

World Watch Research

Mexico: Background Information

September 2024



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Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Copyright and sources

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

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Map of country



Mexico: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
129,388,000	123,265,000	95.3

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Recent history

In July 2018, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (hereafter abbreviated to 'AMLO') won the presidential elections, marking a milestone in Mexican politics; he is the first president who does not belong to the main Mexican political parties, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) or the National Action Party (PAN), and was elected with the highest number of votes ever. He ran as leader of the political party 'National Regeneration Movement' (MORENA) and had significant contact with churches during his electoral campaign. Despite AMLO'S promises to tackle corruption and violence, the country has continued to suffer from violence and insecurity. Additionally, accusations have been made against the police, the National Guard and the government itself regarding [collusion](#) with drug-leaders (Milenio, 15 May 2022), [abuse](#) of authority and human rights violations (El País, 21 March 2023). Despite the 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).

Due to the measures surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the country was plunged into one of the biggest political, social, and economic crises in recent history. This highlighted the weakness of the

government at such a crucial time (El Economista, 25 May 2021). Unlike other Latin American countries, AMLO decided to prioritize economic factors over health considerations, for which he was strongly criticized. At the state level, churches had to follow the rules imposed by the authorities which sometimes included the ceasing of church services. Despite all restrictions and risks, Christian communities actively supported those most in need, especially in areas not reached by the authorities and often dominated by criminal groups.

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

In May 2023, AMLO was [declared](#) persona non grata by the Peruvian congress due to his repeated support for the former president of Peru, Pedro Castillo (who is under investigation in prison after attempting a failed 'self-coup') and for his continued rejection of the current president, Dina Boluarte. In addition, the diplomatic tension led to AMLO's refusal to transfer the presidency of the Pacific Alliance to Peru, a procedure that should have been carried out at the beginning of 2023. In December 2022, the Mexican ambassador in Peru had been declared persona non grata by the Peruvian government (El País, 22 May 2023). In February 2023, the Government [concluded](#) the functions of the Ambassador in the Diplomatic Service of the Republic as Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Peru in Mexico (El Peruano, 24 February 2023). Since May 2024, the Mexican Government requires a [visa](#) for Peruvians who wish to travel to Mexico (Embajada de México, May 2024).

Recently, due to the arrest of the former vice-president of Ecuador Jorge Glas, in the facilities of the Mexican embassy located in Quito, Mexico announced the [breaking of](#) diplomatic relations with Ecuador due to its non-compliance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, in particular, of the principle of inviolability of the premises and of the Mexican diplomatic personnel (Mision, 6 April 2024).

In March 2024, on the VIII Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), Mexico [led](#) the adoption of the Declaration on Feminist Foreign Policy for Latin America and the Caribbean. This declaration has an intersectoral approach, taking into account the interconnection of different types of discrimination, such as gender, race, social class and sexual orientation (Gobierno de México, 2 March 2024).

2024 elections

Elections were held in Mexico on 2 June 2024, with voters electing a new president to serve a six-year term, all 500 members of the Chamber of Deputies, and all 128 members of the Senate of the Republic. These elections took place concurrently with the 2024 state elections. Climate scientist and Mexico City's former mayor, Claudia Sheinbaum, was elected the country's first female (and Jewish) president ([Reuters, 3 June 2024](#)). She heads the "Let's Keep Making History" alliance made up of MORENA, the Labor Party and the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico.

Political and legal landscape

President AMLO took office in 2018. His presidency was criticized for his handling of the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and for the rising levels of insecurity. The report [Rule of Law Index in Mexico 2022-2023](#) particularly highlighted (World Justice Project, 2023):

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

AMLO's victory in 2018 and MORENA's majority in the Chamber of Deputies and Senators resulted in a high level of power and a deepening of control which caused a [loss of autonomy](#) for some institutions, especially the judiciary (El País, 21 April 2021). However, after the [mid-term legislative elections](#) held in June 2021, AMLO's party lost many seats in the Chamber of Deputies and (despite keeping their majority) now depends on the support from their political allies to a greater degree (LSE, 10 June 2021). A significant event was the [referendum](#) in April 2022 concerning whether AMLO should step down or complete his six-year term. 90% of those who cast their votes said they wanted the president to stay in office until 2024, but turnout was low, at less than 19% (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 attempted 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), took control of energy agencies and implemented restrictive [market competition](#) measures (Bloomberg, 29 April 2021). He made radical reforms that weakened autonomous institutions and undermined the work of the autonomous body entitled "National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data", which has been responsible for guaranteeing the right of access to public information for the last two decades. "[Access to information](#)" is in decline and many of the responses to requests for information made to the federal government have lacked detail (The Washington Post, 16 March 2022). In general, the AMLO government attempted to politicize public institutions, concentrate power in the executive and therefore limit the autonomy of the Legislative power.

