

FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

MEXICO

LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

(Reporting period: 1 November 2017 – 31 October 2018)

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Introduction

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Introduction

World Watch List Mexico	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	61	39
WWL 2018	59	39
WWL 2017	57	41
WWL 2016	56	40
WWL 2015	55	38

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.

Please note: 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”.

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Mexico

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18095241>

Recent country history

President Enrique Peña Nieto's term of office came to an end on 30 November 2018 and he stepped down from power along with the loss of prestige of his PRI party. His successor is the leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador who won the presidential elections in July 2018, when he ran as leader of the National Regeneration Movement (Morena). He will now have to deal with the increasingly restrictive [policies](#) of US President Donald Trump and the crowds of Central American migrants along the Mexican-US border, among many other matters.

Mexican democracy has been weakened i) by the loss of legitimacy of its governmental authorities, ii) by the lack of security, iii) by the failing economy, iv) by an increase in the presence of organized crime and v) by the lack of access for many to social services and justice. In this context, Christian leaders have assumed a more influential role in society, but this has also made them more likely to be targeted by criminal networks. In addition to the [numerous murders](#) of church leaders in the WWL 2019 reporting period, many churches have been victims of robberies and attacks. In previous years, violent crime was usually restricted to specific regions of the country (such as Guerrero and Chihuahua), but in recent months this seems to be spreading all over the country, even to the [capital](#).

Another event that also affected Christians was the earthquake on 19 February 2018. Catholic officials responsible for the care of church property had already laid plans for [emergency action](#) in the face of natural disasters after the September 2017 earthquake - the aim being to prevent the looting of any churches affected. This is especially important in churches belonging to the indigenous communities.

The religious landscape

In Mexico, several religions coexist: Christianity is by far the majority religion but there are also religious minorities such as the ethno-religionist community (due the large indigenous population) and the Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist communities. Although Mexico is a predominantly Roman Catholic country, WCD statistics show that the Protestant presence is on the increase. This is the result of: a) an increasing acceptance of Christian diversity and the growing tolerance of cross-denominational conversions; b) the greater unity among Christians in standing up for Christian values, defending the life of the unborn, promoting a biblical understanding of marriage and opposing violence caused by criminal organizations; c) a growing interest in the Christian Gospel among the poor.

Despite these factors, the Christian presence in the public sphere is still very restricted, especially in the political sector. Criticism often focuses on the need for the secular nation to keep Church and State well separated, but the increasing secular intolerance in many areas makes Christians vulnerable: Attacks against them are increasing from political, social, academic and criminal groups, the latter regarding Christian faith as a threat to their criminal practices. Aggression against Christians is often regarded as personal conflict and is hence not seen as being the result of violence due to religious discrimination.

Despite the common criticism focusing on the need for the secular nation to keep Church and State separate, government authorities and politicians look to Christian leaders publicly for support when it

is convenient. On the other hand, Christian values are still targeted by LGBTI and radical feminist groups, who mock the Christian faith and continually demand the imposition of their agenda at legislative, political and social levels. Another obstacle for Christians is the growing presence of criminal groups; due to the government's poor response in combatting such groups, some Christian leaders have taken the initiative and have developed their own [strategies](#) to increase safety as far as possible.

The political landscape

As mentioned above, the governing PRI party has lost support, mostly due to corruption, money laundering and various scandals. As a result, the PRI party only received just over 16% of the vote in the July 2018 presidential elections, the [lowest percentage](#) in their entire history. Thus, the victory of Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), who had formed an electoral alliance with both conservative and left-wing parties called "[Together we will make history](#)", is an indicator of how [weary](#) of traditional political parties the general public has become. Mexican citizens preferred to vote for the independent option, hoping for a return to the rule of law and an end to the prevailing corruption in the country. However, although the alliance served well for attaining power, it is difficult to know if it will be able to govern effectively, considering the mix of ideologies within the coalition. AMLO will officially take over the presidency on 1 December 2018, so, it is too early to affirm whether the new president will opt for a right-wing, left-wing or authoritarian form of government.

Regarding the 2018 electoral process, there are two factors to highlight: i) The Christian vote: The Christian population has been recognized as an important political element and this caused candidates – even presidential candidates - to seek alliances with Christian leaders and groups in their desire to win votes (promising the protection of Christian values if elected). However, after the elections, the winners have not hesitated to position themselves against Christian values, as has can be seen in the planned appointment of staff to key positions, who openly promote issues like abortion and euthanasia. ii) The violence prior to elections: From September 2016 to June 2018 (i.e. the elections campaigning period), more than 120 candidates were [assassinated](#), turning this electoral process into one of the most violent in the country's history and demonstrating that criminal organizations were actively seeking to influence the elections.

Meanwhile, Christian leaders continue to be criticized - and even [threatened](#) with sanctions - when expressing their opinions on political issues whether publicly or in church preaching. This is frequently considered an affront to the secular principles of the State. As a result, Christians have to put up with being ridiculed, harassed and sometimes attacked for defending their religious convictions in the political sphere.

