

World  
Watch  
Research

## Mexico: Full Country Dossier

January 2022



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Woman from an indigenous community in southwestern Mexico (c) Open Doors International

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

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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 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- 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).

## Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

## External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

# WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Mexico

## Brief country details

Mexico: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
135,384,000	129,627,000	95.7

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

## Map of country



Mexico: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	65	43
WWL 2021	64	37
WWL 2020	60	52
WWL 2019	61	39
WWL 2018	59	39

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Mexico: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Organized corruption and crime	Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials, Political parties
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, Political parties

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

## Brief description of the persecution situation

The increasing presence of criminal groups of different backgrounds and the struggle for territorial control causes Christians and church leaders living in affected areas to face a constant risk of being targeted. This occurs wherever Christians are perceived as being a threat to criminal operations and disregard 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. Elsewhere, intolerance of the Christian faith is increasing, especially when Christians openly express their faith-based views on issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, parental rights and religious liberty. Non-discrimination laws promoted by ideological pressure groups (and the government officials who support them) mean that any links between Christian faith and politics are placed under very 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 2021, Mexico City:** During a march in which feminists were demanding access to "safe and legal abortion", a mob of women [attempted](#) to burn down the Cathedral in Mexico City. Arriving at the Zócalo or Plaza de la Constitución, the feminists headed towards the fences surrounding the Cathedral, threw objects and set fire to different points. They also painted graffiti such as "paedophiles" and "legal abortion" and chanted slogans against the Church in general (Aciprensa, 29 September 2021).
- **July 2021, Chiapas:** Pedro Pérez López, a Catholic catechist and member of the Organización Sociedad Civil Las Abejas de Acteal (an organization which was created to demand justice after the massacre of 45 indigenous people in the church of the Acteal community in 1997), was [assassinated](#) by a shot in the head when he was accompanied by his son to do some shopping at the market in the municipality of Simojovel de Allende. A local priest said the attack was carried out by a drug trafficking gang in the area (Infobae, 6 July 2021).
- **July 2021, Xalapa:** After the vote in the Veracruz Congress to decriminalize abortion, feminist groups gathered in the center of the city where they [vandalized](#) the walls and doors of the Cathedral. This state became the fourth Federal Entity to allow free abortion on demand up to 12 weeks of pregnancy (Catolin, 20 July 2021).
- **June 2021, Chiapas:** Since January 2021, approximately 30 evangelical Christians, including a pastor, comprising 5 families, were imprisoned for not professing the same faith (Catholic syncretism) as the "Tzotzil" ethnic group and were subsequently expelled from the community. In June 2021, the 5 houses on his property were demolished and burned in [reaction](#) to the pastor's visit to his sick mother (El Heraldo de Chiapas, 18 June 2021).
- **November 2020, Chiapas:** Catholic NGO Caritas was attacked while delivering humanitarian aid by a paramilitary group in the community of Tabak, Aldama, Chiapas. As a result, the nun María Isabel Hernández Rea was [shot](#) in the right leg and had to be treated in hospital. Caritas San Cristobal de Las Casas and the Mexican Trust for the Health of Indigenous Children (FISANIM) were delivering food and aid to displaced families. Although only one nun was wounded, those accompanying her were threatened at gunpoint (Agenzia Fides, 20 November 2020).



## Specific examples of positive developments

- Due to [state inefficiency](#) and scarce resources during the COVID-19 crisis, Christian groups cooperated with other sectors of society to bring food and aid to people in need (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 8 April 2020).
- For many, the importance of the religious dimension of life became increasingly evident during the COVID-19 crisis. Not only was material help offered by church groups but also much-needed spiritual support for the sick and vulnerable. Activities such as prayer chains and fasts were organized, with denominational differences playing little role in many cases.
- Recently, more and more church leaders are daring to speak out about the restrictions they encounter in carrying out their ministry, whether due to criminal groups or other factors. Such advocacy highlights in particular the [vulnerability](#) of Christian leaders in the face of spiraling violence (Amerindia, 9 July 2021).

## 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: attempted - <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/violentas-feministas-intentan-quemar-catedral-de-mexico-50908>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: assassinated - <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2021/07/06/asesinaron-a-simon-pedro-perez-lopez-defensor-de-derechos-humanos/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: vandalized - <https://www.catolin.com/feministas-vandalizan-la-catedral-de-xalapa-despues-de-la-aprobacion-de-iniciativa-pro-aborto.php>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: reaction - <https://www.elheraldodechiapas.com.mx/local/municipios/encarcelan-a-evangelicos-y-destruyen-su-vivienda-en-mitziton-6859429.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: shot - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/69072-AMERICA\\_MEXICO\\_Religious\\_woman\\_injured\\_in\\_attack\\_on\\_humanitarian\\_workers\\_We\\_do\\_not\\_want\\_any\\_more\\_suffering](http://www.fides.org/en/news/69072-AMERICA_MEXICO_Religious_woman_injured_in_attack_on_humanitarian_workers_We_do_not_want_any_more_suffering)
- Specific examples of positive developments: state inefficiency - <https://www.csis.org/analysis/mexican-governments-response-covid-19-insufficient>
- Specific examples of positive developments: vulnerability - <https://amerindiaenlared.org/contenido/19965/la-diocesis-de-san-cristobal-de-las-casas-levanta-su-voz-ante-la-espiral-de-violencia-en-chiapas/>

# WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Mexico

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/north-america/mexico/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/north-america/mexico/</a>	20 August 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18095241">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18095241</a>	20 August 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-MEX.html">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-MEX.html</a>	20 August 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mexico/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mexico/</a>	20 August 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020 (page 37)	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf</a>	20 August 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	20 August 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index (Mexico is not included)	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/mexico/freedom-world/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/mexico/freedom-world/2021</a>	20 August 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2021 report	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/mexico/freedom-net/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/mexico/freedom-net/2021</a>	13 January 2022
Garda World country report	Garda World	<a href="https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/mexico">https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/mexico</a>	20 August 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/mexico">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/mexico</a>	20 August 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/central.htm#mx">https://www.internetworldstats.com/central.htm#mx</a>	20 August 2021
RSF's 2021 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2021	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/mexico">https://rsf.org/en/mexico</a>	20 August 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/mex">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/mex</a>	20 August 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI 2020	<a href="http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MEX">http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MEX</a>	20 August 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mexico/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mexico/</a>	20 August 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports (Mexico is not included)	USCIRF 2021	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/countries">https://www.uscirf.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank country report	World Bank	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mexico">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mexico</a>	20 August 2021

## 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-trafficking leaders (El Financiero, 13 May 2021), [abuse of authority](#) (Expansión Política, 1 July 2021) and human rights [violations](#) (Eje Central, 8 April 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).

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 the economy over health, 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. As of November 2021, the average monthly survey on presidential approval conducted by MITOFSKY revealed that he had a [65%](#) approval rating after three years in office (Mitofsky, 30 November 2021). AMLO has been criticized for his inefficient handling of the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, added to the economic crisis and the increased insecurity. According to the [Rule of Law Index](#) 2021, Mexico's worst score was in the “absence of corruption” category. Other problematic areas continue to be those of justice, security and regulatory enforcement (World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2021).

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, as stated above, after the [mid-term legislative elections](#) held in June 2021, AMLO's party lost many seats on 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). Additionally, MORENA lost power in the capital districts, but [won](#) 11 out of 15 government states offices (People's world, 14 June 2021).

