

World
Watch
Research

Mexico: Full Country Dossier

January 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Mexico

Brief country details

Mexico: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
132,834,000	126,876,000	95.5

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



Mexico: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	68	37
WWL 2023	67	38
WWL 2022	65	43
WWL 2021	64	37
WWL 2020	60	52

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Mexico:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Organized corruption and crime	Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Government officials
Secular intolerance	Government officials, Ideological pressure groups

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

The increased presence of several criminal groups and their struggle for territorial control has caused Christians and church leaders living in affected areas to face the constant risk of being targeted. This occurs whenever Christians are perceived as being a threat to criminal operations or have disregarded criminal group demands. In indigenous communities, those who decide to abandon the community religious beliefs (often syncretistic practices related to Catholicism) face rejection and punishments such as fines, incarceration and forced displacement, without any proper investigation and support from state authorities. Hostility towards Christian faith and values' presence in the public arena are becoming more evident, especially when Christians express traditional faith-based opinions on marriage, family and life issues. Public expressions of Christian faith face strict legal scrutiny.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Mexico has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Mexico is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christian converts from indigenous communities experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children from indigenous communities are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christian leaders are monitored and their activities actively watched (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian female converts from indigenous communities are at risk of forced marriage (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **January 2023, Chihuahua:** The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights set up special [security measures](#) for eleven members of the Jesuit community of Chihuahua, who had suffered attacks and threats from criminal groups, preventing them from carrying out pastoral work. Two of their number had been assassinated in June 2022. (IACHR, 31 January 2023)
- **January 2023, Hidalgo:** María Concepción Hernández Hernández, a member of the Iglesia Bautista Gran Comisión, was tied to a tree and [severely beaten](#) by the leaders of her village in the community of Rancho Nuevo. She was attacked after she visited a plot of land that she owns in response to a request from a neighbor who had asked her to remove two trees. Since 2015, the local authorities have prohibited members of the religious minority from accessing or using their land for cultivating crops.
- **August 2023, Chiapas:** Miguel Montoya Moreno, Catholic priest and vicar for Justice and Peace of the local Catholic diocese, publicly denounced the increase in [threats](#) by both criminal groups and government officials against church leaders who speak out about serious violence. Moreno called for an end to the criminalization of human rights defenders.

Specific examples of positive developments

- **Recognition of religion as a key for peace:** There have been initiatives by some Mexican authorities to recognize religious faith as a valuable factor for encouraging peace. The General Director of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior [expressed](#) the federal government's commitment to guarantee religious freedom as a fundamental right (Siete24, 28 April 2022). Also, the 65th Legislature of the state of Oaxaca [urged](#) the governor, in coordination with the Ombudsman for Human Rights of the People of Oaxaca (DDHPO), to implement training programs on human rights, aimed at all municipal authorities, in order to promote respect for religious beliefs within their communities and thus avoid conflicts of religious intolerance that could result in acts of oppression, discrimination, forced displacement and even loss of human life (NVI Noticias, 30 January 2022).
- **Recognition of religious diversity:** The active presence of [interreligious councils](#) in all the states of the Mexican federation is an example of progress in recognizing not only the country's religious diversity but also the need and importance of interdenominational cooperation (CNLR Press Room, 30 January 2022).

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: security measures - https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/preleases/2023/012.asp
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: severely beaten - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2023/01/05/press/5902/article.htm>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: threats - <https://www.jornada.com.mx/notas/2023/08/06/estados/amenazan-a-clerigos-en-chiapas-que-denuncian-la-violencia/#>
- Specific examples of positive developments: expressed - <https://siete24.mx/mexico/nacional/gobierno-federal-garantiza-libertad-religiosa-como-un-derecho-fundamental/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: urged - <https://www.nvnoticias.com/oaxaca/politica/pide-congreso-fomentar-respeto-la-diversidad-religiosa-en-oaxaca/125346>
- Specific examples of positive developments: interreligious councils - <https://observatorioliberaladreligiosa.org/news/?p=77211>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Mexico

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Mexico report	AI Mexico 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/north-america/mexico/report-mexico/	30 June 2023
BBC News Mexico profile - updated 4 April 2023	BBC Mexico profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18095241	30 June 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Mexico Report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/MEX	30 June 2023
CIA World Factbook Mexico - updated 18 June 2023	World Factbook Mexico	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mexico/	30 June 2023
Crisis24 Mexico report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Mexico report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/mexico	30 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2022 – covering 167 countries	EIU Democracy Index 2022 - Latin America pp.40-45	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-version-report.pdf	30 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Mexico	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	30 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Mexico not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Mexico	https://freedomhouse.org/country/mexico/freedom-world/2023	30 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Mexico	https://freedomhouse.org/country/mexico/freedom-net/2023	8 January 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Mexico profile	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/mexico/	30 June 2023
Girls Not Brides Mexico report	Girls Not Brides Mexico	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/mexico/	30 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Mexico country chapter	HRW 2023 Mexico country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/mexico	30 June 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Mexico	https://www.internetworldstats.com/central.htm#mx	30 June 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Mexico	https://rsf.org/en/mexico	30 June 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Mexico	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/mex	30 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Mexico	UNDP HDR Mexico	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/MEX	30 June 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Mexico	IRFR 2022 Mexico	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mexico/	30 June 2023
USCIRF 2023 covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Mexico not included	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Mexico - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Mexico	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/e408a7e21ba62d843bdd90dc37e61b57-0500032021/related/mpo-mex.pdf	30 June 2023
World Bank Mexico data – 2021	World Bank Mexico data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=COUNTRYPROFILE&b450fd57tbar=ydf=yinf=nzm=ncountry=MEX	30 June 2023
World Bank Mexico overview – updated 4 April 2023	World Bank Mexico overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mexico/overview	30 June 2023

Recent history

In July 2018, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (hereafter abbreviated to 'AMLO') won the presidential elections, marking a milestone in Mexican politics; he is the first president who does not belong to the main Mexican political parties, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) or the National Action Party (PAN), and was elected with the highest number of votes ever. He ran as leader of the political party 'National Regeneration Movement' (MORENA) and had significant contact with churches during his electoral campaign. Despite AMLO'S promises to

tackle corruption and violence, the country has continued to suffer from violence and insecurity. Additionally, accusations have been made against the police, the National Guard and the government itself regarding [collusion](#) with drug-leaders (Milenio, 15 May 2022), [abuse](#) of authority and human rights violations (El País, 21 March 2023). Despite the initial support for AMLO and his party at the beginning of his term, in the midterm elections held in June 2021, the MORENA party [lost](#) much of its majority in the lower house of Congress and now has to rely on the support of its party allies to push its agenda (Americas Quarterly, 7 June 2021).

Since August 2021, Mexico has been the [host](#) of negotiations and talks between the Government of Venezuela and the Unitary Platform of Venezuela (Mexican government, 13 August 2021). The dialogue continued until [November 2022](#) (Santiago Tribune, 3 April 2023) and was not resumed until October 2023, the date on which some [agreements](#) were discussed and reached on the electoral guarantees of the next elections in Venezuela (BBC News, 17 October 2023).

In May 2023, AMLO was [declared](#) persona non grata by the Peruvian congress due to his repeated support for the former president of Peru, Pedro Castillo (who is under investigation in prison after attempting a failed 'self-coup') and for his continued rejection of the current president, Dina Boluarte. In addition, the diplomatic tension led to AMLO's refusal to transfer the presidency of the Pacific Alliance to Peru, a procedure that should have been carried out at the beginning of 2023. Already in December 2022, the Mexican ambassador in Peru had been declared persona non grata by the Peruvian government (El País, 22 May 2023).

Due to the measures surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the country was plunged into one of the biggest political, social and economic crises in recent history. This highlighted the weakness of the government at such a crucial time (El Economista, 25 May 2021). Unlike other Latin American countries, AMLO decided to prioritize economic factors over health considerations, for which he was strongly criticized. At the state level, churches had to follow the rules imposed by the authorities which sometimes included the ceasing of church services. Despite all restrictions and risks, Christian communities actively supported those most in need, especially in areas not reached by the authorities and often dominated by criminal groups.

Political and legal landscape

President AMLO took office in 2018. He has been criticized for his handling of the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and for the rising levels of insecurity. The report **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** particularly highlighted (World Justice Project, 2023):

- Weakening of institutional checks and balances and contraction of civic space;
- Deterioration of justice systems;
- Stagnation in the fight against corruption.

A survey revealed that AMLO had a 59.7% [approval rating](#) in October 2023 (Mitofsky, October 2023).

AMLO's victory in 2018 and MORENA's majority in the Chamber of Deputies and Senators resulted in a high level of power and a deepening of control which caused a [loss of autonomy](#) for some institutions, especially the judiciary (El País, 21 April 2021). However, after the [mid-term legislative elections](#) held in June 2021, AMLO's party lost many seats in the Chamber of

Deputies and (despite keeping their majority) now depends on the support from their political allies to a greater degree (LSE, 10 June 2021). A significant event was the [referendum](#) in April 2022 concerning whether AMLO should step down or complete his six-year term. 90% of those who cast their votes said they wanted the president to stay in office, but turnout was low, at less than 19%. The president's single six-year term comes to an end in September 2024 (BBC News, 11 April 2022).

Some sectors of civil society classify the political measures adopted by AMLO (as part of his political plan called "Fourth Transformation") as [dictatorship](#), since he is attempting to end the autonomy of independent agencies designed to check presidential power (WSJ, 4 June 2021). AMLO has [concentrated](#) power in the Executive Branch (Expansión Política, 25 May 2021), has taken control of energy agencies and has implemented restrictive [market competition](#) measures (Bloomberg, 29 April 2021). He has made radical reforms that have weakened autonomous institutions and undermined the work of the autonomous body entitled "National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data", which has been responsible for guaranteeing the right of access to public information for the last two decades. "[Access to information](#)" is in decline and many of the responses to requests for information made to the federal government are lacking in detail (The Washington Post, 16 March 2022). In general, the AMLO government has attempted to politicize public institutions, concentrate power in the executive and therefore limit the autonomy of the Legislative power.

In March 2023, AMLO [approved](#) electoral reforms, the so-called "Plan B". The changes include a restructuring of the INE's composition, reducing its budget, its number of workers and closing several of its local offices (El País, 2 March 2023). Part of the reform package was challenged by the National Electoral Institute (INE) before the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN), which indefinitely [suspended](#) the application for reform (AS, 24 March 2023). As a result, the INE decided to [stop](#) all attempts at modifying the regulatory and administrative instruments for implementation (Central Electoral, 28 March 2023). So far, in May 2023, the SCJN has declared the [partial invalidity](#) of the reform project (AS, 8 May 2023). On June 2023, Plan B was [annulled](#) in its entirety by the SCJN, which will allow the INE to continue operating with its same resources, infrastructure and powers for the upcoming presidential and legislative elections in 2024 (El País, 22 June 2023).

Other problematic areas continue to be those of justice and security. President AMLO has [criticized](#) the decisions of judges which are unfavorable for the administration; he has also frequently accused judges of alleged acts of corruption, without presenting evidence. A recurrent theme in his speeches concerns the reform of the judiciary. He would like to see all magistrates being elected directly by the people (El País, 5 September 2023). President AMLO has also expanded the armed force's responsibilities by eliminating civilian law enforcement and by setting up a 'new' security force called the Guardia Nacional (National Guard). This move [increases](#) the risk of corruption, is likely to cause a greater number of human rights violations, and causes a reduction in the level of resources available for local police (Observatory of the National Guard and Militarization in Mexico, July 2022). In 2022, the Mexican Chamber of Deputies [approved](#) a legislative reform promoted by AMLO that transferred the National Guard to the Ministry of National Defense (Los Angeles Times, 3 September 2022); however in April 2023 the SCJN [invalidated](#) the transfer as being unconstitutional (Los Angeles Times, 19 April

2023). AMLO warned that before the end of his term he will [insist](#), through another initiative to Congress, that the National Guard be absorbed by the Secretariat of National Defense (Reforma, 30 June 2023).

The fact that in June 2021 the MORENA party lost seats in the Legislative Branch, has been viewed positively by those concerned about [democratic stability](#) in the country (The Wall Street Journal, 4 June 2021). The loss of influence could also be seen as serving as a warning to President AMLO if he wishes to retain his political allies, continue with his [reforms](#) and win the 2024 elections (Los Angeles Times, 31 May 2021). Despite this, in the 2023 elections to renew governors in Coahuila and in the State of Mexico, MORENA now has the [majority](#) of seats in 22 state governments (Milenio, 5 June 2023). Campaigning for the next elections began in November 2023. A new president, along with senators and federal deputies of the country are to be elected in June 2024.