Problematic areas continue to be those of justice and security. President AMLO [criticized](#) the decisions of judges unfavorable for the administration; he also frequently accused judges of alleged acts of corruption, without presenting evidence. A recurrent theme in his speeches concerned the reform of the judiciary. (El País, 5 September 2023). President AMLO also expanded the armed force's responsibilities by eliminating civilian law enforcement and by setting up a 'new' security force called the Guardia Nacional (National Guard). This move [increased](#) the risk of corruption, was likely to cause a greater number of human rights violations, and cause a reduction in the level of resources available for local police (Observatory of the National Guard and Militarization in Mexico, July 2022). In 2022, the Mexican Chamber of Deputies [approved](#) a legislative reform promoted by AMLO that transferred the National Guard to the Ministry of National Defense (Los Angeles Times, 3 September 2022); however in April 2023 the SCJN [invalidated](#) the transfer as being unconstitutional (Los Angeles Times, 19 April 2023). AMLO warned that before the end of his term he would [insist](#), through another initiative to Congress, that the National Guard be absorbed by the Secretariat of National Defense (Reforma, 30 June 2023).

Under AMLO, 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) caused some churches to withdraw their support for the AMLO government. Also, some members of the MORENA party [tried to bring changes](#) to the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship in an effort to restrict churches from teaching traditional Christian values which could be classed as "hate speech" against some minorities (Gobernación, 6 September 2022). Analysts pointed out that the president's strategy was to stay close to Catholic voters (since their vote can have a significant influence) but to keep his [distance](#) from the Catholic bishops who were critical of his government (El País, 2 November 2022).

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

In November 2023, the campaigns for the 2024 elections began. Among the [risks](#) identified in the electoral process, were potential political violence, electoral influence by organized crime (see more in *Security situation*), corruption derived from the illegal financing of political campaigns, uncertainty regarding the legitimacy of the electoral results, among others (Controlrisks, May 2024). During the electoral process there has been interaction between the candidates and the church representatives. In March 2024, the presidential candidates [signed](#) the Commitment to Peace, a document prepared by the Conference of the Mexican Episcopate (CEM), the Society of Jesus, religious congregations, universities, companies and civil associations, which contains 117 proposals to outline a route for conciliation in the country, despite questioning some of the proposed points (Forbes, 11 March 2024). The Catholic church and some evangelical Christian denominations called on their parishioners to participate in the electoral process in a reasoned manner and with social responsibility. In some cases, calls or comments by religious leaders have been considered political proselytism (See below: *Religious landscape*).

On the whole, Catholic church leaders are [optimistic](#) about the new president, Claudia Sheinbaum, taking office after the June 2024 elections. She has experience in combatting violence in the capital city and is committed to maintaining her predecessor and fellow party member AMLO's economic policies (Crux, 4 June 2024).

Gender perspective

Mexico's legal landscape remains restrictive towards women in several areas. Whilst men and women have broadly equal rights in relation to divorce and guardianship under Mexico's Federal Law (Civil Code, Art. 156 and 263), divorce proceedings differ from state to state and customary practices remain prevalent. In indigenous communities for example, the elders of the community often decide if a woman can separate from her husband. Child marriages remain prevalent, driven by poverty, harmful traditional practices, and widespread trafficking networks. According to [Girls Not Brides Mexico](#) (accessed 30 July 2024), 21% of girls marry by the age of 18. To combat this, the Mexican government

removed all exceptions to the minimum age of marriage through an [amendment](#) in the Federal Civil Code in June 2019 (Gobierno de México, 2019).

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

Religious landscape

Mexico: Religious context	Number adherents	of %
Christians	123,265,000	95.3
Muslim	128,000	0.1
Hindu	12,400	0.0
Buddhist	31,800	0.0
Ethnic religionist	1,348,000	1.0
Jewish	39,300	0.0
Bahai	47,100	0.0
Atheist	147,000	0.1
Agnostic	4,330,000	3.3
Other	39,300	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Following WCD's 2024 figures, Christians make up 95.3% of the population of the country and an estimated 3.5% of the population identify themselves as agnostic/atheist; however, according to the [official figures](#) of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, the latter make up around 8.1% of the population (Nexos, 1 February 2021). This phenomenon is the result of strong secular tendencies that have been driven by previous government policies and influenced by secularist groups. Mexico has no official religion, and no religious classes are taught in state schools. The state has remained strictly secular and - until 1992 - the Mexican government did not have any formal relations with and did not officially recognize any church at all. In 1992, the Salinas government modified the Constitution to give recognition to the various religions that exist in Mexico.

Today, Mexicans have the right to exercise any religion they please. The federal government coordinates religious affairs through the Secretariat of Governance (SEGOB), which (together with the General Directorate for Religious Associations - DGAR) promotes religious tolerance, conducts conflict mediation, and investigates cases of religious intolerance. Each of the 32 states has an office with responsibility for religious affairs. However, although some government authorities [recognize](#) the religious sector as an ally in helping vulnerable communities, the radical understanding of the principle of Church-State separation continues to be a challenge, and sometimes an obstacle. Government authorities have repeatedly tried to prevent church leaders from speaking out on public affairs. Church leaders who demanded a [change](#) in the security policy (El País, 30 June 2022) or [questioned](#) (Proceso, 20 February 2023) President AMLO's electoral reform, were criticized by the president himself. He did not hold back from [lashing out](#) against critical church leaders (El Economista, 9 July 2023).

The Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship established that ministers of worship may not associate for political purposes, nor may they proselytize for or against any candidate, party, or political association. In the run-up to the 2024 elections, the Mexican Episcopal Conference issued in December 2023 a new version of [guidelines](#) to help church leaders avoid engaging in conduct that could be subject to sanctions in electoral matters. The document warned that church leaders should not “publicly promote, recommend, support or endorse any candidate or political party,” either “directly or indirectly in acts of worship,” whether “inside or outside churches”, neither should they “criticize or attack any candidate or political party”, “distribute material containing electoral propaganda”, or “allow meetings for political or partisan purposes to be held inside church property” (Aciprensa, 6 December 2023). At the same time, the Catholic Church [urged](#) citizens to participate in the vote, the electoral authorities of the country to exercise their function in accordance with the electoral laws, the media to report truthfully and ethically, and the armed forces to maintain peace (Diocesis Qro, 21 May 2024).

Various parish priests did promote voting in [support](#) of political projects that respect life, marriage, and family or, in general, to vote according to the principles of the Church and the common good (Jornada, 1 April 2024). The Complaints Commission of the Electoral and Citizen Participation Institute [asked](#) the minister of worship, Juan Sandoval Iñiguez, Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Guadalajara, to avoid inducing the will of voters in favor of or against any political force (Noticias GDL, 7 May 2024). During the referendum on the presidential mandate in 2022, Cardinal Felipe Arizmendi reported that both he and the president of the Episcopal Conference had been [accused](#) of acting illegally (El Sol de Mexico, 8 May 2022).

Political pressure groups have continued their attempts at marginalizing traditional Christian values and teaching, demanding that church leaders should not get involved in public debates on issues relating to abortion, marriage and comprehensive sex education, for example. The activities of pressure groups have become increasingly aggressive as can be seen in the incidents involving [vandalism](#) of Christian-owned property (Aciprensa, 9 March 2024). There have also been attempts to [censor](#) politicians who give faith-based points of views on such matters (Petition on Change.org, last accessed 3 July 2023). The Special Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary upheld a ruling in which a Christian leader and activist was [convicted](#) of gender-based political violence for social media posts on X and Facebook referring to transgender-identifying Mexican Congressional representative, Salma Luévano, as a “man who self-ascribes as a woman”. In January 2024, the case

was [filed](#) with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ADF International, 17 January 2024). Catholic priests who have expressed their rejection of abortion, and have been in dialogue with authorities concerning the subject, have been harshly [criticized](#) by feminist groups (Religión Digital, 22 March 2023). A bill was presented to include as 'violence against reproductive rights' any action or omission that limits or violates the right of women to decide freely and voluntarily about their reproductive function, that is, any type of rejection or action that seeks to prevent abortion could be considered an action of [violence](#) against women (Aciprensa, 1 June 2023). In 2023 and 2024, some state deputies began [replicating](#) initiatives of this type (Retodiario, 14 January 2024).

Conscientious objection in the medical profession

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. In October 2023, the Chamber of Deputies [approved](#) a reform to the General Health Law which established certain limits on conscientious objection. Conscientious objection will not be applicable when the patient's life is at risk, in cases of medical emergency or when it involves preventable harm to the person undergoing treatment. Furthermore, it will not be allowed in situations of insufficient staffing, when the denial produces consequences for the patient, when it unnecessarily prolongs the patient's suffering or when there is no viable and accessible alternative to provide the service (Chamber of Deputies, 31 October 2023). The reform must now be approved by the Senate of the Republic. Associations and health professionals have [pointed out](#) that the reform was carried out without including the medical sector in the preparation of the project and that it places a great responsibility on the objecting personnel, even to the point of criminalizing them since it contemplates civil, administrative and even criminal sanctions for the doctors and nursing staff (Forbes, 5 November 2023).

In 2022, the First Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice reviewed a constitutional-protection lawsuit opposing the placement of “signs that allude to a specific religious conviction” on public property, but without reaching a decision. There was the possibility that the ruling could have led to the prohibition of displaying religious symbols such as crosses on public property throughout the country ([US State Department IRFR 2023 Mexico](#)).

Legal action against "conversion therapies"

Since 2020, some Mexican states have already approved reforms to [forbid](#) any attempts made to alter a person's sexual orientation or gender identity (El Sol de Puebla, 19 October 2021). In March 2024, the Chamber of Deputies [approved](#) reforms to the Federal Penal Code and General Health Law to classify and penalize so-called conversion therapies in the country. The reform establishes two to six years in prison and fines for anyone carrying out treatment that “hinders, restricts, prevents, undermines, nullifies or suppresses a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or expression”. The penalty will be doubled where people under 18 years of age are involved. If it is a parent or guardian doing the hindering or undermining, sanctions or warnings will be implemented at the discretion of the judge. The measures will be increased two-fold if the perpetrator has, for instance, used physical, psychological or moral pressure against the victim (Chamber of deputies, 22 March 2024). The reform must be forwarded to the Senate of the Republic for full approval. 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.