It is important to mention that the June 2021 elections were marked by a strong [social polarization](#) around the figure of the president (Fronteras, 24 April 2021), an escalation of [political violence](#) against candidates, government officials and former government officials (Noria Research, July 2021) and attempts to restrict the [freedom of expression](#) of the media most critical of the government (Human Rights Watch, 14 April 2021). For more details, see below: *Security situation*. This has led some sectors of civil society to begin to 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, 04 June 2021). AMLO has [concentrated](#) power in the Executive Branch (Expansión Política, 25 May 2021), has taken control of energy agencies and has imple-

mented restrictive [market competition measures](#) (Bloomberg, 29 April 2021), in addition to trying to implement radical constitutional reforms that weaken autonomous institutions like the National Electoral Institute - [INE](#) (Americas Quarterly, 14 April 2021) or the National Institute of Access to Information – [INAI](#) (The Washington Post, 14 May 2021). He 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) (El país, 17 June 2021).

The MORENA party's loss of representatives in the Legislative Branch is i) seen as positive by those concerned about [democratic stability](#) in the country (The Wall Street Journal, 4 June 2021), and ii) a warning to AMLO if he wishes to retain his political allies, continue with his [reforms](#) and win the 2024 elections (Los Angeles Times, 31 May 2021). Winning the 2024 election does not seem to be an option for parties with a lot of social support, 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).

The Church has not been oblivious to the electoral process and the political tension that exists in the country. On more than one occasion, government authorities have tried to [prevent](#) church leaders from making a public appeal to voters to respect democracy and the preservation of Christian values when electing new representatives. The authorities argue that such appeals violate Church-State separation since church leaders are thereby interfering in the political scene (El Imparcial, 5 June 2021). Despite criticism, [government accusations](#) (Aciprensa, 6 October 2020) and attempts to [manipulate](#) religious language by some political actors (Heraldo de Mexico, 14 December 2020), the Church has stood firm in its call for [dialogue](#) (Agenzia Fides, 8 June 2021), [unity](#) (International Observatory of Religious Freedom, 17 May 2021), respect for the [Rule of Law](#) (El Sol de Mexico, 15 April 2021) and its condemnation of all forms of [violence](#) (Agenzia Fides, 22 March 2021).

Other issues to note:

- During the electoral campaign, two political parties were fined for violating the [principle of State-Church separation](#) when they used religious symbols as part of their political campaign (Centro UC Derecho and Religion, 16 June 2021) and when their defense of a position against [abortion](#) was deemed to be a form of hate-speech towards women (MVS Noticias, 15 July 2021).
- The year 2021 has been a period of intense legislative debate at the state and federal level concerning issues such as:
  - [decriminalization of abortion](#) (Gaceta UNAM, 13 September 2021)
  - authorization for the [recreational use](#) of marijuana (CNN, 29 June 2021)
  - [same-sex marriage](#) (Milenio, 23 September 2021)
  - the [conscientious objection](#) of doctors regarding abortion (Catholic News Agency, 21 September 2021)
  - the [extension](#) of the deadline to 20 weeks to perform an abortion in case of rape (La República, 30 April 2021)

- the introduction of [legal consequences](#) for church leaders and preachers where their speech is considered discriminatory (Proceso, 2 April 2021)
- the annulling of birth certificate [gender information](#) (Fernanda Familiar, 15 October 2020).

In addition, other government action coming into force included the [creation](#) of a separate police unit for the LGBT+ community (Central Municipal, 4 April 2021) and the [obligation](#) to include LGBT+ representatives on electoral lists (Actual, 11 February 2021).

Due to the lack of guarantees in the electoral process in Nicaragua and threats against opposition politicians, the Mexican government decided to call its ambassador back for [consultation](#). Mexico had not previously participated in the OAS resolution condemning the threats against democracy in Nicaragua (El Financiero, 21 June 2021).

The “Migration Protection Protocols” (MPP) frequently referenced as “Remain in Mexico”; a US policy implemented in 2019 is still in force. The policy means asylum seekers arriving at ports of entry on the US-Mexican border will be [returned to](#) Mexico to wait for the duration of their US immigration proceedings (Latin America working group, October 2021). Catholic organizations have sent letters to the presidents of Mexico and the USA [urging them to end](#) this policy (Border Report, 9 December 2021).

The USA works closely with the Mexican government and international partners to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and reduce secondary economic effects in both countries. The US administration has [sent](#) a total of 5.82 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Mexico as of August 2021 (US Department of State, 16 September 2021).

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](#) (2021), 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, Boletín No. 133/2019).

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 (HRW 2021) however, protection is inadequate. 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	129,627,000	95.7
Muslim	130,000	0.1
Hindu	12,200	0.0
Buddhist	31,000	0.0
Ethno-religionist	1,407,000	1.0
Jewish	40,000	0.0
Bahai	46,800	0.0
Atheist	154,000	0.1
Agnostic	3,898,000	2.9
Other	38,400	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 2021)

Following WCD figures, Christians make up 95.7% of the population of the country, an estimated 3% of the population identify themselves as agnostic/atheist; however, according to the [official figures](#) of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography - INEGI, 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, also 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 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 2020), each of the 32 states has offices 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.



The extension and implementation of the principle of Church-State separation continues to be a challenge for religious groups in the country. On the one hand, AMLO [declared](#) himself to be Christian just two days before the last elections (El País, 4 June 2021), and on the other hand, he and other [government authorities](#) (El Universal, 06 June 2021) have repeatedly tried to prevent the Church from speaking out on public affairs, especially during the period of [election campaigning](#) (Jornada, 4 June 2021), on the grounds that it is an [interference](#) in political life and a violation of State-Church separation (El Imparcial, 6 May 2021). However, after receiving a government [warning](#), the archdiocese of Mexico City issued a statement in May 2021 defending the Church's right to speak out on public issues (Crux Now, 4 May 2021). It is worth mentioning that civil society organizations have criticized government measures without punishment, but as soon as church leaders speak in support of the neediest in society, they are immediately [accused](#) of supporting the opposition (Aciprensa, 6 October 2020).

Many Christian groups that initially supported the president, such as [CONFRATERNICE](#) (Alliance of Evangelical Churches), have since become less keen (Imdosoc, 22 January 2021). As explained above (see: *Political Landscape*), the ruling party's political interests in favor of abortion, euthanasia, censorship of religious leaders, same-sex marriage, modification of the Law on Religious Affairs etc. has caused some churches to withdraw their support for the AMLO government.

Churches in the country have actively contributed to [reducing](#) the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and help those in need (Vatican News, 13 February 2021), emphasized the importance of the [vaccination](#) program (Aciprensa, 05 July 2021) and have given humanitarian support to the most vulnerable, especially [migrants](#) (Agenzia Fides, 21 September 2021). However, the running and maintenance of churches have been strongly affected by the [economic crisis](#) (Diario de Queretaro, 1 February 2021). As of September 2021, the [epidemic risk traffic light](#) strategy was still in place to determine what activities are allowed or not, including religious services (Mexico City Government, September 2021).

Churches have also experienced intolerance from radical ideological groups and criminal groups. Ideological pressure groups have continued targeting Christian values by trying to officially marginalize [faith-based](#) views (Proceso, 2 April 2021). They have demanded that church leaders should not get involved in public debates on issues relating to [abortion](#) (Moreliamix, 17 July 2021), [same-sex marriage](#) (Manati, 13 January 2021) and comprehensive sex education, etc. There have even been attempts to censor [politicians](#) who give their faith-based points of views or who publicly defend Christian values (Evangelico Digital, 20 July 2021). Actions by ideological pressure groups have become increasingly aggressive as can be seen in the incidents involving [vandalism](#) of Christian property (Crux, 11 March 2020), which has made the maintenance of places of worship even more difficult. Faced with acts of vandalism from radical feminist groups, Christian leaders have seen the need to file [complaints](#) with the authorities (Meganews, 22 February 2021). During 2020 and 2021, some Mexican states approved reforms to [criminalize](#) "conversion therapies" for considering them as activities that go against free self-determination in matters of gender (El Sol de Puebla, 19 October 2021). This means that church leaders or Christian groups can face legal action if they offer support to any person who - even willingly - wants to deal with gender identity or sexual orientation issues from a Christian perspective.