The socio-economic landscape

According to the Corruption Perception Index (2017), Mexico [ranks](#) 135th out of 180 countries and scores 29/100 in a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean), which means corruption in the country is a serious problem. From what is known in the WWL 2019 reporting period, this is an issue involving politicians, government representatives and the public services in particular. This phenomenon has led to other problems, such as the propagation of activities linked to organized crime all over the country. While it is true that the police lack personnel and government backing for combatting crime, there are also indications of serious collusion.

Another issue is the high and rising inequality between rich and poor. According to the last official [report](#) on the Evolution of Poverty 2010-2016 (2017), the number of Mexicans living in poverty was 53.4 million and the number of people living in extreme poverty was 9.4 million. The southern states

of Veracruz, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Chiapas and Campeche were identified as being the poorest. This has forced many Mexican families to move to other areas of the Republic that have [improved](#) economically, in the hope of finding a greater degree of economic and social stability.

Similarly, when analyzing the social context, attention must be paid to the state of security. The Criminal Incidence report (October 2018) shows that recorded cases of murder in Mexico in the period January to September 2018 rose to [21,383](#) (the equivalent of 78 murders a day) in comparison to the September 2017 figure of [18,151](#). These figures confirm that the violence perpetrated by criminal groups is increasing. The main reasons for this would appear to be [police shortages](#), the increasing numbers of [gangs](#), corruption and weak state institutions. This level of violence has an impact not only in the personal and community spheres of Christian life, but also affects economic growth at national level. As [indicated](#) by the Mexico Peace Index 2018, the economic impact of violence in Mexico in 2017 amounted to 4.72 trillion pesos (249 billion USD), equivalent to 21% of the country's GDP. The greater the degree of [insecurity](#), the greater the investment required to combat it.

Naturally, other aspects - such as international relationships - also influence the national economy. The uncertain results of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations and the ["trade war"](#) initiated by the USA against Mexico are major factors in this respect.

Concluding remarks

The government's inefficient handling of the main problems that plague the country, such as inequality, poverty, insecurity and criminal violence (along with the impunity allowed by the government), has led Mexican citizens to place their hopes in a new president, whose form of government might be left, right, or something else. Despite his socialist background, ambiguity reigns at present. If - as some of the opposition suspect - his socialist vein will prevail, Christians could be at great risk. Christians tend to be among those vulnerable groups persecuted for being the first to oppose totalitarian government practices and for demanding respect for democracy and the rule of law - as has been seen in countries like Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, where the authorities seek to maintain power at all costs, sacrificing traditional values.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Mexico

- Recent country history: policies
<https://www.voanews.com/a/trump-presses-demand-for-wall-along-us-mexico-border/4506390.html>
- Recent country history: numerous murders
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/mexico-no-protection-for-christian-leaders/>
- Recent country history: capital
<http://time.com/5324888/mexico-violence-murders/>
- Recent country history: emergency action
<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/church-in-mexico-releases-security-protocols-to-prevent-crime-86309>
- The religious landscape: strategies
<https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2018/06/21/mexican-bishops-announce-security-protocols-for-priests-religious/>

- The political landscape: lowest percentage
<https://computos2018.ine.mx/#/presidencia/nacional/1/1/1/1>
- The political landscape: Together we will make history
<https://www.razon.com.mx/coalicion-juntos-haremos-historia-transformara-al-pais-dice-amlo/>
- The political landscape: weary
<https://www.dw.com/en/mexico-election-leftist-outsider-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-stretches-lead/a-44167227>
- The political landscape: assassinated
<http://www.etellekt.com/reporte/quinto-informe-de-violencia-politica-en-mexico.html>
- The political landscape: threatened
<https://www.unotv.com/noticias/portal/nacional/detalle/ningn-ministro-de-culto-puede-inducir-el-voto-pgr-956474/>
- The socio-economic landscape: ranks
https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017#table
- The socio-economic landscape: report
<https://www.coneval.org.mx/SalaPrensa/Comunicadosprensa/Documents/Comunicado-09-Medicion-pobreza-2016.pdf>
- The socio-economic landscape: improved
<http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/economia/los-5-estados-que-mas-crecieron-en-2017>
- The socio-economic landscape: 21,383
<http://secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/docs/pdfs/nueva-metodologia/CNSP-Delitos-2018.pdf>
- The socio-economic landscape: 18,151
<http://secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/docs/pdfs/nueva-metodologia/CNSP-Delitos-2017.pdf>
- The socio-economic landscape: police shortages
<https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/politica/Insuficientes-los-policias-en-Mexico--20171227-0093.html>
- The socio-economic landscape: gangs
<https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c1don37v>
- The socio-economic landscape: indicated
<http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/cn/pibo/default.aspx>
- The socio-economic landscape: insecurity
<https://socialistproject.ca/2018/07/mexico-violence-corruption-inequality-amlo-to-the-rescue/>
- The socio-economic landscape: "trade war"
<https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-mexico-canada-trade-deal-nafta-update-usmca-trouble-2018-11>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
130,759,000	125,347,000	95.9

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

How did Christians get there?

