

World
Watch
Research

Mexico: Country Dossier

December 2020



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2021

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	94	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.2	94	93	94	93	89
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.3	9.8	92	92	91	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.4	15.9	16.3	16.3	12.4	92	90	87	86	78
5	Pakistan	13.9	14.2	15.1	14.9	13.5	16.7	88	88	87	86	88
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	11.1	88	87	86	86	82
7	Yemen	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	3.9	87	85	86	85	85
8	Iran	14.5	14.5	13.9	15.7	16.5	10.6	86	85	85	85	85
9	Nigeria	13.3	13.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	16.7	85	80	80	77	78
10	India	13.0	12.9	13.5	14.9	13.7	15.4	83	83	83	81	73
11	Iraq	13.6	14.6	14.2	14.8	13.8	11.5	82	76	79	86	86
12	Syria	13.3	13.9	13.5	14.5	14.0	12.0	81	82	82	76	86
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.6	15.7	9.1	79	85	87	87	87
14	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.9	14.4	15.8	16.6	2.2	78	79	77	79	76
15	Maldives	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.8	16.6	0.4	77	78	78	78	76
16	Egypt	12.5	13.2	11.5	12.7	11.0	14.1	75	76	76	70	65
17	China	12.6	9.7	12.0	13.2	15.4	11.1	74	70	65	57	57
18	Myanmar	11.9	12.0	13.1	12.9	12.3	11.9	74	73	71	65	62
19	Vietnam	12.1	8.8	12.7	14.0	14.5	10.0	72	72	70	69	71
20	Mauritania	14.3	14.0	13.5	14.1	13.6	1.9	71	68	67	57	55
21	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	1.3	71	73	74	73	71
22	Laos	12.1	10.2	13.6	13.5	14.3	6.9	71	72	71	67	64
23	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.5	70	70	69	68	67
24	Algeria	13.9	13.9	11.5	13.1	13.4	3.9	70	73	70	58	58
25	Turkey	12.5	11.5	10.8	13.3	11.6	9.3	69	63	66	62	57
26	Tunisia	12.0	13.1	10.4	11.5	13.2	7.4	67	64	63	62	61
27	Morocco	12.6	13.5	11.2	12.4	14.1	3.7	67	66	63	51	49
28	Mali	9.4	8.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	15.4	67	66	68	59	59
29	Qatar	14.0	13.9	10.8	13.1	14.1	1.5	67	66	62	63	66
30	Colombia	11.4	8.8	12.4	11.0	9.7	13.9	67	62	58	56	53
31	Bangladesh	11.5	10.3	13.0	11.3	10.1	10.6	67	63	58	58	63
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.4	11.8	14.3	67	66	48	-	-
33	Tajikistan	14.0	12.3	11.9	12.5	13.2	2.2	66	65	65	65	58
34	Nepal	12.4	9.7	9.9	13.0	12.3	8.5	66	64	64	64	53
35	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.1	9.6	9.9	15.6	66	68	70	61	58
36	Ethiopia	9.9	8.5	10.7	10.3	10.8	14.4	65	63	65	62	64
37	Mexico	10.3	8.1	12.4	10.7	10.3	12.6	64	60	61	59	57
38	Jordan	13.1	13.9	11.4	11.6	12.4	2.0	64	64	65	66	63
39	Brunei	13.9	14.6	10.7	10.9	13.5	0.7	64	63	63	64	64
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	11.2	9.4	11.6	16.1	64	56	55	33	-
41	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	11.0	12.5	13.4	2.4	64	64	63	63	56
42	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.0	12.3	15.7	64	60	54	38	-
43	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	11.9	12.7	13.8	0.0	64	61	64	62	61
44	Oman	13.2	13.5	10.3	12.5	13.0	0.9	63	62	59	57	53
45	Mozambique	9.3	7.6	11.3	7.9	11.1	16.1	63	43	43	-	-
46	Malaysia	12.1	14.3	12.9	11.5	10.0	2.4	63	62	60	65	60
47	Indonesia	11.5	11.4	12.4	10.7	9.3	7.8	63	60	65	59	55
48	Kuwait	13.2	13.5	9.9	12.2	13.2	1.1	63	62	60	61	57
49	Kenya	11.7	9.2	10.5	8.0	10.3	12.8	62	61	61	62	68
50	Comoros	12.5	11.1	11.4	11.3	14.2	1.9	62	57	56	56	56

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
51	Cuba	10.9	7.7	11.8	12.9	13.4	5.4	62	52	49	49	47
52	Sri Lanka	12.2	9.1	11.7	12.2	9.7	7.0	62	65	58	57	55
53	UAE	13.4	13.3	9.7	12.0	12.4	1.1	62	60	58	58	55
54	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.6	10.6	62	60	52	45	47
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.2	10.4	12.0	1.3	58	57	56	54	48
56	Palestinian Territories	12.5	13.3	9.1	10.4	11.7	0.9	58	60	57	60	64
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	10.2	58	55	52	53	59
58	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.5	12.1	3.9	57	60	60	51	46
59	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	56	56	57
60	Bahrain	12.1	12.5	9.1	10.7	10.5	0.9	56	55	55	57	54
61	Azerbaijan	12.8	9.8	9.4	11.1	12.6	0.0	56	57	57	57	52
62	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	3.7	53	56	48	40	-
63	Nicaragua	6.9	4.6	9.9	11.3	10.0	8.1	51	41	41	-	-
64	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.9	48	48	43	-	-
65	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	12.0	47	48	47	46	53
66	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.9	47	45	46	-	-
67	Honduras	6.8	5.0	10.6	7.6	9.0	7.6	46	39	38	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	10.1	11.4	7.2	46	43	42	-	-
69	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	44	44	-	-
70	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	0.6	43	43	43	-	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	0.7	43	41	42	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	8.1	42	42	41	-	-
73	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.3	42	42	43	-	-
74	El Salvador	6.6	4.9	9.8	4.2	8.7	7.8	42	38	30	-	-

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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).
- The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.
- The WWL 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- 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 2021 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 Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

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

WWL 2021 Short country profile / Mexico

Brief country details

Mexico: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
133,870,000	128,229,000	95.8

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

Mexico: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	64	37
WWL 2020	60	52
WWL 2019	61	39
WWL 2018	59	39
WWL 2017	57	41