In the current reporting period, A deputy of the MORENA parliamentary group presented in October 2020 a bill seeking to [reform](#) section IV of Article 29, corresponding to the chapter on infractions and sanctions of the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship (Gaceta Parlamentaria, 13 Octubre 2020). The proposal sought to expressly sanction religious associations and ministers of worship whose teachings or expressions discriminate the sexual identity or gender expression of people. In addition, government institutions, such as the National Council based on to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) have continued to call the attention of Christians and Christian leaders, asking them to avoid hate-speech or anything that limits women's rights when they make public statements based on biblical values concerning life from conception or marriage. The National Electoral Institute is also one of the institutions that monitors church leaders [to prevent](#) them making public opinions relating to electoral processes (El Universal, 06 June 2021). The Mexican Supreme Court declared [invalid](#) an article of the general health law that enshrined conscientious objection 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.

#### **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. 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: *Clan oppression*.)

Christians of non-accepted church groups in localities such as [Chiapas](#) (Evangelical Focus, 18 January 2021) and [Hidalgo](#) (CSW, 17 March 2021), 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.

## Economic landscape

As in most countries in the region, Mexico has sought to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus through social isolation measures and restrictions on travel. These measures have had a serious impact on the production and marketing chains, have caused the closure and massive bankruptcy of companies, and have generated enormous cuts in personnel and decreases in wages. According to official information provided by INEGI, until March 2021, the crisis surrounding the pandemic had affected 85% of Mexican companies, 73.8% of which had suffered a significant [decrease](#) in their incomes (El Financiero, 31 May 2021). However, experts attribute some of this downturn to mismanagement by AMLO's administration in the last 3 years and classify 2020 as [the worst](#) economic situation in Mexico for 86 years (Forbes, 30 December 2020).

According to the [UNDP's full 2020 report](#) (page 357):

- **Gross National Income (GNI) per capita:** 19,160 (2019)
- **GNI per capita women/men:** 12,765 (women); 25,838 (men)
- **Income inequality:** 33.4%.
- **Population vulnerable to multidimensional poverty:** 4.7%

According to World Bank:

- **Poverty:** Over the last three decades Mexico has underperformed in terms of growth, inclusion, and poverty reduction compared to similar countries. The incidence rate of poverty based on the national poverty line corresponded to 41.9 % of the population in 2018, while in 2016 the poverty line corresponded to 43.6% of the population.

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 the Bank of Mexico ([BBVA, 14 July 2021](#)):

- **Remittances:** Remittances to Mexico increased by 11.4% in 2020, and are forecast to grow 21.7% by 2021, to 49,400 million dollars. Only China and India surpass Mexico in the amounts of remittances received.

The Círculo de Estudios Latinoamericanos reported that the economy has gone through a phase of accelerated recovery during the first half of 2021. However, in the absence of domestic stimulus, it began to [slow down](#), with growth of 7.58% and 3.73% in July and August (CESLA, November 2021). With the slowdown in the US recovery and its industrial activity in July and August 2021, Mexican exports slowed down as well.

The economic crisis has also affected Christian activities. In the case of the Catholic Church, because of church closures and the suspension of religious services, many churches have been [unable](#) to pay staff salaries, basic services, maintenance, etc. (Expansion, 11 February 2021). Despite the economic difficulties, Christian groups have managed to be a [reliable channel](#) for the distribution of food, medicines and aid to the needy (Vatican News, 5 July 2021). In the case of Protestant churches, according to Open Doors research, during 2020 35% of the churches closed down due to not having the means to pay rent for their premises. In many rural churches, pastors had no income since there were no offerings or tithes due to the economic crisis surrounding the COVID -19 pandemic.

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 ([Borgen Project, 2018](#)). 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 Intercensal Survey 2015 reported that 12 million people live in indigenous households - [10.6%](#) of the population (CDI, 2015) and [21.5%](#) of the population self-identifies as indigenous (INEGI, 2015). The indigenous population which makes up around 68 communities, is mainly located in rural areas along the country's southern border (Oaxaca, Yucatan, and Chiapas) and central-western area (Hidalgo, Guerrero, Puebla, and Jalisco). Due to their geographical location, they 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 (CIDH, 27 April 2021). Very significantly, because the indigenous communities enjoy autonomy, they are governed by their own 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: 92.7%; Spanish and indigenous languages: 5.7%; indigenous only: 0.8%; unspecified 0.8%; note -indigenous languages include various Mayan, Nahuatl, and other regional languages (2005 est.)
- **Urban population:** 81% of total population (2021)
- **Literacy rate:** Total population 95.2%. Male 96.1% and female 94.5% (2020)

According to World Bank:

- **Education:** School enrollment for pre-primary is 70.969 (2019); for primary 104.656 (2019) and for secondary 104.647% (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:** 4.71% (2020) Modeled ILO estimate
- **IDPs/Refugees:** The refugee population is 15,408 (2020). 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 (IACHR, January 2021). According to the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance - COMAR, the total number of refugee applicants from January to November 2021 was [123,187](#), mostly from Honduras, El Salvador, Cuba, Venezuela, Haiti, Guatemala and Nicaragua (COMAR, December 2021). However: "The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the [exacerbation of xenophobia and unemployment](#), as well as limiting access to health services for the migrant population in Mexico" (Jornada, 19 February 2021).

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI 2020):

- **Human Development Index:** Mexico's score is 0.779, which puts the country in the high human development category, positioning it at rank 74 out of 189 countries and territories. This is above the average of 0.753 for countries in the high human development group and above the average of 0.766 for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Between 1990 and 2019, Mexico's HDI value increased from 0.656 to 0.779, a sustained growth of 18.8%.
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 75.1 years. From 1990 to 2019, Mexico's life expectancy at birth increased by 4.2 years.
- **Gender inequality:** Mexico has a 2019 Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.322, ranking it 71 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, material 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. In view of this scenario, the President of Mexico announced before the UN Security Council that his country intends to propose to the General Assembly a [World Plan for Fraternity and Well-being](#) (UN News, 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.

Mexican churches have focused on helping the neediest communities in the country, which became evident during the COVID-19 crisis. Also, church leaders have continued to [call for](#) respect for the rights of migrants and for their international protection (Vatican News, 25 July 2021). 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*).

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 ([OECD iLibrary, 2017](#)). 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 ([UN Women, 26 July 2018](#)). Nonetheless, domestic violence and violence towards women remain high and have reportedly been exacerbated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ([Thomson Reuters, 25 January 2021](#)).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

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

According to World Bank (country profile):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 96 per 100 people.

As indicated in the [GSMA's 2020 Mobile Gender Gap Report](#) (accessed 20 August 2021), the gender gap in relation to mobile ownership is minimal, with 84% of women owning a mobile compared to 86% of men. There is no difference in mobile internet use. A [Georgetown study \(2019/20\)](#) found that Mexico was in the top ten countries that had demonstrated the biggest improvement to cellphone inclusion. This indicates that female and male Christians have equal access to digital Christian resources and community networks.

According to the [National Survey](#) on the Availability and Use of Information Technologies in Households (ENDUTIH), in 2020, there were 88.2 million cell phone users - 75.5% of the population aged six and over. In 2019 the proportion was 75.1% (i.e. 86.5 million users) (INEGI, June 2021).

According to Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2021:

- Mexico ranks as a "partly free" country (score 60).
- Problems include manipulation of content, coordinated attacks against 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 2021):

- Mexico is one of the world's more dangerous countries for the media and ranks 143rd out of 180 countries. Due to a deeper spiral of violence and impunity, journalists who cover sensitive political stories or crime, especially at the local level, are warned, threat-

ened, kidnapped, and then often gunned down in cold blood. Ownership of the broadcast media is limited to just two media groups: Televisa and TV-Azteca own almost all the TV channels and the many community broadcast media are often persecuted for using frequencies for which they have been unable to obtain licenses.

