

World
Watch
Research

Mexico: Full Country Dossier

Revised: May 2023



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Contents

Introduction	3
World Watch List 2023	3
Copyright note.....	4
Sources and definitions.....	4
WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Mexico	5
Brief country details	5
Map of country.....	5
Dominant persecution engines and drivers	6
Brief description of the persecution situation	6
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	6
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	7
Specific examples of positive developments	7
External Links - Situation in brief	7
WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Mexico	8
Links for general background information.....	8
Recent history	9
Political and legal landscape	10
Religious landscape	12
Economic landscape.....	15
Social and cultural landscape	17
Technological landscape	19
Security situation	20
Trends analysis	23
External Links - Keys to understanding	24
WWL 2023: Church information / Mexico.....	29
Christian origins.....	29
Church spectrum today.....	29
Areas where Christians face most difficulties	30
Christian communities and how they are affected	30
External Links - Church information.....	31
WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Mexico	31
Reporting period	31
Position on the World Watch List	31

Persecution engines	32
Drivers of persecution	34
The Persecution pattern.....	36
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	37
Violence.....	44
5 Year trends	47
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	49
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male	50
Persecution of other religious minorities.....	51
Future outlook.....	51
External Links - Persecution Dynamics.....	52
Further useful reports.....	54



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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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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 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Mexico

Brief country details

Mexico: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
131,563,000	125,738,000	95.6

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Mexico: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	67	38
WWL 2022	65	43
WWL 2021	64	37
WWL 2020	60	52
WWL 2019	61	39

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

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 various 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 or syncretistic practices (commonly related to Catholicism), face rejection and punishments such as fines, incarceration and forced displacement. General societal intolerance of Christianity and its beliefs continue to grow, especially when Christians express faith-based opinions on marriage, family and life issues. Expressions of Christian faith in the public space 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

- **September 2022, Jalisco:** On 28 September, during the "Global Day of Action for Abortion" march, a group of feminist activists [attacked](#) Catholic parishioners who were forming a barrier to protect the Basilica of the Blessed Sacrament in Guadalajara. While some of the group sprayed graffiti on the church walls, others insulted those praying and hit one person. (Verdad en Libertad, 3 October 2022)
- **June 2022, Chihuahua:** Two Jesuit priests were [killed](#) trying to defend a man who was being chased by an armed person and had sought refuge in the church (COPE, 21 June 2022). In the same area, nuns from the same Jesuit community were threatened with [rape](#) due to their pastoral work with local youth (El Pais, 23 June 2022).
- **January 2022, Oaxaca:** Evangelical residents of San Pedro Chimaltepec reported the forced closure and looting of their church and the [imprisonment](#) of three people for not adhering to the religious beliefs of their indigenous community and who refused to participate in 'community stewardship'. (El Universal, 4 January 2022)
- **January 2022:** The Electoral Court of the Judicial Power of the Federation (Upper Chamber) [declared](#) two cardinals, a bishop and two priests guilty of violating electoral law by encouraging Catholic Christians to vote in favor of candidates who supported traditional Christian values concerning unborn life and family. The Upper Chamber determined that the Ministry of Interior should decide what legal measures should be taken, which could range from a simple reprimand to a fine of three million pesos (about USD 150,000) (Aciprensa, 20 January 2022).

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: attacked - <https://verdadenlibertad.com/atacan-en-basilica-de-mexico-mientras/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: killed - https://www.cope.es/religion/hoy-en-dia/iglesia-universal/noticias/dos-jesuitas-asesinados-mexico-defender-hombre-una-parroquia-20220621_2154889
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: rape - <https://elpais.com/mexico/2022-06-23/el-asesinato-de-dos-sacerdotes-en-una-sierra-tarahumara-secuestrada.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: imprisonment - <https://oaxaca.eluniversal.com.mx/municipios/denuncian-evangelicos-persecucion-religiosa-en-chimaltepec-oaxaca-encarcelan-3-por-no>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: declared - <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/confirman-sentencia-contracardenal-y-sacerdote-por-alentar-votocatico-en-mexico-70087>
- 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://observatorioliberalidadreligiosa.org/news/?p=77211>

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Mexico

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 249-253)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	21 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18095241	21 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/MEX	21 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mexico/	21 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/mexico	21 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (pp. 49/51)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	21 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2021	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	21 June 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy Index – covering 29 countries, Mexico not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/mexico/freedom-world/2022	21 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/mexico/freedom-net/2022	5 January 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/mexico	21 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/central.htm#mx	21 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/mexico	21 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/mex	21 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/MEX	21 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mexico/	21 June 2022

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Mexico not included	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mexico/overview	21 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=MEX	21 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 40-41)	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/e408a7e21ba62d843bdd90dc37e61b57-0500032021/related/mpo-lac.pdf	21 June 2022

Recent history

Roman Catholic priest Miguel Hidalgo made history when, on 16 September 1810, he gave a call to arms that triggered the Mexican war of independence. On 27 September 1821, the Trigarante army entered Mexico City and the Act of Independence of the Mexican Empire was signed the following day (which was not recognized by the Spanish government until 1836). In October 1824, Guadalupe Victoria was declared the first president of Mexico.

After gaining independence, a further important moment in history was the drafting of the Constitution of 1857, a document in which the official separation of State and Church was established. The main objective of the state was to secularize not only politics but cultural and social life. Subsequently, a set of decrees issued between 1859 and 1863 aimed to complete the process of separation of Church and State. The later Constitution of 1917 established the annulment of the Roman Catholic Church as a legal body in the country. In 1926, the "Calles Law" - which sought to reduce the number of priests, restrict religious worship and the freedom of belief - unleashed the so-called [Cristero](#) or Christian War (Boletín Informativo, May 2003).

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 electoral coalition '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 (Expansión Política, 9 November 2021). 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). Although the dialogue ceased for more than a year, it looks set to [resume](#) in 2023, seeking an end to the humanitarian crisis and comprehensive agreements ahead of the 2024 elections in Venezuela (EEAS, 26 November 2022).

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 and 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 cancellation of church services. Nonetheless, Christian communities became agents of solidarity with those most in need, despite the risks, 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 rising levels of insecurity. A detailed report by the World Justice Project ([Mexico States Rule of Law Index 2021-2022](#)) particularly highlighted:

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

Nevertheless, a survey revealed that he still had a 59.8% [approval rating](#) in September 2022 (Mitofsky, 30 September 2022).