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Mexico: Main Persecution engines		Main drivers
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, One's own (extended) family, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Government officials	
Organized corruption and crime	Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials, Political parties	
Secular intolerance	Ideological pressure groups, Government officials, 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 denominations and the struggle for territorial control causes Christians and church leaders living in those areas to face a constant risk of being targeted wherever they are perceived as being a threat to criminal operations and are not obedient to 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.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **July 2020, Guerrero:** According to Archbishop Salvador, during the COVID-19 lockdown in the Diocese of Chilpancingo, several [priests received death-threats](#), forcing them to hold church services despite the fact that it was prohibited (La Silla Rota, 24 July 2020). The threats were directed against the priests, their families and parishioners and apparently came from criminal groups operating in Mexico State. Additionally, there were reports of similar threats being received from “Los Zetas” or “Jalisco New Generation Cartel” against priests in states such as [Chiapas](#) (Agenzia Fides, 28 April 2020) and [Nuevo León](#) (Heraldo, 23 April 2020).
- **April 2020, Chihuahua:** In a state with strong presence of narco-traffickers and other criminal groups, the two sons of evangelical pastor Martín Bruno Escobar Ávila, president of the Evangelical Ministerial Confraternity of Chihuahua, were violently [murdered](#) by criminal groups (Eje Central, 01 May 2020). The young men worked in the congregation with their father, who was well known for his public stance against violence, drugs and corruption. This kind of violence is commonly used to intimidate religious leaders and discourage church attendance. In another violent state, Morelos, the father of a Catholic priest was [shot](#) in February 2020. He died of his wounds (La Silla Rota, 7 February 2020).
- **March 2020:** Aciprensa reported on 9 March 2020 that [feminist groups](#) involved in International Women's Day marches had caused violent damage in various parts of Mexico:
 - In Sonora, a feminist group damaged the exterior of the Hermosillo Cathedral and attempted to enter to vandalize the interior.
 - In Xalapa, in the Mexican state of Veracruz, feminist groups caused damage to the Catholic Sacred Heart of Jesus church as well as to Catholic educational establishments nearby.
 - In Guadalajara, in the Mexican state of Jalisco, feminists covered the monument to Fray Antonio Alcalde y Barriga with graffiti. He was a well-known 18th century Roman Catholic bishop.
 - In Mexico City, in addition to the damage caused to the Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico, graffiti was sprayed on the walls of the San Felipe de Jesús church, after high church fences had been knocked down.

- **January - May 2020:** In the first few months of 2020, there were almost 12 Christian buildings sprayed with offensive slogans such as “[Take out your rosaries](#)” (Milenio, 27 May 2020) and “[Burn the rapist Church down](#)”(Imagen del Golfo, 2 June 2020). This vandalism was a reaction to discussions about abortion legislation.
- **October 2019, Chiapas:** According to Open Doors country researchers, all 31 members of a young church in the Napite indigenous community were expelled from the community. They were celebrating the sixth anniversary of their conversion and were thus contradicting the orders of the ethnic authorities to not promote a faith different to the Catholic rites accepted in the community. Four Christian leaders were imprisoned before they were expelled with the other members of their church.

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.

External Links - Short country profile

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: priests received death-threats - <https://lasillarota.com/estados/amenazan-y-obligan-a-sacerdotes-a-oficiar-misas-en-guerrero-guerrero-misas-cjng-los-zetas/416553>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Chiapas - http://www.fides.org/en/news/67814-AMERICA_MEXICO_Priest_threatened_with_death_but_the_Church_does_not_stop_in_defense_of_the_rights_of_the_population
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Nuevo León - <https://www.heraldo.mx/irrumpe-en-misa-para-extorsionar-a-sacerdote/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: murdered - <https://www.ejecentral.com.mx/valor-de-la-palabra-ministros-de-culto-sufren-la-otra-pandemia/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: shot - <https://lasillarota.com/estados/violencia-pega-a-iglesia-y-a-religiosos-en-morelos-morelos-cuernavaca-iglesia-catolica/359761>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: feminist groups - <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/violentas-feministas-atacaron-iglesias-en-diversas-ciudades-de-mexico-43444>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Take out your rosaries - <https://www.milenio.com/politica/comunidad/video-investigacion-vandalismo-en-catedral-de-leon>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Burn the rapist Church down - <https://imagendelgolfo.mx/xalapa/interpone-iglesia-de-xalapa-denuncia-por-vandalismo-en-templos/50019438>
- Specific examples of positive developments: state inefficiency - <https://www.csis.org/analysis/mexican-governments-response-covid-19-insufficient>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Mexico

Link for general background information

- [Mexico country profile - BBC News](#)

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, another important moment in history was the drafting of the Constitution of 1857, a document in which the official separation of the State and the Catholic 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 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 and the National Guard regarding abuse of authority and human rights [violations](#) (Justice in Mexico, 24 July 2020).

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 weakness of the government at such a crucial time. 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 authorities which sometimes included the cancellation of church services. Nonetheless, Christian communities became agents of solidarity with those most in need, especially in areas not reached by the authorities and often dominated by criminal groups.

Political and legal landscape

President AMLO took office in 2018. At the end of September 2020, popularity polls registered [62%](#) support (El Financiero, 5 October 2020). Even before the COVID-19 crisis began to bite, AMLO had been criticized for his inefficient handling of the economic crisis and the increased insecurity. These and other issues such as corruption, the lack of rule of law, the violation of human rights and delayed criminal justice placed Mexico in [104th](#) place out of 128 countries evaluated in the 2020 World Justice Project (WJP, 11 March 2020).

AMLO's victory in 2018 and MORENA's majority in the Chamber of Deputies and Senators resulted in a level of power which has led to a deepening of control and a [loss of autonomy](#) for some institutions (La Política Online, 18 June 2020). This situation could change, however, in the forthcoming federal chamber elections to be held in 2021. Voting could seriously [affect](#) MORENA's majority in Congress if discontent among the electorate continues (Mexico News Daily, 23 June 2020).

The government has been blamed for [dismantling](#) and/or weakening state institutions under AMLO's austerity policy (World Politics Review, 8 July 2020). AMLO's promised "[Fourth Transformation](#)" is becoming increasingly authoritarian (Cato Institute, 1 December 2019), as can be seen in the use of the armed forces to implement government programs which [control](#) social and economic sectors far beyond issues related to the country's security (El Universal, 25 July 2020). Additionally, the government's social policy was called into question for being incompatible with sustainable funding over time. There are also signs of [suppression](#) targeting media that cover corruption and political debate or that actively criticize the government (Expansión Política, 26 May 2020).

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has [denounced](#) human rights violations by military personnel such as torture to obtain confessions and extract information, enforced disappearances, extra-judicial killings, and attacks on journalists and human rights defenders (HRW, World Report 2020). At the same time, the Organization of American States (OAS) has expressed [concern](#) about the situation of migrants and refugees in Mexico (IACHR, 7 February 2020), especially since the [joint](#) public policies with the USA are having a direct impact on the human rights situation of migrants (IACHR, 23 July 2019).

Finally, in the WWL 2021 reporting period, the 2020-2021 [electoral process](#) has begun. In the upcoming election, 500 federal deputies will be elected. These elections are likely to define the course for the second part of President AMLO's mandate, whose party currently dominates both Houses.