Christianity reached Mexico during the Spanish conquest of the Aztec natives (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 the country. In modern times, the government did not recognize churches and religious associations as a legal body until 1992, thanks to the reforms to [Article 130](#) of the Constitution and the implementation of the Law on Religious Associations and Public Worship.

What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Mexico	Christians	%
Orthodox	121,000	0.1
Catholic	114,874,000	91.6
Protestant	4,708,000	3.8
Independent	7,055,000	5.6
Unaffiliated	1,350,000	1.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-2,761,000	-2.2
Total	125,347,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,730,000	2.2
Renewalist movement	15,846,000	12.6

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: Believers 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.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

Mexico has one of the largest Roman Catholic populations in the world, representing almost 91.6% of the Christian population according to WCD 2018 estimates. In recent years there has been a decline in the Catholic population and an increase in the number of Protestants. Thus, according to the latest population [census](#) (2010), between 2000 and 2010 the group of Protestant Christians had increased by 3.2% over the previous census, meaning an increase of 3.2 million Protestant believers.

However, a [report](#) entitled "Pope Francis and Religion in Chile and Latin America Latinobarometro 1995-2017" (2018) indicates that the number of non-Catholics has increased to 5 million believers. Information provided by the Mexican government shows that the states with the largest non-Catholic population are Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Quintana Roo and Yucatan.

Religious context

Religious Context: Mexico	Numbers	%
Christians	125,347,000	95.9
Muslim	122,000	0.1
Hindu	11,800	0.0
Buddhist	30,000	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	1,376,000	1.1
Jewish	40,200	0.0
Bahai	44,900	0.0
Atheist	138,000	0.1
Agnostic	3,612,000	2.8
Other	36,900	0.0

OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

Although Christians make up 95.9% of the population of the country, it is important to note that an estimated 3.0% of the population identify themselves as agnostic/atheist. This phenomenon is the result of strong secular tendencies emerging over recent years.

Notes on the current situation

- The culture of religious pluralism has spread in the urban areas of the country making it possible for Christians from all churches to unite in defending biblical values concerning unborn life and marriage. Demonstrations have also been organized in favor of life and family issues.
- Given the wave of violence and insecurity due to organized crime and the ineffectiveness of the local authorities to protect Christians and churches, some Christian leaders are carrying out their own security strategies and have initiated dialogue with criminal group leaders, instead of waiting in vain for state law enforcement to act.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- How did Christians get there?: Article 130
https://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/en/mex/en_mex-int-text-const.pdf
- What church networks exist today?: census (2010)
<http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/temas/religion/>
- What church networks exist today?: report
<http://www.latinobarometro.org/latNewsShow.jsp>

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

In WWL 2019 Mexico scored 61 points and reached rank 39.

What type of persecution dominates?

Organized corruption and crime: Many Christians are seen as obstacles to criminal gangs, especially where they are engaged in youth work and/or drug rehabilitation. Christians experience attacks, extortion and even murder, especially where there is collusion between the authorities and criminal groups.

Ethnic antagonism: According to the Intercensal Survey (2015), about 21.5% of the Mexican population belong to indigenous groups. Their communities are governed by traditional laws and customs with minimal intervention from the State. Converts to Christianity (usually Protestants) suffer severe pressure and often violent attacks, when they abandon the religious practices of the ethnic group.

Secular intolerance: Policies that seek to promote liberal ideologies have been encouraged, especially in matters related to comprehensive sex education, abortion and same sex marriage. The defense of life and family promoted by Christians is regularly criticized. Also, some church leaders have been threatened with sanctions for stating political opinions in public.

Who is driving persecution?

Violent persecution is carried out by criminal groups against priests and pastors, endorsed directly or indirectly by the government due to corruption and impunity. Leaders and members of indigenous communities (including family) are also responsible for attacking Christian converts and applying pressure through fines, isolation, denying basic community services and imprisonment. In addition, secular ideology is increasing in influence due to pressure exerted by ideological pressure groups (such as the LGBTI and radical feminist communities) and due to encouragement from political parties and multilateral organizations who are all attempting to eradicate Christian values from the public sphere (particularly concerning such issues as unborn life, marriage and parental rights).