Many Christian groups that initially supported the president, such as [CONFRATERNICE](#) (Alliance of Evangelical Churches), have since become less enthusiastic (Imdosoc, 22 January 2021). The Encuentro Solidario Party – PES, a political party integrated for Christians evangelical, with an important presence in the country in the past years, and that even maintained an [alliance](#) with MORENA (Evangélico Digital, 5 May 2021), [lost its registration](#) for not reaching 3% of votes in the 2021 federal election (Central electoral, October 2021).

The ruling party's political stance on issues involving the right to life, parental rights and the right to freedom of religion or belief (e.g., concerning modifications to the Law on Religious Affairs) has caused some churches to withdraw their support for the AMLO government. Also, some members of the MORENA party have [been trying to bring changes](#) to the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship in an effort to restrict churches from teaching traditional Christian values which could be classed as "hate speech" against some minorities (Gobernación, 6 September 2022). Analysts have pointed out that the president's strategy is to stay close to Catholic voters (since their vote can have a significant influence) but to keep his [distance](#) from the Catholic bishops who are critical of his government (El País, 2 November 2022).

The Catholic Church in particular has not been oblivious to the political developments. Church leaders have been constantly [calling](#) for dialogue, unity, respect for the rule of law (Vatican News, 29 April 2022) , [condemning](#) all forms of violence (El Siglo de Torreon, 7 June 2023) and have called for the reforms not to [compromise](#) the legitimacy of the country's democratic institutions (Vatican News, 7 November 2022). The Church has also [called on](#) citizens not to stop participating in the country's elections (La Jornada, 30 April 2023). As a result, many Christians, especially Catholics, have had to face a wide range of hostility, including accusations of supporting the opposition, and even prosecution for allegedly violating the electoral process.

Gender perspective

Mexico's legal landscape remains restrictive towards women in several areas. Whilst men and women have broadly equal rights in relation to divorce and guardianship under Mexico's Federal Law (Civil Code, Art. 156 and 263), divorce proceedings differ from state to state and customary practices remain prevalent. In indigenous communities for example, the elders of the community often decide if a woman can separate from her husband. Child marriages remain

prevalent, driven by poverty, harmful traditional practices, and widespread trafficking networks. According to Girls Not Brides Mexico, 21% of girls marry by the age of 18. To combat this, the Mexican government removed all exceptions to the minimum age of marriage through an [amendment](#) in the Federal Civil Code in June 2019 (Gobierno de México, 2019).

Mexico has legislation addressing domestic violence (Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida libre de Violencia) and rape (Penal Code, Art 265) and has made efforts to combat violence against women, which is widely understood to be endemic in Mexico. Victims are often hesitant to report crimes due to a lack of trust in the justice system and the fear of stigmatization. The newly [ratified](#) International Labor Organization Convention on Violence and Harassment shows further evidence of efforts by the government to address gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the workplace (HRW 2023 Mexico country chapter).

Religious landscape

Mexico: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	126,876,000	95.5
Muslim	138,000	0.1
Hindu	12,500	0.0
Buddhist	31,700	0.0
Ethno-religionist	1,407,000	1.1
Jewish	40,000	0.0
Bahai	47,600	0.0
Atheist	157,000	0.1
Agnostic	4,085,000	3.1
Other	39,900	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Following WCD's 2023 figures, Christians make up 95.5% of the population of the country and an estimated 3.2% of the population identify themselves as agnostic/atheist; however, according to the [official figures](#) of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, the latter make up around 8.1% of the population (Nexos, 1 February 2021). This phenomenon is the result of strong secular tendencies that have been driven by previous government policies and influenced by secularist groups. Mexico has no official religion, and no religious classes are taught in state schools. The state has remained strictly secular and - until 1992 - the Mexican government did not have any formal relations with and did not officially recognize any church at all. In 1992, the Salinas government modified the Constitution to give recognition to the various religions that exist in Mexico.

Today, Mexicans have the right to exercise any religion they please. The federal government coordinates religious affairs through the Secretariat of Governance (SEGOB), which (together with the General Directorate for Religious Associations - DGAR) promotes religious tolerance, conducts conflict mediation, and investigates cases of religious intolerance. According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Mexico), each of the 32 states has an office with responsibility for religious affairs. According to the law regulating religious organizations, church officials are not allowed to publicly express political opinions or hold public office, and the state authorities cannot intervene in the internal life of religious associations.

Churches in the country actively contributed in [addressing](#) the impact of the COVID pandemic by bringing humanitarian assistance to those in need (Vatican News, 27 April 2021). During the most critical stage, the government introduced a pandemic traffic light system in 2020 for permitted activities, which included restrictions on the holding of church services. All restrictions have since been dropped and church services have resumed across the country.

Although some government authorities [recognize](#) the religious sector as an ally in helping vulnerable communities, the principle of Church-State separation continues to be a challenge, and sometimes an obstacle. Government authorities have repeatedly tried to prevent church leaders from speaking out on public affairs. Church leaders who have asked for a [change](#) in the security policy (El País, 30 June 2022) or have [questioned](#) (Proceso, 20 February 2023) the President's electoral reform, have been criticized by the president himself; they were also being [censored](#) during the election campaign period in 2021, (INE, 6 June 2021). In general, President Lopez Obrador has [lashed out](#) against the church every time the institution has criticized any aspect of the government (El Economista, 9 July 2023).

Civil society organizations have been able to criticize government measures without punishment; however, as soon as Christians speak in support of the neediest in society, they are likely to be denounced at different levels of government. This was evident during the recent referendum on the presidential mandate. When Catholic church leaders [encouraged](#) reflection and prayer to discern whether or not to participate in the referendum (CEM, 15 March 2022), Cardinal Felipe Arizmendi reported that both he and the president of the Episcopal Conference had been [accused](#) of acting illegally (El Sol de Mexico, 8 May 2022).

Political pressure groups have continued their attempts at marginalizing traditional Christian values and teaching, demanding that church leaders should not get involved in public debates on issues relating to abortion, marriage and comprehensive sex education, for example. The activities of pressure groups have become increasingly aggressive as can be seen in the incidents involving [vandalism](#) of Christian-owned property (Notigram, 9 March 2023). There have also been attempts to [censor](#) politicians who give faith-based points of views on such matters (Petition on Change.org, last accessed 3 July 2023). A Christian leader and activist was accused of political violence against women after opposing an action by Deputy Selma Luévano, who dressed up as a Catholic bishop in the Chamber of Deputies. The Specialized Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary [ruled against him](#) (Aciprensa, 5 May 2023). Priests who have expressed their rejection of abortion, and have been in dialogue with authorities concerning the subject, have been harshly [criticized](#) by feminist groups (Religión Digital, 22 March 2023). A bill has now been presented that seeks to include as 'violence against reproduc-

tive rights' any action or omission that limits or violates the right of women to decide freely and voluntarily about their reproductive function, that is, any type of rejection or action that seeks to prevent abortion could be considered an action of [violence](#) against women (Aciprensa, 1 June 2023).

The Mexican Supreme Court declared an article of the general health law that enshrined conscientious objection for doctors to be [invalid](#) on the grounds that it was too vague and affected the rights of patients, especially women and pregnant women (CAN, 21 September 2021). The Court pointed out that this could interfere with the right of women to have an abortion. According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Mexico), the First Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice also reviewed a constitutional-protection lawsuit opposing the placement of “signs that allude to a specific religious conviction” on public property. This could prohibit displaying religious symbols such as crosses on public property throughout the country.

Since 2020, some Mexican states already approved reforms to [forbid](#) any attempts made to alter a person's sexual orientation or gender identity (El Sol de Puebla, 19 October 2021). At the end of the WWL 2024 reporting period, 15 states – 5 more than in the previous reporting period (WWL 2023) – had already legalized conversion therapies (Nuevo León, Sonora, Hidalgo, Puebla, Baja California, Jalisco, Tlaxcala, Colima, Yucatán, Zacatecas, Baja California Sur, Edomex, Cd Mexico, Sonora, Queretaro). There are still legislative initiatives that seek to continue not just eliminating but to [criminalize](#) this practice (Aciprensa, 26 April 2023). Given the ambiguity of the ruling, church leaders and Christian groups can face legal action if they offer support to any person seeking help in such matters.

Further, the rights of Christian parents are at risk as a result of some recently approved measures, such as [legal sex change](#) for children (Evangelico Digital, 15 June 2023). The Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation has indicated in a ruling that the impediment for children and adolescents to change their legal sex was “violatory of their right to have their self-perceived gender identity recognized,” and that “the absolute prohibition to modify official documents does not find constitutional or conventional justification” a situation that could result in the rights of parents (e.g., to educate their children according to their own convictions) simply being ignored. Additionally, the Ministry of Public Education evaded a [court order](#) that required it to subject the redesign of textbooks to be distributed in national schools to prior consultations and other legal requirements (Infobae, 22 August 2023). The National Union of Parents had aired concern over contents relating to sexual education and indigenous teachings, which were incorporated without proper participatory procedure from government departments, educational specialists or parents of schoolchildren.

Christians have also suffered different forms of censorship. Students or recent graduates who speak publicly on such matters as family and marriage without hiding their traditional Christian convictions, run the risk - among other things - of [losing](#) their degrees (Hispanidad, 12 September 2022). Also, Rodrigo Iván Cortéz, a Christian activist, has been [convicted](#) of gender-based political violence,” including digital violence, for social media posts on Twitter and Facebook referring to transgender-identifying Mexican Congressional representative, Salma Luévano, as a “man who self-ascribes as a woman” (ADF International, 10 August 2023). Another recent example is the congressman Hector Malavé Gamboa of the MORENA party who lost his tem-

per and

[verbally attacked](#) religious groups who were protesting in front of Congress. They were demanding the review of a bill that apparently limited their freedom of worship. The deputy accused the Catholic Church of wanting to intervene in state affairs (24 Horas Campeche, 14 December 2023).

Also, when church leaders have criticized the ineffectiveness of the government's security policies, they have often received [insults](#) in return (El Universal, 1 July 2022). Given the lack of government action to combat the spiral of violence and insecurity across the country - particularly where it affects religious communities -, Catholic church leaders have called for a [Dialogue for Peace](#), which would bring various social actors together to find solutions to the excessive violence (El País, 3 April 2023). (See below: *Security situation*.)

A special note about 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' in indigenous communities

Within indigenous communities, the religious factor is an important component of their culture and identity and shapes their relationships with other people and even natural resources. As in many indigenous communities in Latin America, the religious practices are mostly related to syncretistic practices adapted from Roman Catholic rites. In some cases, they identify themselves as Catholics and indigenous leaders tend to be more receptive to the presence of Roman Catholic members than with Christians from other denominations. However, any type of preaching or religious activity requires permission from the leaders. Anything going against the customs of the ethnic group will be [punished](#) (Evangelico Digital, 24 August 2022). Due to the general acceptance of Catholic traditions inside indigenous communities, most 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' are of Protestant or Evangelical origin.

In indigenous communities, Christian's face opposition where they reject the religious practices and customs of the ethnic group to which they belong. This has led to indigenous leaders often seeing Christian influences from outside as a destabilizing element. Since ethnic leaders are those who administer justice in their territories, religious freedom of indigenous people is not duly guaranteed by local (state) authorities where it concerns a religion differing from the community one. Therefore - and only with regard to indigenous people - those adhering to 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' refer in this country dossier to those Christians who refuse to follow the ancestral or traditional beliefs of the ethnic group to which they belong because it contradicts their faith. Thus, when syncretistic religious customs related to Roman Catholic rites (or ancestral religious customs that worship nature) are practiced in the indigenous community, they refuse to participate and consequently face hostility and rejection. See below: *Persecution engines / Clan oppression*)

Christians of 'non-accepted church groups' in localities such as [Oaxaca](#) (La Jornada, 4 January 2022), [Chiapas](#) (El Heraldo de Chiapas, 16 February 2022) and [Hidalgo](#) (Redalyc, 12 October 2020), who refused to profess the same faith as the community in which they lived, were harassed, fined, arrested and expelled from their homes, without there being any effective intervention by the government authorities. In the WWL 2024 reporting period there was also a violent [attack](#) on a woman, the attack was linked to her membership of a religious minority in her community (Forbinfull, 17 April 2023). In such cases, 'non-accepted Christians' frequently fail to receive any proper guarantee of their rights when they ask for state intervention. This is

either due to a lack of interest on the part of the state authorities or due to a [false interpretation](#) of what indigenous autonomy entails (Cronica, 15 June 2022).

The US State Department mentioned (in IRFR 2022 Mexico) that the General Directorate for Religious Affairs investigated five new cases related to religious freedom that took place in Oaxaca, Chiapas and Querétaro. Most of these cases involved members of minority religious groups who stated that members of the majority religious community where they lived had deprived them of the right to basic services and reported facing psychological threats. Citing CSW, the report notes that vulnerable religious communities described high levels of impunity for state officials and a lack of protections granted by these officials, who, they said, often sided with members of majority religious groups.