AMLO's victory in 2018 and MORENA's majority in the Chamber of Deputies and Senators resulted in a level of power that led to a deepening of control and a [loss of autonomy](#) for some institutions, especially the judiciary power (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 allowed 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 is now working on radical reforms that would weaken autonomous institutions. One of his proposals concerns electoral reform, which would seek to centralize the functions of the National Electoral Institute (INE), thus eliminating the Local Public Electoral Organizations and the Electoral Courts, which would represent a [risk](#) for democracy (The Dialogue, 13 May 2022). The goal of the electoral reform is to [increase](#) the chances that MORENA will remain the majority party among the deputies (El Financiero, 31 March 2022).

AMLO also appears to have 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).

Other problematic areas continue to be those of justice and security. President AMLO frequently [criticizes](#) the decisions of judges which are unfavorable for the administration (El País, 31 May 2022). President AMLO has 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). These risks are more evident now that reforms have been approved which mean nothing less than the total militarization of public security (Al-Jazeera, 9 September 2022).

A significant development was the fact that the June 2021 elections were marked by a strong [polarization](#) for or against the president (Fronteras, 24 April 2021) as well as an escalation in [political violence](#) targeting candidates, government officials and former government officials (Noria Research, July 2021). There were also attempts to restrict [press freedom](#) (Human Rights Watch, 3 May 2021). For more details, see below: *Security situation*.

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). Many of the parties with a broad support base seem unlikely to get more votes than MORENA due to the radical nature of some of their proposals. This is the case, for instance, for the Encuentro Solidario Party - [PES](#) (El Mañana, 25 May 2021), which commands the majority of the "[evangelical vote](#)" (Eje Central, 18 June 2021) and which will apparently [discontinue](#) its alliance with MORENA due to disagreements over the current form of government (Evangélico Digital, 5 May 2021).

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 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.

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) and [condemning](#) all forms of violence (CEM, 21 May 2022). As a result, many Catholics have had to face various kinds of hostility. In the previous reporting period (WWL 2022), church leaders were [accused](#) by the government of siding with the opposition (Aciprensa, 6 October 2020). Those who expressed their views on candidates or government plans were also

prosecuted (see above in *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: January 2022 sentencing of Catholic leaders for violating the electoral process*).

Gender issues

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 ([OECD, 2019](#)). Child marriages remain prevalent, driven by poverty, harmful traditional practices, and widespread trafficking networks. According to [Girls Not Brides](#), 26% 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. According to Human Rights Watch, however, protection is inadequate (HRW 2022 country chapter). Victims are often hesitant to report crimes due to a lack of trust in the justice system and the fear of stigmatization ([OECD, 2019](#)).

Religious landscape

Mexico: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	125,738,000	95.6
Muslim	132,000	0.1
Hindu	12,200	0.0
Buddhist	31,100	0.0
Ethno-religionist	1,395,000	1.1
Jewish	40,000	0.0
Bahai	46,500	0.0
Atheist	150,000	0.1
Agnostic	3,979,000	3.0
Other	38,900	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Following WCD's 2022 figures, Christians make up 95.6% of the population of the country and an estimated 3.1% 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 in order 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 2021, 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-19 pandemic by bringing humanitarian assistance to those in need (Vatican News, 27 April 2021), especially [migrants](#) (Agenzia Fides, 21 September 2021). The government introduced a pandemic traffic light system in 2020 for permitted activities, which included the holding of church services. According to an article by the [Ogletree Deakins Resource Center](#) published on 3 April 2022: "For the first time since Mexico's federal government rolled out its [pandemic monitoring system](#) in June 2020, all of the nation's thirty-two states have been given the green light to conduct social and business activities without restriction, although face masks are still required while using public transportation".

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, especially during the election campaign period (see above in *Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period*: January 2022 sentencing of Catholic leaders for violating the electoral process). 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).

It would seem that 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 the 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 faith-based views 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 property (El Siglo de Torreon, 12 April 2022). There have also been attempts to [censor](#) politicians who give faith-based points of views on such matters (Petition on Change.org, last accessed 15 July 2022).

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.

During 2020 and 2021, some Mexican states already approved reforms to [criminalize](#) any attempts made to alter a person's sexual orientation or gender identity (La Razón, 2 June 2022). 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.

Universities have also become places 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).

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 Herald de Chiapas, 16 February 2022) and Hidalgo, 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 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).

Economic landscape

According to the UNDP's HDI 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 country overview:

- **Growth:** The Mexican economy grew by 4.8% in 2021, after an 8.2% fall the previous year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its recovery is underway, albeit slowly: the economy forecast is to grow by 2.1% this year and 2.1% in 2023.
- **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 2018, limiting progress in convergence relative to high income economies.

According to the [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (ECLAC) report published in November 2021:

- **Informal employment:** The decrease in informality rates in the second quarter of 2021 relative to the second quarter of 2019 was lower in Argentina, Chile and Costa Rica than the decline observed in the second quarter of 2020. In Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Paraguay these rates were at much the same levels as before the pandemic.

According to a report by the [Bank of Mexico](#) (Bank of Mexico, 1 February 2022):

- **Remittances:** In the quarter from July to September 2022, remittance income remained at historically high levels, although with some slowdown compared to what was observed in 2021. For the whole of 2021, the value of income from remittances was 51,594 million dollars, an amount higher than the 40,605 million dollars reported in 2020 and which meant an annual expansion of 27.1%.

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 although since the beginning of 2022 the Mexican economy has continued to grow, it has done so below its potential pre-pandemic rate (2.16%). Its growth during the first and second quarters was 1.8% and 2.04%. As a result of an environment of great uncertainty, largely caused by erratic government policies, private investment has maintained a downward trend even since before the COVID-19 crisis. On the other hand, consumer inflation in Mexico has maintained a persistent upward trend during the second and third quarters of 2022, being the highest in 28 years and the highest since Banco de México adopted the inflation targeting approach (CESLA, November 2022). As a consequence of inflation, the Mexican central bank has taken radical measures, such as [increasing](#) the interest rate to 8.50% (as of August 2022), the highest level in 16 years (El País, August 2022).

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, loans 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).

Gender issues

Women and girls remain economically more vulnerable, due to societal norms which place them in the home to conduct domestic chores. 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](#), 2021). According to research published in 2020, despite Mexico being a manufacturing powerhouse, “female employment falls off a cliff

once women reach childbearing age” ([The Finance Info, 21 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 ([OECD, 2019](#)).