What it results in

Christians, their leaders and their church-buildings have become victims of attacks, threats, extortion, etc. This is happening with increasing frequency all over the country and not just in those states known to be the most violent. It seems that there is a strong presence of criminal cells now in many more regions than before. In regard to secular intolerance, Christians and those expressing their Christian convictions are victims of harassment, criticism and ridicule, especially in public debates concerning abortion, same sex marriage and comprehensive sex education. Finally, it is not unusual for Christian families in indigenous communities to be punished for leaving tribal customs; often they are forced to leave their homes.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

Mexico	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	15	24	10	40	5
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	8	149	11	6	8

Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- In October 2018, Marcelino Carrillo, an indigenous Wixarica of the northern region of Jalisco, was kidnaped by Wixarican authorities ("tupiles") and punished with imprisonment (according to the community's "internal laws") for an indefinite period of time. Carrillo had been expelled a year ago due to his conversion to Christianity.
- In April 2018, the Catholic church authorities in the states of Mexico, Hidalgo and Tlaxcala decided to [change](#) the times of their church services and other activities due to the rising insecurity. Among other measures, priests are no longer to go out alone when carrying out religious duties and no church member is to bring valuables to the church.
- In April 2018, three Roman Catholic priests were [killed](#). One was abducted in Cuernavaca and died while his rescue was in process. Another was shot dead in Jalisco in his church office. A third was stabbed to death inside a church in Mexico City.
- In February 2018, the state attorney general in Guerrero insinuated that Roman Catholic priests killed by criminal groups were themselves involved in crime. The Bishop of the Chilpancingo-Chilapa diocese publicly rejected this. As a result, the Ministry of the Interior [ordered](#) him not to state anything more on the subject publicly, thus allowing the reputation of the executed priests to be discredited.

External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

- What type of persecution dominates?: 21.5%
http://internet.contenidos.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva_estruc/702825078966.pdf
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: change
<https://vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/cambia-iglesia-horarios-de-culto-por-inseguridad>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: killed
<https://regeneracion.mx/abril-negro-tercer-sacerdote-asesinado-esta-semana-van-24-en-sexenio/>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: ordered
<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/acusa-obispo-de-chilpancingo-presiones-por-hablar-de-asesinatos-de-sacerdotes>

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

In WWL 2019 Mexico scored 61 points and reached rank 39. The score in WWL 2018 was 59 points (also at rank 39). The rise in score is almost entirely due to a rise in the score for violence. The run-up to elections in the first half of 2018 gave rise to an increase in attacks against Christians and church leaders in particular. There were also more violent incidents against indigenous converts reported.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Mexico	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Not at all
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Strong
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Very 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 (long version).

Organized corruption and crime (Strong):

The presence of organized crime is one of the most serious problems in Mexico, as a result of the ineffective measures taken by the government along with the climate of impunity due to corruption at all levels. Mexico is crowded with criminal groups, and not just in the so-called "[narco-states](#)"; networks are being [established](#) in various other states as well. In some Mexican towns, communities have formed self-defense groups to keep criminal groups and corrupt police officers away. In areas, where criminal groups are active, Christians are vulnerable since their attitude and work are often perceived as being a threat: This occurs when they refuse to participate in illegal activities and when their youth-work is involved in advocacy and anti-drug trafficking support. Such Christians experience surveillance, threats, extortion, kidnapping and robberies, not to mention the number of Christians murdered in the WWL 2019 reporting period, which have all increased the levels of fear in churches and limited their freedom greatly.

The presence of this Persecution engine has also been identified in the political field and affects Christians. The last election campaign period was one of the most violent and [lethal](#), demonstrating that criminal organizations were seeking to influence the result of the elections, either by making sure (through violence) that their choice of candidate succeeded or by putting pressure on others - especially Christian candidates - to abandon their political career. In this way, they aimed to maintain the current levels of corruption, allowing them both to keep their illegal businesses intact and to keep opposition under control, including Christians.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

According to the Intercensal Survey 2015, the indigenous population makes up about [21.5%](#) of the Mexican population and 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). Since the State recognizes their right to self-determination and autonomy, these communities are governed by indigenous traditional laws and customs that do not allow any other religious practices, such as Christianity. The indigenous leader is the main - and often, only - authority and therefore, the intervention of the State is minimal. Some communities have even rejected representatives that do not belong to their community by [blocking](#) access to ballot boxes or ballot papers in their communities, thus obstructing local elections. Within these communities, tribal leaders attempt to impose a lifestyle regulated by their ancestral customs; if these tribal customs are rejected (for instance by Protestant Christians) it is considered a serious attack on the indigenous community's worldview and welfare. Especially converts from indigenous religions face pressure to renounce their new Christian faith through fines, isolation, the blocking of basic community services, imprisonment, beatings, the destruction of Christian property and even forced displacement.

In most cases, the intervention of government authorities is ineffective and in any case the agreed conflict resolution measures are generally not carried out by the communities, nor do the authorities follow up on them.

Secular intolerance (Medium):

In the most recent electoral process, the Christian community made up an important proportion of voters. For this reason, various groups (such as ideological pressure groups and government authorities) demanded that their influence be removed from the public sphere and criticized any political alliances with Christian groups or representatives. Where candidates emphasized such issues as the defense of life, family and marriage, these were heavily criticized and labeled discriminatory. One of the reasons for keeping Christians out of the political arena was also to maintain the levels of corruption enjoyed by public officials. In other words, Christians are seen as a threat where impunity and corruption reign and by preventing them from serving in government posts, the corrupt system has been able to protect its illegal economic and political interests.

