforts to effectively serve vulnerable populations, where commonly-reported needs included psycho-social support and the provision of basic needs.

**Regulatory issues**

5. Regulations linked to public funding in some contexts constrain FBSs’ autonomy and faith-identity, requiring trade-offs between religious mission/identity and access to financial resources.

6. There are tensions between religious views and progressive social or policy trends, which some FBSs and FBOs associate with international influence and may pose barriers to partnership.
Financial Resource Constraints

While policies in each context allow public subsidy of some FBSs, the majority are privately-funded, which is linked to their most frequently cited challenges. Resource constraints are linked to the majority of challenges reported by FBSs in most contexts. In every country case there are at least some FBSs that are publicly-subsidized, but in most contexts, this is a minority of FBSs. This financial model poses a significant constraint to FBSs’ mission-orientation to serve vulnerable communities and is linked to the majority of the challenges they reported.

Fee-based (and low-fee) funding streams limit FBSs’ and FBOs’ sustainability and scope in some contexts, resulting in recent enrollment declines and school closures in some countries. Multiple country cases found that private FBSs face resource constraints that impede their ability to provide quality services, especially to low-income populations. Resource constraints for private FBSs were a central challenge identified in four of the five countries. COVID-19 was reported to have put particular pressure on private FBSs in some countries, and political instability and inflation were threats to the sustainability of FBSs in Haiti. These examples indicate that fee-based schools are more susceptible to economic fluctuations, internal disruptions, and external shocks, which can threaten their sustainability and viability. In most contexts, it was noted that this financial model limits the growth and potential impact of FBSs. Countries with more public funding of non-state schools also tend to have higher FBS market share (e.g. Chile, Belize, the DR), and less social stratification between state and non-state schools (OECD, 2012). This suggests that the lack of public funding of FBSs (and other non-state schools) constrains their market share, limits their ability to serve low-income communities, and leads to more stratification between state and non-state schools.
Many FBSs adopt creative financing strategies to ensure accessibility to low-income populations while enabling quality service delivery and fiscal sustainability. For example, in El Salvador, the Human Promotion Association (APROHU) is an initiative of Opus Dei, a mostly lay institution of the Catholic Church whose members seek Christian holiness in their ordinary work. APROHU supports two secondary schools for high achieving, low-income students that use the campuses of two high-income, high-performing schools sponsored by Opus Dei for evening shifts. Colegio Citalá uses the campus of Colegio Lamatepec. The model has been replicated in schools in Ecuador, Honduras, and recently in a second school in El Salvador, Villanueva School, serving all girls on an elite girls school campus. The program’s aims are oriented towards providing opportunities for low-income students and combating the root causes of violence.

Another creative financing model is used by a network of private Protestant schools in El Salvador, the Rev. Juan Bueno Lyceums Network, which operates 27 K through secondary colegios that serve families from a wide range of socio-economic strata. The network uses a cross-subsidy model of higher-fee schools contributing to lower-fee schools that serve marginalized communities. The network enjoys good relationships with the Ministry of Education, but leaders indicate that they believe they should receive funding like the subsidized Catholic schools, since they have a similar mission in El Salvador. This raises equity concerns about the degree to which funding is equally accessible across denominational networks, an issue in both Haiti and El Salvador.

FBSs are reported to enjoy motivated staff and strong leadership, but often struggle to find and retain qualified teachers and to provide quality materials, both of which are linked to resource constraints. For privately-funded FBSs, evidence from many country cases indicated that they struggled to pay competitive salaries and benefits to teachers, impeding their abilities to hire and retain qualified staff. It was also often reported that publicly-funded FBSs struggled to pay teachers on time due to delays in the allocation of public funds by the government. This suggests that, while compensation and benefits for teachers in tuition-based FBSs are less than in state schools, payment may be timelier and more consistent, likely a positive incentive.

In some contexts, like Haiti and the DR, FBSs’ difficulties retaining certified teachers appear to contribute to higher rates of unregistered private schools, linked to requirements that they employ a certain percentage of certified teachers.

Another issue noted in most contexts was inadequate access to teaching and learning materials. This was a challenge reported by privately-funded FBSs in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Haiti, and publicly funded FBSs in the DR.

Resource challenges were also noted as particular constraints in efforts to effectively serve vulnerable populations, where key needs included psycho-social support and the provision of
services for basic needs. These resource gaps are a key issue, as FBSs and FBOs are particularly inclined to serve marginalized populations who have more acute needs. Effectively serving high-need populations requires resources. In this, FBSs and FBOs are often aided by external revenue sources, such as from local and international donations or through creative funding models, which enable service provision even when public funding is not available.

Finally, FBS and FBO stakeholders reported particular challenges in serving vulnerable populations. Challenges were related to their significant role in and efforts to serve those facing insecurity, poverty, migration, and those with disabilities. In each context, FBSs’ and FBOs’ commitments to working with vulnerable populations often brought them into relationships with the most marginalized in their communities. Stakeholders had deep first-hand knowledge of the needs of these communities, as well as the challenges they faced in effectively serving them.

Challenges related to serving in contexts of insecurity were noted in Honduras, Haiti, and El Salvador. These included threats to physical integrity of staff and property in FBSs and FBOs, the emotional health and well-being of staff and the children and families they serve, and social stigma related to serving troubled youth. A frequently mentioned resource gap was the need for more specialized staff, like counselors and psycho-social experts, to assist with counseling and rehabilitation from drug addiction.

Challenges related to serving children in poverty were noted in Honduras, Haiti, Guatemala, and the DR. At times, this entailed challenges related to providing for children’s and families’ basic needs, like food and housing (e.g. Haiti, Guatemala). In other contexts, challenges related to poverty and unhealthy family environments were highlighted as key issues. In the DR, this included breakdowns in family structure where respondents reported serving more children living without either parent due to incarceration, work requirements, or migration. Another challenge related to high rates of teenage pregnancy. Both in the DR and Guatemala, respondents also noted challenges supporting children who are victims of violence, abuse, and/or sexual assault. Finally, both in Haiti and the DR, issues related to child labor were noted. A key barrier to ending this practice was reported to be families’ reliance upon the supplemental income of child-workers. A related issue was reported in Guatemala, where high rates of school dropout were linked to families’ economic constraints.

Challenges serving migrant children and unaccompanied minors were noted in the DR, Haiti, and Honduras. Challenges reported in the DR were related to being a destination for Haitian migrants, and included an inadequate number of Creole language speakers within the education system, as well as challenges supporting unaccompanied, often homeless, minors, including the provision of basic services (e.g. food, hygiene). Human rights issues were also a key challenge, including migrants that lacked appropriate documentation and had difficulty accessing schools and the need to protect the rights of families during deportation processes. Challenges in Haiti and Honduras were related to their being sites of outmigration and internal displacement. Issues noted in both Haiti and Honduras were related to the high mobility of migrant populations and the instability it creates for children’s education and development. Reasons for migration included instability, gang-violence, and economic challenges. In all contexts, high rates of trauma and the need for socio-emotional support were also noted.

**Regulatory Issues**

Regulations linked to public funding in some contexts constrain FBSs’ autonomy and faith-identity, requiring trade-offs between religious mission/identity and access to financial resources.

There appears to be a need to standardize the legal and regulatory frameworks for agreements between FBSs and states in many contexts. In both the DR and Honduras, stakeholders noted that agreements with government officials may not be honored by subsequent administrations, limiting the stability and coherence of the policy context, and creating unpredictable policy environments.
Additionally, in some contexts, particularly in Honduras and to some extent the DR, public funding was conditional upon ceding of FBSs’ operational autonomy. In Honduras, this meant that FBSs needed to secularize their operations and could not teach confessional religious education. In the DR, the schools became quasi-state-run in their management, where assignment of staff and students and the need to comply with various regulations typical of public schools limited operational control by the religious sponsors of FBSs. The largest constraint on mission identity is likely the loss of control over staff hiring decisions, necessary to maintain a faith-based mission identity, though FBSs in the DR still had partial influence over final decisions with hiring processes.