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 2022 Report](#) by IWGIA published on May 2022, Mexico is home to 68 indigenous peoples, each speaking its own native language, which together bring together 364 variants. .

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, indigenous communities are more vulnerable to the ineffectiveness of state action and 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, 40% of the indigenous populations in Mexico face [displacement](#) due to drug trafficking, illegal felling of trees, mining activity and even priority projects of the Mexican federal government (El Economista, 12 September 2022). 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 CIA Factbook:

- **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% (2020 est.). Indigenous languages include various Mayan, Nahuatl, and other regional languages.
- **Urban population:** 81.3% of total population (2022)
- **Literacy rate:** Total population 95.2%. Male 96.1% and female 94.5% (2020)

According to World Bank country profile:

- **Education:** School enrollment for pre-primary is 71 (2019); for primary 105 (2019) and for secondary 105 (2019). The duration of compulsory education is 14 years (2020). The Gender

- Parity Index (GPI) for Mexico is 1.052 (2019). This is the ratio of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.
- **Unemployment:**4.4% (2021) Modeled ILO estimate
- **IDPs/Refugees:** The refugee population is 16,403 (2021)

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **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 a strong reduction in inequality over 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 of Mexico one of the most [unequal](#) countries on earth (World Inequality Report, 2022). 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 [National Survey of Occupation and Employment](#), in September 2022:

- **Economically Active Population:** 59.5 million people (2 million more than in September 2021)
- **Participation Rate:** 59.6%.
- **Non-Economically Active Population:** 40.3 million people (798,000 less than in September 2021).

In view of this, 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 November 2022 was 111,257, mostly from Honduras, Cuba, Haiti, Venezuela and Nicaragua (COMAR, November 2022). 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

(Vatican News, 24 October 2022). The Mexican bishops also demanded that the authorities give the Catholic Church room for carrying out humanitarian activities (Debate, 31 May 2022).

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). Organizations such as Human Rights Watch have pointed out that Mexico and the USA are committing [serious abuses](#) against migrants on their shared border (HRW 2022 country chapter).

During the COVID-19 crisis, Mexican churches focused on helping the neediest communities in the country. Church groups carried out information campaigns about safety protocols, offered spiritual care and provided free distribution of food and medicine. In many cases, this humanitarian work put Christians at risk (see below: *Security situation*).

Gender issues

Within Mexico's patriarchal context, men and women are expected to assume traditional roles, particularly in rural areas and indigenous communities. Recent opinion polls indicate that attitudes toward gender are changing, as younger Mexicans adopt more egalitarian views ([Schroeder et al, 2019](#)). Reflecting this, societal unrest in relation to gender-based violence has risen over recent years. In March 2020, millions of women took to the streets to protest against the rising levels of gender-based violence ([BBC News, 9 March 2020](#)). 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 2022):

- **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 country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 95 per 100 people.
According to the report "Statistics on Information and Communication Technologies in Homes" based on results of the National Household Survey (ENAH0), in the first three months of 2022, 73 out of every 100 people aged 6 and over of age accessed the Internet in the country, a figure that shows a growth of 5.1 and 17.7 percentage points when compared to the same quarter of the years 2021 (67.4%) and 2019 (54.8%), respectively. (INEGI, June 2022).

As indicated in the [GSMA 2022 Mobile Gender Gap Report](#), the gender gap in relation to mobile ownership is minimal, with 90% of women owning a mobile compared to 91% of

men. There is also a slightly higher gender gap of [3%](#) in mobile internet use (GSMA, 2022, p. 15). A [Georgetown study \(2019/20\)](#) found that Mexico was in the top ten countries that had demonstrated the biggest improvement in cell phone inclusion. 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 school and electricity which, at the very least disrupts access to internet services ([CSW, 27 August 2020](#)).

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report:

- Mexico ranks as a "partly free" country (score 61).
- Problems include manipulation of content, coordinated targeting of journalists, and violence, threats, and cyberattacks against other users.
- While the government has pledged to make Internet connectivity a top priority, the country faces obstacles in its quest to reduce the digital gap between rural and urban populations.

According to Reporters Without Borders (World Press Freedom 2022):

- "President López Obrador and other government officials have adopted a combative and stigmatizing rhetoric against the press, frequently accusing journalists of promoting the opposition's agenda. They have established a space every Wednesday called 'Who's Who in Fake News', in yet another attempt by the government to discredit journalists. In the three years of his administration, the President has criticized journalists for their lack of professionalism, and has described the Mexican press as 'biased', 'unfair' and 'the scum of journalism'."

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. Online access has however not always been possible in the most remote areas.

Security situation

According to the November 2022 [Security Report](#) published by the Government of Mexico, during the year 2022 there were 22,077 intentional homicides (SEGURIDAD, November 2022). Records [indicate](#) that almost 50% of the homicides took place in: Guanajuato, Michoacán, State of Mexico, Baja California, and Jalisco (El Financiero, 20 October 2022). The [National Urban Public Safety Survey](#) revealed that during the third quarter of 2022, 64.4% 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, Irapuato, Naucalpan, Tijuana, Colima, Guadalajara, Ecatepec de Morelos and Zacatecas (INEGI, October 2022).

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). However, President AMLO denies such statistics. 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, 24 March 2022).

Additionally, in the WWL 2023 reporting period, 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 País, 11 April 2021). However, they have also been [under attack](#) by other groups (Chiapas Paralelo, 12 May 2022).

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](#) (Nexos, 25 October 2021). The army and the National Guard (GN) are two of the 10 federal institutions with the most accusations of possible human rights violations. According to the National Human Rights Violation Alert System, from January to October 2022, [388 complaints](#) were made against the National Guard for abusing human rights (CNDH, November 2022).

According to the [Global Peace Index 2022](#) published by the Institute of Economics and Peace in May 2022 (page 15):

- “In 2021, three of the five indicators in the MPI [Mexico Peace Index] improved. Notably, both firearms crime and homicide improved, with the rates falling by 6.2 and 4.3 percent, respectively, and both reaching around 26 per 100,000 people. ... However, the longer-term trends indicate a marked deterioration in peacefulness between 2015 and 2021. Peace in Mexico has deteriorated by 17.1 percent with many crime indicators significantly higher than seven years ago. The homicide rate in 2021 was 76.3 percent higher than in 2015. While the trend in homicide has improved in the last two years, Mexico's homicide rate remained near historically high levels in 2021, at 26.6 deaths per 100,000 people, or over 34,000 victims. This equates to approximately 94 homicides per day. Both the organized crime and violent crime indicators deteriorated to near pre-pandemic levels in 2021, after improving in the prior year. Deteriorations in the organized crime indicator were driven by

increases in the rates of extortion and retail drug crimes, which rose by 11 and 6.2 percent, respectively. ... The deterioration in violent crime in 2021 is likely associated with the lifting of public health measures and the return to pre-pandemic levels of mobility. In addition, the deterioration in violent crime was also driven by continued increases in reports of family violence and sexual assault. Organized crime continues to be the main driver of homicide and gun violence in Mexico. Approximately two-thirds of homicides were estimated to be connected to organized crime in 2021".