During the last electoral process, some authorities in the country did show a greater recognition of the role Christian communities play. However, this was mostly a form of manipulation to win votes. The new government led by Manuel López Obrador is already planning to promote an agenda contrary to Christian values, especially on issues related to abortion and euthanasia, in reaction to the pressure exerted by ideological groups and international agencies. Christians who speak up against this measures, are criticized, insulted and accused of discrimination.

Drivers of persecution

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

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:

In Mexico, some of the most violent criminal groups are the Sinaloa Organization, the Golfo Cartel, the Juarez Cartel, the group Los Zetas and the Michoacana Family. Other smaller cells are gaining strength nationwide and not just in the traditional "narco-states". Criminal gangs act violently against Christians when church leaders voice opposition or influence people not to get involved in illegal activities. At times, ordinary citizens and family are forced to collaborate or be indifferent to the attacks against Christians. This context of persecution is allowed by governmental officials at all levels as a result of corruption and impunity, so that when Christians go to the authorities complaining about the illegal activities of a group, they become victims of reprisals.

Drivers of Ethnic antagonism:

Tribal leaders and indigenous religious authorities reject any religious manifestation contrary to the community's ancestral customs. Christian worship is thus regarded as a betrayal and an affront to the entire indigenous culture and identity. This attitude will also cause other members of the community and family to denounce Christian practices, as part of their obligations to the ethnic group. Due to the syncretistic nature of the indigenous religions, Catholic leaders also sometimes encourage pressure to be exerted against converts to Evangelical groups within these communities when they do not

collaborate and refuse to participate in community celebrations. Government officials at the municipal and state level allow this due to a misinterpretation of the concept of "Indigenous autonomy" and to inefficiency in protecting the Christians' right to religious freedom. This issue is usually underreported but is known to be a major problem in Ejido of San Miguel Chiptic in [Chiapas](#), San Sebastian Teponahuaxtlan, Bolaños y Mezquitic in [Jalisco](#), and San Jose Quianitas in [Oaxaca](#).

Drivers of Secular intolerance:

Government officials at all levels (and some members of political parties who have a radical understanding of Church-State separation) demand the non-participation of Christians in public debate. In the recent election campaigns, there were claims that "the Christian churches have become a springboard for probable criminal politicians or [accomplices](#) of these". Besides such slander, there is the constant ridicule and harassment Christians faith whenever they express their faith-based views on issues related to life, marriage and family. As regards freedom of speech, it could be claimed that LGBTI groups have been given "[more rights](#)" than Christian groups, since they can publicize their views without being accused of hate-speech and discrimination. In addition, ideological pressure groups, citizens and some multilateral organizations have [requested](#) that policies defending the right to conscientious objection be removed (for instance in cases of hospital staff refusing to carry out abortions). Other drivers of Secular intolerance are criminal groups, intolerant citizens and members of pressure groups who vandalize and desecrate Christian churches and property.

Context

Recent Mexican history shows a weakening democracy, the loss of legitimacy of its governmental authorities and institutions, an increasing insecurity as a result of organized crime, a failing economy and (for many) a lack of access to social services. Within this situation, the sheer determination of the churches to provide physical and spiritual care to the neediest, stands out clearly.

In the 2018 elections, Mexican citizens opted for a president outside the traditional political party system. For Christians, this new government represents a new opportunity to collaborate and engage in the development of the country, with human rights being upheld despite all the challenges of violence and intolerance still addressed against them by pressure groups or criminal gangs and despite the unclear ideological stance of the new president, which could ease the way for active involvement - or shut the churches out completely. The [role](#) of the church in the midst of the [Central American migration crisis](#) is worth highlighting. The Mexican Episcopal Conference has more than once demanded a humanitarian response from state and federal government and has condemned all xenophobia and discrimination aimed against the migrant caravan approaching the border to the USA.

Finally, besides the social and political dimensions, another challenge is evident at the economic level. Factors such as the increasing insecurity, the implementation of a more aggressive control on migration and the uncertainty of the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have all negatively influenced private investment and hence seriously affected Mexico's economic growth.

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 still the majority religion) and small Orthodox, Presbyterian and Anglican communities make up this category. These communities

are particularly affected by the activities of criminal gangs, the corruption of local authorities as well as by the intolerance shown by society and government as regards the public expression of Christian beliefs. Christians from this category often suffer from the results of the Persecution engine Ethnic antagonism when they live within indigenous communities.

Converts: This category includes cross-denominational converts from historical Christian communities, converts from a criminal (mafia) background and Christians who abandoned the religious practices of the indigenous community to which they previously belonged. In such cases, they are put under pressure to leave their new faith and their new way of living. This pressure usually takes the form of threats of violence, expulsion and even death, if the communal or mafia leaders’ demands are not met.

Non-traditional Christian communities: This category includes Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal congregations and the Catholic Renewal Movement. They are particularly affected by Mexican society's lack of respect for religious diversity, which leads to greater vulnerability for these younger Christian communities. This is especially the case where these communities are involved in advocacy activities in areas affected by organized crime and in the native communities, which refuse to accept the presence of other religious denominations.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for Mexico shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Mexico remains at a high level, decreasing very slightly in the WWL 2019 reporting period from 9.7 (WWL 2018) to 9.6.
- Pressure went down in the *Family* and *National* spheres compared to the WWL 2018 reporting period. However, it remains at a very high level in the *Community sphere of life* and at a high level in the *National and Church spheres*.