Other issues to note:

- The political asylum granted to Evo Morales in November 2019 was not universally accepted due to the apparent support this act signaled for a dictator accused of corruption (Independent, 13 November 2019).
- The US border wall and the migrant phenomenon continued to be the subject of agreements and disagreements between Mexico and the USA (The Washington Post, 6 July 2020).

- Mexico currently holds the pro tempore presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)
- In July 2020, the Mexico-United States-Canada Treaty (T-MEC) entered into force.

Religious landscape

Mexico: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	128,229,000	95.8
Muslim	125,000	0.1
Hindu	12,000	0.0
Buddhist	30,500	0.0
Ethno-religionist	1,400,000	1.0
Jewish	40,000	0.0
Bahai	46,000	0.0
Atheist	150,000	0.1
Agnostic	3,800,000	2.8
Other	37,500	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 February 2020)

Although Christians make up 95.8% of the population of the country, an estimated 3% of the population identify themselves as agnostic/atheist. This phenomenon is the result of strong secular tendencies that have been driven by previous government policies. 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's 2019 International Religious Freedom [Report](#) (USIRF), 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 (USIRF 2019).

Religious language and symbols have featured regularly in the president's addresses. Especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, President AMLO has alluded to the help [religious faith](#) can give in face of such a crisis (CBC, 29 March 2020). However, critics suggest that the religious references are just a strategy to connect with the Christian Mexican majority in order to gain their support. Despite President AMLO'S initial close relationship with various Christian groups such as the Alliance of Evangelical Churches (CONFRATERNICE) and his [praise for their positive cooperation](#) in government social programs (La Silla Rota, 18 January 2020), he has since [distanced](#) himself from certain actions and statements made by the Alliance, in order to "respect" the principle of Church-State separation (Contra Réplica, 5 December 2019). Similarly, President AMLO [openly rejected](#) the legislative bill which sought to eliminate phrases relating to the "separation of the State and the Churches" from the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship (Crux Now, 19 December 2019). Therefore, despite his speeches and use of religious language, the president's position in relation to the Church is not entirely clear, especially in the public sphere.

As the COVID-19 pandemic reached Colombia, the authorities ordered the immediate suspension of non-essential activities at the federal level, urging at the same time a voluntary lockdown at home for those not participating in essential work activities. Consequently, religious activities were also suspended. Up to August 2020, a regional "traffic light system" was established for restarting activities. It has thus been possible for religious groups to restart their activities in closed public spaces in a limited way according to the categorization of each state (Maximum, High, Medium, Low). Activities related to the economy, culture and sport have enjoyed less restrictions.

Christian values and views continued to be targeted by LGBTI and radical feminist groups in the WWL 2021 reporting period. These ideological pressure groups [criticize](#) faith-based views (Explica, 23 March 2020) and demand that church leaders do not get involved in public [debates](#) on issues relating to abortion, same-sex marriage and comprehensive sex education, etc. (La Jornada, 08 October 2019). There have even been attempts to censor politicians who give their faith-based points of views or who publicly defend Christian values. 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). Faced with acts of vandalism from radical feminist groups, Christian leaders have seen the need to file [complaints](#) with the authorities (Imagen del Golfo, 02 June 2020). Church leaders have also been criticized for supporting the reopening of churches for religious services. Also, in the WWL 2021 reporting period, Mexico City approved a law [criminalizing activities](#) that go against free self-determination in matters of gender. 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 homosexual inclinations from a Christian perspective (Reuters, 24 July 2020).

In a context of rising violence and insecurity, it has become frequent for Christian leaders to be targeted by criminal groups. Killings, extortion, death threats and property vandalism have become commonplace. See below in *Security situation*.

A special note about 'non-accepted Christians' in indigenous communities:

In indigenous communities, Christians face opposition where they reject the religious practices and customs of the ethnic group to which they belong. This has led to indigenous leaders seeing Christianity as a destabilizing element. Since ethnic leaders are those who administer justice in their territories, the 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 - the term 'non-accepted Christians' is used in this dossier to refer 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 and ancestral religious customs that worship nature are practiced in the indigenous community, 'non-accepted Christians' are those who refuse to participate and consequently face hostility and rejection.

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, around 12 million people lost their jobs in April 2020 alone.

According to [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300 onwards):

- **Gross National Income (GNI) per capita:** 17,628 (2018)
- **GNI per capita women/men:** 11,254 (women); 24,286 (men)
- **Income inequality:** 36.3%
- **Population vulnerable to multidimensional poverty:** 4.7%

According to [World Bank's April 2020 update](#) (accessed July 2020):

- **Poverty:** 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 April 2020:

- **Remittances:** Mexico is exposed to the contraction of the US economy and the reduction of remittances from migrants. The report also indicates that the country will suffer from the fall in the price of oil and as a result, a GDP growth 2020 of -6.5% is likely (ECLAC, April 2020).

According to the Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP) in its [Mexico Peace Index 2020](#):

- **Violence:** The economic impact of violence increased 38.8% between 2015 and 2019, increasing annually, except in 2019. In per capita terms, the economic impact of the violence was 36,129 pesos, more than five times the average monthly salary of a Mexican worker.

According to the Bank of Mexico, in August 2020, 3.574 million dollars entered the country for family remittances, 5.3% more compared to the same month of the previous year. Mexico receives the [third highest amount of remittances in the world](#), ahead of the Philippines, which held third position for many years. Only China and India surpass Mexico in the amounts of remittances received (BBVA, 7 October 2020).

The economic crisis has also affected Christian activities. In the case of the Catholic Church, the General Secretary of the Conference of the Mexican Episcopate (CEM) [indicated that](#) because of church closures and the suspension of religious services, many churches have been unable to pay staff salaries etc. (La Jornada, 14 May 2020). Despite the economic difficulties, Christian groups have managed to be a reliable channel for the distribution of food and aid to the needy (Vatican News, 15 June 2020). In the case of Protestant churches, according to Open Doors country researchers, 35% of the churches have 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.

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 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).

According to the [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300) and the [World Factbook](#) (updated April 2020):

- **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%
- **Urban population:** 80.7% of total population
- **Literacy rate:** 95.4%

According to [World Bank's April 2020 update](#) (accessed July 2020):

- **Education:** School enrollment for pre-primary is 73.7% (2015); for primary 105.77% (2017) and for secondary 104.4% (2017). The duration of compulsory education is 14 years. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Mexico (2017) is 1.039. This is the ratio of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.
- **Unemployment:** 3.483% (2019)
- **IDPs/Refugees:** The refugee population is 12,870 (2018).