However, some steps have been taken at the legislative level to prevent this type of conduct. In September 2022, the Oaxaca State Congress [approved](#) the reform of the State Penal Code, regarding the crime of discrimination, which includes as punishable conduct "imposing activities, quotas, charges, services or punishments as a sanction for not professing a specific religion or creed" (OJS, 21 November 2022). Due to the continual reports of hostility being shown towards religious minorities, it is essential that similar measures are introduced in other states of the country and that affirmative actions be put into practice by government authorities to guarantee the exercise of religious freedom in those circumstances. At the moment, the autonomy enjoyed by indigenous communities is often used as a justification for the inefficiency in resolving this type of conflict.

Economic landscape

According to the UNDP's HDR Mexico profile:

- **Gross National Income (GNI) per capita:** 17,896 (2021)
- **GNI per capita women/men:** 12,456 (women); 23,600 (men) (2021)
- **Income inequality:** 29.8%.
- **Population vulnerable to multidimensional poverty:** 4.7%

According to the World Bank Mexico overview:

- **Economic growth:** "The Mexican economy grew by 3.1% in 2022, after a bounce back of 4.7% in 2021, and a 8.0% fall in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The economy has recovered its employment and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) pre-pandemic levels."
- **Poverty:** "Over the last three decades, Mexico has underperformed in terms of growth, inclusion, and poverty reduction compared to similar countries. Its economic growth averaged just above 2 percent a year between 1980 and 2022, limiting progress in convergence relative to high-income economies. ... To accelerate sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction over the medium term, Mexico needs to address structural constraints such as limited access to finance, insecurity, informality, regulatory burdens, and infrastructure bottlenecks."

According to the [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (ECLAC) report published in January 2023:

- **Informal employment:** (Page 14) "In line with the increase in the number of wage earners and based on figures available, the average informal employment rate in the region dipped slightly in 2022, from 48.8% in 2021 to 48.7% in 2022. Informality decreased in 8 of the 11 countries for which information is available, notably in Colombia (2.0 percentage points) and Costa Rica (1.7 percentage points). In México (0.4 percentage points) Three countries reported an increase in the informality rate, in Argentina it rose 4.1 percentage points."

According to a report by the [Bank of Mexico](#) (Bank of Mexico, 1 November 2023):

- **Remittances:** "In September 2023, income from remittances from abroad reached a level of 5,613 million dollars, which represented an annual growth of 11.4%. The total amount of remittance income in the period January - September 2023 was 47,071 million dollars, higher than the 42,978 million dollars registered in the same period of 2022 and which represented an annual increase of 9.5%."

As in most countries in the region, Mexico sought to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus through social isolation measures and restrictions on travel. These measures had a serious impact on production and marketing chains, caused the closure and bankruptcy of many companies, and generated significant cuts in staff-levels and wages. According to the results of a study by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) on the [Demography of Businesses 2021](#), in the period May 2019 - July 2021, 1,187,169 micro, small and medium-sized businesses started up. In the same period, 1,583,930 units closed their doors. 38.16% of these closures were in non-financial private services, 29.88% were in commerce and 25.69% in manufacturing (INEGI Press Release, 21 December 2021).

Corruption is a serious problem that affects the country's economy. According to INEGI, in 2021, the [total cost](#) as a result of corruption in making payments, procedures or requests for public services and other contacts with authorities was 9.5 billion pesos. The cost as a result of corruption in contact with public security authorities was 3,186 million pesos (INEGI, Encuesta Nacional de Calidad e Impacto Gubernamental, May 2022).

The Círculo de Estudios Latinoamericanos [reported](#) that in the second quarter of 2023 the Mexican economy grew 3.6% compared to the same quarter of the previous year. The increase in public spending on infrastructure has boosted private investment and growth and the unemployment rate has remained at historically low levels close to 2.8%. On the other hand, inflation has maintained a downward trend; It was 4.47% in September 2023 and 4.27% in the first half of October. (CESLA, November 2023). As a consequence of inflation, the Mexican central bank has taken radical measures, such as [increasing](#) the interest rate to 11.25%, the highest level in recent years (El País, November 2023).

The economic crisis caused by the anti-COVID measures also affected Christian activities. In the case of the Catholic Church, because of church closures and the suspension of religious services, many churches were [unable to pay](#) staff salaries, basic services, maintenance, etc. Some of them had to apply for loans during the pandemic, some of which are still being paid off (Expansión, 11

February 2021). Despite the economic difficulties, Christian groups managed to be a reliable channel for the distribution of food, medicines and aid to the needy, especially during the [COVID-19 crisis](#) (Observatorio Mesoamericano de Pastoral de Movilidad Humana, April 2022). Although, to date, there are no restrictions on religious services, the long-term consequences of the pandemic mean that, in some states of Mexico, the level of donations continues to be [much lower than usual](#) due to the poor financial situation of parishioners, making it impossible for some churches to keep operating (Pulso, Diario de San Luis, 3 August 2022).

According to the latest data available from the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy, living conditions for the indigenous population in Mexico have been [far worse](#) than for the non-indigenous population. In 2018, the percentage of the indigenous population in a situation of poverty was 69.5%, in contrast to the 39% of the non-indigenous population. Being in a situation of poverty implies receiving insufficient income to satisfy food and non-food needs and, at the same time, presents at least one social deprivation (CONEVAL, 2018). Despite the difficulties and crisis, to date, churches continue to provide help to the [neediest](#) in the country (Vida Nueva Digital, February 2023). Considering these circumstances, Christians who experience persecution at the hands of their local communities find it very difficult to survive and remain firm in their faith when they are deprived of their property and farmland or are forced to pay exorbitant fines. This directly affects the growth of local churches, when they are a religious minority in these communities.

Gender perspective

Women and girls remain economically more vulnerable, due to societal norms which limit their work to the home. Girls are more likely to drop out of school early to fulfil these domestic responsibilities, or to be married, hence, more likely to be unemployed; only 43% of 25 to 34-year-old women with lower levels of education were employed in 2020 compared to 88% of men ([Borgen Project, 2018](#); [OECD, Education at a glance 2021/Mexico](#)). According to research published in 2020, despite Mexico being a manufacturing powerhouse, “female employment falls off a cliff once women reach childbearing age” ([Mexico News Daily, 26 October 2020](#)). Further limiting women’s opportunities to gain financial independence, land grabbing remains rife, and patrilineal inheritance practices continue to deny women their due inheritance.

Social and cultural landscape

Regarding indigenous communities, the Census of Population and Housing 2020 reported that 11,800,247 people live in indigenous households. However, there was a problem of census under-registration due to the COVID-19-related data collection limitations. According to the [Indigenous World 2023 Report](#), Mexico is home to 68 indigenous peoples, each speaking its own native language, which together bring together 364 variants (IWGIA, March 2023).

Meanwhile, the number of people speaking an indigenous language as their main language has experienced a significant increase, [rising](#) from 6,913,362 in 2010 to 7,364,645 in 2020 (INEGI, August 2022). The states with the highest number of [indigenous language-speaking populations](#) (Gobierno de México, January 2021) are:

- Oaxaca (31.2%)
- Chiapas (28.2%)

- Yucatan (23.7%)
- Guerrero (15.5%)
- Hidalgo (12.3%).

Due to their geographical location and the ineffectiveness of state action, indigenous communities are more vulnerable to abuse by organized crime, which sometimes forces members of these communities to flee and become displaced, increasing their difficulties. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, the phenomenon of internal displacement mainly affects indigenous people, who, despite representing 10% of the total population of Mexico, were affected by [40%](#) of the displacement episodes recorded by civil society in 2020. (UN Geneva, 4 July 2023). Significantly, because the indigenous communities enjoy autonomy, they are governed by their own laws and customs, sometimes generating situations of religious intolerance (see above: *Religious landscape*).

According to the World Factbook Mexico:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Mestizo (Amerindian Spanish) 62%, predominantly Amerindian 21%, Amerindian 7%, other 10% (mostly European) (2012 est.)
- **Main languages:** Spanish only: 93.8%; Spanish and indigenous languages: 5.4%; indigenous only: 0.6%; unspecified 0.2%; note -indigenous languages include various Mayan, Nahuatl, and other regional languages (2020 est.)
- **Urban population:** 81.6% of total population (2023)
- **Literacy rate:** 95.2% (male 96.1%; female 94.5%) (2020)

According to World Bank Mexico data:

- **Education:** School enrollment for pre-primary is 71% (2020); for primary 103% (2021) and for secondary 98% (2021). The duration of compulsory education is 14 years (2022). The Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Mexico is 1.05 (2020). This is the ratio of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.
- **Unemployment:** 3.3% (2022) Modeled ILO estimate
- **IDPs/Refugees:** The refugee population is 17,642 (2022)

According to the UNDP Human Development Report for Mexico:

- **Human Development Index:** Mexico's score is 0.758
- **Life expectancy at birth:** Female, 74.9% and male, 66.1% (2021).
- **Gender inequality:** Mexico has a 2021 Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.309, ranking it 75 out of 162 countries..
- **Labor force participation rate:** 60.7% (44.2% for women compared to 78.5% for men, indicating a clear gender gap)

Mexico did not experience any major reduction in inequality over the course of the 20th century. In fact, income inequality in Mexico has been extreme throughout the past and present centuries. The top 10% income share has oscillated around 55%-60% over that period, while the bottom 50% has been constant at around 8-10%, making Mexico one of the most unequal countries in the world ([World Inequality Report 2022, Mexico country sheet, p.207](#)).

In the health sector, deficiencies in infrastructure and human resources have become evident. In the education sector, the digital gap became evident. In the informal employment sector, vulnerability increased, especially for indigenous communities and migrants, who suffered the most from the economic consequences of the lockdown measures.

According to the [Indicators for Education and Employment](#), in August 2023 (INEGI, 28 September 2023):

- In August 2023, the Economically Active Population (EAP) was 61 million people, which implied a participation rate of 60.5 percent. This population was 1.3 million people higher than that of August 2022. The Non-Economically Active Population (PNEA) was 39.8 million people, 58 thousand people less than in the eighth month of 2022.
- The unemployed population was 1.8 million people, and the Unemployment Rate (TD) was 3% of the EAP. Compared to August 2022, the unemployed population decreased by 308 thousand people and the TD was lower by 0.6 percentage points.

In this context, the President of Mexico announced before the UN Security Council that his country intended to propose to the General Assembly a [World Plan for Fraternity and Well-being](#) (UN News, 9 November 2021). The initiative seeks to guarantee the right to a dignified life for the 750 million people who survive on less than two dollars a day. However, to date this program has made no progress.

The Migration crisis

The ongoing migration crisis is a major issue in the country. Mexico is a country of origin, transit, destination and return for mixed migratory movements from the region and from other parts of the world, especially by people seeking to reach the USA. According to the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR), the total number of [refugee applicants](#) from January to October 2023 was 127, 796 mostly from Haiti, Honduras, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala and Venezuela (COMAR, October 2023). The Mexican Episcopal Conference has emphasized the [urgent need](#) for the federal government to rethink its current immigration policy, so that it abandons its military and containment strategy, and seeks alternatives from a human rights perspective (Forbes, 30 April 2023).

The Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has expressed its [concern](#) about the USA's and Mexico's accelerated procedures for expelling migrants from the USA to the northern and southern borders of Mexico, and from Mexico to borders with Guatemala. (IACHR, September 2021). More recently, the IACHR, in the context of a fire in a temporary migrant hostel in which around 40 people died, expressed its concern about human rights violations inside [immigration stations](#), fear of deportation, overcrowding and unsanitary conditions (IACHR, 1 May 2023). Organizations such as Human Rights Watch have pointed out that President AMLO has intensified efforts to [prevent](#) migrants from traveling through Mexico to reach the US. He has deployed nearly 30,000 soldiers for immigration enforcement. Soldiers and immigration agents operate immigration checkpoints throughout the country. In May 2023, the Supreme Court ruled these checkpoints to be unconstitutional, saying they were affecting Indigenous and Afro-Mexican people disproportionately (HRW, June 2023). The presence of the armed forces has [implied](#) the use of disproportionate weapons and force, acts of violence and

human rights violations against migrants, seekers of international protection, human rights defenders and journalists (Caravana Migrante, 2022).

In this scenario, the church is one of the [essential agents](#) for the care of migrant populations in the country, especially in recent months, with the intensification of the flow across the southern border. Assistance to this humanitarian crisis is provided through Migrant Houses staffed by nuns, religious men and diocesan priests, providing food services, medical care, psychological first aid, legal advice, among others (Vatican News, 6 October 2023). In many cases, this kind of humanitarian work have put Christians at risk.