In multiple contexts, regulations were reported as impeding operational efficiency. In Honduras, it was reported that certain regulations constrained the work of IHER and SAT, two organizations serving out of school youth through alternative or distance education programs. In both cases, the organizations do not always use school facilities to provide academic services, which may be mostly virtual, and the lack of recognized school facilities prevented students from receiving a credential from the State to recognize their educational gains. Similar challenges were related to regulations that impeded over-age and out of school children from re-entry into the school systems, hampering the work of some FBOs in Honduras. Irregular or delayed funding flows were reported as issues in the DR, Haiti, and Honduras, as were general governance inefficiencies, especially related to data collection, noted in Haiti and Honduras.

There are tensions between religious views and progressive social or policy trends, which some FBSs and FBOs associate with international influence and may pose barriers to partnership. Evidence from multiple country cases reported examples of how contested moral issues posed policy challenges or impeded relationships with international actors. Three out of five schools interviewed in the DR mentioned “gender ideology” as a concern for which they sought to screen curricular content. State requirements to incorporate inclusive content on gender and sex education in both the DR and Honduras were met with resistance from FBSs and other actors in society that hold views of the human person and about sexuality that are in tension with some contemporary, progressive views, leading to the rollback of curricular reforms or their lack of enforcement. A similar tension was noted in El Salvador, where the national curriculum’s treatment of sexual and reproductive education, life sciences, and views on gender come into conflict with some religious beliefs.

Potential divergences between religious views and practices and the requirements of donor organizations were noted as another potential challenge. Respondents in El Salvador reported that some funders set requirements on their funding that limit religious practice, such as prayer or Bible reading. Other tensions may arise on issues of sexuality and the use of contraception and may affect how organizations interact with and support vulnerable youth. Sometimes, even perceptions pose a barrier, as reported by an FBO in the DR that noted that they serve all young people, including LGBTQ youth, but sometimes prospective partner organizations assume they will not because of their faith status.

**STUDY QUESTION 3: COMPARING FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS TO STATE SCHOOLS**

3. How do faith-based schools compare to state-run schools in terms of resources (and sources), accessibility (urban/rural), safety, parental and community engagement, perceived advantages and disadvantages, quality and learning outcomes, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations, adaptability to shocks (e.g. COVID-19, violence, migration), and curricular differences?

**Answer:** FBSs are distinctive from state-run schools in a number of ways, most notably their differing funding models in most contexts (public versus private), though some FBSs in all contexts are also publicly-funded. Distinctive perceived advantages include FBSs’ personalized communities, safety, and high parental and community engagement, while their notable disadvantage is their challenge in providing competitive compensation to and retention of teachers. The situation is mixed and less clear in terms of
FBSs’ accessibility and quality/learning outcomes compared to state-run schools.

**Key Findings**

1. Perceived distinctive advantages of FBSs compared to state schools include their **personalized communities, safety, and high parental and community engagement**.
2. Perceived disadvantages of FBSs compared to state-run schools include **tuition cost barriers, non-competitive salaries for teachers impeding retention of qualified staff, and limited access to resources**.
3. The sharpest distinctions between FBSs and state-run schools are those of **financial resources and sources**, where **FBSs have varied funding sources (often largely tuition)**, and **state-run schools are free and primarily government-funded** with greater access to public donor support.
4. **The accessibility of FBSs and state-run schools is regarded as mixed**. While FBSs are constrained by tuition costs, they are enabled by a commitment to serving the poor, creative models, and philanthropic support. On the other hand, both state and FBSs struggle to provide access to students with disabilities.
5. **Comparative quality and learning outcomes of FBSs are uncertain due to data limitations** and results are mixed from the information reported and available. However, **there is some suggestive evidence of possible attainment effects**.

Applied across the different country-cases, a set of patterns emerge that distinguish how faith-based and state-run schools are perceived within each context.

Perceived distinctive advantages of FBSs compared to state schools include their **personalized communities, safety, and high parental and community engagement**. Respondents across most of the country contexts reported that Catholic schools tended to have the following characteristic:

1. Personalized communities with strong caring relationships, orderly environments, small-class sizes, and commitments to pastoral care;
2. Relative safety from gangs, violence, and disruptive behavior; and
3. High parental and community involvement and participation, with and through Church communities.

It is important to note that these perceived benefits, if accurate, may be related to the religious organizational culture. They might also be explained, however, by other factors. For example, safety might be a result of having more selective student composition due to school tuition fees, which pose a barrier to entry to the most under-served students. Similarly, higher levels of parental engagement may be related to parents’ feeling a greater sense of ownership as fee-paying stakeholders, which might make them more likely to exercise their voice in seeking accountable school operations.

It was also noted in Guatemala that state schools also communicate values through parts of the curriculum. And in El Salvador, it was reported that the degree to which the school environment is nurturing is largely dependent on the principal in both state schools and FBSs, and that all schools are sources of protection for students. All schools also have relational ties to community members and families of gang members that insulate them from violence. Finally, it was reported in Guatemala, the DR, and Honduras, that state schools have varied degrees of community and parental involvement, often depending on context (e.g. more involvement in rural schools), and state schools tended to engage more with local NGOs and community organizations, as opposed to local faith communities.
An important finding, though only uncovered in one country case, is lower dropout rates reported in FBSs in Honduras. School dropout rates are a critical issue in the region and one with high relevance to gang participation. If there is a differential dropout rate between FBSs and state schools, especially at the lower and upper secondary level, this would be an important finding and one worthy of further investigation. This will be discussed further below in considering evidence of possible FBS effects.

Other frequently mentioned advantages included:

- Higher accountability and continuity of service, like higher teacher attendance, as noted in Haiti; fewer days closed in 2022, as found in Honduras; and tighter management, reported in both Haiti and El Salvador;
- Higher expectations for students, noted in El Salvador, Haiti, and the DR, and lower incidence of behavioral challenges, found in El Salvador, though these last two points may be linked to selectivity in enrollment;
- Being perceived to be more prestigious or of higher quality, noted in both El Salvador and the DR; and
- Their tendency to belong to networks, which can provide varying degrees of support and training network infrastructure and is associated with high performing school systems (Mourshed et al., 2011). This item in particular can be considered a potentially significant advantage of FBSs.

Perceived disadvantages of FBSs compared to state run schools include tuition cost barriers, non-competitive salaries for teachers impeding retention of qualified staff, and limited access to resources.

- Cost barriers in private FBSs compared to free state schools represented the largest difference and also an obvious perceived benefit of state schools.
- Noncompetitive salaries and benefits to teachers were reported to often limit FBSs’ ability to retain qualified teachers, leading to higher turnover and challenges in maintaining quality instruction. Strong management and accountability and teachers’ sense of commitment were identified as counter-acting reasons for strong teacher performance. Additionally, it is likely that more timely teacher compensation in privately-funded FBSs, in contrast to the frequently delayed compensation of state schools, may enhance teacher satisfaction and mitigate retention challenges.
- Fewer resources for supplies and teaching and learning materials as well as less state and public donor support for professional development and interventions were also mentioned as some of the disadvantages of FSBs. However, it is also noteworthy that the network infrastructure common in FBSs provides internal training mechanisms that are a common feature to such schools, as resources allow.

The sharpest distinctions between FBSs and state-run schools are those of financial resources and sources, where FBSs have varied funding sources (often largely tuition), and state-run schools were free and primarily government-funded with greater access to public donor support. While some FBSs in each context received public funding, in most contexts the majority use a mix of revenue from (primarily) tuition, church fees, donations, NGOs, and international networks. This presents some accessibility challenges for some families, and schools are also able to screen students, which limits access.