According to the [UN Global Human Development Indicators](#) (2019):

- **Human Development Index 2018:** Mexico's DDI value is 0.767, which puts the country in the high human development category, positioning it at rank 76 out of 189 countries and territories. This is above the average of 0.750 for countries in the high human development group and above the average of 0.759 for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Between 1990 and 2018, Mexico's HDI value increased from 0.652 to 0.767, a sustained growth of 17.8%.
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 75.0 years. From 1990 to 2018, Mexico's life expectancy at birth increased by 4.1 years.
- **Gender inequality:** Mexico has a 2018 Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.334, ranking it 74 out of 162 countries.

A major issue in the country is the ongoing migratory crisis. According to the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid (COMAR), by the end of October 2020, 32,272 migrants had made [applications](#) for refugee status in Mexico, mostly from Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela, Guatemala and Nicaragua (COMAR, 2 November 2020).

The United Nations Development Program has pointed out that inequalities in human development in Mexico will [worsen](#) because of the COVID-19 crisis (UNDP, 14 July 2020). In the health sector, deficiencies in infrastructure, material and human resources were evident. In the education sector, the digital gap became evident, in addition to the increased vulnerability of people working in the informal sector, indigenous communities and migrants, who suffered the most from the economic consequences of confinement.

The activities of the Mexican churches have had a focus on helping the neediest communities in the country, which became evident during the COVID-19 crisis. 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, as is explained below in the *Security situation* section below.

Technological landscape

According to [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed July 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 66.5% penetration - survey date: June 2020
- **Facebook usage:** 59.7% penetration – survey date: June 2020

According to [World Bank's country profile](#) (2018):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 95.2 per 100 people.

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net Report 2019](#):

- Mexico ranks as a "partly free" country in the 60/100 position. As the report states, online manipulation tactics, high levels of digital violence against journalists, and ongoing investigations around abusive surveillance practices persist.

According to [Reporters Without Borders](#):

- Mexico is one of world's deadliest countries for the media (World Press Freedom Index 2020). Journalists who cover sensitive political stories or report on organized crime regularly receive threats and some are killed. Ownership of the broadcast media is limited to just two media groups: Televisa and TV-Azteca own almost all the TV channels.

During the COVID-19 crisis, Christian leaders and churches have made use of the technological resources at their disposal to continue many church activities. Church services, biblical training and prayer days etc. have been held online for many congregations in order to keep to social distancing guidelines. Online access has however not always been possible in the most remote areas.

Security situation

Since 2015, there has been an increase in homicidal violence every year in Mexico ([Animal Politico, 21 July 2020](#)). The National Urban Public Safety Survey indicated that during September 67.80% of people aged 18 years and over considered it unsafe to live in their city. ([The Mazatlan Post, 23 October 2020](#)).

Drug trafficking is one of the main causes for 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 territories 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 which go back many years. However, many have now fragmented into many smaller groups.

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 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). The National Guard has already been the subject of complaints for [intimidating](#) civil society organizations that work with migrants at the border (CNDH, 2019), as well as for cases of [excessive](#) use of force and human rights violations (Proceso, 26 May 2020).

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.

Within this context of violence and insecurity, many church leaders are receiving [death threats](#), especially those with greater involvement in politics and social action (Front Line Defenders, 30 April 2020). There have been cases of [extortion](#) (Eje Central, 01 May 2020), [kidnappings](#) (BPN, 28 April 2020) and even killings. Linked to this, churches are often the target of vandalism and theft. The situation worsened during the COVID-19 crisis since government confinement measures have also affected drug cartels and other criminal groups, which has led to a more intense battle for territory control and drug distribution areas. Christian organizations dedicated to providing humanitarian assistance to those most in need have thus suffered robberies and extortion. Many of them could not carry out their activities without authorization from the local criminal group in control. Because the state authorities are focused on preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, it has been difficult for them to provide any security to the Christians affected. It has been difficult for Christians to inform the authorities of such illegal activities and threats due to the COVID-19 lockdown measures and fear of reprisals from criminal groups.

Also, in the WWL 2021 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.

Trends analysis

1) The levels of illegal activity by criminal groups continue to rise

In the context of COVID-19, criminal groups have expanded the areas under their control. Especially those Christians opposing criminal activity have suffered retaliation in the form of threats and violence, and it is increasingly difficult for church groups to carry out their humanitarian and spiritual work.

2) The increased powers given to indigenous leadership does not benefit Christian converts

The autonomy of indigenous communities has always caused serious problems for Christian converts. However, the COVID-19 crisis has worsened the situation since the community leaders' authority over indigenous territories has been strengthened. Those who do not participate in a community's ancestral customs and syncretistic practices (sometimes related to Catholicism) face opposition, rejection, detention and forced displacement.

3) The influence of radical secularist groups is increasing

Over the last years, society is showing an increasing secularist tendency, which has increasingly led Christians to self-censor. Christians have been denounced under anti-discrimination regulations for expressing their faith-based points of view.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Mexico country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18095241>
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- Religious landscape description: church officials - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/MEXICO-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Religious landscape description: religious faith - <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/mexico-s-choice-amulets-or-science-to-fight-covid-19-1.5513973>
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- Religious landscape description: distanced - <https://www.contrareplica.mx/nota--Niega-AMLO-intervencion-de-Confraternice-en-Jovenes-Construyendo-el-Futuro201951244>
- Religious landscape description: openly rejected - <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-americas/2019/12/mexico-president-opposes-bill-to-end-church-state-separation/>
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WWL 2021: 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	122,000	0.1
Catholic	115,574,000	90.1
Protestant	5,533,000	4.3
Independent	8,300,000	6.5
Unaffiliated	1,550,000	1.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-2,850,000	-2.2
Total	128,229,000	100.0

Evangelical movement	2,800,000	2.2
Renewalist movement	17,450,000	13.6

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

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.

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Mexico

Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Mexico: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	64	37
WWL 2020	60	52
WWL 2019	61	39
WWL 2018	59	39
WWL 2017	57	41

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

Mexico rose 4 points compared to the score in WWL 2020. Organized crime was mainly responsible for this increase; criminals were able to take advantage of the socio-political instability surrounding the COVID-19 crisis to reinforce and increase their territorial dominance, generating greater vulnerability (and increased violence) for Christians. The COVID-19 context also encouraged the indigenous community authorities to act more harshly against those Christians refusing to adhere to traditional customs. *Secular intolerance* was also a factor elsewhere in the country, with radical groups opposing church activities and Christians.

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):

The [Corruption Perception Index](#) 2019 (Transparency International, 23 January 2020) ranks Mexico 130th out of 180, with a 29/100 score (0= highly corrupt and 100= very clean). 2020 has been one of the most violent years for Mexico: In the first six months 20,494 people were killed, [outnumbering](#) the more than 20,176 registered in 2019 by 318 (Forbes, 2 September 2020), not to mention that attacks against law enforcement agencies by drug cartels are constant.