- The score for violence is extremely high at 13.5, rising from 10.4 in WWL 2018. The increase is mainly due to the fact that the number of Christians (mostly church leaders) murdered in the country almost doubled.

Private sphere:

For Christians (especially converts) within the indigenous population, private acts of worship need to be done in secret. Christian faith is regarded as betrayal; meetings, owning Christian literature and even the use of religious symbols can be regarded as a defiance. Christians are then commonly punished through verbal and physical violence, isolation, imprisonment, torture, forced displacement, etc.

Christians located in areas controlled by criminal groups struggle with the pressure and threats exerted by drug mafia and cartels, who see conversion to Christianity as an obstacle to their interests. In addition, in urban areas, Christians cannot reveal their faith (or manifest their faith-based opinions) without putting themselves at the risk of been accused of hate-speech. Hence they practice self-censorship, and feel unable to communicate their views even in their closest circles.

Family sphere:

Within the circle of the family, Christian converts from indigenous communities cannot live their faith freely since they are persecuted by their own relatives, and Christian families cannot conduct their family life in a Christian way. In general, indigenous leaders reject Christianity and therefore, Christian practices such as baptisms, marriages, burials, among others, are forbidden. Most Christians – especially converts – have to leave their villages to carry out Christian ceremonies. Christian parents are prohibited from passing on their Christian faith to their children since this would cause damage to the child's "indigenous identity"; those parents who disobey are likely to be separated from their children.

Organized crime is also a cause of separation within families. This occurs when the danger of attack by criminal groups is high and some Christian family members are forced to look for a safe place to live elsewhere, and also when criminal groups recruit children and young adults to [commit crimes](#), taking them away from their parents and families. Also, in the urban areas, the State still supports the teaching of sexuality in schools in a way that contradicts Christian values, despite this being rejected by Christian parents. (The latter have, however, been able to make their voices heard in opposition to policies that obstruct parental rights to educate their children according to their own convictions and beliefs.)

Community sphere:

Within indigenous communities, it is Christian converts in particular who are monitored and their daily activities are hindered since their religious practices are unauthorized. They cannot enjoy or benefit from the [community resources](#) such as the water supply, electricity, health care, etc. Also, when Christians have refused to participate in the religious rites of the community, they have often been fined, forbidden to work the land, refused jobs, suffered boycotts and loan restrictions, not to mention that their children have sometimes been banned from the local school.

In areas dominated by organized crime, Christians are seen as ones who challenge gang "authority". Criminal groups force Christians to be accomplices, to remain silent, to pay 'taxes' in order to live in peace and be able to conduct church activities freely. Those who oppose such groups suffer harassment, threats, verbal and physical violence. Also, thanks to the corruption of state officials, such

Christians find they have greater difficulties in obtaining business permits, and boycotts are also common. As can be seen in the hundreds of assassinations of political leaders in the last election campaign period, criminal groups like to determine who governs and hence local communities are shaped by their political alliances and [protégés](#).

Christians are also under pressure to hide their faith in public to avoid being accused of intolerance and hate-speech, particularly in discussions concerning abortion, family, marriage and religious liberty. Some LGBTI and radical feminist groups have made systematic attempts to discredit Christian participation in various forums.

National sphere:

The State guarantees autonomy for indigenous communities which gives indigenous leaders free rein to violate the human rights of Christians converts and harass members of minority religious groups. Tribal leaders can impose restrictions, sanctions or fines, not to mention, the lack of a fair access to justice, due process and equality before the law. On the other hand, when a case against Christians is passed up to the State authorities, the religious motivation behind the conflict is not taken into account which is then regarded as a mere cultural conflict within the ethnic group.

Christians living in areas controlled by criminal groups are frequently coerced into financing (or becoming accomplices of) illegal activities or into refraining from reporting them to the authorities. In general, Christians who speak up against criminal activities in public become targets for threats, attacks and even [murder](#) - often through collusion with government officials. The State has also [refused to answer Christian leaders](#) who have questioned the way crimes committed against Christians are investigated.

Christian leaders are blocked from pursuing a political career. Given the presence of religious intolerance, any sort of religious manifestation from political leaders or government officials is considered an attack on the secular principles of the State.

Church sphere:

Churches have suffered mostly from the increasing violence by criminal groups. Generally speaking, criminal groups aim to prove that they have control over entire communities, not just in the economic or social dimensions but also in the political sphere. Acts of violence against churches and church leaders (e.g. killings, abductions, extortion, threats, curfews etc.) have hindered normal religious activities and particularly work among the youth has been threatened. Some church leaders have developed safety [strategies](#) and started direct dialogue with criminal group leaders.