Parental rights ignored

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

Censorship of Christians

Christians have also suffered different forms of censorship. Students or recent graduates who speak publicly on such matters as family and marriage without hiding their traditional Christian convictions, run the risk - among other things - of [losing](#) their degrees (Hispanidad, 12 September 2022). Another recent example is the congressman Hector Malavé Gamboa of the MORENA party who lost his temper and [verbally attacked](#) religious groups who were protesting in front of Congress. They were demanding the review of a bill that apparently limited their freedom of worship. The deputy accused the Catholic Church of wanting to intervene in state affairs (24 Horas Campeche, 14 December 2023).

Also, when church leaders have criticized the ineffectiveness of the government's security policies, they have often received [insults](#) in return (El Universal, 1 July 2022). Given the lack of government action to combat the spiral of violence and insecurity across the country - particularly where it affects religious communities -, the Conference of the Mexican Episcopate, the Conference of Major Superiors of Mexico, the Episcopal Dimension for the Laity and the Mexican Province of the Society of Jesus convened a [National Dialogue for Peace](#), to which representatives from universities, media of communication, various churches and denominations, migrants and indigenous groups were also invited (Diálogo Nacional por la Paz, May 2024). As a result of this convention, the document [Commitment to Peace](#) was prepared which contained recommendations for public policy to address the crisis of violence and social decay in the country (CEM, May 2024). This document was [signed](#) by the three presidential candidates, although Claudia Sheinbaum expressed her disagreement with the diagnosis made by the Episcopal Conference on security issues (Independiente, 12 March 2024). (See below in: *Security situation*)

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

Within indigenous communities, the religious factor is an important component of their culture and identity and shapes their relationships with other people and even natural resources. As in many indigenous communities in Latin America, the religious practices are mostly related to syncretistic prac-

tices adapted from Roman Catholic rites. In some cases, they identify themselves as Catholics and indigenous leaders tend to be more receptive to the presence of Roman Catholic members than with Christians from other denominations. However, any type of preaching or religious activity requires permission from the leaders. Anything going against the customs of the ethnic group will be [punished](#) (Evangelico Digital, 24 August 2022). Due to the general acceptance of Catholic traditions inside indigenous communities, most 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' are of Protestant or Evangelical origin.

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

Christians of 'non-accepted church groups' in localities such as [Oaxaca](#) (La Jornada, 4 January 2022), [Chiapas](#) (El Heraldo de Chiapas, 16 February 2022) and [Hidalgo](#) (DiarioVialibre, 24 April 2024), 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 2023, there was, for instance, a violent [attack](#) on a woman which was linked to her membership of a religious minority in her community (Forbinfull, 17 April 2023). In such cases, 'non-accepted Christians' frequently fail to receive any proper guarantee of their rights when they ask for state intervention. This is either due to a [lack of interest](#) (Forbinfull, 2 May 2024) on the part of the state authorities or due to a [false interpretation](#) of what indigenous autonomy entails (Cronica, 15 June 2022).

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

However, some steps have been taken at the legislative level to prevent this kind of conduct. In September 2022, the Oaxaca State Congress [approved](#) the reform of the State Penal Code, regarding the crime of discrimination, which includes as punishable conduct "imposing activities, quotas, charges, services or punishments as a sanction for not professing a specific religion or creed" (OJS, 21 November 2022). Nonetheless, efforts are still needed to make the reform truly effective in practice. Thus, due to the continual reports of hostility being shown towards religious minorities, it is essential that similar measures are introduced in other states of the country and that affirmative actions be put

into practice by government authorities to guarantee the exercise of religious freedom in those circumstances. At the moment, the autonomy enjoyed by indigenous communities is often used as a justification for the inefficiency in resolving this type of conflict.

Economic landscape

According to the [UNDP's Human Development Report Mexico](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **Gross National Income (GNI) per capita:** 19,138 (2022)
- **GNI per capita women/men:** 13,548 (women); 25,008 (men) (2022)
- **Income inequality:** 28.4%.
- **Population vulnerable to multidimensional poverty:** 3.5%

According to the [World Bank Mexico overview](#) (last updated: 27 March 2024):

- **Economic growth:** "The Mexican economy grew by 3.2% in 2023, the second consecutive year of growth exceeding 3%, a moderation after the post-pandemic rebound."
- **Poverty:** "The official multidimensional poverty rate fell from 43.9% in 2020 to 36.3% in 2022, lifting 8.8 million Mexicans out of poverty, although extreme poverty has decreased more slowly."

According to the [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (ECLAC) report published in December 2024:

- **Informal employment:** (Page 14) "In Latin America and the Caribbean, job creation continued alongside falling regional unemployment, just as it had in 2022, in particular among groups most affected by the pandemic. In the eight countries for which data on the first half of 2023 are available, total employment increased by 2.5% compared to the first half of 2022. This trend held true across the board, although it was particularly pronounced in Argentina, Colombia and Mexico. Analysis across occupational categories shows continued expansion in those that had been most affected by the pandemic, most notably in the employers (4.6%) and domestic workers (3.9%) categories. In contrast, own-account and unpaid family work declined (-0.3% and -6.0%, respectively). Own-account work decreased most in Costa Rica, Ecuador and Paraguay, while it increased in Chile, Mexico and Colombia"

According to a report by the [Bank of Mexico](#) (Bank of Mexico, 2 May 2024):

- **Remittances:** "In March 2024, income from remittances from abroad stood at 5,021 million dollars, which represented an annual decline of 3.3%. The accumulated amount of remittance income in the first quarter of 2024 was 14,105 million dollars, which compares to the 13,972 million dollars registered in the same period of 2023 and which implied an annual increase of 1.0%. Remittances sent by residents of Mexico abroad reached a level of 122 million dollars, which represented an annual increase of 29.3%."