During the COVID-19 crisis, Christian leaders and churches have made use of the technological resources at their disposal to continue carrying out their activities. Church services, biblical training and prayer days, etc. have been 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

Between 1 December 2018 and 30 September 2021, [100,344](#) violent deaths were recorded: 97,532 intentional homicides and 2,812 feminicides. 2021 is the third most violent year in a row (Expansión, 21 October 2021). In 2020 alone, violence in Mexico reached [record levels](#) and murders increased in 11 of the 33 states (Animal Político, 29 December 2020). The National Urban Public Safety Survey indicated that by September 2021 [64.5%](#) of the population 18 years of age and older considered it unsafe to live in their city (INEGI, 19 October 2021). The cities with the highest proportion of the population feeling insecure were Fresnillo, Ciudad Obregón, Irapuato, Coahuila de Zaragoza, Naucalpan de Juárez and Zacatecas.

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 seven organizations as dominant ([Congressional Research Service, 28 July 2020](#)):

- Sinaloa, Los Zetas
- Tijuana/AFO, Juárez/CFO
- Beltrán Leyva
- Gulf
- La Familia Michoacana
- The Knights Templar
- Cartel Jalisco Nuevo Generación (CJNG)

These are well-established Mexican drug trafficking organizations that go back many years. However, many have now fragmented into smaller groups. With groups having a presence throughout the country, it is estimated that they have [complete control](#) of 30-35% of Mexican territory (The Yucatan Times, 22 March 2021). However, President AMLO denies such statistics.

President AMLO has relied on the armed forces and a military-led [National Guard](#) to help suppress the levels of violence (American Society Council of the Americas, 17 July 2019). 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 (Business Insider, 12 May 2020), especially against [migrants](#) (Nexos, 25 October, 2021). The army and the National Guard



(GN) remain two of the 10 federal institutions with the most complaints of possible human rights violations. According to the CNDH, from January 2019 to June 2021, there have been 1,654 such [complaints](#) against the army and the National Guard (El Economista, 08 August 2021).

According to the [Global Peace Index 2021](#) published by the Institute of Economics and Peace (page 15, accessed 20 August 2021):

- "Mexico is the largest and most populous country in Central America, and it remains the least peaceful country in the region. Mexico recorded a 1.9 per cent deterioration in peacefulness on the 2021 GPI. There was a slight deterioration in political instability, as the past year saw an increase in the deployment of federal troops internally, increases in allegations of political corruption against government officials, and an increase in violence against journalists and political candidates. Despite some falls in interpersonal violence in Mexico owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the level of violence in the country remains extremely high, with Mexico having the ninth highest homicide rate in the world in 2018. The five cities with the highest homicide rates in the world are also all in Mexico. However, organised crime improved over the past year, with a 2.9 per cent fall, according to the 2021 Mexico Peace Index."

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, criminal cartels have become agents in charge of providing "[assistance](#)" through the delivery of food supplies and medicine to the inhabitants of the communities under their control (Infobae, 7 April 2020). However, this is done to strengthen the communities' loyalty and to exercise greater control over them, so that they can continue their illegal practices without resistance from residents. Furthermore, criminal groups have [mutated](#) and adapted to 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 politically polarized campaign, with candidates, local officials, journalists and activists being targeted (Open Democracy, 10 June 2021).

Within this context of violence and insecurity, some church leaders try to act as mediators between criminal groups and their communities, in order to reach a bearable level of peace. Despite this, many church leaders receive [death threats](#), especially those with greater involvement in politics and social activities (La Region en Linea, 5 October 2020). There have been cases of extortion, [forced displacement](#) (Swissinfo, 31 May 2021), kidnappings and [killings](#) (CCM, 29 March 2021). Linked to this, [churches have often been targeted](#) for vandalism and theft (El Imparcial, 20 May 2021). Christian organizations dedicated to providing humanitarian assistance to those most in need have been intimidated with violence when refusing to pay "protection fees", for instance. Many of these organizations could not carry out their activities without authorization from the local criminal group in control.



Also, in the WWL 2022 reporting period, members and groups related to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation have been making attempts to advance their revolutionary movement through exploiting the situation of the indigenous population and with activities related to the [forced recruitment](#) of children (El Pais, 11 April 2021). However, they have also been victims of attacks made by [paramilitary groups](#) accused of complicity with the government (Avispa, 14 January 2021).

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 identified by these groups, often abducted and raped. 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 principle 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 ([CSIS, 2020](#)). 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) Organized crime influences political and social life

The direct influence of the various factions of criminal groups is visible both in political policies and in the daily life of Mexicans, especially after taking advantage of the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The interests of criminal groups continue to destabilize weak, local and federal attempts to address social violence and increase citizens' distrust in their authorities. Thus, the Church becomes more vulnerable in the crossfire between criminal groups and between them and the government when it raises its voice against corruption and violence.

### 2) The autonomy of indigenous communities poses a risk for Christians

Government authorities respect the autonomy given to indigenous communities and distance themselves from internal affairs. Ethnic leaders thus feel empowered to defend their community identity and punish anyone refusing to participate in the community's ancestral customs and syncretistic practices (sometimes related to Catholicism). This particularly affects community members belonging to non-accepted church groups. State intervention in these cases is minimal and ineffective.

### 3) Radical secularist groups are becoming more aggressive

The intolerance and social polarization promoted by radical secularist groups that attempt to displace and invalidate faith-based opinions, as well as the positions of church leaders on issues such as life, marriage and family, has become more evident and frequent. However, what is most concerning is that such intolerance is increasingly taking on a violent character and targeting virtually any expression of Christian faith. The resulting intimidation increases the tendency for Christians to self-censor, especially at work and in academic contexts.

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## WWL 2022: 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	124,000	0.1
Catholic	116,536,000	89.9
Protestant	5,727,000	4.4
Independent	8,488,000	6.5
Unaffiliated	1,589,000	1.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-2,837,000	-2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>129,627,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,841,000	2.2
Renewalist movement	17,669,000	13.6

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

**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 89.9% of all Christians according to WCD 2021 estimates, losing 0.2% affiliation in comparison to WCD 2020 figures. Protestant churches are gaining in strength, especially in rural areas of the country. Pentecostal churches are becoming more influential, especially in the political context.



# WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Mexico

## Reporting period

1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

## Position on the World Watch List

Mexico: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	65	43
WWL 2021	64	37
WWL 2020	60	52
WWL 2019	61	39
WWL 2018	59	39

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

Mexico's score increased by one point, the fall in rank (compared to WWL 2021) being irrelevant to the worsening situation in the country. Christians in indigenous communities continued to face hostility, and religious intolerance increased in society in general, driven by radical ideological groups. 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 political and COVID-19 crises in order to expand their areas of control.

## 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 2020) ranks Mexico 124th out of 180 countries, with a 31/100 score (0= highly corrupt and 100= very clean). As mentioned above (see: *Security situation*), 2021 was the third most violent year in a row, judged by the number of violent deaths. In the WWL 2021 reporting period, the government's plan to control violence using military force proved to be ineffective. The high levels of impunity and corruption have led commentators to call Mexico a "[narco-state](#)" (Los Angeles Times, 31 July 2021) . 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 (Narco Data, June 2021). These factors mean that there is continual warfare between groups, causing a [spiral](#) of violence (El País, 2 July 2021). Some communities have formed [self-defense groups](#) (CNN, 30 January 2020) 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) and legitimize their illegal activities. "Narco" cartels have demonstrated their great capacity to [adapt](#) during the COVID crisis and now rank as some of the most influential groups in the world (Insight Crime, 23 March 2021).