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).

The 2021 electoral process was marred by violence perpetrated by criminal groups throughout the country. Where criminal groups perceived threats to their interests, they did not hesitate to assassinate any political actors representing an obstacle to them. Thus, the June 2021 elections became the [second](#) most violent in Mexican history (Jornada, 16 May 2021). According to Open Democracy, up to [150](#) people were killed during the campaigning period, with candidates, local officials, journalists and activists being targeted (Open Democracy, 10 June 2021).

Within this context of violence and insecurity, some church leaders [speak out](#), calling for peace (CEM, 21 May 2022), and try to act as mediators between criminal groups and their communities, in order to reach a bearable level of security. 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 (El Sol del Bajío, 29 January 2022). It appears that members of organized crime 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 messages" (Hispanidad, 9 October 2022).

Despite the seriousness of the situation, the president claims to have [no knowledge](#) about such issues. This, in itself, is a sign of the degree of vulnerability to which church leaders are exposed (EL Economista, 30 June 2022). Besides the kidnappings and [killing](#) of Christians (Zenit, 8 July 2022), church buildings have often been targeted for vandalism and [theft](#) (Vida Nueva Digital, 1 September 2022). Also, Christian organizations providing humanitarian assistance have faced violent intimidation if they refuse to pay protection money. Many of these organizations cannot carry out their activities without authorization from the local criminal group in control.

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, among other things, "hypocrites" (Animal Politico, 30 June 2022). 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).

Gender issues

Criminal gangs pose a particular threat to young men and adolescents (and increasingly children), who are commonly targeted for the purpose of forced recruitment ([AP News, 24 January 2020](#)). Girls are also targeted by these groups for abduction and rape. Daughters of prominent Christian leaders have reportedly been specifically targeted as a means of punishing the parents. Access to justice, trafficking, and gender-based violence 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 ([El País, 27 December 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) Violence perpetrated by organized crime is a major threat to church activities

The consolidation and advancement of territorial control exercised by the various criminal groups throughout Mexico represents an obstacle to peace and the free exercise of the rights of the Mexican population. This has only been possible due to the weakness of State institutions and the apparent lack of political will to deal effectively with the multi-dimensional crisis that the country is experiencing. The lack of government protection has made Christians, church leaders and church buildings vulnerable to attack by criminals whenever they publicly support society's poorest and challenge the illegitimate authority that criminal groups have imposed on the population through the use of force and intimidation.

2) The protection of indigenous customs is being used as a pretext for not properly protecting Christians

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 authorities tend to act indifferently to such situations. The prioritized protection of indigenous autonomy and cultural identity means that the right to religious freedom of Christian minorities within indigenous communities is not guaranteed.

3) A radical view of Church-State separation has increased hostility towards Christians

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. This all results in self-censorship among many Christians.

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- Security situation: criticized - <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2022/06/amlo-sacerdotes-hipocritas-iglesia-calderon-seguridad/>
- Security situation: treated as criminals - <https://elpais.com/mexico/2022-07-08/las-detenciones-de-sacerdotes-en-chiapas-elevan-la-tension-con-la-iglesia.html#:~:text=El%20sacerdote%20P%C3%A9rez%20est%C3%A1%20acusado,desaparecidas%20casi%20un%20a%C3%B1o%20despu%C3%A9s.>
- Security situation: AP News, 24 January 2020 - <https://apnews.com/article/a69b4886eb51293a2f28cc717d0e5676>
- Security situation: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2018) - https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/MEX/CO/9&Lang=En
- Security situation: El Pais, 27 December 2021 - <https://elpais.com/mexico/2021-12-31/mexico-cierra-un-ano-negro-con-mas-de-3000-mujeres-asesinadas.html>
- Security situation: El Economista, 26 July 2022 - <https://www.economista.com.mx/politica/Homicidios-dolosos-contra-mujeres-en-maximos-20220726-0005.html>
- Security situation: The Guardian, 25 February 2021 - <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/feb/25/mexico-femicide-frida-guerrera>

WWL 2023: 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-eighteenth 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	125,000	0.1
Catholic	117,064,000	93.1
Protestant	5,926,000	4.7
Independent	8,677,000	6.9
Unaffiliated	1,629,000	1.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-7,684,000	-6.1
Total	125,737,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,878,000	2.3
Renewalist movement	17,863,000	14.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

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 93.1% of all Christians according to WCD 2022 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](#)" (Riodoce, 5 January 2022). According to the Economic Research and Teaching Center, there are [148 criminal groups](#) with an active presence throughout the country and there is at least one cartel operating in each state of the federation (EME, 29 January 2022). 16 cartels are in a state of open war over territorial control of some zones. In Michoacan, Guerrero, State of Mexico and Mexico City, there are between 20 and 24 criminal groups operating in each state. Although the organizations with the greatest presence are the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel - CJNG (27 of 32 states), Sinaloa / Pacifico Cartel (21 of 32 states) and Golfo Cartel (14 of 32 States), there are other criminal groups (not including the many new offshoots) with a high-profile presence in the country, especially in the [capital](#) (Infobae, 2 October 2022). These all act as drivers of persecution wherever the Church is perceived as being a threat to their interests.

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, Baja California, 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 actions against their religious leaders. It is mostly Protestants from this category who suffer from the effects of *Clan oppression* when they live in indigenous territories where the practice of their faith is not tolerated. 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 and public debate.

Converts: This category includes converts from a criminal (mafia) background and Christians who have abandoned the religious (ancestral or syncretistic) practices of the indigenous community to which they previously belonged. Indigenous converts are put under high pressure to abandon their new faith and may face threats of violence, arrest and even expulsion.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Evangelicals, Pentecostals and the Renewalist movement - especially where they are involved in advocacy activities in 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 face criticism and threats for defending their faith-based opinions in the public arena.