Corruption is a serious problem that affects the country's economy. According to INEGI, at the national level, in 2023, the [cost](#) as a result of corruption when payments, procedures or requests for public services and other contacts with authorities were made, amounted to 11,910.6 million pesos (INEGI, Encuesta Nacional de Calidad e Impacto Gubernamental, March 2024).

The Círculo de Estudios Latinoamericanos [reported](#) that in the second quarter of 2023 the Mexican economy grew 3.6% compared to the same quarter of the previous year. The increase in public spending on infrastructure has boosted private investment and growth and the unemployment rate has remained at historically low levels close to 2.8%. On the other hand, inflation has maintained a downward trend; It was 4.47% in September 2023 and 4.27% in the first half of October. (CESLA, November 2023). As a consequence of inflation, in November, the Mexican central bank [increased](#) the interest rate to 11.25%, the highest level in recent years (El País, November 2023). However, in March 2024 the interest rate was [cut](#) to 11%, despite the fact that inflation in the country was still above the target range of between 3% and 4% (El País, 21 March 2024).

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

According to the latest data available from the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy, living conditions for the indigenous population in Mexico have been [far worse](#) than for the non-indigenous population. In 2018, the percentage of the indigenous population in a situation of poverty was 69.5%, in contrast to the 39% of the non-indigenous population. Being in a situation of poverty implies receiving insufficient income to satisfy food and non-food needs and, at the same time, presents at least one social deprivation (CONEVAL, 2018). Despite all difficulties, churches have continued to provide help to the [neediest](#) in the country (Vida Nueva Digital, February 2023).

Gender perspective

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

Social and cultural landscape

Regarding indigenous communities, the Census of Population and Housing 2020 reported that 11,800,247 people live in indigenous households. However, there was a problem of census under-registration due to the COVID-19-related data collection limitations. According to the [Indigenous World 2024 Report](#), Mexico is home to 68 indigenous peoples, each speaking its own native language, which together bring together 364 variants (IWGIA, May 2024).

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

- Oaxaca (31.2%)
- Chiapas (28.2%)
- Yucatan (23.7%)
- Guerrero (15.5%)
- Hidalgo (12.3%).

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

According to the [World Factbook Mexico](#) (accessed 30 July 2024):

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

According to [World Bank Mexico data](#) (accessed 30 July 2024):

- **Education:** School enrollment for pre-primary is 71% (2020); for primary 102% (2022) and for secondary 98% (2021). The duration of compulsory education is 14 years (2023). The Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Mexico is 1.05 (2020). This is the ratio of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.
- **Unemployment:** 2.8% (2023) Modeled ILO estimate
- **IDPs/Refugees:** The refugee population is 17,642 (2022)

According to the [UNDP's Human Development Report Mexico](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **Human Development Index:** Mexico's score is 0.979
- **Life expectancy at birth:** Female, 78.2% and male, 71,5% (2022).
- **Gender inequality:** Mexico has a 2022 Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.352, ranking it 84 out of 193 countries..

- **Labor force participation rate:** 45.0% for women compared to 76.3% for men, indicating a clear gender gap)

Mexico did not experience any major reduction in inequality over the course of the 20th century. In fact, income inequality in Mexico has been extreme throughout the past and present centuries. The top 10% income share has oscillated around 55%-60% over that period, while the bottom 50% has been constant at around 8-10%, making Mexico one of the most unequal countries on earth ([World Inequality Report 2022, Mexico country sheet, p.207](#)). In the health sector, deficiencies in infrastructure and human resources have become evident. In the education sector, the digital gap became evident. In the informal employment sector, vulnerability increased, especially for indigenous communities and migrants, who suffered the most from the economic consequences of the lockdown measures.

According to the [Indicators for Education and Employment](#), in April 2024 (INEGI, 30 May 2024):

- In April 2024, the Economically Active Population (EAP) was 61.4 million people, which implied a participation rate of 60.5 percent. This population was higher than that of April 2023, by 794 thousand people. The non-economically active population (PNEA) was 40.1 million people, 318 thousand more than in the fourth month of 2023.
- The unemployed population was 1.6 million people, and the unemployment rate (TD) was 2.6% of the EAP. Compared to April 2023, the unemployed population decreased by 108 thousand people and the TD was lower by 0.2 percentage points.

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

The Migration crisis

The ongoing migration crisis is a major issue in the country. Mexico is a country of origin, transit, destination and return for mixed migratory movements from the region and from other parts of the world, especially by people seeking to reach the USA. According to the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR), the total number of [refugee applicants](#) from January to April 2024 was 30,230 mostly from Honduras, Cuba, Haití, El Salvador, Venezuela and Guatemala (COMAR, May 2024). 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 (El Siglo de Torreón, 27 March 2024).