Christians, who inform the authorities of illegal operations, act as human rights defenders or who are involved in providing humanitarian assistance to those most affected by COVID-19, are considered a threat to the interests of criminal groups. They can quickly become targets for all sorts of reprisals, [attacks](#) (Agenzia Fides, 20 November 2021), surveillance, [break-ins and robberies](#) to their workplaces and homes (Forbes, 3 February 2021), [death threats](#) (La Región en Línea, 5 October 2020), kidnapping attempts, and even [killings](#) (Infobae, 6 July 2021). Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, churches have been targeted for robbery and sometimes church staff have been injured in the process and/or [extorted](#) (El imparcial, 20 May 2021). Such acts of intimidation forced many church members to stop attending church activities even [before](#) the appearance of COVID-19 in the country (Excelsior, 27 November 2020).

### **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](#) (NVNoticias, 6 January 2020), fines, isolation, the blocking of basic community services, imprisonment, beatings and the [destruction](#) of Christian property (Evangelical Focus, 18 January 2021).

In the context of COVID-19 crisis, the situation has [worsened](#) since indigenous converts without access to basic services risk infection by not being able to follow basic sanitary measures (CSW, 7 April 2020). Some indigenous converts have been unable to receive state aid since they are no longer viewed as members of the ethnic group during aid distribution. Some have also been put under pressure to attend traditional healing rituals, even though these are contrary to their Christian belief. At times, such Christians from non-accepted church groups have been blamed for the spread of the virus due to their contact with people outside the community during their religious gatherings. The risk of reprisals against such Christians is great and there has been no possibility for them to escape due to the COVID-19 closure of internal borders. They have also been forced to use traditional medicines and bury their dead according to indigenous rites.

Through the State Commission on Human Rights, measures have been taken to guarantee the physical integrity and personal security of indigenous Christians belonging to non-accepted church groups. However, cases have not always been followed up satisfactorily. Although in some cases, agreements have been signed to support indigenous people displaced for religious reasons or to allow participation in discussions between ethnic leaders and the Christians in question, in many cases, these measures prove ineffective. It is very often, that such cases are not viewed as a violation of the right to religious liberty, but are considered 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 seek to defend a syncretistic form of Roman Catholicism and impose it on all members of their community.

### **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 are public officers. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, aggressive intolerance was particularly in evidence where Christian values were brought into [discussions](#) concerning marriage, life and family (Evangélico Digital, 2 March 2021). Radical secular groups, ideological groups, members of political parties, some citizens and some government authorities tend to view Christian involvement in politics as an [annoying impediment](#) to women's and minority rights (Intolerancia, 12 January 2021). At the local level, Christians advocating for the issues mentioned above are regularly labeled as 'homophobic' and run the risk of being taken to court for breaching [non-discrimination and hate speech laws](#) (Diario de Querétaro, 19 July 2021). Attempts are made to limit parents' rights to educate their children according to their own convictions regarding sexuality.

Likewise, Christians defending their beliefs at work or in schools are also often verbally attacked and defamed. In addition, it is becoming increasingly common that church property is vandalized by feminist groups as a sign of their rejection of the Church's opposition to abortion. In such cases, the authorities almost never carry out in-depth investigations, not only because of the problems caused by COVID-19 restrictions, but also because attacks on Christians and churches are not considered as a [“real problem”](#) (Debate, 7 March 2021). To a certain extent, this governmental attitude encourages indifference in society and a normalization of a situation that

places the Church at an ever greater disadvantage and vulnerability. In this respect, the mass media, far from helping to present the facts in an objective way, tend to be biased and usually present the Church as a discriminatory and oppressive institution, justifying in some way the attacks made against it. The media are also known to exaggerate any negative news involving the Church in order to discredit Christians and undermine their reputation.

## Drivers of persecution

<b>Mexico: Drivers of Persecution</b>	<b>IO</b>	<b>RN</b>	<b>ERH</b>	<b>CO</b>	<b>CDP</b>	<b>CPCO</b>	<b>SI</b>	<b>DPA</b>	<b>OCC</b>
	-	-	-	STRONG	WEAK	-	MEDIUM	-	STRONG
Government officials	-	-	-	Medium	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	-	Weak	-	Weak
Political parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	Medium	-	Medium
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 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 their operations and in violence. Christians who go to the authorities to denounce criminal groups or seek protection, sometimes find themselves as victims of immediate reprisals, implying a double risk of persecution. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, most authorities did not take efficient action to provide 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 members of the political class helps promote the cover-up of criminal group activities. Their decisions reinforce 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. 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 inefficient in protecting 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):** LGBT+, radical feminist and other pressure groups (such as "Catholics for the Right to Decide", "Rainbow Foundation" and "Information Group in Selected Reproduction") try to eradicate the use of biblical values and viewpoints in public discussion. These groups harass, aggressively criticize, and make accusations of discrimination and hate-speech when Christians speak publicly about the Christian view of family, marriage and religious liberty. They try to get church leaders and parents taken to court when they educate children and young people in matters of sexuality according to Christian faith. It has also become a common tactic for pressure groups to vandalize churches.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Some of the 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 any 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 Christian denominations), have promoted initiatives to censor Christians in the public sphere, especially in alliance with ideological pressure groups in matters related to unborn life, family, marriage and sexual ethics. Some have even tried to impose sanctions on Christians in their party ranks.

### 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](#)" (Imer Noticias, 27 April 2021). According to recent information, 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. 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 (Infobae, 02 July 2021). 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 and Oaxaca.

**Main areas for Secular intolerance:** National laws underpinning a radical view of Church-State separation and non-discrimination affect Christians throughout the country. However, the levels of intolerance towards Christians speaking publicly about biblical views on abortion, parental rights and same-sex marriage are particularly high in states such as Colima, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Morelos, Mexico City, Mexico State, Oaxaca and Veracruz. Church buildings are also more likely to be vandalized in these states.

## 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.

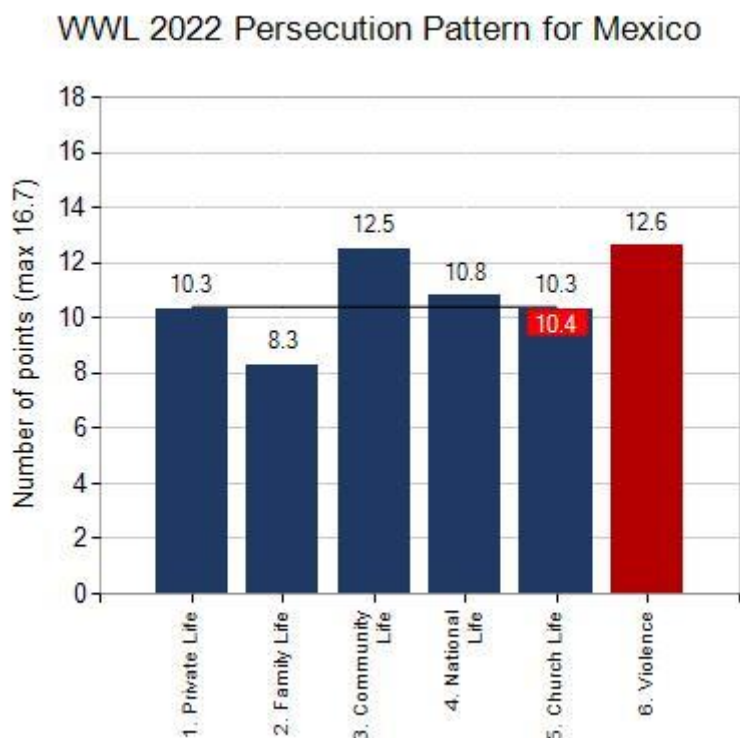
**Historical Christian communities:** The Roman Catholic Church (which is the biggest denomination) and small Orthodox, Presbyterian and Anglican communities make up this category. Catholic churches are particularly affected by the activities of criminal gangs and the corruption of local authorities. Difficulties increased due to criminals taking advantage of the COVID-19 restrictions. It is mostly Protestants from this category who suffer from the effects of *Clan oppression* when they live within indigenous communities. 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, arrests and even expulsion. As in the other categories of Christian communities, even if converts do not face hostility explicitly for converting, they nevertheless have to face the growing rejection of Christian expressions of faith in an increasingly secularist society.