External Links - Church information

- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: narco-states - <https://riodoce.mx/2022/01/05/el-mapa-de-la-criminalidad-en-mexico/>
- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: 148 criminal groups - <https://www.m-x.com.mx/al-dia/grupos-criminales-fuera-del-radar-los-que-no-salen-en-informes-de-fgr>
- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: capital - <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2022/10/02/asi-se-ve-el-mapa-del-narco-en-la-ciudad-de-mexico/>

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Mexico

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Mexico: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	67	38
WWL 2022	65	43
WWL 2021	64	37
WWL 2020	60	52
WWL 2019	61	39

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Mexico's score increased by around two points, reflecting the extremely high levels of violence against Christians recorded during the WWL 2023 reporting period. Criminal groups continued to target Christians wherever they were perceived to be a threat to a group's illegal operations and took advantage of the weakness of the government that allows the existence of major corruption networks and impunity. Christians in indigenous communities increasingly face hostility due to their refusal to follow ancestral and traditional customs (mostly mixed with Catholic practices). Religious intolerance driven by radical ideological groups against expressions of Christian faith in the public sphere is also increasing.

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	Not at all
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 2021) ranks Mexico #124 out of 180 countries, with a 31/100 score (0 = highly corrupt and 100 = very clean). As mentioned above (see: *Security situation*), 2022 was the fourth most violent year in a row, judged by the number of violent deaths. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, 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](#)" (Modern Diplomacy, 6 March 2022). Many criminal groups are not only active in the communities under their control but have also established networks in various other states as well and have built up an active presence throughout the country. The main criminal groups have also [diversified](#) to increase their scope of action (Nexos, 22 November 2021). These factors mean that there is continual warfare between groups, causing a [spiral](#) of violence (El País, 2 June 2022). Some communities have formed [self-defense groups](#) (US News, 27 November 2021) to keep criminal groups and corrupt police officers away; however, many regard these as criminal groups as well.

At the beginning of COVID-19 crisis, criminal groups exploited the [security void](#) (Reuters, 18 June 2020) to increase their control of the drug trade while at the same time acting as "[guardians and protectors](#)" of the neediest to make them compliant (The Conversation, 22 June 2020). "Narco" cartels [capitalized](#) on, strengthened and expanded during the COVID crisis and now rank as some of the most influential groups in the world (CRS, 14 October 2021).

Christians, who inform the authorities of illegal operations, 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 [reprisal](#) (Eje Central, 8 March 2022), [attacks](#) (Agenzia Fides, 20 November 2021), [surveillance](#) (Aciprensa, 25

February 2022), [break-ins and robberies](#) to their worship places and homes (Aciprensa, 14 January 2022), [death threats](#) (Jornada, 17 March 2022), [kidnapping attempts](#) (La Verdad Noticias, 11 July 2022), and even [killings](#) (El Imparcial, 25 February 2022). During the COVID-19 crisis, these situation did not [stop](#) (La Prensa, 25 October 2020). Such acts of intimidation forced many church members to stop attending church activities and increased [awareness](#) of the risks church leaders and other Christians are exposed to (El Sol de Zacatecas, 22 November 2021).

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](#) (Aqui Noticias, 22 August 2022), fines, isolation, the blocking of basic community services, imprisonment, beatings and the [destruction](#) of Christian property (Evangelical Focus, 18 January 2021).

During the COVID-19 crisis, the situation worsened for indigenous converts who were allowed no access to basic services (CSW, 7 April 2020). Some indigenous converts were also unable to receive state aid, were put under pressure to attend traditional healing rituals, and were blamed for the spread of the virus due to their contact with people outside the community during their religious gatherings. Although the health crisis is no longer severe, non-accepted indigenous Christians are still put under pressure when ill to use indigenous traditional medicines and bury their dead according to indigenous religious rites.

Through the State Commission on Human Rights, measures have been taken to guarantee the safety of indigenous Christians belonging to non-accepted church groups. However, cases have not always been followed up satisfactorily and very 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 (NVI Noticias, 4 March 2022), 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, especially when they hold positions of public office. Christians experience increasing societal intolerance for expressing faith-based beliefs, including at work or school. Vandalism of church property is also on the increase, yet the authorities rarely carry out in-depth investigations, not considering it a ["real problem"](#) (Debate, 7 March 2021).

Drivers of persecution

Mexico: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	-	-	-	STRONG	WEAK	-	MEDIUM	-	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 in operation. 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 and break into and rob church buildings. 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 view 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 and parents have also been threatened with legal action by these groups when they teach 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.
- **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 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.

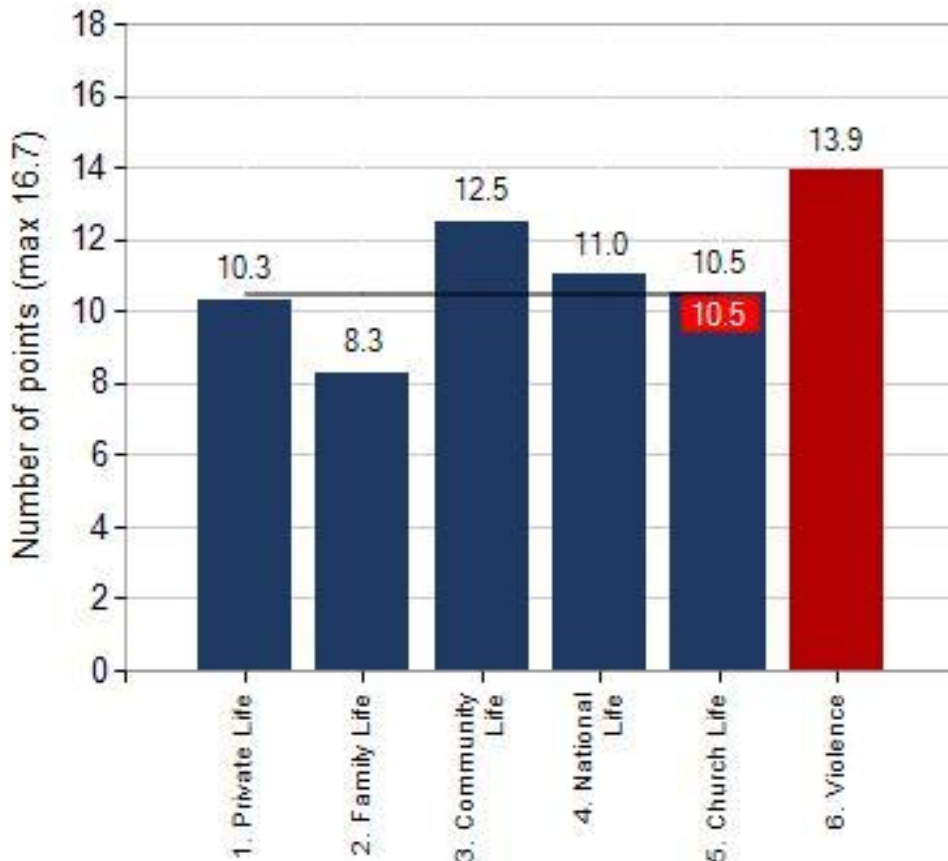
The Persecution pattern

The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Mexico shows (see below):