Regarding actions to contain irregular movements of people, the The Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has [noted](#) that immigration policies such as Zero Tolerance and the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), also known as the Remain in Mexico policy, caused effects such as: i) the imposition of restrictions on the administrative and justice mechanisms available for effective access to the right to seek and receive asylum; ii) a drastic increase in the use of immigration detention, immediate and sometimes prolonged, as a tool to separate families, discourage the continuation of asylum procedures and, in general, migration towards its borders; iii) the execution of expedited deportations through simplified processes without due judicial guarantees and iv) the forced returns

of people to the Mexican side of the border, even when they are subject to immigration processes in the USA (OAS, 21 July 2023). More recently, the IACHR, in the context of a fire in a temporary migrant hostel in which around 40 people died, expressed its concern about human rights violations inside [immigration stations](#), fear of deportation, overcrowding and unsanitary conditions (IACHR, 1 May 2023).

Organizations such as Human Rights Watch have pointed out that President AMLO intensified efforts to [prevent](#) migrants from traveling through Mexico to reach the US. He deployed nearly 30,000 soldiers for immigration enforcement. Soldiers and immigration agents operate immigration checkpoints throughout the country. In May 2023, the Supreme Court ruled these checkpoints to be unconstitutional, saying they were affecting Indigenous and Afro-Mexican people disproportionately (HRW, June 2023). According to a [report](#) published in March 2024 with the title "The militarization of the National Migration Institute and its implications for human rights violations against migrants", "the federal government's narrative positions the military and other security forces as saviors of migrants. The 'rescue' of migrants, in addition to the dismantling of smuggling and trafficking networks, have built a public opinion that is strategically favorable to cover up the scenarios of human rights violations perpetrated by these state armed forces" (IBERO, March 2024).

In this scenario, the church is one of the [essential agents](#) for the care of migrant populations in the country, especially in recent months, with increasing numbers crossing the southern border. In an effort to alleviate this humanitarian crisis, church-run migrant hostels have been set up to provide food, medical care, psychological aid and legal advice, among other things (Vatican News, 6 October 2023); similar projects have been set up by evangelical churches in the border areas. In many cases, this kind of humanitarian work has put Christians at risk. Two UN Special Rapporteurs [requested](#) information from the Mexican government about the situation of Baptist Pastor Lorenzo Ortiz, who was kidnapped for ransom in June 2022. Whilst working voluntarily for more than five years in assisting migrants with shelter and food near the border between the USA and Mexico, he had been subjected to continual threats and harassment by criminal groups (Milenio, 22 January 2023). For more information, see below: Security situation. But also the abuses exercised by the National Guard or local security forces have disrupted activities of the church-run centers. Even agents from the National Migration Institute have carried out operations at places of worship that housed migrants, making [excessive](#) use of force (Debate, 1 November 2022).

Gender perspective

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

Technological landscape

According to Datareportal [Digital 2024: Mexico](#) (23 February 2024) / survey date - January 2024

- **Internet usage:** 83.2% penetration
- **Social media usage:** 70.0% of the total population
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** 97.3% of the total population

As indicated in the [GSMA 2024 Mobile Gender Gap Report](#), Women remain less likely than men to own a mobile phone in all survey countries except Kenya and Mexico, where ownership levels are similar. Mobile ownership for men is 90% and 87% for women (GSMA, 2024, p. 18-20). A Georgetown study (2023/24) found that 79% of women use cellphones ([GIWPS Mexico](#), accessed 30 July 2024). 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 being denied access to schools and electricity which, at the very least, disrupts access to Internet services (The Christian Post, 9 September 2021).

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net 2023](#) Mexico report:

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

In June 2023, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights expressed concern about the government's use of Pegasus surveillance software which violates the right to privacy enshrined in the American Convention puts at risk the integrity of journalists and activists, while increasing self-censorship in the press and discouraging work to defend human rights (IACHR 2 June 2023).

According to [Reporters Without Borders](#) (World Press Freedom 2024):

- "Mexico is one of the countries with the highest media concentrations in the world, and it is difficult for small, independent entities to carve out a place for themselves. President López Obrador and other government officials have adopted a combative and stigmatizing rhetoric towards the press, frequently accusing journalists of supporting the opposition. Collusion between officials and organized crime poses a grave threat to journalists' safety and cripples the judicial system at all levels. Journalists who cover sensitive political stories or crime, especially at the local level, are warned, threatened and then often gunned down in cold blood. Others are abducted and never seen again, or they flee to other parts of the country or abroad as the only way to ensure their survival. President López Obrador has not carried out the reforms needed to rein in this violence and impunity."

In recent years, the use of modern technology has been invaluable for churches to carry out various religious activities and disseminate information widely. However, threats to online security, violations of freedom of expression and religious freedom, are a constant challenge for carrying out some religious activities that can compromise the integrity of the participants and those who direct them. Added to this are the difficulties that exist in some areas of the country to access digital content, whether due to lack of infrastructure or availability in the native language etc.