In the WWL 2024 reporting period, two UN Special Rapporteurs [requested](#) information from the Mexican government about the situation of Pastor Lorenzo Ortiz. Whilst working voluntarily for more than five years in assisting migrants with shelter and food near the border between the USA and Mexico, he has been subjected to threats and harassment by organized crime (Milenio, 22 January 2023) (For more information, see: *Security situation*). But also, the abuses exercised by the National Guard or local security forces have sometimes affected the normal development of the activities of the centers run by the Church, even agents from the National Migration Institute have carried out operations at places of worship that housed migrants, without following due protocols, making [excessive](#) use of force (Debate, 1 November 2022).

Gender perspective

The social landscape within Mexico is such that men and women typically assume traditional roles, particularly in rural areas and indigenous communities. However, recent opinion polls indicate that attitudes toward gender are changing, as younger Mexicans lean towards more egalitarian views ([Schroeder et al: Becoming More Egalitarian - A Longitudinal Examination of Mexican-Origin Adolescents' Gender Role Attitudes](#), 2019). Reflecting this, societal unrest in relation to [gender-based violence](#) has risen over recent years (CSW, 5 January 2023). In November 2022, women took to the streets to protest against the rising levels of femicide and gender-based violence ([Reuters, 26 November 2022](#)). Female representation in parliament has also improved, which has been widely welcomed as a positive development ([Wilson Center, 7 March 2022](#)). Nonetheless, domestic violence and violence towards women remain high and reportedly increased during the COVID-19 crisis ([Thomson Reuters, 25 January 2021](#)).

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Mexico):

- **Internet usage:** 76.9% penetration – most recent survey date: March 2021
- **Facebook usage:** 76.9% penetration – most recent survey date: March 2021

According to World Bank Mexico data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 100 per 100 people.
According to the National Survey on Availability and Use of Information Technologies in Homes (ENDUTIH), 93.8 million cell phone users (79,2% of those surveyed) were [registered](#) in 2022 (INEGI, June 2023).

As indicated in the [GSMA 2023 Mobile Gender Gap Report](#), the gender gap in relation to mobile ownership is minimal, with 88% of women owning a mobile compared to 90% of men. There is also a slightly higher gender gap of 4% in mobile internet use (GSMA, 2023, p. 17). A Georgetown study (2023/24) found that 79% of women use cellphones (GIWPS, 2023). While these statistics suggest that Christian men and women, overall, have equal access to digital Christian resources and community networks, there are [indications](#) that Christian minorities in indigenous communities may not have the same level of access due to tighter restrictions, including denied access to schools and electricity which, at the very least, disrupts access to Internet services (The Christian Post, 9 September 2021).

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 Mexico report:

- Mexico ranks as a "partly free" country (score 62/100).
- "Despite growing internet penetration, the urban-rural digital divide remains significant: in 2022, 83.8 percent of the urban population used the internet, compared to only 62.3 percent of the rural population."
- "In August 2022, the Federal Telecommunications Institute reported that 80 percent of the Indigenous population is covered by 2G, 3G, or 4G technology; however, this number drops to 62 percent in localities classified as historical Indigenous settlements."
- "Mexico continues to be one of the world's deadliest countries for journalists, and online journalists are regularly targeted with harassment, threats, and physical violence, contributing to a climate of self-censorship."
- "President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his political allies have taken actions to undermine regulators, including those that oversee the telecommunications industry and enforce data protection standards, weakening [sic!] the effectiveness and independence of these bodies."
- "The government has used the poor security situation in the country to justify expanding the state's surveillance powers, with little accountability and oversight. The Mexican military is reported to be one of the world's largest users of Pegasus spyware, which can surveil all activities on mobile devices with no apparent signs of a breach. Pegasus has been used to target those investigating government corruption and human rights abuses in Mexico."

In June 2023, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights expressed concern about the illegitimate use of Pegasus surveillance software since this type of practice not only violates the right to privacy enshrined in the American Convention, but also has the potential to put at risk the integrity of journalists and defenders, while increasing self-censorship in the press and discouraging work to defend human rights (IACHR 2 June 2023).

According to Reporters Without Borders (World Press Freedom 2023):

- "President López Obrador and other government officials have adopted a combative and stigmatising rhetoric towards the press, frequently accusing journalists of supporting the opposition. Collusion between officials and organized crime poses a grave threat to journalists' safety and cripples the judicial system at all levels. Journalists who cover sensitive political stories or crime, especially at the local level, are warned, threatened and then often gunned down in cold blood. Others are abducted and never seen again, or they

flee to other parts of the country or abroad as the only way to ensure their survival."

During the COVID-19 crisis, Christian leaders and churches made use of the technological resources at their disposal to continue carrying out their activities. Church services, biblical training and prayer days, etc. were held online for many congregations in order to keep to COVID-19 guidelines. The use of digital technology has continued since then, but online access is still not always possible in the most remote areas.

Security situation

According to the [Security Report](#) published by the Government of Mexico, from January to October 2023 there were 21,254 intentional homicides (SEGURIDAD, November 2023). Records [indicate](#) that almost 47.6% of homicides occur in just six states: Guanajuato, Baja California, Edomex, Chihuahua y Morelos (SDPNoticias, 24 November 2023). The [National Urban Public Safety Survey](#) revealed that during the third quarter of 2023, 61.4% of the population aged 18 and over consider that, in terms of crime, living in their city is unsafe. The cities with the highest proportion of the population feeling insecure were Fresnillo (95.4 %); Ciudad Obregón (92.3 %); Zacatecas (92.1 %); Uruapan (91.5 %) Naucalpan de Juárez (87.3 %); and Toluca de Lerdo (86.2 %) (INEGI, October 2023).

Drug trafficking is one of the main causes of the high degree of violence in the country. The presence of various cartels (sometimes in collusion with co-opted authorities) often involves disputes over the control of territory and transportation routes and the distribution of illegal commodities. For several years, the US Drug Enforcement Administration has [identified](#) the following organizations as dominant (Congressional Research Service, 7 June 2022):

- Tijuana/Arellano Félix Organization
- Sinaloa
- Juárez/Carrillo Fuentes Organization
- Gulf Cartel
- Los Zetas and Cartel del Noreste
- Beltrán Leyva Organization
- La Familia Michoacana
- Los Rojos
- Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación.

These are well-established Mexican drug-trafficking organizations that go back many years. However, many have now split up into smaller groups. With groups having a presence throughout the country, some country experts reckon they have [complete control](#) of most Mexican territory (El País, 8 May 2022). Although President AMLO [denies](#) such statistics (El Economista, 24 March 2023) the government's justification for transferring the National Guard to SEDENA was - among other things - because organized crime has developed into a [quasi-military force](#) (Politica Expansion, 1 September 2022). With the escalation of violence in the last decade, criminal groups in Mexico have increasingly adopted a militarized approach to their tactics and weapons (BBC News, 31 May 2023).

Additionally, over the last years, groups related to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation have been making attempts to advance their revolutionary movement through exploiting the indigenous population in Chiapas, including the [forced recruitment of children](#) (El Pais, 11 April 2021). However, they have also been [under attack](#) by other groups (France24, 10 June 2023).

President AMLO has relied on the armed forces and the military-led National Guard to help suppress the levels of violence. However, these measures have been strongly [criticized](#) because in Mexico and in surrounding countries it has been repeatedly demonstrated that, far from reducing violence, the presence of military personnel tends to increase the level of insecurity and crime (Contralinea, 28 May 2022), especially against [migrants](#) (Debate, 24 April 2023). The army and the National Guard (GN) are among the federal institutions with most accusations to their name of possible human rights violations. According to the National Human Rights Violation Alert System, from January to December 2022, [577 complaints](#) were made against the National Guard for abusing human rights (CNDH, November 2023).

According to the [Global Peace Index 2023](#) published by the Institute of Economics and Peace in May 2023 (page 15):

- “In 2022, three of the five indicators ... improved. Most notably, homicide experienced its largest improvement in the last eight years, with its rate dropping by 7.9 percent. As organized criminal groups have driven the changes in the homicide rate since at least 2015, it is likely that last year’s drop was associated with a decline in organized crime-related homicides. The homicide rate fell to 24.5 deaths per 100,000 people in 2022, its lowest level since 2017. This fall marks the third straight year of improvement for homicide following steep increases between 2015 and 2019. Despite this, homicides continue to be widespread in Mexico, with more than 30,000 victims each year since 2018.”

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, criminal cartels became providers of "[assistance](#)" through the delivery of food supplies and medicine to the inhabitants of the communities under their control (Infobae, 7 April 2020). However, this was done to strengthen the communities' loyalty and to exercise greater control over them, so that illegal practices could be continued without resistance from residents. Furthermore, criminal groups learnt to [adapt](#) and take full advantage of mobility restrictions, corruption networks, and high levels of impunity in order to earn income through extortion (International Crisis Group, 13 November 2020), and even the illegal sale of [vaccines](#) (NTN 24, 14 January 2021).

Within this context of violence, insecurity and corruption, more and more church leaders have been [speaking out](#), calling for peace (Jornada, 6 August 2023), and trying to act as [mediators](#) between criminal groups and their communities, in order to reach a bearable level of security (La Verdad, 11 July 2023). As a result, many church leaders receive death threats, especially those with greater involvement in politics and social activities. There have been an increasing number of reports involving the [extortion](#) of Christian leaders (Informador, 29 December 2022). It appears that members of criminal groups particularly target church personnel in order to [rise in rank](#) in the drug cartels and hinder any pastoral work from being carried out in their communities (Infocatólica, 4 October 2022). The level of brutality against the Church has increased to the point that, according to the Director of the Multimedia Catholic Center: "if before they were stabbed 5 times, now they are [stabbed](#) 20 times and with narco-satanic mes-

sages" (Hispanidad, 9 October 2022). Besides the [kidnappings](#) (Srdefenders, 5 October 2022) and [killing](#) of Christians (El Financiero, 23 May 2023), church buildings have often been [targeted](#) for vandalism and theft, in some cases Christian leaders have been discouraged from reporting thefts due to lack of criminal prosecution by authorities (Pulso, 13 May 2023). Also, Christian leaders that help victims of violence and Christian organizations providing humanitarian assistance have faced [violent intimidation](#) (Infobae, 18 October 2023). Many of these organizations cannot carry out their activities without authorization from the local criminal group in control.

In the WWL 2024 reporting period, the [communication](#) sent in July 2022 by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants to the government of Mexico, was published. The rapporteurs requested information regarding the kidnapping of Baptist Pastor Lorenzo Ortiz and the risks facing him in his work supporting the rights of migrants (Srdefenders, 5 October 2022).

Due to the increasing levels of brutality against church leaders and their activities (both in rural and urban areas), Catholic leaders in particular have begun to speak out about the dangers they are facing and to request that the government introduces a more effective security strategy. In response, they have been [harshly criticized](#) by AMLO to the point of being called "hypocrites", among other things. Also, for their comments about the country's security, religious leaders have been accused of intervening in political affairs (Vanguardia, 4 July 2023). Likewise, Christian human rights activists and conflict mediators are being [treated as criminals](#) by state authorities when they refuse to accept agreements which include aspects of corruption (El País, 8 July 2022). There have also been [incidents](#) of priests being harassed and accused by authorities for alleged acts of violence during their missionary work in indigenous communities (COPE, 15 July 2022). In the WWL 2024 reporting period, churches have continued to support the [migrant community](#) (Aciprensa, 18 May 2023), however government officials carried out [acts of harassment and disturbance](#) of the humanitarian activities of some churches (Jornada, 1 November 2022).

Additionally, the Jesuit community [condemned](#) reports of army personnel receiving instructions to monitor public statements made by church authorities in order to assess whether they were critical of the current government (Jesuitas Mexico, 17 October 2022). Despite the seriousness of the general situation, at one point the president has claimed to have no knowledge about such issues and recently, affirmed that his security strategy is [working](#) as expected. (El Economista, 1 September 2023). This is another sign of the degree of vulnerability to which church leaders are exposed.

Gender perspective

Criminal gangs pose a particular threat to young men and adolescents (and increasingly children), who are commonly targeted for the purpose of forced recruitment ([Council on Foreign Relations, 7 September 2022](#)). Girls are also targeted by these groups for abduction and rape; [pastors and priests](#) – the majority of whom are male – are usually killed (CBS, 13 February 2023). Daughters of prominent Christian leaders have reportedly been specifically targeted as a means of punishing the parents. Trafficking, gender-based violence and access to justice were highlighted as principal areas of concern by the [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women \(2018\)](#). Statistics show that approximately ten women are killed every day in

Mexico ([The Guardian, 20 September 2021](#)). Between January and June of 2022, the daily average increased by almost 2% ([El Economista, 26 July 2022](#)). The police are reportedly slow to act, and when perpetrators are caught, it is harder to convict them for the crime of committing femicide than it would be for the crime of homicide ([The Guardian, 25 February 2021](#)).