---

4 The Honduras report author calculated the average dropout rate reported by faith-based schools in 2022 according to the Ministry of Education database (0.64). Then compared this rate with the average dropout rate reported by the Ministry of Education for public schools from 2015-2019 (4.43) in the 2022 Honduras Education Progress Report (Informe de Progreso Educativo: Honduras 2022). This descriptive data does not consider possible selection effects that may explain some or all of these differences.
In all contexts, state-run schools are free and have no enrollment screening, and are therefore more accessible to all populations. They tended to be better resourced, receiving more consistent public funding from governments and public donors, though often this funding was reported as being inadequate and physical infrastructure was often noted as being in poor condition in state schools.

The accessibility of FBSs and state-run schools is regarded as mixed. The accessibility of FBSs is constrained by tuition costs, but enabled by a commitment to serving the poor, creative models, and philanthropic support. Both state and FBSs struggle to provide access to students with disabilities. Data from across the country cases on the accessibility of FBSs compared with state schools show a mixed and variable picture. On the one hand, FBSs’ tuition fees pose a barrier to access for some families compared with free state schools. This barrier is mitigated, however, in a number of ways. First, some FBSs in each of the country contexts are publicly-funded and free or heavily subsidized. Secondly, even among private FBSs, a high proportion are low-fee schools. Furthermore, these schools are often subsidized by church donations, international giving, or cross subsidization from other sources within the faith-based networks. These methods, combined with the strong commitment of what appears to be a large portion of FBSs to serving low-income families, results in relatively high accessibility of FBSs. Yet, this accessibility comes at a cost. As noted in other parts of this report, private FBSs must run lean organizations, which often limits their capacity to compensate their employees and provide the goods and services they need to deliver the highest quality services possible to high-need populations. In other words, FBSs are often forced to try to do more with less.

Comparative quality and learning outcomes of FBSs are uncertain due to data limitations and mixed results from the information reported and available, though there is some suggestive evidence of possible attainment effects. Efforts to compare the quality and relative learning outcomes of different types of schools, often called “school effects” research, is complex. The methodologies used in this study do not lend themselves to being able to answer this question rigorously or thoroughly. Issues that make this difficult are the prevalence of “selection effects,” where families select schools and schools select students, which prevent researchers from making comparisons between two equivalent groups of students. In other words, a more selective school with a higher-achieving group of students does not necessarily mean a higher-performing school if they selected a group of students that were already higher achieving. It is often difficult to account for this issue in analysis and rich data sets and complex analytic experimental or quasi-experimental research designs are required to address this question.

With that said, the evidence that was reported in each of the country cases, which should be interpreted with significant caution, was quite mixed. No student level comparative data was available for Guatemala. Some countries reported higher outcomes from FBSs (Haiti and Honduras), some lower outcomes (El Salvador). The DR found higher outcomes at the primary level for public FBSs compared to state schools, but lower learning outcomes at the secondary level for public FBSs. The DR inquiry also sought to apply more rigorous quasi-experimental techniques, though it used cross-sectional and not longitudinal data, which cannot control for all individual-level characteristics or attrition in the samples, so the findings should still be interpreted with caution. Other indicators of possible quality include lower rates of dropouts for FBSs in Honduras as compared to state-run schools (though they are reportedly higher in Haiti, which a study by UNICEF has linked primarily to financial barriers), much higher instructional time (in 2022) in Honduras, a reputation for better quality language instruction and access to technology in Honduras, and the perception of higher expectations and more rigor in most country cases.

Though, again, it is vital to emphasize that many FBSs are able to select students, or families self-select into FBSs due to personal preferences. Most FBSs in these countries charge some level of tuition fees, even if they are subsidized by philanthropy and church revenues. This makes it likely that students
attending FBSs and public schools across most contexts are not equivalent and too few rigorous studies have provided definitive evidence about possible FBS effects in the region.

The questions of possible FBS effects in low- and middle-income countries and particularly in the LAC region, have received relatively little attention compared to the fairly robust body of research on the topic in the U.S. since Coleman et al. (1982) reported Catholic school effects, especially for low-income and minority students. Some research from the region suggests possible Catholic school effects, including a study by McEwan (2001) in Chile and quasi-experimental and experimental research on the impact of Fe Y Alegria Schools, which has tended to find modest positive effects of Fe y Alegria schools on learning outcomes in the studies summarized by Wodon (2019).

More rigorous research with quasi-experimental or experimental designs to explore the presence of FBSs effects in the region would be a significant contribution to the field and would be of high policy relevance. Such studies should seek to disaggregate by faith-affiliation, as previous research suggests that different types of FBSs' denominational affiliations may have differential outcomes. Such research should also seek to look beyond test scores and consider retention and drop-out rates, a major predictor of gang involvement and a challenge in the region, and other outcomes, including future criminal behavior.

Research on Catholic school effects and the impact of voucher programs in the U.S. suggest that such FBS effects may be likely. For example, research by DeAngelis and Wolf (2016) found that male voucher recipients in Milwaukee have a reduced likelihood of being convicted of a crime, which is relevant given the large share of voucher recipients attending faith-based schools. Similarly, a significant body of rigorous quasi-experimental research has found graduation and college matriculation effects with U.S. Catholic schools (e.g. Altonji et al., 2005; Evans and Schwab, 1995) and positive voucher participation effects on high school graduation, college matriculation, and college graduation (Chingos et al., 2019). Given the report of higher graduation rates of FBSs in one of the two countries that reported data on this topic (Honduras), and findings that emphasize FBS characteristics that are associated with higher retention and graduation rates (e.g. high expectations, caring school environments, strong sense of community, higher parental participation) (Murphy and Torre, 2014), it is reasonable to hypothesize that there may be higher attainment and retention rates in FBSs in the LAC region. Considering the salience of the issue for gang participation and violence prevention, and the high market share of secondary and vocational FBSs, this issue is deserving of additional attention and more rigorous research.

STUDY QUESTION 4: PARTNERING WITH FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS AND ACTORS

4. What are the effective ways and opportunities for donors and the public education sector to engage religious communities and partner with FBOs to leverage/improve education outcomes?

Answer: There are ample opportunities to expand and clarify existing PPP models with FBSs and FBOs for educational development, particularly through the expansion of subsidies and contracting in areas where FBSs and FBOs possess strategic capacity and advantages. However, doing so requires effective structures, frameworks, and political commitment.

1. Donors and governments can better capitalize on **strategic opportunities for partnership with FBSs and FBOs** to leverage their apparent distinctive advantages to better meet the needs of vulnerable populations, particularly in the areas of: 1) violence reduction and mitigation; 2) ECD and parental support; 3) secondary school completion and youth workforce development; 4) supplemental support for basic skills development; and 5) integrated service provision for vulnerable children (rural, indigenous, girls, migrants).

2. **More PPPs with states and donors would enhance FBSs and FBOs impact and accessibility** through expanded subsidies to FBSs and contracting of and grants to FBOs for
service delivery.

3. For FBSs and FBOs to gain greater access to donor funding, they need greater political recognition as strategic partners (with greater unity and visibility as a sub-sector) and capacity strengthening.

4. There is a lack of a clear framework for PPPs grounded in human rights norms to guide decision-making, particularly on contested moral issues.

Donors and governments can better capitalize on strategic opportunities for partnership with FBSs and FBOs to leverage their distinctive advantages to better meet the needs of vulnerable populations, particularly in the areas of: 1) violence reduction and mitigation; 2) ECD and parental support; 3) secondary school completion and youth workforce development; 4) supplemental support for basic skills development; and 5) integrated service provision for vulnerable children (rural, indigenous, girls, migrants).