- The average pressure on Christians in Mexico remained at a high level (10.5 points), a very slight increase in comparison with 10.4 points in WWL 2022. 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 8.3 points or above. Pressure is highest in *Community life* (12.5 points) and *National life* (11.0). 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 (13.9 points), an increase of 1.3 points in comparison to WWL 2022. The level of violence against Christian communities and individu-

als continues to be of very serious concern and was exacerbated by criminal brutality during the WWL 2023 reporting period. There was an increase in the number of killings, detentions, cases of sexual harassment and physical/mental abuse targeting Christians for faith-related reasons.

WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Mexico



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 2023 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 essential for the transmission of faith, if Christians from non-accepted church groups try to share their faith by written means with other members of the community, they will be punished

by ethnic leaders.

As social media has been used with more frequency during the WWL 2023 reporting period, many Christians have expressed their rejection of the violence perpetrated by criminal groups in the context of the elections and have linked these opinions with statements of faith or quotes from church leaders. Such activity makes both them and the quoted leaders more vulnerable to attack.

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 election candidates who defended traditional Christian values were also affected. Also, politicians can be severely criticized by political parties and social media if they make their Christian beliefs known.

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 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.

Elsewhere, as an example of *Christian denominational protectionism*, Christians living in some 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. The power exerted by criminal groups has grown during the WWL 2023 reporting period; in consequence, the level of control they exert on those they consider to be a threat to their stability has also grown.

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.

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 in-country sources, this is common in the indigenous communities of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Hidalgo and Guerrero.

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.

In urban areas, Christian schoolchildren have to be taught and examined on matters of sexuality as part of state-approved compulsory education. This endangers the parents' right to educate their child in line with their own faith-based 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 2.9: 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 to further their education in indigenous schools.

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 being interested in them for sexual abuse, recruitment, or kidnapping for human trafficking.

In schools, many Christian children face hostility and bullying as part of the increasing rejection of faith-based views in the public sphere. This has also been the case online with the increased use of social media since the COVID-19 pandemic, and has occurred where children have mentioned their Christian faith or that they belong to a specific Christian denomination.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.00 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 many criminal groups during the COVID-19 crisis, the recruitment of children sky-rocketed; they were being used to transport drugs in food and medicine 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 limitation of rights is particularly pronounced in Baja California Sur, Colima, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Mexico City, Oaxaca, Puebla, Yucatan, Zacatecas and Mexico State.

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 2023 reporting period, especially due to the political unrest surrounding the 2021 elections.

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 the authorities or media about criminal operations. This is especially the case when former gang members have convert-

ed to Christianity.

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.

Christians who oppose the presence of organized crime in their communities tend to have greater difficulties in obtaining permits for operating their businesses, if the authorities are in collusion with these criminal groups. Organized boycotting is also common.

There were many shortages caused by the COVID-19 crisis and many businesses were forced to sell their products at reduced prices so that criminal groups would then be in charge of distributing them or re-selling them at a higher price. Christians who refused, faced 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.

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. Usually criminal groups intimidated people to obtain information about donations and other goods obtained by churches or Christian 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. 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.

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. During the WWL 2023 reporting period, two bishops were found guilty of making public statements which were judged as interfering with the electoral process (see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights*). 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.

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 themselves establish and regulate their 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 and robberies inside the place of worship interrupting church activities occurred at a high rate.

Pressure groups have at times disrupted church services, attacking worshippers and shouting slogans denigrating faith-based views.

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. It was especially harsh during the anti-COVID restrictions, because it was easier for Christians belonging to non-accepted church groups to be closely monitored.

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. Also, in at least 10 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 criminal groups will even [cut off a Catholic priest's fingers](#) (which are used 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).

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.

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 5 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. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor’s article dated 13 November 2013 available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

Mexico: Violence Block question	WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	14	7
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	42	45
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	27	17
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	12
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	4	4
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	2	0
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0

Mexico: Violence Block question	WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	44	40
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?	3	80
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?	71	405
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 2023 reporting period:

- **Christians killed (14):** This was double the number recorded in WWL 2022. 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 (42):** 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.
- **Christians arrested (27):** This higher number of arrests in comparison to WWL 2022 mostly involved indigenous Christians of non-accepted church groups being punished by ethnic leaders when they refused to return to the ancestral/traditional religious rites of the indigenous community. As a form of reprisal for not renouncing their faith, they were held in the local jail. The number also includes Christian leaders detained by local police authorities (in seeming collusion with local criminal groups) who were known for defending human rights.
- **Christians attacked (44):** Most of these incidents involved criminal groups attacking Christians; however, the number also includes attacks within indigenous communities and to lesser extent, incidents caused by militant pressure groups.

- **Christians forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country (71):** In comparison to WWL 2022, there are fewer incidents of this type of violence, however, the number still shows the vulnerability of Christians (with their relatives) being expelled from indigenous communities for not giving up their faith.