Trends analysis

1) The vulnerability of the Church to the actions of organized crime has become more evident than ever

The state authorities have not been able to effectively combat the proliferation of criminal groups throughout the country and their exercise of increased territorial control. On the contrary, the weaknesses of the measures adopted and the levels of corruption have allowed the spread of criminal influence in almost all areas. The work of religious leaders and the resistance of Christians to become part of the criminal world is seen as a challenge to the de facto authority that these groups exercise in the areas where they have an active presence. As a result, those involved in church pastoral ministry among the most vulnerable, as well as those teaching and living out the Christian message of peace, face continuous and increasingly brutal reprisals. Such intimidation is deemed necessary by the criminal groups to avoid the permanence and stability of illicit business in those areas being jeopardized.

2) There is no effective guarantee of Christian security in indigenous communities

Members of indigenous communities face hostile opposition when they embrace Christian faith and abandon the community's ancestral or syncretistic customs (sometimes related to Catholicism). State inaction or support for other religious groups is often justified as being a sign of respect for the protection of indigenous autonomy and cultural identity. At other times, the solutions proposed by government authorities are so superficial that they fail to provide an effective way of guaranteeing the full exercise of the right to religious freedom of Christian minorities within indigenous communities.

3) Hostility towards the Christian faith is spreading in Mexican society and taking on new forms

National laws underpinning a radical view of Church-State separation and non-discrimination are affecting Christians throughout the country. Hostility towards Christians sharing faith-based views in public on contentious issues has included acts of violence against church buildings and property, ostensibly as acts of intimidation. In 2023, the administrative and judicial systems were used to silence the public voice of Christian leaders. This all results in self-censorship among many Christians.

External Links - Keys to understanding

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WWL 2024: Church information / Mexico

Christian origins

Christianity reached Mexico during the Spanish conquest of the native Aztec population (1519-1521). It was part of the military strategy to convert the native inhabitants of New Spain to the Roman Catholic faith. From that time until approximately 1872, the Roman Catholic Church was the only Christian denomination present in Mexico and still forms a majority in the country. However, Mexico has allowed freedom of worship since the mid-nineteenth century and since then, traditional Protestant denominations have been established. In modern times, the government did not recognize churches and religious associations as legal entities until 1992, when reforms to Article 130 of the Constitution were made and the Law on Religious Associations and Public Worship was implemented.

Church spectrum today

Mexico: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	127,000	0.1
Catholic	117,750,000	92.8
Protestant	6,129,000	4.8
Independent	8,868,000	7.0
Unaffiliated	1,669,000	1.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-7,667,000	-6.0
Total	126,876,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,918,000	2.3
Renewalist movement	18,073,000	14.2

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

The largest Christian denomination in Mexico is the Roman Catholic Church, representing 92.8% of all Christians according to WCD 2023 estimates. Protestant churches are gaining in membership and visibility, especially in rural areas. Pentecostal churches are becoming more influential, especially in the political context.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Main areas for Organized corruption and crime: Criminal networks have spread throughout Mexican territory and are no longer confined to the so-called "[narco-states](#)" (Texas Public Policy Foundation, 22 September 2022). According to national media, there are [159 criminal groups](#) with an active presence throughout the country (Reversos, 12 June 2023) and following [US-Congressional Research Service](#), there is at least one cartel operating in each state (CRS, 7 June 2022).

Main areas for Clan oppression: The violation of rights of Christians inside indigenous communities occurs particularly in the southern zone, i.e. in Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Puebla, Yucatán, and Zacatecas.

Main areas for Secular intolerance: Christians throughout the country are affected by national laws underpinning a radical view of Church-State separation and non-discrimination. However, the vandalism of church buildings and the intolerance towards Christians sharing faith-based views on contentious issues are particularly high in states such as Colima, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Morelos, Mexico City, Mexico State, Oaxaca and Veracruz.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians

Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not scored in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities

The Roman Catholic Church (which is the largest denomination) and small Orthodox, Presbyterian and Anglican communities make up this category. Catholic churches are particularly affected by the activities of criminal gangs and the corruption of local authorities who contribute directly or indirectly to illegal activities, which could include violence targeting church leaders. It is mostly Protestants from this category who suffer from the effects of *Clan oppression* (mostly blended with *Christian denominational protectionism*) when they live in indigenous territories where the practice of their faith is not tolerated and they are a minority religious community. Throughout Mexico, churches in this category struggle with the growth of *Secular intolerance*, especially where attempts are made to prevent their faith-based opinions being heard in the public sphere or public debate, and places of worship are vandalized by radical ideological groups. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, particularly the Catholic Church within this category has been the target of abuse by the government when it has defended the most vulnerable or has criticized the government for ignoring democratic practices and respect for human rights. This is a typical dynamic of *Dictatorial paranoia*.

Converts

This category includes converts from historical Christian communities, converts from a criminal (mafia) background and Christians who have abandoned the religious practices of their indigenous community. Those ethnic rites could be ancestral or syncretistic (mostly related to the Roman Catholic faith). Indigenous converts are put under high pressure to abandon their new faith and may face threats of violence, arrest and even expulsion. In other areas of the country, mostly rural areas closer to indigenous communities, cross-denominational converts are sometimes a target of hostilities when their new form of faith is not accepted by their families or neighbors.

Non-traditional Christian communities

Evangelicals, Pentecostals and the Renewalist movement - especially where they are involved in advocacy activities in some indigenous communities - suffer retaliation from community members who refuse to accept the presence of other religious groups. In areas co-opted by organized crime, they also suffer the risk of being put under pressure or attacked for their active evangelism. They often face threats for defending their faith-based opinions in the public arena.

External Links - Church information

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WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Mexico

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Mexico: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	68	37
WWL 2023	67	38
WWL 2022	65	43
WWL 2021	64	37
WWL 2020	60	52

Mexico rose 1 point (1.7 points unrounded) in WWL 2024. The extremely high score for violence increased slightly and there was a noticeable rise in pressure in the *Private sphere of life* due to faith-based targeting of Christians in indigenous communities. Widespread territorial control by multiple criminal groups continued to be the main threat to Christians, who are seen as a potential risk to the stability of illicit operations.

Persecution engines

Mexico: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Medium

Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very weak
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

Transparency International (CPI 2022) ranked Mexico 126th out of 180 countries for corruption. With the sustained increase in violence during AMLO's administration, his six-year term in government has been classified as the [most violent](#) in history (Forbes, 13 November 2023). Thus, although it continues to be a recurring strategy, the government's plan to control violence using military force proved once again to be ineffective. The high levels of impunity and corruption have led commentators to call Mexico a “[narco-state](#)” (La Silla Rota, 11 July 2023). Many criminal groups are not only active in controlling communities but have also established networks in [various other states](#) as well and have built up an active presence throughout the country (DW, 23 June 2023). The main criminal groups have also [diversified](#) their illicit activities to expand their scope of action (Economis, 11 May 2023), having [capitalized](#) on the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic (CRS, October 14, 2021). These factors mean that there is continual warfare between groups, causing a [spiral](#) of violence (El País, 31 October 2023). Some communities have formed [self-defense groups](#) (Le Grand Continent, 17 April 2023) to keep criminal groups and corrupt police officers away; however, many regard these as criminal groups as well.

Christians, who preach about sin and social justice, who inform the authorities of illegal operations, who act as human rights defenders, or who are involved in providing humanitarian assistance to the neediest, are considered a threat to the interests of criminal groups. They can quickly become targets for all sorts of reprisals, attacks, surveillance, extortion, break-ins and robberies of their places of worship and homes, death threats, kidnapping attempts, and even killings. During the COVID-19 crisis, these forms of violence did not [stop](#) (La Prensa, 25 October 2020). In addition, in recent years, criminal groups have been showing an increasing level of cruelty when [acting](#) against church leaders (MSN News, 9 October 2022).

Clan oppression (Strong)

Given the indigenous autonomy recognized by the state as a community right, state intervention is minimal. Within these communities, ethnic leaders attempt to impose a lifestyle regulated by their ancestral or syncretistic customs (often involving Catholic rites); if these ethnic customs are rejected (for instance by Protestant Christians) it is considered a serious attack on the indigenous community's way of life. Especially converts from indigenous religions face pressure to renounce their new Christian faith through forced displacement, fines, isolation, the blocking of basic community services, imprisonment, beatings and the destruction of Christian property.

Through the State Commission on Human Rights, measures have been taken to guarantee the safety of indigenous Christians who belong to church groups not accepted under the majority indigenous peoples criteria. However, cases have not always been followed up satisfactorily and often, the authorities do not view cases as being a violation of the right to religious liberty but consider them instead to be a minor internal conflict about political or personal differences.

Clan oppression is often linked to the Persecution engine *Christian denominational protectionism* where indigenous community leaders (sometimes supported by State officers) seek to defend a syncretistic form of Roman Catholicism and try to impose it on all members of their community, allegedly to defend their faith.

Secular intolerance (Medium)

Ideological pressure groups and some government authorities seek to promote a secularist agenda which aims to restrict the participation of Christians in the public sphere and promote self-censorship, especially when they hold positions of public office. Christians experience increasing societal intolerance for expressing faith-based beliefs, including at work or school, in topics related to the defense of sanctity of life and marriage. Vandalism of church property is also on the increase, yet the authorities rarely carry out in-depth investigations, not considering it a “real problem”.

Drivers of persecution

Mexico: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	-	-	-	STRONG	WEAK	-	MEDIUM	VERY WEAK	STRONG
Government officials	-	-	-	Medium	Very weak	-	Medium	-	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	-	-	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Weak	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	-	-	-	Strong	Weak	-	Weak	-	Weak
One's own (extended) family	-	-	-	Strong	Weak	-	Very weak	-	Weak
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	Weak	-	Weak
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Weak
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	Very weak	-	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Strong):** As listed above under the heading *Security situation*, there are a host of violent criminal organizations operating in Mexico. Criminal gangs attack church leaders who voice opposition to their illegal activities or who influence people not to get involved with them. These groups threaten the personal safety of church leaders, attack church buildings, and even cause damage to the private property of Christians. Indigenous communities are one of the most affected targets since their territories are usually the ideal location for drug traffickers.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Corrupt officials at various levels allow criminal activity to take place with impunity which encourages a further increase in criminal operations and violence. Christians who go to the authorities to denounce criminal groups or seek protection, sometimes find themselves as victims of immediate reprisals. Even before the COVID-19 crisis that helped criminal groups expand their influence, most authorities did not provide effective protection for Christians, church leaders and their places of worship, since many officials do not recognize these as special targets for organized crime.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Corruption among politicians helps promote the cover-up of criminal group activities. Politicians' decisions have reinforced impunity, allowing organized crime cartels to continue with their illegal activities and exert pressure and violence against Christians in the most neglected areas of the country. In addition, criminal groups' interests were the cause of high levels of violence during the electoral period. Indeed, some politicians are, at least in part, supported by 'narco-finance'. This is another reason why organized crime has been able to expand.

Drivers of Clan oppression

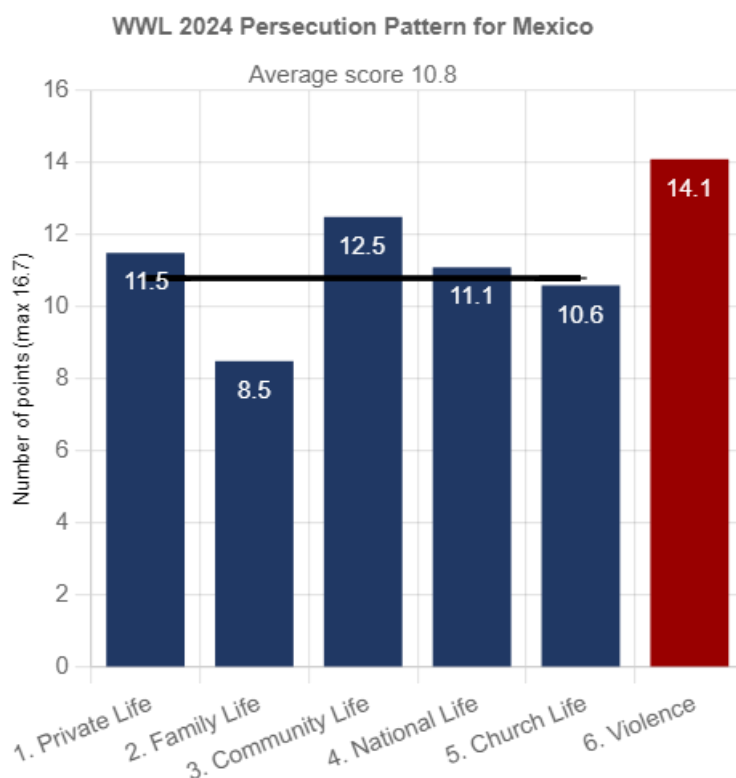
- **Ethnic group leaders (Strong):** Ethnic leaders and indigenous religious authorities oppose any religious activity contrary to the community's religious rites, that are sometimes a form of Roman Catholicism merged with ancestral customs. Conversion to and practice of a non-accepted Christian faith is thus regarded as a betrayal and an affront to the entire indigenous culture that must be dealt with severely. For instance, even during the COVID-19 crisis, indigenous Christians belonging to 'non-accepted church groups' were refused special community assistance by the leaders who consider them traitors with no community rights.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Strong):** Indigenous religious leaders who follow ancestral beliefs are the most respected members of the community. Their authority is considered divine - they are often shamans - and are the main inciters to eradicate any manifestation of a different faith in order not to alter the balance of community life and not to betray the gods they worship.
- **One's own (extended) family (Strong):** Loyalty to the indigenous community is expected to have a higher priority than loyalty to one's family. Thus, any family member abandoning the religious ancestral or syncretistic practices of the community to become a Christian is liable to face rejection from their wider family, either out of fear or loyalty to their ethnic group and culture.