1. As noted earlier under the Study Question 1 section, FBOs and religious leaders have long played a role in violence mitigation in the region. Though the sources of violence have (in most contexts) shifted from state-sponsored repression to violence associated with gangs, organized crime, and drug-cartels, the role of religious institutions remains important and efficacious (Berk-Seligson et al., 2014). While it may not be possible for public institutions to directly support “rescue” efforts that utilize spiritual conversion as primary modes of change, various institutional and programmatic approaches remain that represent good prospects for partnership. These include rehabilitation centers, outreach programs to vulnerable children, youth groups through local faith communities, and vocational and technical schools or workforce development programs linked to vulnerable youth and social enterprises for job placement.

Moreover, religious leaders on the frontlines of gang-rescue also represent important sources of knowledge and are connected to networks that can play important roles in helping to develop institutional responses. Additionally, it would be valuable to better understand the efficacy and potential role of brokered peace agreements or “no-violence zones” or similar social contracts, in which religious leaders can and often have played important roles. Finally, while complex, more work can be done to inquire into these approaches; seek to understand promising practices and identify bright spots; and develop collaborative responses with FBOs and religious leaders in order to address the threats of violence in the region. Additionally, much of the work related to the following points also have indirect, but important, preventative roles in mitigating gang violence.

2. There is interest from FBSs and FBOs to engage more fully with governments to expand and improve the quality of ECD and parental support programs, identified explicitly in some contexts. ECD and parenting are strategic areas of investment for which a growing body of evidence suggests they make long-term impact on children’s development and life outcomes (Huebner et al., 2016; World Bank, 2018; Smart Buys, 2021). Recognition of the strategic importance of this sub-sector has led to the recent passage of the Global Child Thrive Act into U.S. Law, which supports official country policies and plans to improve 1) early childhood development; 2) maternal, newborn, and child health and nutrition care; 3) basic education; 4) water, sanitation, and hygiene; and 5) child protection plans. The evidence from this study suggests that religious networks and FBOs can be vital partners in realizing these goals. Additionally, their access to families and parents through existing church communities and pastoral structures represent particularly valuable opportunities for early engagement and intervention (e.g. Baptism preparation classes within Haitian Catholic parishes) and the possibility for the co-location of services like nutrition, maternal and infant care, ECD, and protection from violence and neglect (Huebner, et al., 2016).

3. There appear to be particularly robust opportunities to deepen partnerships with FBSs and FBOs in the areas of youth and workforce development, with explicit and implicit links to violence reduction
and prevention. FBSs have overweighted market share among secondary schools and vocational/technical schools at higher rates than their primary school market share. They also have a reputation of running high-quality programs in both of these sub-sectors. In particular, the importance of youth persistence in school is a major area of concern in the region thought to significantly relate to violence mitigation and prevention.

The findings from this study point to possible secondary-level FBS attainment / retention effects. Both from the evidence reported from Honduras of higher graduation rates, as well as the characteristics that were used to describe FBSs from all cases, there is suggestive evidence that FBSs may be better at fostering persistence and reducing dropout rates. Characteristics of FBSs described in the research literature—and suggested in the findings from this study—indicate that FBSs are more inclined to create a sense of community, have high expectations and a caring school environment, have extended teacher roles because their teachers view their work as a ministry, provide more mentorship opportunities with trusted adults, and have strong overlapping social capital that provides social safety nets and strong home-school connections (Bryk et al., 1993; Coleman et al., 1982). This is an area worthy of additional inquiry, namely, conducting more rigorous quasi-experimental studies to explore possible FBS effects with a focus on persistence/drop-outs, violence prevention, and an exploration of the possible causal mechanisms if such benefits exist.

Additionally, vocational and technical schools and other youth and workforce development programs have been found to play a vital role for both economic opportunity and poverty reduction as well as violence mitigation and the prevention of youth entry into gangs (Berk-Seligson et al., 2014). Feedback from participants, as well as findings from the research on youth and workforce development programs, suggest exploring a deeper focus on entrepreneurship, linkages to firms, and the use of social enterprises to ensure both skills and higher rates of job-placement (USAID, 2020).

4. Given their non-trivial market share as well as their strong network infrastructure, service provision capacity at a network level, and connections to HEI, FBSs and FBOs represent promising partners in the areas of service delivery and supplemental support for basic skills development. Many FBSs are part of networks, like Fe Y Alegria networks throughout the region and the Rev. Juan Bueno network in El Salvador. These represent promising delivery mechanisms for and incubators of educational innovations and programmatic improvements. A 2011 McKinsey and Company report on the highest functioning school systems (Mourshed et al., 2011) found that the presence of a mediating layer of network infrastructure to support and spread quality improvements was a key attribute of improved system-performance. The mid-sized networks typical of FBSs represent such a mediating layer, suggesting that FBS networks are both valuable assets and can represent effective partners as early adopters and incubators of new interventions prior to scale-up by government.

Additionally, FBOs supporting public and faith-based schools are promising partners with whom to engage in alternative education, education for over-aged children, school reintegration, education in remote contexts, and supplemental education. Programs that utilize out-of-school time to support small groups, often through targeted small group tutoring, like Pratham’s Teaching at the Right Level, have been among the most effective models for improving foundational skills (Smart Buys, 2021). Similarly, distance learning models have also emerged as valuable means of skill development in low- and middle-income countries (Cao et al., 2014). Many FBOs have long-established programs utilizing these approaches. Supporting them to refine (as needed) and scale up their programming could be an impactful partnership opportunity.

5. Finally, the integral vision of FBOs in their approach to serving vulnerable children (e.g. rural, indigenous, girls, and migrants), which embraces local communities and places the dignity of the person at the center, makes many FBOs worth supporting, studying, and potentially scaling or
replicating their models. These include school networks like Fe y Alegria, the Rev. Juan Bueno Schools, or the schools operated by the Christian Love Brigades in Honduras, which serve poor, urban, and often violent areas. These school networks would benefit from support, especially in augmenting their capacity to provide for basic needs and counseling for children that have experienced trauma and adverse childhood experiences.

Additionally, social programs like JRS throughout the region, the St. Luke’s Foundation in Haiti, ACOES and the Mennonite Social Action Commission in Honduras, and the Caminante Proyecto Educativo in the DR, provide essential services to some of the most vulnerable children and migrants. Programs like the Bealee Q’eqchi Mennonite School and the Don Bosco Catholic School provide essential access to secondary and technical education to marginalized indigenous communities in Guatemala, and all represent credible, effective, local, front-line organizations.

**More PPPs (with states and donors) would enhance FBSs and FBOs impact and accessibility** through expanded subsidies to FBSs and contracting of and grants to FBOs for service delivery.

For most of the organizations and sub-sectors described above, these actors would be there providing service to the vulnerable with or without public financial support from the State or international donors. Many do not receive public support and are nonetheless there doing the work. Yet, the potential to augment the quality and scale of their services with public support could significantly enhance their impact. Other case studies of important civil society organizations in education, like that of Pratham in India, note the value of private revenue flows and a degree of independence from the State. However, these actors also recognize that to make systemic impact at scale, civil society actors benefit from collaboration with government and public funding sources (Datar et al., 2010). Effective collaborations between civil society and the State have the capacity for the best of both organizational forms, including the innovation, creativity, and local roots of FBOs coupled with the resources, capacity, and scale possible with states and public donors.