Security situation

According to the [Security Report](#) published by the Government of Mexico, from January to April 2024 there were 8,318 intentional homicides (SEGURIDAD, May 2024). Records [indicate](#) that the 5 most dangerous states in Mexico are: Guanajuato, Estado de Mexico, Baja California, Chihuahua and Morelos (SDPNoticias, 24 November 2023). The [National Urban Public Safety Survey](#) revealed that during the first quarter of 2024, 61.0% 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 are: Fresnillo (95.4 %), Naucalpan de Juárez (89.6 %), Zacatecas (89.3 %), Chilpancingo de los Bravo (87.3 %), Cuernavaca (87.0 %) and Ciudad Obregón (86.6 %) (INEGI, April 2024).

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. Country experts reckon that some groups have a [presence](#) in most Mexican territories (El Universal, May 2024). Although then President AMLO [denied](#) such statistics (El Financiero, 22 March 2024), the government's justification for transferring the National Guard to SEDENA was - among other things - because organized crime has developed into a [quasi-military force](#) (Politica Expansion, 1 September 2022). With the escalation of violence in the last decade, criminal groups in Mexico have increasingly adopted a militarized approach in tactics and [weaponry](#) (Infobae, 30 Sep 2023).

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

Former President AMLO relied on the armed forces and the military-led National Guard to help suppress the levels of violence. However, these measures were strongly [criticized](#) because in Mexico and in surrounding countries it has been repeatedly demonstrated that, far from reducing violence, the presence of military personnel tends to increase the level of insecurity and crime (Contralinea, 28 May 2022), especially against [migrants](#) (Debate, 24 April 2023). The army and the National Guard (GN) are among the federal institutions with most accusations for potentially perpetrating human rights violations. According to the National Human Rights Violation Alert System, from January 2023 to June 2024, [465 complaints](#) were made against the National Guard for abusing human rights (CNDH, accessed 31 July 2024). The National Guard also is involved in [infrastructure](#) projects (El Financiero, 18 April 2024) and [immigration](#) (El Economista, 19 November 2023). In the 2024 budget, the armed forces have been allocated [20%](#) of the total budget of the Federal Government (Infodefensa, 24 November 2024). This expansion of responsibilities for the armed forces has led to episodes of [corruption and impunity](#) as a result of collusion between armed groups and government officials (Crisis Group, 24 May 2024).

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

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

Organized crime disrupts election periods through murders, attacks and threats against public officials and candidates. Thus, violence has become a tool for criminal groups to influence the country's public life. Not surprisingly, violence increased in the run-up to the June 2024 elections: According to information provided by [Civic Data](#), 70 incidents of political-criminal violence were recorded in April 2024 alone, taking place in the states of Guanajuato, Veracruz, Chiapas, Nuevo León, Puebla, Morelos,

Guerrero, Tabasco, Michoacán, Mexico City, Colima, Oaxaca, Baja California, Jalisco, San Luis Potosí, Mexico and Quintana Roo. From the beginning of the federal electoral period in September 2023 to the end of April 2024, 80 people related to the elections (pre-candidates, candidates and members) were attacked by criminal groups. In sum, as of 31 May 2024, 37 candidates for election were murdered, and a total of 828 non-lethal attacks against candidates were recorded. Thus, the run-up to the 2024 elections proved to be the [most violent](#) in the democratic history of Mexico (Aristegui Noticias, 31 May 2024).

As happened in the context of COVID-19 and Hurricane Lorena, the aftermath of the Hurricane Otis in Acapulco-Guerrero in October 2023 was taken advantage of by criminal cartels to [distribute](#) basic goods in affected municipalities, with the aim of demonstrating that they have taken over the role normally carried out by a state authority (Infobae, 8 November 2023). This has been done to strengthen the communities' loyalty to the criminal group and to exercise greater control over them, so that illegal practices could be continued without resistance from residents. During COVID 19, criminal groups learnt to [adapt](#) and take full advantage of mobility restrictions, corruption networks, and high levels of impunity in order to earn income through extortion (International Crisis Group, 13 November 2020), and even the illegal sale of [vaccines](#) (NTN 24, 14 January 2021).

Within this context of violence, insecurity and corruption, more and more church leaders have been [speaking out](#), calling for peace (Jornada, 6 August 2023), and trying to act as mediators between criminal groups and their communities, in order for society to attain a bearable level of security. An example of this was the [truce](#) between two drug cartels promoted by Catholic bishops and priests in Guerrero, after months full of violence (Vatican News, 7 March 2024). Another example are the efforts that Catholic Church leaders are making to maintain dialogue with drug traffickers in order to [bring peace](#) to the State of Mexico (Milenio, 19 February 2024). Various sectors of civil society have made [accusations](#) against these initiatives, suspecting possible church collusion with criminal groups (Infobae, 11 March 2024).

Many church leaders receive death threats, especially those involved in politics and social activities. There have been an increasing number of reports involving the [extortion](#) of Christian leaders (La Jornada Zacatecas, 4 March 2024). In 2024, evangelical church leaders reported the [closure](#) of numerous evangelical churches in recent months to safeguard the safety of their pastors and parishioners in the face of the wave of violence in the municipalities of the Sierra de Chiapas. Pastors and their families have had to flee their homes and take refuge in the mountains to avoid being caught up in clashes between rival cartels (El Sol de México, February 17, 2024). It appears that members of criminal groups particularly target church personnel in order to [rise in rank](#) in the drug cartels and hinder any pastoral work from being carried out in their communities (Infocatólica, 4 October 2022). The level of brutality against church workers 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).