**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 evangelization. Also, they are particularly affected by Mexican society's lack of respect for religious diversity, which leads to greater vulnerability for these newer Christian groups. They are also the target for constant criticism by radical secularist movements and are accused of anti-modern teaching.



## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 Persecution pattern for Mexico shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Mexico remains at a high level (10.4 points), the same as in WWL 2021. This is mainly due to the continues pressure caused by expanding criminal and indigenous group control.
- All spheres of life scored at least 8.3 points or above and thus pressure is at a high level throughout. Pressure is highest in *Community life* (12.5 points) and *National life* (10.8) because 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).
- The score for violence is extremely high (12.6 points), the same as in WWL 2021. The level of violence against Christian communities continues to be of serious concern and was exacerbated by criminal activity during the electoral process. There were killings, churches attacked, abductions, arrests, physical/mental abuse and internal forced displacement targeting Christians for faith-related reasons.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2021 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://open Doors analytical.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 severely punished.
- Due to COVID-19 restrictions, online platforms played a more significant role than ever; it became easier for criminal groups to target Christians who published material supporting non-violence, denouncing corruption and opposing criminal activities.
- When Christians use social media to air their faith-based opinions on issues relating to life, family and marriage, they have become targets for verbal attacks from LGBT+ supporters and feminist groups. This also affects Christians when promoting electoral political support to candidates who defend Christian values. 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 church groups.
- Elsewhere, through the effects of *Christian denominational protectionism*, Christians face rejection from their relatives when they abandon the traditional faith of the family (mostly Roman Catholic).
- Extended family linked to criminal groups may react violently towards relatives who become Christians and abandon criminal life.
- Due to the fact that religious intolerance is increasing in the country, extended family who oppose Christian values may attempt to discourage any family member from speaking 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. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, ethnic leaders were able to increase their control over the private life of those considered traitors; any attempt to meet up with other Christians in the same situation was considered suspicious.
- The lockdown measures also reinforced the power of criminal groups to regulate the social life in the areas under their control. They viewed with suspicion any non-religious

gatherings of activist Christians because they could be interpreted as being an act of defiance against their de facto authority.

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

The increased monitoring resulting from the COVID-19 measures increased the pressure on Christians from non-accepted church groups living inside indigenous communities. Where Christian religious symbols were found, they were likely to be destroyed and the Christian using them, punished. Motivated by their loyalty to the community, immediate family members within indigenous communities 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.
- In urban areas, Christian schoolchildren have to be taught and examined on matters of sexuality as part of state-approved compulsory education, including contents contradicting biological sex and Christian teaching. This also endangers the rights of Christian parents to raise their children according to their own beliefs.

**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 family, spouse and children during an indefinite period. Also, there are cases in which children are separated from their family, purely 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. Due to the war for territorial control between cartels, it is increasingly dangerous to flee for safety, because criminal groups have allies in many other territories, or because rival groups also do not look kindly on Christians. As a result, this makes the separation more prolonged and some may even try to flee the country, submitting to the rules of criminal groups who smuggle migrants.

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

- Within indigenous communities, Christian parents are usually prohibited from passing on their Christian faith to their children, since this would allegedly cause damage to the

child's "indigenous identity" and alter the spiritual balance of the community. Ethnic leaders apply pressure to make all residents in the indigenous community comply.

- Due to the expansion 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 violently 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, the state is limiting the rights of Christian parents to bring up their children according to their biblical beliefs. State authorities are following ideological pressure group guidelines for curriculum content about sexuality, which Christian parent groups have protested against. Such opposition by parents is regarded as out-dated and invalid, since it is claimed that the state is acting in the best interest of the nation's children. Currently, in Mexico City, Yucatan, Baja California Sur, Zacatecas and Mexico State, thanks to the support of some political parties, it is considered discriminatory behavior and a crime when Christian parents want to help their children with gender dysphoria or identification problems with biological sex by providing therapeutic psychological aid.

**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, criminal groups harass the children of Christians to recruit them or as a way to put pressure on their parents to stop their Christian activities in the area.
- In schools, many Christian children face hostility and bullying. This has also been the case online with the increased use of social media due to COVID-19 measures, and has occurred where children have mentioned their Christian faith or that they belong to a Christian denomination facing legal action from secularists.

## 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.). (3.50 points)**

Monitoring continued to be frequent during the WWL 2022 reporting period, aided by the fact that COVID-19 restrictions were in place. In areas where government authorities were not present - and aided by the political unrest surrounding the election period - Christians were much more exposed to the surveillance of ethnic leaders and criminal groups.

- Within indigenous communities, Christian converts in particular 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 converted 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) not to give them the same conditions for their crops as for other members of the community. This is a method of economic violence to discourage their faith; they are even denied the economic subsidy all members of the community are supposed to receive by right.
- Christians who oppose the presence of organized crime in their communities tend to have greater difficulties in obtaining permits or authorizations, if the authorities are in collusion with these groups and with citizens. As a result, client boycotts are also common. In the WWL 2022 reporting period (as in WWL 2021), due to the shortage of products caused by the COVID-19 crisis, merchants were at times forced to sell their products at reduced prices so that criminal groups would then be in charge of distributing them or reselling them at a higher price.

**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 or refuse to allow them to return to their homes if they were displaced. 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 unmolested. As criminal groups have an active presence throughout the Mexico, extortion continues to be the most frequent method for groups to show their control over an area. People have no other choice but 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 activities within indigenous communities.

- 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 - and especially during the COVID-19 crisis - 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) 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 guarantees contained on UDHR.

### **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 matter of debate is not necessarily linked to church matters.
- Christians who denounce criminal activities in public frequently become victims of threats or attacks.
- Almost every mention of Christian faith made by church leaders when participating in public debate is 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.

### **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)**

Christian political parties are totally forbidden in the country, as are any kind of political party related to any faith. Given the levels of corruption, state authorities allow criminal groups - directly or indirectly - to hinder the activities of civil society organizations, especially those working with young people in drug and crime prevention programs or with migrants. Faith-based charities are also continually scrutinized by gender activists and risk lawsuits if their projects, statements and publications oppose popular gender ideologies.

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

- Given that 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 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 links between the authorities and criminal networks. In addition, where Christian leaders have been discriminated against or attacked with offensive references in public due to the defense of their faith-based views, the justice system has taken no proper action, even where there has been damage to their dignity and reputation.
- Where Christian churches have been damaged by secularist groups, necessary action has not been taken by the state to prevent the repetition of such violent acts even when they are recurrent.

## 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. During the COVID-19 context, threats and church robberies continued to occur at a high rate.
- Ideological pressure groups have at times disrupted church services, attacked some of those worshipping and shouted offensive slogans, mostly defending abortion as being part of so-called women rights.

**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. Taking advantage of the COVID-19 restrictions, 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. As many churches were holding on-



line church services, threats were issued to preachers to prevent them from speaking about criminal activities, or from asking for non-violent elections, or denouncing the state of impunity.

- Church leaders also experienced many restrictions in political debate. Statements and comments made by public officers are constantly under scrutiny for discriminatory content etc. which could lead to being banned.