Stakeholders consulted for this study consistently expressed openness to and interest in augmented forms of state subsidies for FBSs and government contracting with FBOs. While many noted challenges and limitations related to state funding, they also generally welcomed the prospects of such partnerships. For FBSs, this request was often articulated as a desire to have teacher salaries paid or materials provided or subsidies given, all of which would amount to a form of public subsidy. Some preliminary comparative research seems to suggest, however, that some forms of PPPs may be preferable to others, in terms of the degree to which they invite undue state interference (see the partnership framework finding below). Namely, per pupil subsidies appear to be preferable to the funding of teacher salaries, as per pupil funding is a form of subsidizing the decisions of parents, while funding teacher salaries is akin to having the State assume the status of employer for teachers in FBSs, and often leads to significant entanglement issues and the loss of autonomy of FBSs over staff selection and management decisions, arguably hurting both quality and identity by limiting local control (D’Agostino, 2017).

Additionally, FBS networks and FBOs tended to welcome more opportunities for partnership with international donors, especially in the form of direct grants rather than as sub-awardees through INGOs. Yet, as noted below, there are important prior conditions that are likely to help enhance the frequency and effectiveness of such partnerships.

For FBSs and FBOs to gain greater access to donor funding, they need **greater political recognition as strategic partners (with greater unity and visibility as a sub-sector) and capacity strengthening.**
Multiple respondents across contexts observed the ways in which administrative burdens related to international grants often presented a barrier to FBOs accessing these resources. A relatively smaller number of FBOs, and often larger and more established organizations, possessed the capacity to seek and effectively manage these grants. Other organizations reported being stuck as sub-contractors or sub-award recipients, often under international organizations which they felt failed to adequately build their capacity to be direct recipients.

Additionally, many FBSs and FBOs have organizational/management capacity gaps that impede their ability to secure and effectively manage international grants, particularly in the areas of proposal development and planning, reporting, financial management, and monitoring and evaluation.

While many international donors emphasize localization, there remains a tendency to fund through international organizations and this practice has been slow to change, which may be related to limited management capacity of local organizations and the administrative burdens associated with international grant management of some donors.

There is a lack of a clear framework for PPPs grounded in human rights norms to guide decision-making, particularly on contested moral issues. Stakeholders in multiple countries—Honduras, the DR, and El Salvador—reported challenges related to FBS autonomy and mission integrity that sometimes accompanied public funding of FBSs. This, in turn, required FBSs to make trade-offs between mission and funding, or led to complexities in terms of conditions for grants. Foundational human rights instruments can offer guidance to states, donors, and FBS networks in considering the legal, policy, and regulatory decisions related to public funding of faith-based schools. The following are relevant human rights principles:

1. Education should be “directed to the full development of the human personality” (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR], UN, 1948, 26:2), which is foundational to the right to education.
2. “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children,” (UDHR, UN, 1948, 26:3).
3. These parental rights require that states protect “the liberty of parents…to choose… schools other than those established by public authorities” so as “to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions” (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [ICESCR], UN, 1966, article 13; see also the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR], 1976, article 18).
4. This same provision also notes the appropriate role of states to set “minimum educational standards” and regulate non-state schools so as to meet such standards (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICESCR], UN, 1966),
5. ICESCR (1996) cautions, however, that “no part of this article (13) shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions.” This suggests the need to balance “minimum education standards” as laid down by states with “non-interference” of states in the operation of schools by civil society institutions.

Considering these human rights instruments, states and FBS networks should seek to balance regulations (minimum standards) of FBSs that help ensure the right to education with protections of the adequate autonomy (non-interference with) civil society and religious institutions to operate schools in a distinctive manner so as to reflect parents’ moral and religious convictions, thus ensuring the prior rights of parents to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children in conformity with their own convictions.

What kinds of regulations constitute appropriate minimum standards and what constitutes state interference? Minimum standards should protect the basic health and well-being of children, their right to education, and likely some quality control and accountability measures, like national exams that test
minimum curricular standards. Regulations that impede the “distinctive mission” of FBSs in key areas of their operation should be avoided, including state control over FBS staffing decisions, undue regulations or limitations on religious education or freedom of worship, and failure to grant some discretion over curricular matters so as to ensure conformity with moral and religious beliefs.

Some creativity can go a long way in embracing FBS autonomy while fulfilling the duties of states. Moreover, helpful lessons can be found from comparative contexts. For example, the Netherlands, which has embraced educational pluralism since the 1920s, allows schools the freedom to teach diverse religious views in their curriculum, including Creationism in some Christian schools, while the State still assesses all students on their scientific knowledge of the Theory of Evolution (Berner, 2019). In other words, it is possible to embrace autonomy with minimum standards. In England, the Catholic Church developed and pre-approved a robust sexual education curriculum, which received government approval. This prevented conflicts about possible versions of a sex-education curriculum that may have been objectionable to English Catholic schools, the vast majority of which are publicly-funded, but still ensured quality sex-education was being provided, thus meeting a minimum state standard. While contested moral issues present difficulties in increasingly polarized political environments, there are international legal standards and ample comparative examples that can serve as guidelines for navigating them in the context of PPPs in education.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section offers a set of 10 recommendations to states, donors, and FBSs and FBOs. Many recommendations apply to each of these groups, some are to specific actors within the respective countries. The recommendations are all derived from multiple findings from the study and generated through the cross-case analysis. Prior to introducing and discussing each recommendation in detail, we provide Table 5 that paraphrases each recommendation and indicates the research questions (RQs) and specific findings that informed that recommendation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Audience/s</th>
<th>RQs</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Document the impact of FBOs and FBSs</td>
<td>States, donors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Engage FBSs and FBOs in diagnostic assessment processes by sub-sector</td>
<td>Donors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Facilitate platforms for sustained policy dialogue</td>
<td>States, donors, FBOs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Support efforts to refine and clarify frameworks for PPPs</td>
<td>States, FBOs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Recognize and support FBSs and FBOs as integral partners</td>
<td>States, donors, FBOs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3, 5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Develop a strategy related to FBSs and FBOs and violence reduction and mitigation</td>
<td>States, donors, FBOs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6, 9-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Expand efforts to engage FBSs and FBOs in ensuring persistence to and through secondary school and entry into the workforce</td>
<td>States, donors, FBOs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Invest in quality ECD and parenting programs that seek to more fully engage and utilize faith-communities</td>
<td>States, donors, FBOs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendation 1: Document more systematically the work of FBSs and FBOs by country and sub-sector, including indicators of quality and capacity, to identify promising partners for development interventions.

Given the scarcity of quality data sets, states should seek to more systematically collect data on FBSs sponsorship and affiliation. Additionally, donors should support follow-up inquiries that seek to systematically map the work of FBSs and FBOs by country and prioritized sub-sector (e.g., ECD, vocational/technical, vulnerable children/youth), including indicators of quality and capacity to identify promising partners for development interventions in prioritized areas.

Recommendation 2: Engage FBSs and FBOs by prioritized sub-sectors and/or development challenges through diagnostic assessment processes—this may include systems thinking workshops in collaboration with other key stakeholders—to identify creative solutions, opportunities for partnership, and new directions that can leverage the contributions of FBSs and FBOs.

This recommendation is for USAID or other development partners. Such next steps would have the benefit of fostering within-sector and cross-sector relationships and shared-learning while surfacing creative solutions to complex challenges based upon diagnostic assessments of the root-causes of problems and drawing upon the practical knowledge of front-line service providers.

Recommendation 3: Facilitate platforms for sustained policy dialogue between FBO/FBS networks, government, private sector, and international partners with the aim of fostering greater collaboration around shared commitments to the most vulnerable.

Governments should create local institutional structures for ongoing dialogue with FBS networks and the private sector to ensure greater visibility, voice, and partnership norms. This should also seek to stabilize norms and legal protocols for PPPs, which are inconsistent and unpredictable in many contexts. Donors can provide support in facilitating collaboration of FBSs and FBOs across denominations, so as to engage more effectively with public actors to clarify collaborative frameworks. FBOs and FBS networks should explore deepening inter-denominational coordination and participation in representative bodies that can identify and pursue common priorities. This kind of networking would enable FBSs and FBOs to strengthen their voice and visibility with government and donor organizations and allow them to benefit from common interests, shared learning, and collective action.