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

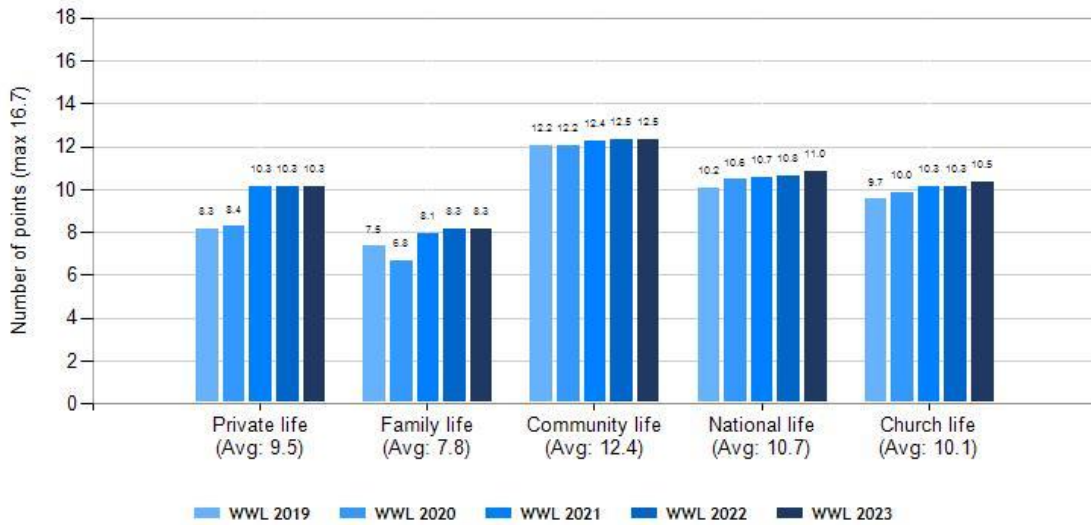
The table below shows that the average pressure on Christians has been stable around the 10.4-10.5 point mark over the last three WWL reporting periods. The high level of average pressure reflects how corruption networks, impunity and government indifference at all levels have caused serious Christian vulnerability and empowered non-state actors (criminal, indigenous and radical ideological groups) as the main drivers of persecution in the country.

Mexico: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	10.5
2022	10.4
2021	10.4
2020	9.6
2019	9.6

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

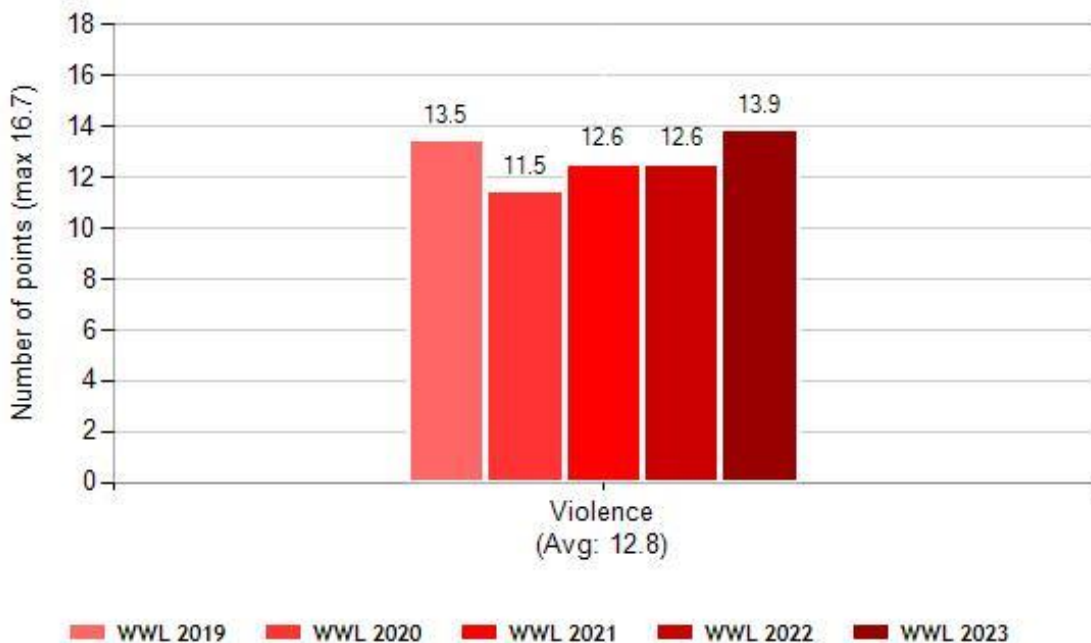
As can be seen in the chart below, over the last five reporting periods, pressure has increased in *all spheres of life*. The most significant rise in pressure occurred in *Private life*, but pressure has always been highest in *Community life*. This is the result of the worsening security situation and of the ineffectiveness of the government authorities to regain control of criminal-controlled areas due to widespread corruption and impunity. 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.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Mexico (Spheres of life)



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Mexico (Violence)



As can be seen in the chart above, over the last five WWL reporting periods, violence scores in Mexico have always been at an extreme level, reaching its highest peak in WWL 2023. 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. The strengthening and diversification of criminal networks in the midst of the political chaos gener-

ated by the COVID-19 crisis (WWL 2021 and WWL 2022), caused the peak in violence in WWL 2023. The Church is clearly viewed as being an enemy of their 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 with a 95.6% Christian population, 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 high levels of pressure, 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 abduction and sexual slavery, most commonly by illegal armed groups (US State Department, “2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mexico”). Additionally, within the WWL 2023 reporting period, there has been an increase in femicide and violence against women and girls. Some studies suggest more than [70%](#) of all women in Mexico have experienced different forms of violence – sexual violence the most prevalent and often occurring in 2021, possibly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Reuters, 31 August 2022).

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 asserts: “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 for abductions and killings since they are considered targets of criminal groups for their relationship with the cartel enemies.

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

servicing 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 girls.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; 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 forced recruitment of Christian men and boys is far-reaching. A country expert commented: “The drug trafficker harasses, above all, the children of pastors or of 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 leader of the church. In recent WWL reporting periods, there have been several examples of priests and pastors being beaten, kidnapped for ransom, and killed ([Agenzia Fides, 1 September 2021](#); [Reuters, 22 June 2022](#)). 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.

Church leaders also face extreme travel restrictions, especially traversing territories controlled by different cartels. One country expert stated: “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 pressure and violence; they may be beaten, harassed, and expelled from the community. 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 influential propagators of the Christian faith.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- During 2021, the government's National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) received three complaints of religious discrimination, compared to two in 2020. Two were directed against public servants purportedly discriminating against Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims.

According to [Observatorio Internacional de Libertad Religiosa \(29 March 2022\)](#):

- Three armed people assaulted a group of around 40 Jehovah's Witnesses inside a place of worship in Puebla. The criminals entered on Sunday afternoon (on 27 March 2022), brandishing weapons and then stripped those present of their valuables.