Besides the [kidnappings](#) (La Jornada, 30 April 2024) and [killings](#) of Christians (Moviendo ideas, 20 February 2024), church buildings have often been targeted for [vandalism](#) (El Universal, 7 October 2023) and [theft](#) (Diario de Yucatán, 21 February 2024), in some cases Christian leaders have been discouraged from reporting thefts due to the lack of will on the part of the authorities to investigate for criminal prosecution. Also, Christian leaders that help victims of violence and Christian organizations providing

humanitarian assistance have faced [violent intimidation](#) (Infobae, 18 October 2023). Many of these organizations cannot carry out their activities without authorization from the local criminal group in control.

A July 2022 [report](#) was published by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants to the government of Mexico. The rapporteurs requested information regarding the kidnapping of Baptist Pastor Lorenzo Ortiz and the risks facing him in his work supporting the rights of migrants (Srdefenders, 5 October 2022). Christian migrant shelters are also exposed to violence from organized crime groups. For instance, the Institute Madre Asunta shelter, run by the Scalabrinian Sisters and located in Tijuana has had to take [extreme measures](#) for the protection and security of their staff and the migrants who stayed in the facilities (Global Sister Report, 19 February 2024). Also, in Tijuana, there has been a constant arrival of displaced people with a verifiable risk, due to threats from cartels to the Ágape shelter facilities; for this reason other migrants [avoid](#) the place, fearing armed attack. Pastor Alberto Rivera, Director of the institution, explained that the number of families that come to the shelter to request help has decreased; currently there are only 120 migrants there but there is capacity for 800 (El Universal, 27 January 2023).

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 the past, they were [harshly criticized](#) by AMLO to the point of being called "hypocrites", among other things. Also, for their comments about the country's security, religious leaders have been accused of interfering in political affairs (Vanguardia, 4 July 2023). Likewise, Christian human rights activists and conflict mediators are being [treated as criminals](#) by state authorities when they refuse to accept agreements which include aspects of corruption (El País, 8 July 2022). There have also been [incidents](#) of priests being harassed and accused by authorities for alleged acts of violence during their missionary work in indigenous communities (COPE, 15 July 2022). Churches have continued to support the [migrant community](#) (Aciprensa, 18 May 2023), however government officials have deliberately [disrupted](#) many church-run humanitarian activities (Jornada, 1 November 2022).

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

Gender perspective

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

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

Christian origins

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

Church spectrum today

Mexico: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	132,000	0.1
Catholic	116,675,000	94.7
Protestant	6,454,000	5.2
Independent	8,924,000	7.2
Unaffiliated	1,597,000	1.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-10,517,000	-8.5
Total	123,265,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,863,000	2.3
Pentecostal-Charismatic	17,841,000	14.5

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

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. **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".

The largest Christian denomination in Mexico is the Roman Catholic Church, representing 94.7% of all Christians according to WCD 2024 estimates. It means an increase of 2.8% in comparison with the

previous record. It could be explained by the more notorious social activism of its religious leaders on topics such as: human rights, respect of democratic rules, migrants, national security, peace, family and life. Protestant and evangelical churches continue being an important sector of the Church, especially in rural areas. Pentecostal churches continue to be influential in society, especially in the political context.

Further useful reports

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

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

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Mexico>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Latin-America-Organized-corruption-and-crime-2018.pdf>

External Links

- Recent history: collusion - <https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/nacional/2021/05/13/frena-denuncia-penalmente-a-amlo/>
- Recent history: abuse - <https://elpais.com/mexico/2023-03-21/lopez-obrador-tacha-el-informe-de-ee-uu-sobre-abusos-de-las-fuerzas-de-seguridad-en-mexico-de-pura-politiqueria.html>
- Recent history: lost - <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/reaction-mexicos-midterm-elections-changes-the-balance-of-power/>
- Recent history: host - <https://www.gob.mx/sre/en/articulos/mexico-to-host-the-negotiations-and-dialogue-between-the-government-of-venezuela-and-the-unitary-platform-of-venezuela-280825?idiom=en>
- Recent history: November 2022 - <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/en-espanol/noticias/story/2023-04-03/colombia-busca-reanudacion-de-dialogo-venezolano-en-mexico>
- Recent history: agreements - <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/c72lvn58d47o>
- Recent history: declared - <https://elpais.com/mexico/2023-05-22/el-congreso-de-peru-declara-a-lopez-obrador-persona-non-grata-y-profundiza-la-crisis-bilateral-con-colombia.html>
- Recent history: conclude - <https://busquedas.elperuano.pe/dispositivo/NL/2155130-1>
- Recent history: visa - <https://embamex.sre.gob.mx/peru/index.php/sconsulares/visas>
- Recent history: breaking of - <https://mision.sre.gob.mx/oea/index.php/comunicados/48-comunicados-2024/967-mexico-rompe-relaciones-diplomaticas-con-ecuador-tras-ataque-a-su-embajada-06-abr-24>
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