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, the government's plan to control violence using military force proved to be [ineffective](#) (Wola, 26 May 2020). The high levels of impunity and corruption have led commentators to call Mexico a “[narco-state](#)” (AZ Central, 16 November 2019). Many criminal groups are not only active in the communities under their control but have also [established](#) networks in various other states as well (BBC News, 24 October 2019) and have built up an active presence [throughout](#) the country (El Cierre Digital, 15 June 2020). The main criminal groups have also [diversified](#) to increase their scope of action (Nexos, July 13, 2020). These factors mean that there is continual warfare between groups, causing a [spiral](#) of violence (Caretas, 27 September 2020). 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.

During the 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, increase area control (The Conversation, 22 June 2020) and legitimize their illegal activities. In Mexico, as in other Latin American countries where criminal groups are very active, they used imaginative methods to [continue](#) drug-trafficking operations, often using face masks, avocados, children's toys, wigs and animals for distribution purposes (Insight Crime, 3 April 2020). Many have also begun using [cybertechnology](#) (Insight Crime, 8 April 2020) and drones for monitoring.

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. This is especially the case where church work aims to prevent young people from joining the ranks of drug traffickers or where Christian leaders have set up projects supporting [immigrants](#) (NCR, 29 October 2019). They can quickly become targets for surveillance, [death threats](#), reprisals, kidnapping attempts and even killings (Sipazen, 20 April 2020). Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, churches have been targeted for robbery and sometimes church staff have been [injured](#) in the process (El Sol de Zamora, 29 July 2020) and/or extorted (Sin Embargo, 23 April 2020). Such acts of intimidation had been forcing 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 (Protestante Digital, 4 July 2020).

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 they are contrary to their Christian belief. At times, such 'non-accepted Christians' 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 'non-accepted 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 Commissions of Human Rights measures have been taken to guarantee the physical integrity and personal security of such 'non-accepted Christians'. 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 'non-accepted Christians', in many cases, these measures were not enough mainly because such cases are very often considered to be a minor internal conflict about political or personal differences and are not viewed as a violation of the right to religious liberty.

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](#) (El Universal, 24 August 2020). In the WWL 2021 reporting period, aggressive intolerance was particularly in evidence where Christian values were brought into discussions concerning marriage, life and family. 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 (Jornada, 27 July 2020). 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 (Reuters, 24 July 2020). Attempts are also made [to limit](#) parents' rights to educate their children according to their own convictions regarding sexuality (AP, 6 July 2020).

Likewise, Christians defending their beliefs [at work](#) or in schools are also often verbally attacked and defamed (Aciprensa, 9 August 2020). 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 (Aciprensa, 9 March 2020). In such cases, the authorities almost never carry out in-depth investigations, not only because of the problems caused by the COVID-19 measures, but also because attacks on Christians and churches are not considered as a "real problem". 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

Mexico: Drivers of persecution per engine									
	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	-	-	-	STRONG	WEAK	-	MEDIUM	-	STRONG
Government officials	-	-	-	Medium	Weak	-	Medium	-	Strong
Ethnic group leaders	-	-	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	-	-	-	Strong	-	-	Very weak	-	Very weak
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Weak	Very weak	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	-	-	-	Strong	-	-	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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Very strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	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 (Very strong):** As listed above in the "Security Situation" section, 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 in 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 (Strong):** 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, a certain amount of 'narco-financing' of politics has begun to take place, whereby drug cartels finance specific political candidates and parties. This is another reason why organized crime has been expanding.

Drivers of Clan oppression:

- **Ethnic group leaders (Very 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 practise 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, 'non-accepted Christians' in the communities were refused special community assistance by the leaders who consider them traitors with no community rights.
- **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 be 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 (Strong):** LGBTI, 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 was initially acted favorably toward 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.
- **Citizens (Medium):** Due to the increasing secularization in the country, there have been coordinated attacks on Christians in social media networks and the vandalism of churches mostly motivated by hatred of Catholic doctrine. Citizens are increasingly regarding churches as an obstacle to progress in society and that everything associated with them deserve no respect.

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](#)" (France 24, 02 December 2019). Although the organizations with the greatest presence are the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel - CJNG (27 of 32 states) and Sinaloa / Pacifico Cartel (21 of 32 states), there are at least 17 other criminal groups (leaving aside the many new offshoots) with [a high-profile presence](#) in the country (El Universal, 22 September 2020). 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 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, Mexico City, Mexico State 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 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.

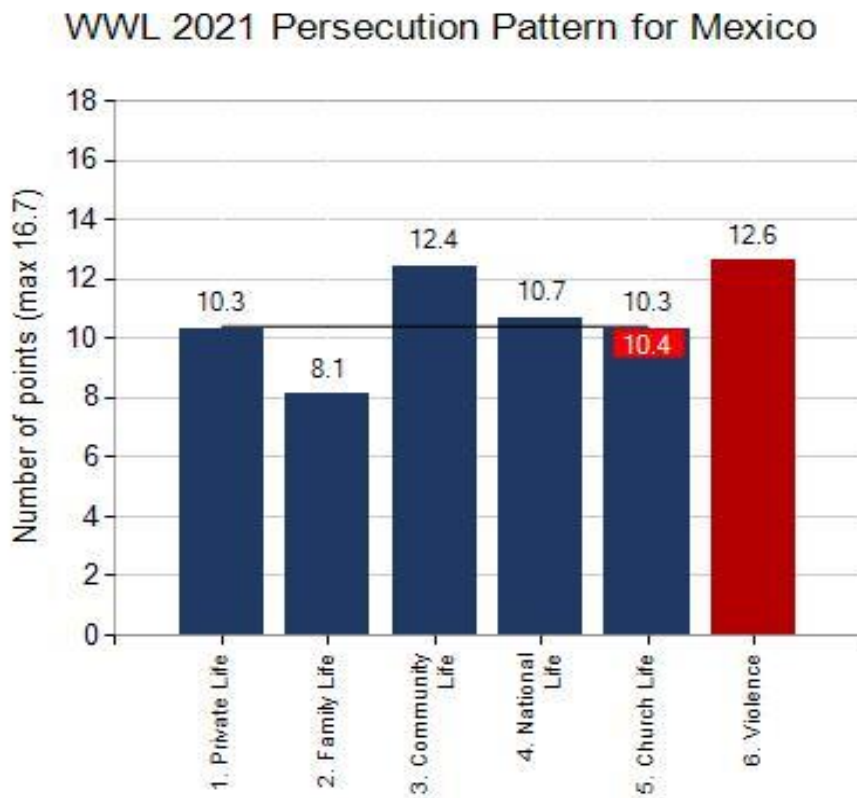
Converts:

This category includes cross-denominational converts from historical Christian communities, 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 also 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 2021 Persecution pattern for Mexico shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Mexico remains at a high level, rising from 9.6 points in WWL 2020 to 10.4 points in WWL 2021. This is mainly due to the rising pressure caused by expanding criminal and indigenous group control.
- All spheres of life scored at least 8.2 points or above and thus pressure is at a high level throughout. Pressure is highest in the Community sphere (12.4 points).
- The score for violence is extremely high. It increased from 11.5 points in WWL 2020 to 12.6 points. There were more incidents of killings, churches being attacked, abductions, sexual harassment, and of physical/mental abuse 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: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.25 points)

Although in indigenous communities, especially those in the south of the country, oral testimony is essential for the transmission of faith, if 'non-accepted Christians' try to share their faith by written means with other members of the community, they will be punished. During the COVID-19 crisis, online platforms played a more significant role than ever; it became easier for criminal groups to target Christians who published material supporting non-violence and opposing illicit activities. Further, 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 LGBTI supporters and feminist groups. This also affects Christians who indicate support for the president and his apparent close relationship with certain Christian denominations. Also, politicians can be swiftly removed from their political parties if they make their Christian beliefs known on social media.

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. Also, extended family linked to criminal groups may react violently towards relatives who convert and abandon criminal life.

Due to the fact that religious intolerance is increasing in the country, extended family who oppose Christian values (or who belong to a different Christian denomination) may attempt to discourage any family member who speaks 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 will try to meet in secret or outside the community. Their meetings are considered religious proselytism and if discovered can lead to imprisonment or forced displacement. This was a particular risk during the COVID-19 lockdown period, when monitoring by indigenous authorities increased greatly. The lockdown measures also reinforced the power of criminal groups to regulate the social life in the area under their control. They viewed with suspicion any non-religious gatherings of activist Christians because they could be interpreted as defying 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 confinement measures increased the pressure on 'non-accepted Christians' 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.

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. This includes content which contradict their Christian faith and ethics.

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 'non-accepted Christians' are expelled from an indigenous community or imprisoned, they are necessarily separated from family, spouse and children. 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. The COVID-19 travel bans prevented external displacement, which meant that those threatened by organized crime could not flee far from their homes, but had to remain within a criminal group's territory.

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 'non-accepted Christian' residents in the indigenous community comply. During the COVID-19 lockdown period, the recruitment of children by criminal groups skyrocketed; 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, which Christian parent groups have protested against. Such opposition by parents is regarded as invalid, since it is claimed that the State is acting in the best interest of the nation's children.

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 'non-accepted 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. 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 during the COVID-19 lockdown measures and has occurred where children have mentioned their Christian faith.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.50 points)

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 if it is a former gang member who has converted to Christianity. Monitoring increased in the WWL 2021 reporting period due to the COVID-19 lockdown measures. With government authorities absent, Christians were much more exposed to the surveillance of ethnic leaders and criminal groups.

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.25 points)

Within indigenous communities, 'non-accepted Christians' face continual threats to make them stop their Christian activities. Continual harassment can lead to forced displacement of Christians and their families. In areas co-opted by criminals, Christians are continuously targeted if represent an obstacle to the illegal activities in the area. During the COVID-19 crisis, many criminal groups distributed financial and material aid to the neediest in their areas of control and Christians were threatened if they refused to accept it. In addition, with the increasing polarization against Christians in wider society, many Christians face continual mockery and hostility for using religious symbols and clothing (such as crosses and rosaries).

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

Indigenous 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 exceed the amount of money that an indigenous Christian could pay. Criminal gangs extort protection money from church leaders and other Christians to allow them to conduct their Christian activities unmolested. In the WWL 2021 reporting period, extortion became more frequent due to the almost total control of some areas of the country by criminal groups.

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. 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 in its Article 24 more or less follows the provisions of Article 18 of the UDHR. However, the Constitution goes on to list certain restrictions concerning the possibility of manifesting and teaching one's own religion as well as promoting its observance in a political context (breaking the principle of separation between Church and State) or where it could be understood to include proselytism or the attempt to interfere in the political landscape. This excessive limitation of the norm and the disproportionate regulation of acts of religious proselytism, has generated actions of interference in the exercise of religious freedom, especially of ministers of worship.

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

Within indigenous communities, it is considered that with their conversion or their refusal not to follow the traditional religion, 'non-accepted Christians' 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. Also, 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 bans.

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 forbidden in the country. Given the levels of corruption, state authorities allow criminal groups 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 'non-accepted Christians'. If the State authorities are informed of such incidents, the conflict is most often dismissed as a private dispute or a cultural issue and is not treated as a 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, the justice system has taken no action, even where there has been damage to their dignity and reputation.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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, 'non-accepted Christians' considered religious leaders 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 lockdown, some criminal groups forced priests to hold church services. Also, Christian leaders 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, 'non-accepted Christians' 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 certain 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.

Block 5.4: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities inside their place of worship. (3.25 points)

'Non-accepted Christians' within indigenous communities 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 lockdown threats and church robberies continued to occur at a high rate. Also, Ideological pressure groups have at times interrupted church services, attacked some of those worshipping and shouted offensive slogans.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.25 points)

Within indigenous communities, any preaching or teaching that contradicts the ancestral or syncretistic practices of the ethnic group are forbidden. During the COVID-19 restrictions, the monitoring of 'non-accepted Christians' was easier and more intense. Elsewhere, criminal groups have threatened church leaders where they have preached sermons opposing corruption, violence and crime. During the COVID-19 lockdown period, when many churches were holding live online church services, threats were issued to preachers to prevent them from publicizing criminal activities or the state of impunity. Church leaders also experience many restrictions in political debate. Statements and comments made by public officers are constantly under scrutiny for potential banning under non-discrimination provisions.

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. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (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 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure. The symbol "x" denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security considerations.

Mexico: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	7	6
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?	61	8
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	15	20
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	2
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	8	7
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	15	0
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)?	61	13
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	3	2
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?	1	5
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	71	104
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	0	15

Violence against Christians for faith-related reasons remains at an extremely high level in the country, despite the COVID-19 lockdown and travel restrictions. Criminal and indigenous groups were the main drivers of persecution, causing such incidents as killings, detentions, abductions, sexual harassment, physical abuse, death threats, internal forced displacement and many more.