- **Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs (Strong):** Members of indigenous communities will denounce Christian practices and harass Christian converts as part of their loyalty to their ethnic group. They feel obliged to protect community stability as being in the best interest of their ethnic group.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Government officials at the municipal and state level do not usually interfere when Christians are mistreated in autonomous indigenous communities. On the contrary, given the institutional weakness of the state, their aim is to reinforce indigenous autonomy instead of promoting its development within the framework of the international obligations to which the Mexican state has committed itself, especially with regard to religious freedom. When government officials do get involved, the measures taken are most usually ineffective and fail to protect the Christians' right to religious freedom. Their involvement is usually to support the indigenous authorities with a view to generating political empathy and signaling their respect of indigenous rights.

Drivers of Secular intolerance

- **Ideological pressure groups (Medium):** Christians who speak publicly on issues concerning family, marriage and religious liberty often face harassment from these groups. Church leaders, Christian activists and parents have also been threatened with legal action by these groups when they teach/defend traditional Christian values concerning sexuality. Such threats violate a parent's right to educate their child in line with their own beliefs. It has also become a common tactic for pressure groups to vandalize churches as part of their demonstrations.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Some municipal, state and federal authorities are in alliance with ideological pressure groups and try to implement a legal framework of restrictions and censorship, especially targeting Christians and Christian organizations, to protect Church-State separation. Also, when approving regulations in favor of secularist group interests, the authorities often ignore petitions made by Christian groups aiming to safeguard the religious freedom and other related rights (as freedom of expression) of those involved.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Some members of the political parties, including MORENA (the ruling political party which initially acted favorably towards various Christian denominations), have promoted initiatives to censor faith-based views in the public sphere, particularly on issues involving the right to life, marriage, parental rights and the right to freedom of religion or belief. Some have even tried to impose sanctions on Christians in their party ranks.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Mexico shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Mexico remained at a very high level (10.8 points), a slight increase in comparison with 10.5 points in WWL 2023. This was mainly due to the continued pressure caused by expanding criminal group control, added to the growing influence of indigenous communities and political pressure groups.
- All spheres of life scored at least 8.5 points or above. Pressure is highest in *Community life* (12.5 points) and *National life* (11.1). This reflects the fact that, in many areas of the country, the de-facto authorities are the criminal leaders and they impose their own rules over the population (via intimidation) and in indigenous areas, ethnic leaders are protected to act apart from state jurisdiction.
- The score for violence is extremely high (14.1 points), an increase of 0.2 points in comparison to WWL 2023. The level of violence against Christian communities and individuals continues to be of very serious concern especially due to the levels of cruelty demonstrated by criminal groups. There was an increase in the number of church buildings and Christian private property attacked, and increases in abductions and cases of sexual harassment targeting Christians for faith-related reasons.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.00 points)

Although in indigenous communities, especially those in the south of the country, oral testimony is the main form of transmission of faith, if Christians from 'non-accepted' church groups try to share their faith by written means with others, they will be punished by ethnic leaders. Social media has been used more frequently since the COVID-crisis and many Christians have used this medium both to promote Christian faith, the abandonment of a criminal way of life and to express their rejection of violence perpetrated by criminal groups. Often they quote statements from church leaders. However, such activity makes both them and the quoted leaders (including their local churches) more vulnerable to attacks. This is a common situation in the northern states of the country.

Christians supporting faith-based views on social media about topics such as family, marriage and the sanctity of life were criticized, mocked and targeted. Christians who promoted support for political leaders defending traditional Christian values were also affected. Also, politicians can be severely criticized by other political parties, radical pressure groups and social media if they make their Christian beliefs known and they can be denounced for breaking the principles of the secular state when they defend their faith from their personal social network accounts, even when they do not do so in their capacity as public officials.

Additionally, some cases of inter-denominational intolerance have been appearing on social media. Some users take advantage of the anonymity offered by social media platforms and have written aggressive reactions to some of items posted by members of churches they disapprove of.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.00 points)

In some indigenous communities, the duty of denunciation (out of loyalty to the community religion or out of fear of losing some benefit as a member of the community) is stronger than blood ties, and extended family will act against any family member who does not follow the ancestral or syncretistic customs, and bring them before the ethnic leaders to be punished. This is the case for those belonging to 'non-accepted' Christian groups. This situation is common in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero and Hidalgo. Elsewhere, as an example of Christian denominational protectionism, some Christians living in rural areas (mainly those closer to indigenous communities) face rejection from their relatives if they abandon the traditional faith of the family (mostly Roman Catholic).

Extended family linked to criminal groups may react violently towards relatives who become Christians and abandon criminal life, due to the risk of information leakage or the identity of members of local criminal groups being revealed. The power exerted by criminal groups continues to be a serious obstacle to human security throughout the country; in consequence, the level of control they exert on those they consider to be a threat to their stability has continued.

Due to the fact that religious intolerance is increasing in the country, extended family who oppose faith-based values may attempt to discourage any family member from speaking openly about their faith, possibly with acts of violence.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.00 points)

In indigenous communities, if there is a small group of Christians who do not follow the religious practices of their ethnicity, they meet in secret or outside the community. This is because their meetings are considered religious proselytism and if discovered can lead to imprisonment or forced displacement for contradicting the community traditions. Any kind of social interaction among 'non-accepted' Christians raises suspicions and it is acutely monitored by indigenous authorities. In some cases, they must pay arbitrary fines or cooperate with the religious festivals of the ethnic group as a condition to be able to meet with each other.

As criminal groups are the de-facto authorities in many areas of the country, they control social life in the territory, including all meetings. In that sense, even when state policies may allow social activities, they could be arbitrarily restricted or disrupted by orders of criminal groups. This frequently happens when Christian activists meet up since they are viewed with suspicion and their meetings are considered to be an act of defiance against the de facto authority of the dominant criminal group.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.75 points)

If 'non-accepted' Christian faith is rejected within an indigenous community, then the possession of such materials as a Bible or devotional book will also be rejected. Motivated by their loyalty to the community, immediate family members within indigenous communities finding such materials will denounce converts to the indigenous leaders for punishment. According to country sources, in some communities in Chiapas, the possession of Christian material runs the risk that it will be destroyed and that its owner will be fined.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)

Within indigenous communities, education is aimed at maintaining the cultural identity of the ethnic group and therefore ethnic and other non-Christian rites are a compulsory part of the school curriculum also for children from Christian families. If Christian parents oppose their children receiving this type of education, the whole family will suffer difficulties and acts of punishment from the community authorities.

Throughout the country, Christian schoolchildren have to be taught and examined on matters of sexuality, promotion of indigenous religious customs and pre-Hispanic practices, as part of state-approved compulsory education. This endangers the parents' right to educate their child in line with their own faith-based values because such content in the curriculum is known to contradict traditional Christian faith and values.

In some rural Catholic schools, even those run by the state, students are occasionally put under pressure to participate in Catholic forms of worship such as festivals for saints.

Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (3.50 points)

When Christians from 'non-accepted' church groups are expelled from an indigenous community or imprisoned, they are necessarily separated from their family. There are also cases in which children are separated from their Christian family, to prevent them being raised as Christian believers.

Organized crime is also a cause of separation within families. This occurs when the danger of attack by criminal groups is so high that some Christian family members are forced to look for a safe place to live elsewhere, sometimes leaving their families behind. Some may even try to flee the country.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.25 points)

Within indigenous communities, Christian parents are usually prohibited from passing on their Christian faith to their children, since this would allegedly cause damage to the child's 'indigenous identity' and alter the spiritual balance of the community. Ethnic leaders apply pressure to make all residents in the indigenous community comply.

Due to the expansion and strengthening of criminal groups, the recruitment of minors has skyrocketed; children have been used to transport drugs in food and medicine, participate in extortion and contract killing activities and to join self-defense groups. When criminal groups recruit Christian children and young adults to participate in criminal activities, Christian parents face harsh intimidation if they oppose this and have no effective way to stop it.

In matters relating to sexual education, by following pressure group guidelines for curriculum content, the state authorities have limited the rights of Christian parents to bring up their children according to their beliefs. This pressure became more evident in the WWL 2024 reporting period: Despite the fact that this situation had been denounced by civil society and there was a court order not to distribute school books that included such pressure group content on sexual matters, the Ministry of Public Education nevertheless distributed them as compulsory education content, annulling - in practice - the judicial protection that the parents had received. This limitation of rights is particularly pronounced in Baja California Sur, Colima, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Mexico City, Oaxaca, Puebla, Yucatan, Zacatecas and Mexico state.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.25 points)

In indigenous communities, children of Christian parents are put under pressure to abandon their faith. Sometimes they are made to leave their Christian family and live with relatives who adhere to indigenous religious rites. The children may also be excluded from community activities and services as a way of punishing their Christian parents. Elsewhere, one of the main ways Christian children are harassed is by denying them the chance of further education in in-

indigenous schools. In other parts of the country (non-indigenous areas), Christian children might be rejected by extended families, teachers and classmates because their parents do not belong to the majority denomination.

Criminal groups are also known to harass the children of Christians as a way of putting pressure on their parents to stop their Christian activities in the area. The harassment and mistreatment of Christian children can also be motivated by criminal groups targeting them for sexual abuse, recruitment, or kidnapping for human trafficking.

In schools, many Christian children face hostility and bullying, especially in schools, as part of the increasing rejection of faith-based views in the public sphere. This has also been the case with the use of social media, and has occurred where children have mentioned their Christian faith.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.25 points)

Monitoring by ethnic leaders and criminal groups continued to be frequent during the WWL 2024 reporting period, in accordance with the very high levels of social violence recorded in the country.

Within indigenous communities, 'non-accepted' Christians are monitored daily to prevent them from sharing their Christian faith with others. In areas dominated by organized crime, Christians are seen as the ones who challenge gang control and are closely monitored by criminals in case they inform/denounce the authorities or media about criminal operations. This is especially the case when former gang members have converted to Christianity.

Additionally, according to in-country sources, some Christian university students have been victims of monitoring and surveillance by pressure groups with the purpose of harassing and intimidating them and looking for opportunities to accuse them of hate speech and discrimination when they defend traditional biblical values regarding life, marriage and family.

Block 3.11: Christians have been hindered in the operation of their businesses for faith-related reasons (e.g. access to loans, subsidies, government contracts, client boycotts). (3.25 points)

As a form of punishment, indigenous leaders prohibit community members from employing or making contracts with Christians belonging to 'non-accepted' church groups. The leaders make sure that buyers and suppliers (especially of agricultural goods) do not give them the same prices for their crops as for other members of the community. This is deliberate economic manipulation to discourage their faith; they are even denied the financial subsidy all members of the community are supposed to receive by right. Also, client boycotts and obstacles to accessing loans are further examples of action against non-accepted Christians.

If the local authorities are in collusion with criminal groups, Christians who oppose the presence of organized crime in their communities tend to have greater difficulties in obtaining permits for

operating their businesses. Organized boycotting is also common. In addition, many local businesses are forced to sell their products at reduced prices to criminal groups, so that the latter can then distribute and re-sell them at higher prices. Christians who refuse to cooperate face threats and violence.

Block 3.12: Christians have been fined for faith-related reasons (e.g. jizya tax, community tax, protection money). (3.25 points)

Indigenous community leaders impose fines on Christians who refuse to participate in the community's religious practices (related to ancestral/Catholic syncretism). These fines can be imposed more than once to the same person or family and they often exceed the amount of money that an indigenous Christian can pay, due to their poor living conditions and because they have already lost some economic benefits as punishment for their faith.

Criminal gangs extort protection money from church leaders and other Christians to allow them to conduct their Christian activities (or even just daily life, in some instances) unmolested. Extortion continues to be the most frequent method for groups to show their control over an area. People have no other choice but to pay, fearing violent reprisals if they refuse.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Ethnic leaders make use of community jurisdictional and control mechanisms to keep track of 'non-accepted' Christian activities within indigenous communities. The purpose is to discourage such Christians from preaching and practicing their faith and to prevent them from converting others.