Where churches are allowed within indigenous communities, Christians are forced to restrict their activities to the point of being clandestine. In some communities, there is a ban on church buildings, preaching and teaching the Christian faith.

During the election campaigning period, sermons and Christian activities in public were monitored by ideological pressure groups and the authorities seeking to [accuse](#) church leaders of meddling in politics. Candidates for the presidency were also [criticized](#) for participating in forums organized by the Mexican Episcopal Conference, which was seen as a violation of the secular state. In addition, there were and are frequent acts of harassment in which certain sectors of society try to defame Christian leaders by accusing them of paedophilia, money laundering, corruption and ties to drug trafficking.

Violence:

Violence in Mexico is worsening and Christians are a frequent target for attacks. They are much easier to identify from the rest of the population – for instance, it is known in which church they regularly meet etc.; the risk of attack is greater for pastors and priests. Indeed, Mexico has the [worst](#) reputation in Latin America for the assassination of Roman Catholic priests by criminal groups. There were also violent incidents against Christians in the south of the country (Chiapas), who did not follow the religious practices of the indigenous communities. These Christians were put under high pressure by the tribal leaders to renounce their faith and in some cases, were imprisoned without reason and made to suffer psychological mistreatment.

For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

The three charts below show the scores for pressure and violence in Mexico over the last five reporting periods. In the first chart, the most significant rise in pressure can be seen in *Community life* and *National life*. The scores for *Private life* and *Church life* have been more or less stable in comparison. The second chart shows that the average pressure has increased from 8.2 in WWL 2015 to 9.6 in WWL 2019, which reflects the context of the administration of President Peña Nieto, which was rated as one of the worst periods in Mexican history. In the third chart, the scores for violence are more or less stable at an extreme level (despite a noticeable reduction in WWL 2018).

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Mexico (Spheres of life)



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Mexico	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	9.6
2018	9.7
2017	8.4
2016	8.3

2015

8.2

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Mexico (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

Female:

Regarding women and young girls there is no particular national law that puts them in particular danger. However, in practice, 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. Christian women are forced to marry non-Christian indigenous men because tribal authorities consider this a way of breaking their faith and forcing them to renounce it. Verbal and physical abuse (including sexual violence) is used to pressure them into following the tribal religion.

In areas controlled by drug traffickers, women are exposed to abuse by members of organized crime. Women who convert to Christianity and desert such groups, may find that their families face rape, death threats and constant surveillance as punishment.

In this context, those Christian women who are raped and get pregnant usually carry their pregnancies to term. However, they run the risk of being [killed](#) because cases have been reported in which, in order to sell babies for organ trafficking or illegal adoption agencies, these groups kill these women during the last month of gestation, taking their babies away.

Male:

There is no law making Christian men more vulnerable to persecution. However, in the areas controlled by criminal groups or drug cartels, young men are exposed to indoctrination and forced recruitment into these groups. In some cases, due to the economic and social context, young men accept this as

their inescapable destiny. Those who refuse to join (due to Christian or other reasons) are persecuted and threatened (along with their families) and sometimes abducted and killed.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to WCD 2018, religious minority groups in the country include Muslims, Hindus, Bahai and Jews. There are also Jehovah's Witnesses and Mennonites. According to the [International Freedom Report for 2017](#), religious discrimination complaints involved Islamic religious attire, anti-Muslim comments and the refusal of some hospitals to treat Jehovah's Witnesses due to the latter's refusal to allow blood transfusions. Regarding anti-Semitic behavior, the government is acting to address hate-speech and incidents of discrimination.

As an example, in June 2018 it was reported that Jehovah's Witnesses were no longer allowed to carry out house-to-house evangelism since many citizens had become [afraid](#) of being robbed by people coming to their homes.

Future outlook

The political outlook: The new government faces such issues as a weak economy, growing public debt, low investment in public infrastructure, as well as the whole issue of migration and high levels of violence and insecurity. It seems that this scenario will continue in the short term, especially since great uncertainty surrounds the measures that the new government will make. Even the idea of federalism itself in the country is in jeopardy.

The outlook for Christians - viewed through the lens of:

- **Organized corruption and crime:** Due to corruption scandals and collusion with criminal groups, there is a high level of citizen distrust in political, legislative and judicial affairs. If, despite the new government, political instability continues, this will favor criminal activities and Christians will continue to be targeted. One important issue will be to stop impunity so that there is no fear of denouncing criminal activities and passing sentences in court. It will also be important to pay attention to how the migration policies of the US government develop. The deportation of Mexican Christians who fled the country due to threats by criminal organizations, is likely to mean increased risk for them.
- **Ethnic antagonism:** The limits of indigenous autonomy in Mexico are not entirely clear, especially in relation to the protection of individual rights. Thus, sanctions or attacks on Christian converts within indigenous communities will not cease until the authorities understand their duty to protect individuals in cases of human rights violations. The lack of understanding about the full meaning of religious freedom as a human right is not only a matter for the Mexican authorities but also for international human rights institutions (e.g. UN and OAS) where they do not take full account of the situation for individuals and families within indigenous communities.
- **Secular Intolerance:** The newly elected president is seeking to appoint ministers known for their support for public policies related to abortion, euthanasia and restrictions of the right of parents to educate their children according to their beliefs. These measures i) contradict his election campaign, in which he affirmed himself a Christian, and ii) also goes against the ideals of the conservative party members of his electoral alliance. In addition, the lack of clarity about the future direction of his government is a source of worry and uncertainty for Christians and others.