5 Year trends

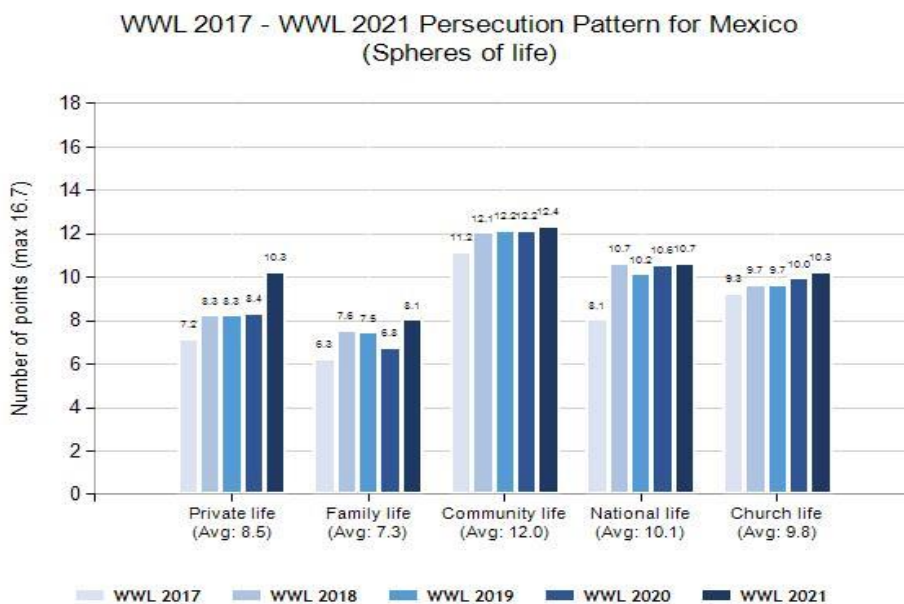
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Mexico: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	10.4
2020	9.6
2019	9.6
2018	9.7
2017	8.4

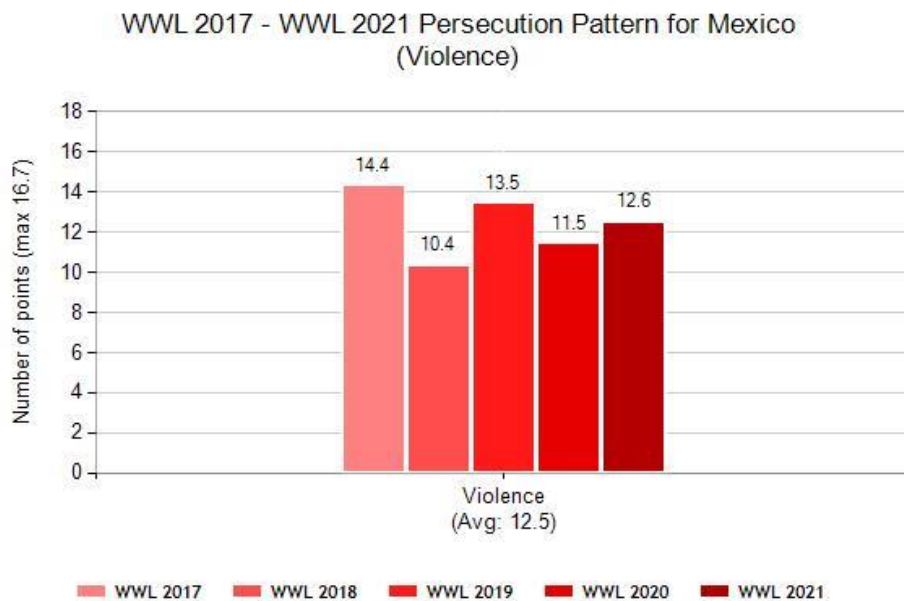
The table above shows that the average pressure on Christians has consistently been between 8.4 and 10.4 points over the last five reporting periods, with a noticeable increase in WWL 2021. This reflects the weakness of the State in the fight against drug cartels and general violence in the country, as corruption networks and government indifference at all levels have caused the vulnerability of Christians to rise.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



In general, although the pressure has increased in all *spheres of life* (with the most significant rise in pressure occurring in *Private life*), pressure has always been highest in *Community life*. This is the result of the worsening security situation and of the ineffectiveness of the 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 'non-accepted Christians' within indigenous communities and by the increased opposition to public manifestations of Christian faith in government and society.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Over the last five 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, during the COVID-crisis in WWL 2021, Christians were more vulnerable to violence than in WWL 2020.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied/restricted healthcare
Forced marriage
Trafficking

Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – sexual

Although there is no specific national law that puts women and girls in particular danger, there are many challenges facing Mexican women, particularly in light of ongoing organized violence. According to information from the Mexican government's [Executive Secretariat](#) (Centro Nacional de Información, 30 September 2020), from January to September 2020, 724 femicides were committed in Mexico, especially in the State of Mexico, Veracruz, Mexico City and Chihuahua. Within the WWL 2021 reporting period there has been an [increase in family violence](#) against women, which has been linked to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Data-Pop Alliance, 27 October 2020). The pandemic has also been [exploited](#) by criminal gangs, who have recruited and trafficked women made vulnerable by economic instability (CNN, 17 August 2020).

Christian women face various challenges within their families and communities. In indigenous communities, [forced marriage](#) is still a cultural tradition, despite government efforts to eradicate it (Animal Politico, 4 November 2019). According to Girls Not Brides (accessed 7 December 2020), [26%](#) of girls are married before they reach the age of 18 in Mexico. Christian converts from this background may be forced to marry non-Christian indigenous men; tribal authorities consider this a way of pressurizing them to renounce their faith. Verbal and physical abuse (including sexual violence) is used to pressure them into following the traditional religion.

Furthermore, in some indigenous communities in Mexico, girls are victims of trafficking under the [“mask” of the dowry](#) (Infobae, 10 October 2019). The dowry is an ancestral tradition which has now become a mere economic transaction. In earlier times, it was a present that one family offered to the other for the happiness of a new couple; nowadays, families negotiate the value of girls with prices range from 40 to 150 thousand pesos.

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, “2020 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.

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.

As public services are operated and distributed by ethnic leaders within indigenous communities, 'non-accepted Christians' are frequently hindered in accessing healthcare services as they are not viewed as properly belonging to the community. Women, who are conditioned to use contraceptive methods (mostly non-reversible) in exchange for social assistance, are most affected.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied access to social community/networks
Discrimination/harassment via education
Economic harassment via fines
Forced to flee town/country
Imprisonment by government
Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – Verbal

Within the context of ongoing violence and organized crime, the risk of young men and boys being killed in Mexico is high. The country's homicide rate has [risen since 2014](#), although remains lower than some neighboring countries (BBC News, 18 February 2020). 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).