According to [Ciudadanía Express](#) (31 January 2022):

- A Mexican court ordered that a blood transfusion should be applied to the youngest daughter of a couple of the Rarámuri ethnic group, despite the parents refusing such treatment on religious grounds.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Organized corruption and crime

The serious security crisis that the country is experiencing is partly the result of the weakness and structural flaws in the state apparatus and government administration. Corruption and the levels of impunity for criminals are far from diminishing and have provided a breeding ground for the proliferation of criminal groups throughout the country. It is almost certain that this context of violence will continue so long as i) the Church continues to be seen as a challenging voice to the territorial control exercised by criminal leaders; ii) the Church's vulnerability continues not to be recognized as a real problem by the state authorities; and iii) the Church continues to be overlooked for projects aimed at dealing with insecurity in the country.

Clan oppression (blended with Christian denominational protectionism)

The governmental and international recognition of indigenous communities requires a detailed analysis of the current challenges faced by individual community members. Considering the continual violations of religious freedom and other related rights suffered by indigenous Christians who abandon community practices (ancestral or syncretistic), it is necessary that both the State and the international community recognize the vulnerability of religious minorities within the indigenous communities. Under the current administration, it is unlikely that such recognition will be achieved in the short-term.

Secular intolerance

The radical ideologies that promote an intolerant attitude towards faith-based views being expressed in the public sphere, have permeated both society and the state apparatus. 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 religious freedom of Christians 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 are trained to be aware of what exactly the right to religious freedom entails and thus contribute to its effective protection in the public sphere.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: narco-state - <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/03/06/is-mexico-becoming-a-narco-state/>
- Persecution engines description: diversified - <https://seguridad.nexos.com.mx/mas-alla-del-trafico-de-drogas-la-diversificacion-del-crimen-organizado/>
- Persecution engines description: spiral - <https://elpais.com/mexico/2022-06-02/la-trampa-del-mes-mas-violento-tres-formas-de-contar-y-enredar-la-muerte-en-mexico.html>
- Persecution engines description: self-defense groups - <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-11-27/500-vigilantes-gather-in-mexico-town-pledge-to-aid-police>
- Persecution engines description: security void - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-mexico-cartels/as-mexico-focuses-on-coronavirus-drug-gang-violence-rises-idUSKBN23P1VO>
- Persecution engines description: guardians and protectors - <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-narco-gangs-could-see-big-popularity-boost-from-helping-residents-in-latin-america-139613>
- Persecution engines description: capitalized - <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11535>
- Persecution engines description: reprisal - <https://www.ejecentral.com.mx/valor-de-la-palabra-evangelicos-como-victimas-colaterales/>
- Persecution engines description: attacks - http://www.fides.org/en/news/69072-AMERICA_MEXICO_Religious_woman_injured_in_attack_on_humanitarian_workers_We_do_not_want_any_more_suffering
- Persecution engines description: surveillance - <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/arzobispo-fue-interceptado-por-el-crimen-organizado-en-mexico-95038>
- Persecution engines description: break-ins and robberies - <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/apunalan-a-sacerdote-y-le-roban-limosna-de-su-parroquia-en-mexico-62715>
- Persecution engines description: death threats - <https://www.jornada.com.mx/notas/2022/03/17/estados/centro-frayba-denuncia-amenazas-contra-sacerdote-de-chicomuselo/>

- Persecution engines description: kidnapping attempts - <https://laverdadnoticias.com/crimen/Familias-de-sacerdotes-son-victimas-de-secuestro-inician-oraciones-20220711-0102.html>
- Persecution engines description: killings - <https://www.elimparcial.com/tijuana/ensenada/Asesinan-a-pastor-de-congregacion-cristiana-en-Ensenada-20220225-0012.html>
- 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: awareness - <https://www.elsoldezacatecas.com.mx/local/iglesia-catolica-implementa-protocolos-ante-inseguridad-7509056.html>
- Persecution engines description: forced displacement - <https://aquinoticias.mx/la-fe-que-exilia-mas-de-30-mil-chiapanechos-expulsados-por-intolerancia-religiosa/>
- Persecution engines description: destruction - <https://evangelicalfocus.com/world/9775/evangelical-families-expelled-and-homes-demolished-in-chiapas>
- Persecution engines description: try to impose - <https://www.nvinoticias.com/oaxaca/general/privan-de-su-libertad-pastor-evangelico-en-la-sierra-sur-de-oaxaca/127102>
- Persecution engines description: discussions - <https://www.evangelicodigital.com/latinoamerica/17950/mexicoproponen-iniciativa-para-limitar-expresionhttps://lucosdelsiglo.com/2021/11/24/se-manifiestan-religiosos-por-libertad-y-proteccion-de-la-vida-local/-de-ministros-de-culto>
- Persecution engines description: annoying impediment - <https://intoleranciadiario.com/articulos/especiales/2021/01/12/972828-por-comentarios-discriminatorios-conapred-apercibe-al-arzobispo-puebla.html>
- Persecution engines description: non-discrimination and hate-speech laws - <https://www.diariodequeretaro.com.mx/local/hoy-audiencia-de-elsa-por-discriminacion-6977679.html>
- Persecution engines description: ban - <https://notipress.mx/actualidad/asi-avanza-prohibicion-terapias-de-conversion-mexico-11118>
- Persecution engines description: real problem - <https://www.debate.com.mx/estados/Feministas-en-Oaxaca-gritan-consignas-y-vandalizan-templos-por-el-Dia-Internacional-de-la-Mujer-20210307-0266.html>
- 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): cut off a Catholic priest's fingers - <https://www.infocatolica.com/?t=noticia&cod=44559>
- 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: 70% - <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/violence-against-women-mexico-rises-over-70-study-finds-2022-08-31/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Vision for Humanity, 2022 Mexico Peace Index, p 28 - <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/mexico-peace-index/%22%20/%20%22/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: recruiting - <https://www.cfr.org/background/mexicos-long-war-drugs-crime-and-cartels>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Agenzia Fides, 1 September 2021; - http://www.fides.org/en/news/70716-AMERICA_MEXICO_A_priest_killed_in_the_state_of_Morelos
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Reuters, 22 June 2022 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexican-authorities-search-bodies-missing-tourists-after-priests-killed-church-2022-06-21/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Observatorio Internacional de Libertad Religiosa (29 March 2022) - <https://observatoriolibertadreligiosa.org/news/?p=77899>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Ciudadanía Express - <https://www.ciudadania-express.com/2022/derechos-humanos/scjn-limita-a-testigos-de-jehova-para-prevaler-vida-de-nina>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page on the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>. As in previous years, these continue to be available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Mexico>
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