Recommendation 4: Support efforts to refine and clarify frameworks for PPPs in accordance with human rights instruments and norms.

Governments and FBO/FBS networks should review or develop frameworks for PPPs in education based upon norms derived from foundational human rights instruments related to the right to education, parental rights, religious liberties, and cultural rights. States should balance the setting of minimum standards with respect for the autonomy and religious liberties of FBSs and parents.
Donors can support the development of such a framework and the policy dialogue forums, process, and technical assistance to support it.

FBSs and FBOs should seek to proactively propose creative solutions to contested issues in such a way that meets public goods and minimum standards while also respecting religious beliefs. All actors can look to international examples and human rights norms for guidance as to how these issues may be addressed.

**Recommendation 5:** Recognize and support FBSs and FBOs as integral partners within the sector, especially in areas of FBO/FBS strength and insufficient state capacity.

States and donors should seek enhanced opportunities for partnership with FBSs and FBOs in areas of high priority and comparative strength, specifically those identified as strong service areas (see recommendations 6-10). This could include the expansion of subsidies to FBSs, contracting with FBOs, and engagement of FBSs and FBOs in international grant opportunities.

Donors should seek to support FBOs and FBSs through the development or strengthening of networks and capacity strengthening. Networks could be sector specific and be both national and regional, and seek to foster shared learning, knowledge, and opportunities for collaboration and support. This should also include a greater focus on using evidence to inform decision-making and could involve partnerships with regional research networks like the Central America Research Alliance and involvement in the LAC education regional “leading through learning” hub through USAID.

Donors, in particular USAID in light of its current policy focus, should also seek to enhance localization of funding so as to build capacity within local institutions, including FBSs and FBOs, but may need to build capacity within organizations first or streamline operational norms around administration and reporting requirements or create alternative mechanisms to enable partnership with a wider number of organizations.

FBSs and FBOs should also improve the degree to which they proactively document and communicate their public impact and their distinctive contributions to whole child development and effective service to the poor to better position themselves as meaningful partners to governments. Additionally, FBSs and FBOs should consider investing in the organizational capacity that would enable them to seek and manage international grants, especially in the area of proposal development and planning, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting.

**SUB-SECTOR SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Recommendation 6:** Develop a strategy related to FBSs and FBOs and violence reduction and mitigation, addressing root causes of violence with a particular focus on youth and workforce development and violence prevention, mitigation, and rehabilitation services, while supporting regional networking, research, and the sharing of effective practices.

States and donors should seek opportunities to partner with FBSs and FBOs, with a focus on expanding the range and scope of service delivery to vulnerable populations (e.g., through subsidies, contracting, or grants), and improving program effectiveness through the spread of promising and effective models and practices.

Donors might advance this strategy by mapping and assessing the work of FBOs and technical/vocational FBSs, with a particular focus on those engaged with youth and workforce development, those that prevent or mitigate violence and entry into gangs, and those working with gang and drug rehabilitation in contexts affected by violence. Inquiries should seek to identify promising models and practices of FBO
engagement in this sub-sector, key gaps in service provision (e.g., counseling services), and optimal roles of engaging religious leaders and local faith communities. In particular, this should seek to explore how local faith communities currently function in preventing/mitigating gang participation through youth pro-social engagement and gang-rescue efforts, and seek to understand appropriate means of enhancing and leveraging their roles (e.g., through the expansion and provision of pro-social, church-based activities, like sports, clubs, and social spaces for youth). Donors could then invest in promising local FBSs and FBOs and local faith communities to augment services and replicate, scale up, and share lessons from promising models and approaches, both within FBSs and FBOs networks and to other non-profit and state organizations as feasible and appropriate.

FBSs and FBOs should seek opportunities for additional international and government support for gang-rehabilitation and violence-prevention strategies. This should include openness to opportunities for technical support and adaptation so as to learn from best practices in the field, such as leveraging the unique role of churches and religious leaders (Berk-Seligson et al., 2014) and deeper integration between technical schools and firms through internship or apprenticeship models to better ensure market alignment, the inclusion of psycho-social and soft-skill support, and the benefits and importance of mentoring, among others (USAID, 2020). Finally, FBSs and FBOs should seek to participate in national/regional networks to foster learning and sharing of practices, leverage partnership opportunities, and better use evidence to inform their work.

**Recommendation 7:** Expand efforts to engage FBSs and FBOs in ensuring persistence to and through secondary school and entry into the workforce with a focus on strategies to strengthen secondary school persistence, supplemental and alternative programs, reentry programs for out of school children, and workforce development programs.

For states and donors, secondary school retention and persistence through graduation, and greater workforce readiness at the end of secondary school are essential strategies to reduce gang participation and violence. These have the dual benefit of occupying the time of youth, especially boys, in pro-social and developmentally positive activities and improving human capital and economic opportunity. Given the disproportionate role of FBSs in secondary and technical education, they should be major partners. Efforts should also be made to study possible FBS effects on attainment (secondary school retention, graduation, and third level matriculation or workforce entry), as these have been some of the largest Catholic school effects and impacts of voucher programs in other contexts, and the findings in this study suggest possible FBS attainment effects and mechanisms that would likely be associated with persistence and retention effects in FBSs, namely: a nurturing and caring environment, high expectations and rigorous academics, accountable and motivated teachers, high participation of parents creating tight social capital links and social safety nets, and a safe environment. Additional potential mechanisms typical of FBSs in other contexts are extended teacher roles, where teachers view their work as a ministry and play a more active and holistic mentoring role in the lives of youth, a critical strategy for youth engagement and engagement in school (Murphy & Torre, 2014). This should be a priority for further research and could be the basis of possible future interventions in and beyond the FBS sector.

Given FBSs’ interests and commitments on issues of vulnerable youth; their orientation toward holistic approaches; their links to religious communities (which can be a key partner and extension of the school network); their engagements in technical education and workforce development; and their involvement with out-of-school youth, alternative education, and re-entry programs, they are optimal partners for driving forward a strategy as well as ongoing learning and innovation in efforts to combat the issues of youth vulnerability, violence, and gang participation. Engaging them deeply in national and regional networks along with other actors (INGOs, donors, government) can be a vital partnership network and proving ground. To this they bring an array of programmatic approaches and experiences, committed local institutions that are already deeply engaged in this work, diverse private funding streams, and
unique organizational assets (e.g., the psychologically protective effects of spirituality, meaning-making, local trust and legitimacy, etc.).

**Recommendation 8:** Invest in quality ECD and parenting programs that seek to more fully engage and utilize church social, pastoral, and physical infrastructure to expand ECD offerings, engage parents and families, and augment the co-location of services for children to thrive.

States and donors should seek to augment investments in ECD and parenting programs given the enormous social benefits and returns on investment in these areas as long-term investments in human capital and violence prevention, in line with recent legislation like the Child Thrive Act.

FBSs and FBOs and local faith communities can be vital partners given their existing physical and social infrastructure and significant existing investments in and concern for families and young children. Many already play significant roles in these spaces, though this reality has been largely undocumented cross-nationally and INGO and development partners have generally failed to consider and build upon faith-communities’ and organizations’ existing capacity and infrastructure (D’Agostino, et al., 2021).

Donors can advance partnerships in this sub-sector by supporting a mapping and inquiry into the FBSs’ and FBOs’ investments in ECD and parenting, documenting existing promising models, such as the L3 initiative with Catholic schools in Haiti, and by supporting opportunities for collaboration and synergy between states and FBSs / faith communities, as noted in the DR.