**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 along with their families.
- In areas controlled by criminal groups, Christian leaders or their family members are the most frequent victims of the imposition of taxes, fines or extortion. Christians, especially those involved in social leadership, the defense of human rights, indigenous communities or anti-corruption programs, have been threatened and assassinated. Acts of intimidation and harassment target nuns and church leaders (both Protestant and Catholic). Despite the COVID-19 restrictions, some criminal groups forced priests to hold church services and not to follow the protocols given by the state authorities.
- Christian leaders also face harassment and accusations of discrimination and hate-speech when they express faith-based opinions in defense of life, family, and marriage.

**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 conflicts.
- In areas where organized crime is dominant, when Christians denounce their aggressors, criminal groups often respond with violent reprisals.
- Elsewhere in society, when Christians complain to the authorities about the defamations they face from citizens influenced by secularist groups, 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. Property belonging to Christians is also attacked at times by adherents of ideological pressure groups.

## 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/>.

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

**5. The symbol "x" in the table:** This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Mexico: Violence Block question	WWL 2022	WWL 2021
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	7	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?	45	61
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	17	15
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?	12	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	4	8
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	15
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	40	61
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?	80	3
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	1
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	405	71
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	0

Violence against Christians for faith-related reasons remains at an extremely high level in the country, due to poor government management in an election year and criminal and indigenous groups, who were the main drivers of persecution, taking advantage of the COVID-19 restrictions to cause killings, detentions, sentences, abductions, physical abuse, death threats, internal forced displacement and much more. Radical ideological groups also caused damage to churches.

For the WWL 2022 reporting period:

- **Churches attacked (45):** Most of the cases are related to attacks perpetrated by criminal groups as one of the most effective methods to intimidate Christians and show their dominance over an area. Also, compared to WWL 2021, there were more incidents in-

volving radical ideological groups vandalizing churches as part of their way of pushing for the decriminalization of abortion.

- **Christians arrested (17):** All arrests 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.
- **Christian homes attacked (80):** Most attacks involved members and leaders of indigenous communities attacking the houses of Christians from non-accepted church groups as a punishment for not adhering to community customs and rites. The attacks could be so violent that entire houses were demolished, stripping victims of everything they owned.
- **Christians forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country (405):** Most recorded incidents are related to Christians being expelled from indigenous communities for not giving-up their faith. Other incidents involved Christians fleeing their homes due to the high levels of violence perpetrated against them (including their children) by criminal groups.

## 5 Year trends

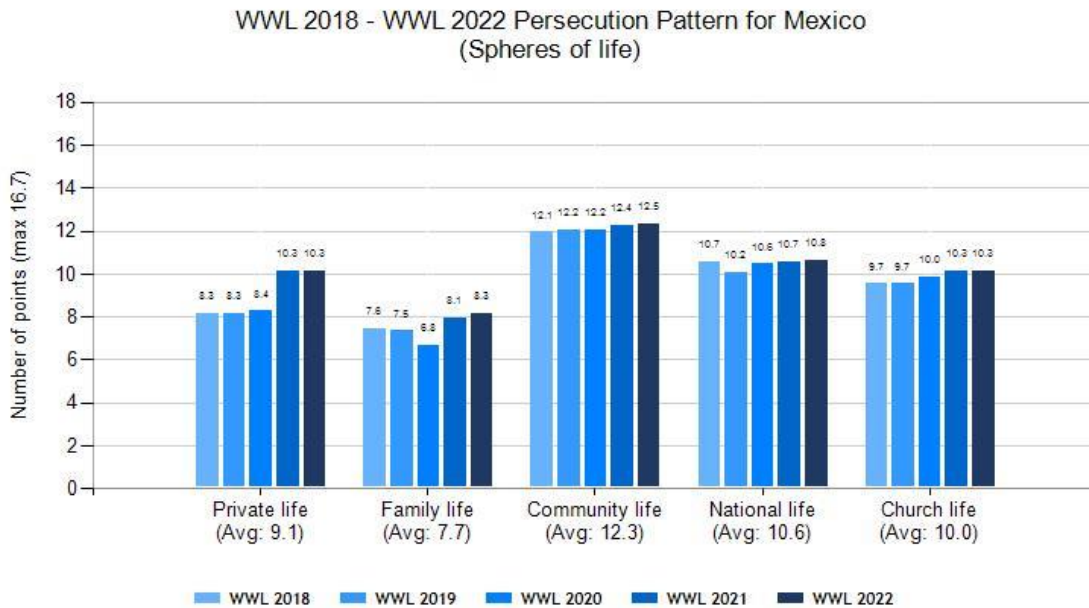
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Mexico: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	10.4
2021	10.4
2020	9.6
2019	9.6
2018	9.7

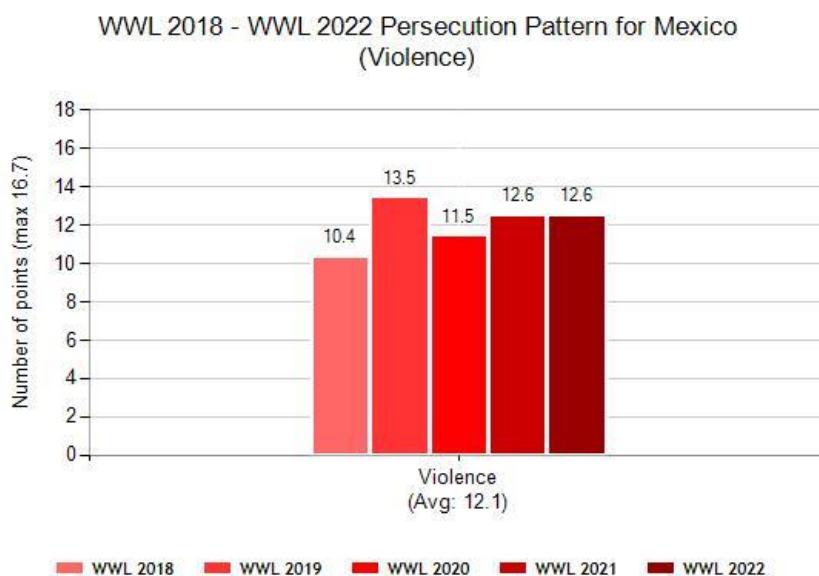
The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians has consistently been between 9.6 and 10.4 points over the last five reporting periods, with a noticeable increase since WWL 2021. The high levels of pressure reflect how corruption networks, impunity and government indifference at all levels have caused the vulnerability of Christians to rise.

## 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Over the last five reporting periods, pressure has increased in all *spheres of life*. The most significant rise in pressure occurred in *Private life*, but pressure has always been highest in *Community life*. This is the result of the worsening security situation 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 intolerance to public expressions of Christian faith, especially concerning topics of national interest.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Over the last five WWL reporting periods, violence scores in Mexico have always been at a very high or extreme level. 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. For reasons explained above in this dossier, both for WWL 2021 and WWL 2022, the advantages acquired during the imposition of COVID-19 restrictions and the political chaos surrounding the recent elections, exposed the vulnerability and risk experienced by Christians in the face of the violence perpetrated by criminal groups present throughout the country.

## 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	-

In a context of ongoing organized crime, Mexican women face a breadth of challenges, both from their own families and communities, as well as from criminal gangs. Within the WWL 2022 reporting period there has been an [increase in family violence](#) against women, which has been linked to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Global Voices, July 2021). Christian converts from indigenous communities face verbal and physical abuse (including sexual violence), used to pressure them into following the traditional religion. They also risk being pressured into marriage with a non-Christian indigenous man, although no instances of this were reported in the WWL 2022 reporting period.