In other areas, drug cartels require Christians to periodically report to them to find out if any church activities represent a danger to their operations. These groups are also interested in Christian activities to see where there may be the possibility of economic benefit. Criminal groups have commonly intimidated people to obtain information about donations and other goods obtained by churches or Christian groups. In some cases, attempts are made to intimidate church leaders and members of local churches into being informants for these groups.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.50 points)

Article 24 of the Constitution more or less follows the provisions of Article 18 of the UDHR. However, the Constitution goes on to list certain restrictions concerning the manifesting and teaching of one's own religion as well as promoting its observance in a political context (i.e. contravening the principle of Church-State separation) or where it could be understood to include proselytism or the attempt to interfere in political decision-making. There are also legislative restrictions in some states regarding the upholding of Church doctrine when it comes to dealing with cases of gender dysphoria. These excessive limitations - especially for church leaders - interfere in the exercise of religious freedom and violate the UDHR guarantees.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)

Within indigenous communities, due to their refusal to follow the traditional religion, Christians from 'non-accepted' church groups are considered to have lost the right to address or to express themselves before the community, even if the issue under debate is not necessarily linked to church matters.

Christians who denounce criminal activities in public frequently become victims of threats or attacks both by criminal groups but also by corrupt officials colluding with them. High levels of violence and citizen insecurity directly impact self-censorship to express claims, complaints or criticism both towards the authorities and towards the perpetrators of these crimes.

Faith-based opinions made by church leaders when participating in public debate are most often considered an attack on the secular principles of the state. Christian leaders and Christians holding a public office who express faith-based views about issues relating to family and marriage in the public sphere, face hostility and state sanctions. In the previous reporting period (WWL 2023), two bishops were found guilty of making public statements which were judged as interfering with the electoral process. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, a Christian activist, civil society leader and former Mexican Congressman, Rodrigo Iván Cortés, has been convicted of “gender-based political violence,” including digital violence, for social media posts on Twitter and Facebook referring to transgender-identifying Mexican Congressional representative, Salma Luévano, as a “man who self-ascribes as a woman”. Such high-profile cases contribute to the climate of self-censorship and have a chilling effect on the Christian population.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)

Any kind of political party based on a specific religious belief is not allowed. Given the levels of corruption, state authorities allow criminal groups - directly or indirectly - to hinder the activities of civil society organizations, especially where Christians are working with young people in drug and crime prevention programs or with migrants. The projects, statements and publications of faith-based charities are continually scrutinized by activists seeking to take legal action, should there be evidence of discrimination or promotion of hate-speech.

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.50 points)

Since the state has given autonomy and self-determination to indigenous communities, indigenous populations establish and regulate their own norms of coexistence. Hence, ethnic leaders, as the main authorities in indigenous communities, allow pressure and violence to be used against Christians who oppose community customs. If the state authorities are informed of such incidents, the conflict is most often dismissed as a private dispute or a minor cultural issue and is not treated as being a serious restriction of religious freedom.

In other contexts, the investigation of criminal cases is often delayed where Christians are involved as victims or where Christian property has been damaged. This is frequently due to corruption and collusion between the authorities and criminal networks.

Where Christian leaders have been discriminated against or attacked with offensive language in public due to their faith-based views, the justice system has not taken action to stop this. Where churches and church property have been vandalized by aggressive pressure groups, state authorities have not taken action to help prevent such violent acts being repeated in the future.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.4: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities inside their place of worship. (3.50 points)

Christians within indigenous communities who belong to a 'non-accepted' church group, cannot conduct their own worship services; it is forbidden. If the members of the community or the authorities discover their house-church activities, they are punished, sometimes even imprisoned.

As a result of insecurity in areas co-opted by criminal groups, churches have often been forced to re-schedule their service times. Threats, robberies inside places of worship and the interruption of church activities occurred frequently in WWL 2024.

As part of their public demonstrations, pressure groups have at times disrupted church services, attacking worshippers and shouting slogans denigrating faith-based views. Sometimes, churches prefer to re-schedule their activities to avoid any confrontation with such ideological groups.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.50 points)

Within indigenous communities, any preaching or teaching that contradicts the ancestral or syncretistic practices of the ethnic group is forbidden.

Elsewhere, criminal groups have threatened church leaders where they have preached sermons opposing corruption, violence and crime or defending democratic elections, indigenous rights or migrants. Preaching in areas such as Tamaulipas and Guerrero is such a high-risk activity that bulletproof vests are sometimes used by those preaching.

Christian leaders experience many restrictions in political debate and their comments are constantly under scrutiny for discriminatory content. Some churches have even been accused by the president of supporting his political opponents; church leaders have also been insulted by him when they have complained of being victims of organized crime.

Also, in at least 15 states of the country, there is systematic monitoring of church teaching on issues of family, marriage and sexuality. Pressure groups carry this out to identify potential violations of the law which could be taken to court or at least highly criticized in media.

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Within indigenous communities, those considered to be leaders of 'non-accepted' Christian groups are particularly targeted for harassment and some types of violence, mainly arrest and forced internal displacement, along with their families.

In areas controlled by criminal groups, Christian leaders and/or their family members are the most frequent victims of the imposition of taxes, abductions, fines or extortion. Christians, especially those with leadership roles in society, the defense of human rights, indigenous communities or anti-corruption programs, have been threatened and assassinated. Acts of intimidation and harassment target nuns, Christian activists and church leaders (both Protestant and Catholic) in an attempt to discourage church work in areas dominated by organized crime. The level of brutality towards the Church has reached such a high level that criminal groups will even cut off a Catholic priest's fingers (which are used for blessing) as a kind of 'war trophy' which is then used for rising to a higher rank in the criminal organization (InfoCatolica, 4 October 2022). As reported by the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Mexico): "According to NGO sources, criminal elements attacked Catholic priests and other religious figures in order to create fear in the community and a culture of silence, which allowed criminal drug and weapons trafficking to continue unhindered."

Church leaders often face harassment when they express faith-based views in public on issues involving the right to life, marriage, parental rights and the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.50 points)

In indigenous communities, Christians belonging to 'non-accepted' church groups who speak out against their oppressors face threats, forced displacement and arrest, among other measures. The possibility of reporting incidents is very limited, and when it is possible, the government authorities reduce religious persecution to the level of personal or political conflict.

In areas where organized crime is dominant, when Christians denounce their aggressors, criminal groups often respond with violent reprisals. The risk for Christians increases where the authorities act in collusion with criminal groups and in cases where calls to action by Church leaders have prompted signs of hostility from the government.

Elsewhere in society, when Christians complain to the authorities about the defamations they face, the authorities usually focus their attention on guaranteeing the freedom of expression of the perpetrators and not on the religious freedom being restricted for those affected.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*

- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar. Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

3. The use of symbolic numbers:

- *In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.*

Mexico: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	13	14
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	78	42
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10	27
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10	4
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	7	2
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	44

6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	6	3
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	74	71
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

Violence against Christians for faith-related reasons remains at an extremely high level in the country. Criminal groups are the main driver of violent persecution, especially given the inefficiency of state policies to reduce nationwide insecurity. At a lower level of influence, indigenous community leaders and militant pressure groups have also had an impact on the violence score.

In the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- **Christians killed (13):** Records remain at a high level, very close to the previous year. The victims were mostly leaders from various church denominations (both Catholic and Evangelical) who refused to stop their pastoral work and were murdered by criminal groups in reprisal.
- **Churches attacked (78):** For WWL 2024, the number of Christian buildings attacked has increased significantly. Most of the cases were related to attacks perpetrated by criminal groups as one of the most effective methods to intimidate Christians and show their dominance over an area. The number also includes some incidents involving pressure groups vandalizing churches as part of their way of pushing for 'women's rights'.
- **Christians abducted (10):** As part of the wave of violence in the country, kidnapping also increased. The incidents recorded concern church leaders (pastors, priests, nuns, missionaries, catechists) being victims of organized crime when their social influence threatened the illicit interests of those criminal groups.
- **Christians attacked (100*):** Most of these incidents involved criminal groups attacking Christians (also through death-threats); however, the number also includes attacks within indigenous communities and - to a lesser extent - incidents caused by militant pressure groups.

5 Year trends

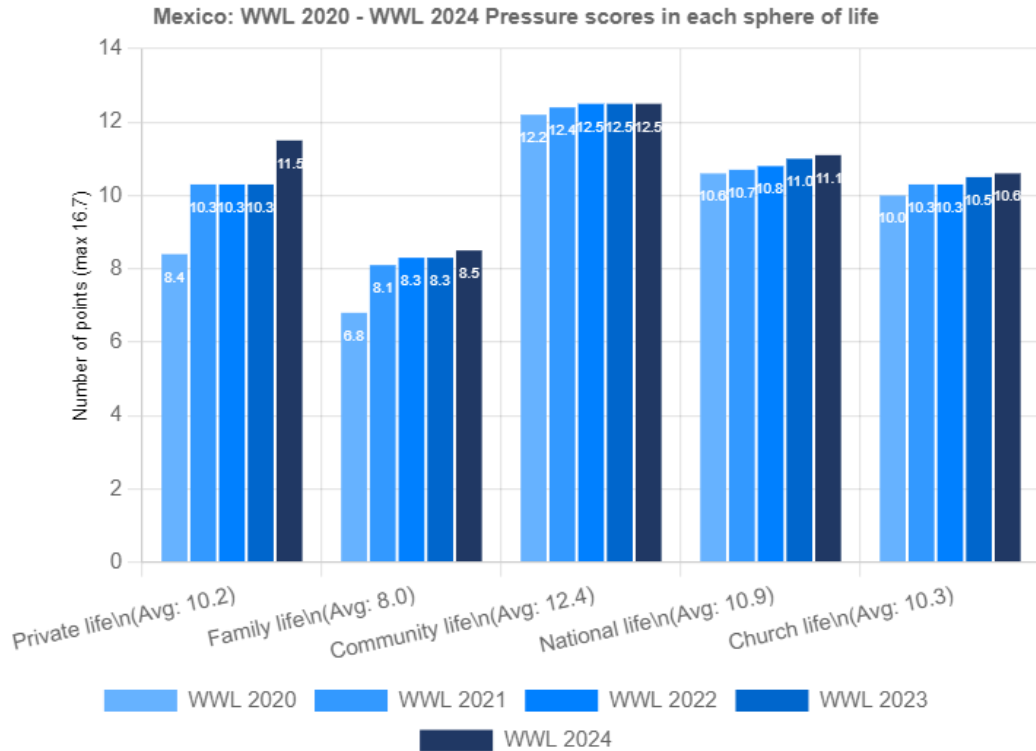
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Mexico: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	10.8
2023	10.5
2022	10.4
2021	10.4
2020	9.6

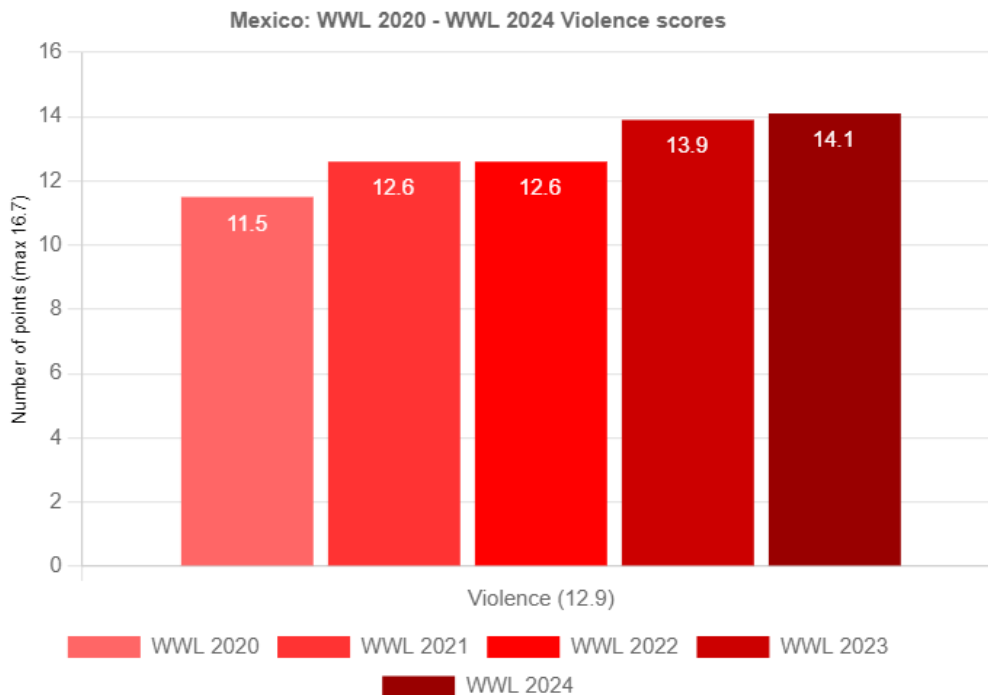
The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians was stable around the 10.4-10.5 point mark over in WWL 2021-WWL 2023. However, overall, the trend is for the score to rise which reflects how corruption networks, impunity and ineffective government authorities at many levels have caused serious Christian vulnerability and empowered non-state actors (criminal, indigenous and radical ideological groups) as the main drivers of persecution in the country.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Over the last five reporting periods, pressure has increased in *all spheres of life*. The most significant rise in pressure occurred in Private life, but pressure has always been highest in *Community life*. This is the result of the worsening security situation given the strengthening and diversification of social control exercised by criminal groups throughout the national territory, combined with the inability of the government to respond with effective measures to the high levels of violence in the country. It is also influenced by the higher levels of pressure faced by Christians belonging to 'non-accepted' church groups in indigenous communities and by the increased hostility towards public expressions of Christian faith, especially concerning topics of national interest.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Over the last five WWL reporting periods, violence scores in Mexico have always been at an extreme level, reaching its highest peak in WWL 2024. The levels of violence depend mainly on the willingness and efficiency of the authorities to take serious action against the main driver of persecution in the country, namely the criminal groups. In the last two reporting periods, the violence score rose significantly, partly caused by increased levels of criminal group cruelty wherever the Church is viewed as being an enemy causing hindrance to illegal operations.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Within the context of a country friendly to Christianity, the persecution facing Christian women in Mexico usually overlaps with other exacerbating factors, focusing mostly on indigenous communities and in regions dominated by organized crime. Christian converts from indigenous communities face significant hostility, including being forced to marry non-Christian indigenous men; tribal authorities consider this a way of pressurizing them to renounce their faith.