FBSs and FBOs and local faith communities can seek to utilize their existing pastoral presence with families to support whole child development approaches, including preaching about child protection and nurturing parenting from the pulpit; utilizing existing programs like parent groups and Baptism or Marriage preparation by integrating science-based and theology-informed messages and guidance regarding the dignity of children; teaching about brain development in the first 1,000 days of life; exposing the risks of toxic stress linked to physical abuse; and emphasizing the benefits of talking to, holding, and expressing affection for babies and young children.

**Recommendation 9:** Support FBSs and FBOs to implement evidence-based interventions and support models within and beyond their networks (e.g., scripted reading programs, after-school programs, summer camps, and distance learning) to strengthen foundational skills acquisition for all.

Research on the most effective and cost-effective approaches to improving learning outcomes affirms the benefits of structured curricular programs alongside teacher training and coaching; small-group instructional interventions targeted at struggling learners (e.g., the Teaching at the Right Level [TARL] approach) that leverage out of school time (after school, summer); and distance learning programs, which are particularly resilient to shocks and disruption to learning (e.g., violence, strikes, pandemics, political disruptions, etc.) (Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2020). FBSs and FBOs are already partners in many of these areas and can be leveraged more fully to ensure the effectiveness of their intervention models and support their replication, growth, and scaling. Additionally, FBS networks and FBOs represent a valuable source of non-state capacity within many systems that have demonstrated themselves to be flexible and reliable partners, committed to serving vulnerable populations and open to partnership. Additionally, to achieve full market coverage of promising interventions, FBS networks are necessary partners, but can also add significant value as implementers. They have deep knowledge and relationships within their own networks and aligned incentives to maximize the benefits of any investments and interventions for their schools, including innovating and improving upon centrally designed and offered programs through iteration and network-wide learning.

Donors and governments should confirm or study the effectiveness of FBO delivered programs (after school, summer, distance education, etc.), for possible partnership, replication, growth, and scaling. They
should also incorporate FBS networks into their plans for foundational skill interventions, both to ensure universal coverage within the system, as well as to leverage the significant capacity and potential benefits of working through mid-sized networks, which can improve program implementation and be a source of innovation and program improvement.

FBSs and FBOs should advocate for participation in public programs, seek public partnerships, welcome evaluations, technical support, and opportunities to participate in and contribute to learning networks, and seek opportunities to replicate or scale their program models with adequate support.

**Recommendation 10:** Support FBOs to deliver integrative, locally-led child protection and educational services for vulnerable children, including those in poverty, indigenous communities, those affected by violence, migrant or displaced children and youth, and girls.

FBOs tend to serve among the most vulnerable children and seek to respond in holistic ways that place the dignity and care of the person and the family at the center of their work. Their efforts are not merely technical, but are often guided by pastoral care, aided by trust; are respectful of cultural identity; and are supported by a sensitivity to the spiritual and psycho-social well-being of those they serve.

Donors and governments should seek to study and learn from these approaches, while also supporting, growing, replicating, and scaling them. As with other recommendations, research, evaluation, and knowledge sharing through learning networks and partnerships can be vital sources of improvement and contribute to broader systemic change. Additionally, these organizations represent vital local assets to be engaged, learned from, and supported.

There are particular opportunities worth noting for donor and partnership coordination across and between the DR and Haiti in seeking to serve and support migrants (e.g. USAID cross-Mission collaboration would be very useful). FBOs may have affiliates or organizations within the same tradition with whom they could collaborate across borders to ensure effective communication and coordination of service delivery.

FBOs in these areas should pursue opportunities for public sector collaboration, emphasizing the importance of serving vulnerable populations to addressing root causes of violence, poverty, and social disruption. Moreover, and as noted previously, they should welcome research and evaluation partnerships and opportunities for within sector networking and collaboration.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Cao, Y., & Ramesh, A. (2014). Parental and Community Involvement in Early Grade Reading. *NORC at the University of Chicago*. 


https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/bitstream/handle/1774.2/63240/v3-Introduction.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y


Robinson, M., Hanmer, S. (2014). Engaging religious communities to protect children from abuse,


ANNEXES

1) Country Case Reports:

El Salvador

The Dominican Republic

Honduras

Haiti

Guatemala
2) Study Statement of Work:

Statement of Work
Under the LAC Education Support Contract

Subject: Understanding the role, contributions, challenges, and opportunities of faith-based education in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Place of Performance: The Contractor will work with the USAID to finalize the set of countries for primary and secondary data collection, understanding USAID’s preferred set of countries to be Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.

Timing: November, 2021- July 31, 2022

Activity Manager: Alexandra Rice and Nathaniel Haight

Context: Throughout the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region, faith-based educational institutions play an important role in supporting children and youth to grow and learn skills to be successful in life. Faith-based educational institutions have a long history developing and contributing to education outcomes for millions of children in the region. Many faith-based schools serve the most vulnerable communities, intentionally building schools in poor and disadvantaged neighborhoods.\(^5\) Education is an integral piece of development and faith-based organizations such as the Catholic Jesuits believe that “development is not possible without education.”\(^6\) However, there is a limited understanding of the history and contributions of faith-based schools in principle, practice, and policy for development practitioners and educators.

Working in partnership with local organizations and using evidence and data to drive decision-making is a key principle for U.S. policy to advance education outcomes. The U.S. government strategy on international basic education (2019-2023) and the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) education policy emphasize the need to engage and partner with local stakeholders, including faith-based organizations, to understand the local context, strengthen local systems, and leverage local resources. Second, understanding education systems in LAC is critical today as the U.S. addresses the root causes of migration from Central America. The U.S strategy for addressing the root causes of migration in Central America discusses enhancing educational opportunities and increasing access to quality education as a key tactic for addressing many of the challenges to development in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. For the U.S. government to successfully achieve this strategy and its policy objectives, it is essential for policymakers to understand the history, access, and contributions of faith-based educational institutions in LAC.

Purpose:
The purpose of this project is to research the role of faith-based actors in education development in the Latin American and Caribbean region. The activity will be co-designed with USAID’s Office of Regional Sustainable Development in the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC/RSD/EDU),


USAID’s Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (CFBNP), and the research team contracted through the DevTech Systems LAC Education Support Contract.

The goal for research is to produce an overview of the role, contributions, challenges, and opportunities of faith-based education in the LAC region and to inform future education programs and policies. This research will focus on understanding the role and contributions of faith-based education, evaluating the access, safety, and quality of education services for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth in the LAC region over the past 30 years. When considering marginalized and vulnerable children and youth, the research team should consider children and youth experiencing extreme poverty, affected by irregular migration and/or violence, those with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, those living in rural and urban environments, and others relevant to each local context. Furthermore, the study will seek to understand key challenges faith-based education faces, compare faith-based schools to state-run schools, and identify opportunities for engaging faith-based education actors and institutions to leverage/improve education outcomes.

This project will take into account local stakeholders -- including educators, family and community members, religious actors, development practitioners, government officials, academics, and researchers - to provide an analysis of the role and contributions of faith-based educational institutions on education development. This project will examine how these institutions achieve lasting education outcomes, as well as analyze barriers and challenges to providing accessible and equitable quality education. This research will evaluate schools and education programs from various faith-based backgrounds (e.g., Catholic, Muslim, Protestant, Jewish, etc.). At the conclusion of the research, the research will result in a virtual dissemination event such as a roundtable or seminar to review the research findings and develop action plans for faith-based educators, policymakers, and education development practitioners.

**Background of Partners:**
Office of Regional Sustainable Development in the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC/RSD/EDU) supports sustainable improvements to the formal and non-formal basic and higher education sectors in LAC, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable populations.