Criminal gangs represent the other primary threat to women and girls. Since Mexico is one of the countries with the [highest rate](#) of human trafficking in the world, women are easy targets for recruitment for abduction and sexual slavery, most commonly by illegal armed groups (US Department of State, “2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mexico”). 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. Some women and girls are also targets of abductions and killings since they are considered targets of criminal groups for their relationship with the cartel enemies.

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 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 social issues.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government
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, the risk of young men and boys being killed in Mexico is high ([Vision for Humanity, 2021 Mexico Peace Index](#)). 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 the main criminal organizations for [recruiting](#) children and adolescents (Vanguardia, 30 April 2019).

The impact of the forced recruitment of Christian men and boys is far-reaching. A country expert comments: “The indoctrination and incorporation of young people into the ranks of criminal groups affects the family not only against the rights of parents to educate their children according to their own beliefs but also weakens them, undermines their stability and consequently, society becomes weaker and more vulnerable to the actions of organized crime.”

Men in Mexico generally face intense pressure and violence as the heads of families and leaders of churches. Threatening the male head intimidates the wider families and communities. When armed criminal groups wish churches to cease functioning or to limit their activities, the threats are often aimed first at the religious leader of the church. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, there have been several examples of priests and pastors being beaten, kidnapped for ransom, and killed ([La Tribuna, January 23, 2021](#); [Agenzia Fides, 1 September, 2021](#)). 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, especially in the context of COVID-19.

Converts from an indigenous background face particular pressures; they may be beaten, harassed and rejected from the community. The level of pressure and violence increases if the convert is deemed to be a Christian leader, since such leaders are understood to be inciters of rebellion.



## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2020):

- "Jewish community representatives assessed online anti-Semitic messages, symbols, and language from January through September 17 [2020], finding Twitter accounted for 69 percent of the anti-Semitic content, news sources 18 percent, online forums 8 percent, and blogs 4.5 percent. Anti-Semitic tweets typically referenced the Holocaust and Hitler, used other derogatory language, and questioned Israel's right to exist."

According to Diario de Yucatán (21 September 2021):

- The president of the Board of Directors of the Jewish Community in Merida, Alejandro Rabinovich Noé, has been the target of antisemitic telephone calls. In April 2020 he began receiving [anonymous threats](#) on his cell phone from several unknown numbers. In every call he received, the fact that he was Jewish was referred to with contempt and he was warned to leave town.

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### Organized corruption and crime

The inefficiency of government management at all levels to fight impunity and corruption has encouraged an increase in violence. This is one of the main causes of the expansion of criminal groups throughout the country. Church leaders have not refrained from condemning the violence, which has increased the risk for both religious leaders and Christians, especially for those fighting against corruption, violence and drug-addiction among the youth. Without a clear and defined strategy and firm political will on the part of the government, Mexico will continue to be caught in a spiral of violence and chaos affecting all citizens.

### Clan oppression

There has been a growing awareness about life in communities of the indigenous population in Mexico and their autonomy has been reinforced, especially in relation to the protection of individual rights of its members. Although state intervention in ethnic groups is currently very low, in order to provide the due protection of religious freedom for Christians of non-accepted church groups, it is urgent that local government authorities gain a better understanding of the dynamics of religious pluralism, the equal treatment of religious minorities, and what a full guarantee of religious freedom should look like. Such training would lead to more timely state intervention and better protection for such Christians.

### Secular intolerance

Radical ideological groups continue trying to impose their ideology in the political and social spheres of life. However, far from the tolerance they use as a slogan, they propose a way of thinking that polarizes society and categorically rejects those who defend issues such as sanctity of life, marriage and family life from a Christian standpoint. In this context, the absence of re-

spect for plurality, especially in relation to the Christian faith, is likely to continue. Radical secularist groups are likely to continue trying to rid the public sphere of manifestations of Christian faith - especially in the political scene. The most worrying thing is that the rejection of the Church is not only manifested through debate but also through violent actions against recognized symbols of the Christian faith, such as church buildings.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: “narco-state” - <https://www.latimes.com/espanol/mexico/articulo/2021-07-31/el-que-y-porque-desde-washington-los-narcos-elegiran-al-proximo-presidente-de-mexico>
- Persecution engines description: networks - <https://narcodata.animalpolitico.com/cartel-jalisco-27-estados/>
- Persecution engines description: spiral - <https://elpais.com/mexico/2021-07-03/pueblos-en-llamas-y-matanza-de-civiles-la-guerra-del-narco-de-la-era-lopez-obrador.html>
- Persecution engines description: self-defense groups - <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/30/americas/children-self-defense-militias-in-mexico-intl/index.html>
- 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: adapt - <https://insightcrime.org/news/dea-report-drug-traffickers-covid/>
- 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](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: break-ins and robberies - <https://www.forbes.com.mx/noticias-equipo-raul-vera-defensor-derechos-humanos-sufre-3-agresiones-en-dos-meses/>
- Persecution engines description: death threats - <https://laregiononline.com.mx/padre-angel-espino-garcia-recibe-anonimo-con-amenazas-y-teme-por-su-vida/>
- Persecution engines description: killings - <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2021/07/06/asesinaron-a-simon-pedro-perez-lopez-defensor-de-derechos-humanos/>
- Persecution engines description: extorted - <https://www.elimparcial.com/tijuana/tijuana/Templos-evangelicos-sufren-robo-extorsion-y-cobro-por-derecho-de-piso-20210520-0014.html>
- Persecution engines description: before - <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/por-inseguridad-iglesia-suspende-misas-nocturnas-en-morelos/1351355>
- Persecution engines description: forced displacement - <https://www.nvnoticias.com/nota/148085/denuncian-intolerancia-religiosa-en-huixtan>
- Persecution engines description: destruction - <https://evangelicalfocus.com/world/9775/evangelical-families-expelled-and-homes-demolished-in-chiapas>
- Persecution engines description: worsened - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/04/07/feature/4603/article.htm>
- Persecution engines description: discussions - <https://www.evangelicodigital.com/latinoamerica/17950/mexicoproponen-iniciativa-para-limitar-expresion-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: “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>
- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: narco-states - <https://noticias.imer.mx/blog/elaboran-mapa-de-los-148-grupos-criminales-que-operan-en-mexico/>

- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: a high-profile presence - <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2021/07/02/mapa-del-narco-en-mexico-16-carteles-se-disputan-el-control-del-pais/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: increase in family violence - <https://globalvoices.org/2021/07/30/violence-against-women-is-on-the-rise-in-mexico-how-do-mexicans-perceive-it/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: highest rate - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/mexico/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Vision for Humanity, 2021 Mexico Peace Index - <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/mexico-peace-index-2021-by-the-numbers/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: recruiting - [https://vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/cartel-jalisco-nueva-generacion-del-golfo-y-los-zetas-son-los-que-mas-reclutan-ninos-para?fbclid=IwAR1NpVdFycEwjOvfN-E\\_WFy-MAfj4FmrhMpqtICOOerHev-6Elv\\_Ua\\_ERH8](https://vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/cartel-jalisco-nueva-generacion-del-golfo-y-los-zetas-son-los-que-mas-reclutan-ninos-para?fbclid=IwAR1NpVdFycEwjOvfN-E_WFy-MAfj4FmrhMpqtICOOerHev-6Elv_Ua_ERH8)
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: La Tribuna, January 23, 2021 - <https://www.latribuna.hn/2021/01/23/matan-en-mexico-a-pastor-que-buscaba-el-sueno-americano/>
- 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](http://www.fides.org/en/news/70716-AMERICA_MEXICO_A_priest_killed_in_the_state_of_Morelos)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: anonymous threats - <https://www.yucatan.com.mx/merida/dejan-mensaje-de-odio-en-la-casa-de-lider-judio-de-merida>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Mexico>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Mexico>
- [Latin America – Organized corruption and crime – 2018](#)

## External Links - Further useful reports

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