Conclusion: How the new president will actually govern is unknown. Some observers think this could represent the return of the right-wing to Latin America. But if the president's socialist vein prevails,

Christians could also be at great risk in the future. Particularly important will be how the new government tackles corruption, since this will particularly affect Christians in many areas and determine to what extent they can live their faith without fear and danger.

External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines: narco-states
<http://www.proceso.com.mx/463066/nos-hemos-convertido-en-corresponsales-de-guerra-en-nuestro-propio-pais-jose-gil>
- Persecution engines: established
<https://www.altonivel.com.mx/actualidad/mexico/este-es-el-mapa-para-entender-el-crimen-organizado-en-mexico/>
- Persecution engines: lethal
https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/05/22/mexico/1527012886_770076.html?id_externo_rsoc=FB_CC
- Persecution engines: 21.5%
http://internet.contenidos.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva_estruc/702825078966.pdf
- Persecution engines: blocking
[file:///C:/Users/Rossana/Downloads/\(https://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/05/sin-casillas-ni-partidos-pueblos-indigenas-autogobernarse/](file:///C:/Users/Rossana/Downloads/(https://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/05/sin-casillas-ni-partidos-pueblos-indigenas-autogobernarse/)
- Drivers of persecution: Chiapas
<https://aquinoticias.mx/chiapas-el-pecado-de-no-ser-catolico/>
- Drivers of persecution: Jalisco
<http://www.jornada.com.mx/2017/12/06/estados/030n1est>
- Drivers of persecution: Oaxaca
<http://oaxacapolitico.com/oaxaca/justicia/expulsan-evangelicos-en-oaxaca-por-no-participar-en-fiestas-patronales>
- Drivers of persecution: accomplices
<https://www.nssoaxaca.com/2018/06/11/iglesias-cristianas-trampolin-de-malo-y-politicos-delincuentes/>
- Drivers of persecution: "more rights"
<https://vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/pastor-asegura-que-gays-y-lesbianas-tienen-mas-derechos-que-cristianos>
- Drivers of persecution: requested
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- Context: role
<https://www.icmc.net/newsroom/church-news/mexican-bishops-call-to-protect-migrants-caravan>

- Context: Central American migration crisis
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-45910779>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: commit crimes
<https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2018/11/23/el-drama-de-los-ninos-sicarios-debe-ser-una-prioridad-para-el-nuevo-gobierno-de-mexico-ioan-grillo/>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: community resources
<https://bajopalabra.com.mx/mujeres-de-chiapa-de-corzo-podrian-ser-multadas-con-30-mil-pesos>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: protégés
<https://www.la-prensa.com.mx/mexico/267101-crimen-organizado-intentara-imponer-candidatos-en-michoacan>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: murder
<https://plumaslibres.com.mx/2018/05/05/asesinan-al-candidato-del-pes-la-alcaldia-tenango-edomex/>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: refused to answer Christian leaders
<https://www.debate.com.mx/mexico/Obispo-Segob-me-pide-ya-no-hablar-asesinatos-de-sacerdotes-20180214-0044.html>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: strategies
<https://cruknow.com/global-church/2018/06/21/mexican-bishops-announce-security-protocols-for-priests-religious/>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: accuse
[file:///E:/Documentos/Open%20Doors%20-%20Frans/World%20Watch%20Unit/WWL%202019/Country%20dossiers/México/\(https://www.unotv.com/noticias/portal/nacional/detalle/ningn-ministro-de-culto-puede-inducir-el-voto-pgr-956474/](file:///E:/Documentos/Open%20Doors%20-%20Frans/World%20Watch%20Unit/WWL%202019/Country%20dossiers/México/(https://www.unotv.com/noticias/portal/nacional/detalle/ningn-ministro-de-culto-puede-inducir-el-voto-pgr-956474/)
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: criticized
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- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: worst
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<http://www.laopinion.net/los-casorios-arreglados-ninas-hombres-mayores-se-suman-millones-mexico-mas-pobre/>
- Gender specific persecution: killed
<http://www.sinembargo.mx/07-04-2018/3405192>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: International Freedom Report for 2017
<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281330.pdf>

- Persecution of other religious minorities: afraid
<https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/republica/sociedad/por-la-inseguridad-testigos-de-jehova-ya-no-salen-a-predicar-lo-hacen-a-traves-de-una-aplicacion-movil-1766091.html>

Additional Reports and Articles

WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

Open Doors article(s) from the region

A selection of articles is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

Use the country search function at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

Recent country developments

Use the country search function at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/> (password: freedom).