Criminal gangs represent the other primary threat to women and girls. Since Mexico is among the countries with [highest rates](#) of human trafficking in the world, women are easy targets for recruitment for abduction and sexual slavery, most commonly by illegal armed groups (US Department of State, “2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mexico”). An expert describes a story of a pastor’s daughter being kidnapped by drug traffickers who demanded that the pastor pay her ransom. On realizing that he could not pay them, they turned to the congregation, forcing them to pay for her release. Blackmail and threats of abduction and harm are not uncommon. In recent years, sexual crimes, including femicide, against girls have increased and impunity rates continue to hover around 95% ([El Pais, 25 November 2023](#)).

While many of the perpetrators of these attacks are violent abusive men who are not linked to criminal groups, the “war on drugs” has exacerbated the conditions under which gender-based violence takes place. The Mexican government has deployed the military to take on criminal organizations. In turn, women have been caught in the crossfire.

Nearly half of all women in the country have been sexually assaulted over the course of their lifetimes. In 2021 alone, almost one in five women was exposed to sexual violence. Between 2007 and 2021, the number of women reported to have “disappeared” increased by a factor of fifteen and the number of femicides (ie, killing women because of their gender) almost tripled ([CNB, 2023](#)). Women are frequently blamed for the violence subjected on them. It is understood that it is a woman’s job to keep herself safe; forcing many to give up their freedom of movement and to stay at home.

Criminal leaders target children of Christian homes, because their attitude of obedience is presumed, making it easier to instruct and indoctrinate them. Those who resist face threats against their own lives as well as those of their families, motivating internal forced displacement. One country expert asserted: “It cannot be ruled out that Christian parents have been victims of

this situation, despite their attempt to prevent their daughters from being kidnapped or receiving money for a forced marriage, especially in a context of abandonment by state

authorities and de facto submission, both to the power of the indigenous community and to the criminal groups that operate in those areas.” Some women and girls are also targets of abductions and killings since they are considered targets of criminal groups for their relationship with the cartel enemies. Forced marriages for women in general are not as common as in previous years, but cases continue to occur for a range of different groups, especially if it involves a commercial interest, whether with businessmen in the area or with drug or smuggling groups.

Additionally, the fact that women are forced to maintain a relationship with members of criminal groups leads to an inevitable threatening of their Christian faith and that of the family; in many cases this dynamic leads to their separation and breakdown. Women recruited into criminal gangs are subjected to “packing drugs, distributing, cleaning houses or making food or serving as sexual slaves.” Those who convert to Christianity and desert such groups are likely to find that their families face punishment in the form of violence or the threat of violence. These dynamics perpetuate cycles of violence, insecurity and socio-economic issues for women and girl.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Within the context of ongoing violence and organized crime, young men and boys are more likely to be killed in Mexico than women ([Vision for Humanity](#), 2022 Mexico Peace Index, p.28). While there is no law which makes Christian men and boys particularly vulnerable to hostility on grounds of faith, in the areas controlled by criminal groups or drug cartels, young men are exposed to indoctrination and forced recruitment into these groups. Some young men accept this as an inescapable destiny due to their economic and social circumstance. Those who do not accept it - whether for reasons of Christian faith or otherwise – face threats and potential abduction and killing. Families, too, are bribed and intimidated to force their children to obey the gangs. The Jalisco Nueva Generacion Cartel (CJNG), the Gulf Cartel (CDG), and Los Zetas are among the main criminal organizations notorious for recruiting children and adolescents ([CFR](#), [7 September 2022](#)).

The impact of the forced recruitment of Christian men and boys is far-reaching. As a country expert commented: “The drug trafficker harasses, above all, the children of pastors or Christians with more commitment in the faith community, to recruit them or as a way of pressuring their parents to stop their Christian activities in the area.”

Men in Mexico generally face intense pressure and violence as the heads of families and leaders of churches. Threatening the male head intimidates the wider families and communities. When armed criminal groups wish churches to cease functioning or to limit their activities, the threats are often aimed first at the religious leader of the church. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, there have been several examples of priests and pastors being beaten, kidnapped for ransom, and killed. Church leaders are also the most frequent victims of fines and extortion since it is believed that they must have access to church funds. Leaders are also targeted in order to prevent them from conducting positive work within the community or speaking out against illegal activity. Religious leaders and their families face harassment from the community in general, such as damage to their property, restrictions on access to schools for their children, theft of resources, threats, beatings, and ridicule. In indigenous communities, local authorities know that without a leader, the local community will return to the majority religion.

Church leaders also face severe travel restrictions, especially traversing territories controlled by different cartels. One expert reveals, “Priests and pastors must be extremely careful when traveling, not only with respect to the permission of the area leader, but also take into account the time and manner of travel, to avoid being a victim of episodes of violence.” Converts from an indigenous background (ancestral rites or syncretistic practices related to Catholic Church) face particular pressures; they may be beaten, harassed, and rejected from the community. An expert describes a situation of a young man being falsely accused and jailed for running someone over. The accusation was fabricated by the communal authorities simply because he was a Christian. The level of pressure and violence increases if the convert is deemed to be a Christian leader since such leaders are presumed to be inciters of rebellion and potential propagators of the Christian faith.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022):

- During 2022, the government's National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) continued to document religious discrimination against “Luz del Mundo” (LLDM) members. LLDM followers reported peers at schools and work bullied them and that passersby outside their places of worship verbally attacked members by calling them a “sect.” According to CONAPRED, discrimination against LLDM members was possibly linked to the arrest of its religious leader, Joaquin Garcia, on charges of child rape and trafficking.
- In May 2022, CONAPRED worked with members of the Jewish community to denounce a Nazi-themed wedding officiated by a Catholic priest on Hitler’s wedding anniversary in Tlaxcala on April 29. CONAPRED talked to the CEM to instruct their bishops to forbid antisemitic or discriminatory symbology. On 5 May 2022, the Diocese of Tlaxcala denounced the use of Nazi symbolism during the wedding, and ACI Prensa reported that the diocese would investigate why the wedding was permitted and would educate priests to prevent further incidents.

- Additionally, Jewish community representatives evaluating online antisemitic messages, symbols, and language from January through to 30 September 2022 found that Twitter accounted for 93 percent of the antisemitic content, Facebook 3 percent, news sources 2 percent, and blogs 2 percent. Antisemitic tweets typically referenced the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The Jewish Central Committee of Mexico detected an increase in antisemitic statements in May, after reports that Israeli forces had killed Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and in August, after Israeli Defense Forces launched Operation Breaking Dawn.
- Some sources mentioned that cases of religious discrimination were often not reported due to a lack of awareness of the filing process.

According to [Telediario](#) (5 November 2022):

- For almost seven years, the Román López Jewish family has suffered various forms of discrimination, for thinking differently from others and for dressing differently from the rest of society. The humiliations and attacks include phrases such as "they are damn Jews and I wish Hitler would have finished or killed them all", in addition to this, the neighbors have often thrown stones at their home along with vicious insults.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Organized corruption and crime

Social violence in the daily life of Mexican citizens is a result of high levels of impunity. This is all the more worrying when state authorities attempt to silence critical voices or victims who demand reparation for damage caused (as experienced by some church communities). As long as there is no firm intention of combatting organized crime, full religious freedom for Christians will not be guaranteed and, on the contrary, their vulnerability will increase in proportion a) to the growth in the number of criminal actors and public officials hostile to Church social work among citizens in need; and b) to the growth in the number of complaints by church leaders demanding to be recognized as victims in this scenario.

Clan oppression (blended with Christian denominational protectionism)

As long as the legal protection of indigenous communities and their members remains ineffective, the recognized rights will not be truly guaranteed. This is due in part to a lack of understanding concerning the worldview of those communities. Thus, state authorities and society need to understand the challenges and vulnerabilities involved in being a Christian who is not accepted in the indigenous context, in order to avoid the continued repetition of violence which only increases the obstacles to an effective exercise of their rights.

Secular intolerance

The influence of radical ideologies that promote an intolerant attitude towards faith-based views being expressed in the public sphere is increasingly noticeable. These ideologies have – often through manipulation of the legal framework – permeated both society and the state ap-

paratus. Thus, where issues such as abortion, marriage, sexuality and religious freedom are discussed, ways are constantly sought to block faith-based opinions, most often by calling upon the principle of Church-State separation and legislation that promotes equality and non-discrimination. In order to prevent such restrictions on the free and full exercise of Christian religious freedom from continuing - both in the public and private sphere (i.e. including the right of parents to educate their children according to their religious convictions) - it is necessary that state officials and civil society recognize the challenges involved and defend exactly what the right to religious freedom entails and thus contribute to its effective protection in the public sphere.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: most violent - <https://www.forbes.com.mx/el-sexenio-de-amlo-el-mas-violento-de-la-historia-coparmex/>
- Persecution engines description: narco-state - <https://lasillarota.com/opinion/columnas/2023/7/11/legado-de-amlo-un-narcoestado-437583.html>
- Persecution engines description: various other states - <https://www.dw.com/es/m%C3%A9xico-crimen-organizado-se-apodera-de-municipios-clave-para-construir-narco-imperios/a-66017826>
- Persecution engines description: diversified - <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2023/05/11/mexicos-gangs-are-becoming-criminal-conglomerates>
- Persecution engines description: capitalized - <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11535>
- Persecution engines description: spiral - <https://elpais.com/mexico/2023-11-01/mexico-registra-mas-de-30000-asesinatos-por-sexto-ano-consecutivo.html>
- Persecution engines description: self-defense groups - <https://legrandcontinent.eu/es/2023/04/17/organizar-la-violencia-el-poder-de-los-grupos-de-autodefensa-en-mexico/>
- Persecution engines description: stop - <https://www.laprensa.hn/mundo/narco-ejecuta-con-rafaga-de-balas-a-un-pastor-evangelico-mexico-narcotrafico-HBLP1403499>
- Persecution engines description: acting - <https://www.msn.com/es-mx/noticias/mundo/sin-temor-a-dios-lanzan-s-o-s-para-frenar-violencia-contra-sacerdotes/ar-AA12M1Bb>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: highest rates - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/mexico/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: El Pais, 25 November 2023 - <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-11-25/more-than-3000-women-are-murdered-in-mexico-each-year-how-violence-affects-the-youngest-victims.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: CNB, 2023 - <https://versionpublicarnpdno.segob.gob.mx/Dashboard/Index>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Vision for Humanity - <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/mexico-peace-index/#/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: CFR, 7 September 2022 - <https://www.cfr.org/background/mexicos-long-war-drugs-crime-and-cartels>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Telediario - <https://www.telediario.mx/nacional/oaxaca-familia-judia-enfrenta-intolerancia-religiosa>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Mexico>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.
- [LATIN AMERICA – Organized corruption and crime – 2018](#)

External Links - Further useful reports

- Further useful reports: LATIN AMERICA – Organized corruption and crime – 2018 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Latin-America-Organized-corruption-and-crime-2018.pdf>