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 2021 reporting period, there have been several examples of priests and pastors being beaten or kidnapped for ransom. 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 incite rebellion.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the [US State Department Report on International Religious Freedom 2019](#):

- “CONAPRED [National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination] President Alexandra Haas Pacuic acknowledged that religious minorities in the country faced prejudice and barriers, including at institutional levels.”
- “Jewish community representatives said they conducted an assessment of online anti-Semitic messages, symbols, and language from January through June [2019], finding that Twitter accounted for 87.1 percent, news sources 8.5 percent, online forums 3.5 percent, and blogs 0.9 percent. The representatives said the number of anti-Semitic attacks was approximately the same as in 2018. Anti-Semitic tweets typically referenced the Holocaust and Hitler, along with other derogatory language.”

According to The Guardian, reporting on [5 November 2019](#), gunmen in northern Mexico ambushed and killed three women and six children belonging to the well-known Mormon LeBarón family while they were driving on a road connecting Chihuahua and Sonora states. However, both the Mexican authorities and relatives said that they believed that cartel gunmen had mistaken the convoy of three vehicles for rivals from another group.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Organized corruption and crime:

The current government's strategy to stop the spread of violence has been notoriously ineffective and would seem to have contributed to a proliferation of criminal groups. This has affected the lives of many Christians and churches. It is necessary for society and State authorities to address this problem fully and accept that Christians are definitely being targeted on grounds of faith. One particularly important issue will be to find ways to end impunity and corruption so that there is no fear of reprisals for reporting criminal activities to the authorities or for passing sentences in court. The fear of reprisals is why, in all probability, a lot of incidents

go unreported. At least in the short term, violence is likely to continue in areas dominated by criminal groups.

Clan oppression:

In spite of the increasing awareness of the overall situation of indigenous peoples and their communities in Mexico, their autonomy was reinforced, especially in relation to the protection of individual rights of its members. Although State intervention in ethnic groups is very slight, in order to provide the due protection of religious freedom for 'non-accepted Christians', 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.

Secular intolerance:

It is very likely that the eradication of religion from the public domain will remain a political-legislative goal for many, especially in non-federal instances. The opportunities for faith-based public discussion of such issues as the sanctity of life, marriage and family are clearly becoming fewer through the influence of ideological pressure groups. If there is not a clear stance to protect religious freedom in all its dimensions as a human right, its free exercise will become increasingly difficult, not just in the public sphere but also related to the excessive limitations in the private sphere of life, as was recorded in the WWL 2021 reporting period.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: Corruption Perception Index - <https://www.transparency.org/country/MEX>
- Persecution engines description: outnumbering - <https://www.forbes.com.mx/noticias-homicidios-mexico-nuevo-record-2020-pese-confinamiento-preve-gobierno/>
- Persecution engines description: ineffective - <https://www.wola.org/analysis/one-year-national-guard-mexico/>
- Persecution engines description: narco-state - <https://www.azcentral.com/story/opinion/op-ed/philboas/2019/11/16/mexico-has-reached-turning-point-destroy-cartels-itself/4178290002/>
- Persecution engines description: established - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-40480405>
- Persecution engines description: throughout - <https://elcierredigital.com/investigacion/941594716/mapa-narcotrafico-mexico-clanes-drogas.html>
- Persecution engines description: diversified - <https://seguridad.nexos.com.mx/?p=2195>
- Persecution engines description: spiral - <https://caretas.pe/mundo/mexico-se-cierne-en-una-nueva-guerra-entre-los-carteles-de-narcotrafico/>
- 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: continue - <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/drug-traffickers-creative-ways/>
- Persecution engines description: cyber technology - <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/threat-cyber-crime-coronavirus/>
- Persecution engines description: immigrants - <https://www.ncronline.org/news/quick-reads/mexican-priest-who-runs-shelter-extorted-later-attacked-rectory>
- Persecution engines description: death threats, - <https://sipazen.wordpress.com/2020/04/20/chiapas-frayba-denounces-threats-and-harassment-of-simojovel-parish-priest-marcelo-perez-perez/>

- Persecution engines description: injured - <https://www.elsoldezamora.com.mx/local/municipios/irrupmen-en-casa-pastoral-de-la-parroquia-del-refugio-y-apunalan-a-sacerdote-5556177.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://www.protestantedigital.com/perseguidos/54096/libertad-religiosa-en-mexico-que-sucede-en-las-comunidades-indigenas>
- Persecution engines description: worsened - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/04/07/feature/4603/article.htm>
- Persecution engines description: public officers - <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/destituyen-funcionaria-de-colima-por-comentario-homofobo>
- Persecution engines description: impediment - <https://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/sociedad/2020/07/27/llaman-a-iglesia-catolica-a-respetar-decision-de-mujeres-sobre-aborto-6214.html>
- Persecution engines description: taken to court - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-lgbtq/mexico-city-outlaws-gay-conversion-therapy-idUSKCN24P2LL>
- Persecution engines description: to limit - <https://apnews.com/901e548018858f84f6c6839e7b80acfa>
- Persecution engines description: at work - https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/medico-salva-a-mujer-que-se-hizo-aborto-en-casa-y-feministas-lo-atacan-80503?fbclid=IwAR3rjnyVEQE83v-g5_FrcHiWYjDmzM69-eK3H8ivwCdgJTS_c2klhVaNsQg
- Persecution engines description: vandalized - <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/violentas-feministas-atacaron-iglesias-en-diversas-ciudades-de-mexico-43444>
- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: "narco-states" - <https://www.france24.com/es/20191202-en-foco-sinaloa-crimen-chapo-narco>
- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: a high-profile presence - <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/el-cjng-el-de-mayor-penetracion-en-el-pais>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Executive Secretariat - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1p9M_mt-4jmn3CE8IB9qEu0sYILAO67fp/view
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: increase in family violence - <https://datapopalliance.org/using-data-to-shed-light-on-the-shadow-pandemic-of-domestic-violence-in-mexico/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: exploited - <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/video/coronavirus-tijuana-mexico-prostitucion-mercado-sexual-pkg-matt-rivers/?fbclid=IwAR3wcZo0ZP729ySMiBzfhp8MCoMfgbTBRjVJTWePnwiVrkPja8Ryy2OWRo#0>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: forced marriage - <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2019/11/matrimonios-forzados-veracruz-ninas-dinero/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 26% - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/mexico/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: "mask" of the dowry - <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2019/12/04/venta-de-ninas-una-tradicion-centenaria-en-comunidades-indigenas-de-guerrero-oaxaca-y-chiapas>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: highest rate - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/mexico/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: risen since 2014 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-50315470>
- 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=IwAR1NpVdFycEwjOvN-E_WFy-MAfj4FmrhMpqtICOOerHev-6Elv_Ua_ERH8
- Persecution of other religious minorities: US State Department Report on International Religious Freedom 2019 - <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/MEXICO-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>

- Persecution of other religious minorities: 5 November 2019 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/05/five-members-of-family-including-children-die-in-mexico-gun-attack>

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:

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