USAID’s Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (CFBNP), Local, Faith and Transformative Partnerships Hub (LFT) within the Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation (DDI) works to strengthen the Agency’s work with faith-based and community organizations to advance policy and research on the role and impact of engaging with religious communities and partnering with faith-based organizations.

**Research Team:** TBD

**Scope of Work:**
LAC/RSD/EDU and DDI/LFT/CFBNP requests the services of an external Research Team to carry out a research on the role of faith-based actors in the LAC region in education development.

**Objectives:**
1. To inform USAID’s strategy, activity design, and implementation on faith-based education, particularly in the LAC region;
2. To contribute to the global knowledge of faith-based education programming, and advance the evidence base for the USAID Education Learning Agenda.

**Research Questions and Variables:**
The research team will work with USAID to finalize the research questions for the study.
Preliminarily, USAID is interested in exploring the following research questions/variables:

- **What is the role** of faith-based education actors and institutions in providing education services, especially for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth (e.g., those experiencing extreme poverty, affected by irregular migration, affected by violence, girls and boys, those with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural and urban, etc.)?

- **What are the contributions** of faith-based education services to:
  - The local community and education system?
  - Access to and safety of education, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth?
  - Learning outcomes and skills development, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable children and youth?

- **What are the challenges** faith-based schools face in regards to achieving education outcomes, especially in communities affected by insecurity, poverty, and migration?

- **How do faith-based schools compare** to state-run schools? Some areas for consideration include:
  - Resources, funding, facilities;
  - Quality of curriculum, teaching and learning materials, teacher training and coaching/mentoring, classroom instruction;
  - Access, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations;
  - Learning outcomes/skills, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations;
  - Safety, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations;
  - Ability to adapt to pressures from other development challenges including COVID-19, natural disasters/climate change, family breakdown, gang violence, irregular migration, trauma, and economic downturns; and,
  - Meaningful engagement of families and communities.

  - Drilling down in this area - When given the choice, would parents/caregivers choose faith-based schools over state-run schools? What advantages and disadvantages do parents/caregivers and other stakeholders perceive in faith-based schools compared to state-run schools?

- **What are the effective ways and opportunities** for donors and the public education sector to engage religious communities and partner with faith-based organizations to leverage/improve education outcomes?

**Deliverables:**
The contractor will comply with the submission for approval of the following deliverables: 1.

- **Work Plan:** this should be presented with a timeline, including resources needed; proposed methodology; and list of persons and/or organizations to be contacted in-country, and a full research protocol with data collection tools.

- **Midterm oral debrief** with the LAC/RSD/EDU and DDI/LFT/CFBNP teams to discuss progress and report formatting.

- **Draft report,** including Executive Summary. A documented draft outline of the research must be presented to the Activity Manager. The evaluation team will submit a draft report for review by the LAC/RSD/EDU and DDI/LFT/CFBNP team, and make a formal presentation to USAID of findings in the draft research report, and subsequently incorporate feedback into the report. Clear guidance on Evaluation Report writing will be provided as mentioned above.

- **Final Report.** This final report should incorporate LAC/RSD/EDU and DDI/LFT/CFBNP team responses and suggestions. The report will be submitted in English, electronically and printed copy (readable in MSWord or Excel Spreadsheet, depending on work). A second version of this report excluding any potentially procurement-sensitive information will be submitted.
(electronically, in English) for dissemination among implementing partners and stakeholders. Conclusion and recommendation sections are among the most important parts of this document. Attachments to the evaluation may be included. Any attachment is excluded from the page limit.

5. A two-page infographic summarizing the research for dissemination.
6. A virtual dissemination event such as a seminar or roundtable with USAID and other selected stakeholders.

**Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning:**

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning will be conducted by the Project Management Team and results reviewed at regular meetings. The research team will submit progress reports to USAID, covering both technical and financial aspects, which should highlight implementation issues and follow-up actions to be taken. Knowledge products will be produced and disseminated accordingly.

**Proposed management structure for the buy-in:**

**Core Management Team:** To be proposed by the research team and approved by USAID.

**COVID-19 Contingencies:**

A substantial part of this study will be conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic period. This will therefore require that the project team puts in place measures to ensure adherence to the required sanitation, masking, and hygiene protocols for prevention of COVID-19. Key Informants will be given the option of being interviewed virtually. In the field, research consultants will be trained on how to ensure social distancing and other preventive measures during the interviews.
3) a list of key informant organizations).

The DR - Table 6. Key informants from the faith-based education community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informants</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fe y Alegria</td>
<td>Association of Catholic publicly funded schools</td>
<td>Run a nationwide network under agreement with the Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nacional Association of Christian Schools (ACSI)</td>
<td>Association of Protestant schools</td>
<td>Provide technical support to a national network of protestant schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Association of Adventist Schools</td>
<td>Association of Adventist schools</td>
<td>Run a nationwide network of private and publicly-funded Adventist schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polytechnic Ave Maria</td>
<td>Catholic publicly funded school (Secondary)</td>
<td>A large polytechnical school located in a low-income neighborhood of Northern Santo Domingo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Lorenzo School</td>
<td>Catholic publicly funded school (Elementary)</td>
<td>A small elementary school in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Eastern Santo Domingo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical School Adonai</td>
<td>Evangelical publicly funded school</td>
<td>A large elementary school in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Eastern Santo Domingo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Merced Foundation</td>
<td>Faith-based non-profit organization</td>
<td>Small nonprofit focused on school reinsertion and other educational projects located in a semi-rural low-income community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caminante Education Project</td>
<td>Faith-based non-profit organization</td>
<td>Mid-size nonprofit located in a semi-rural low income community. They focus on youth protection and educational projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Vision</td>
<td>Faith-based non-profit organization</td>
<td>Large nonprofit that manages large programs with international organizations and the government. They work in partnership with protestant churches for specific projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Regulation authorities</td>
<td>Authorities from the Ministry of Education</td>
<td>Long term public officials from different areas of the Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Key Informant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Fe y Alegria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caminante Education Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evangelical School Adonai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Merced Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nacional Association of Christian Schools (ACSI)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Association of Adventist Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Polytechnic Ave Maria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>San Lorenzo School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Regulation authorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>World Vision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>Adventist Schools’ Network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elia del Cid, Minister of Education Honduras</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julio Miralda, National Commission for Non-Formal Education, CONEANFO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dilmer Maradiaga, Coordinating Committee of Educational Networks (CONCORDE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Br. Walter Guillen sdb, Episcopal Conference of Catholic Church</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paola Guevara, Honduras Bahai Community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Br. Horacio Macal sdb, Honduras Federation of Public Schools and San Miguel Salesian Institute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fanny Cruz, Honduras Adventist Church Union</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gustavo Moreno, The Brigades Association of Christian Love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Javier Diaz, Honduran Institute for Radio Instruction (IHER)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miguel Molina, Fe y Alegria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>Alejandro Martinez, Bayan Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comision Épiscopale des Écoles Catholiques</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Federation of Protestant Schools of Haiti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EDUQUAT (Frères de l’Instruction Chrétienne, Soeurs de St Joseph de Cluny, Soeurs de la Sagesse)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The St. Luke Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Key Informant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of Notre Dame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Director of the Center for Professional Formation, Agape El Salvador</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation Supervisor, Catholic Relief Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fe y Alegria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Libertad Parish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Director and Chaplain, Nehemias Project Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>REDES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Archdiocesan coordinator of Consejo Educativo Católico Escolar (Catholic School Education Board) Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principal, CECE school, San Salvador</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manager, Ministry of Education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Savior of the World Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>World Vision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Instituto Evangélico América Latina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fé y Alegria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instituto Federico Crowe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visión Mundial Guatemala</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACSI Latam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Edify Guatemala</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talita Cumi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EJEGUA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Rafael Landivar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>