

WORLD WATCH LIST 2026

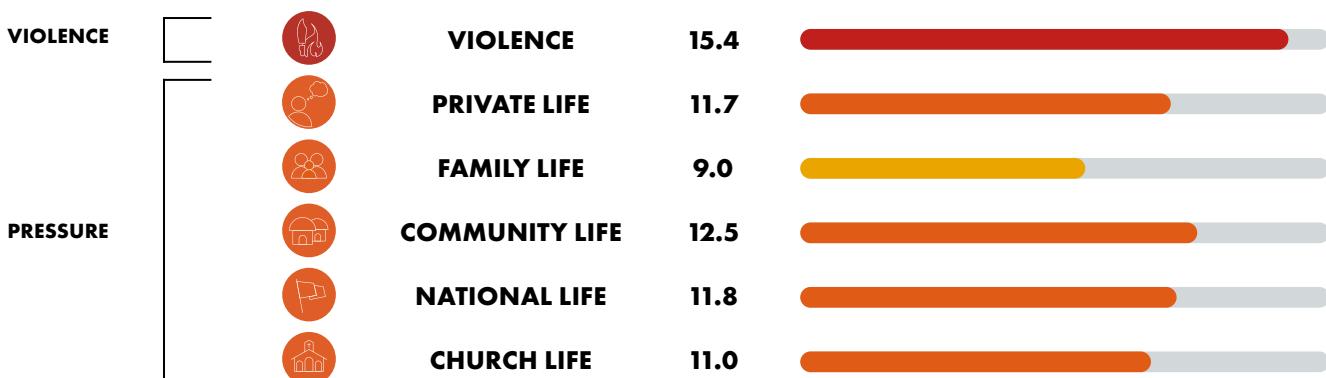
SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
30

MEXICO



LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

The pervasive control exercised by criminal groups has generated a long-standing environment of violence and fear in Mexico. Christians and church leaders are particularly vulnerable, especially when they are perceived as obstructing criminal interests or refusing to comply with cartel demands. This persistent insecurity leaves many faith communities unprotected and contributes to a broader climate of fear and culture of terror. State efforts to address these dynamics remain largely absent or ineffective. In indigenous communities, individuals who abandon the community's religious customs, often syncretic practices linked to Catholicism, face fines, imprisonment, denial of basic services, and forced displacement, without adequate state protection. Meanwhile, societal hostility toward Christian views on marriage, family, and life continues to grow. Public expressions of faith are increasingly watched and restricted, depending on the political climate.

Quick facts

LEADER

President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo

POPULATION

130,301,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

124,066,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Christianity

GOVERNMENT

Federal Presidential Republic



Context

Religious context	Number of adherents	% of adherents in country
Christians	124,066,000	95.2
Agnostics/Atheists	4,564,000	3.5
Ethnic religionists	1,368,000	1.0
Others	303,600	0.2
Total		100%

Source²

In June 2024, Claudia Sheinbaum was elected as Mexico's first female president ([CNN, 01 October 2024](#)). Her victory strengthens the legacy of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, whose rule saw more executive power, weaker checks and balances, and greater military control of public security. ([The Dialogue, 10 November 2023](#)). Although some controversial reforms, like the attempted militarization of the National Guard and electoral changes, were blocked by the Supreme Court, Sheinbaum is expected to maintain much of her agenda. The 2024 elections were marred by political violence ([ACLED, 02 July 2024](#)), organized crime interference, and misuse of resources. In this tense atmosphere, religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, encouraged civic engagement through initiatives like the "Commitment to Peace" ([Vida Nueva Digital, 05 June 2024](#)) but often faced accusations of proselytism for speaking out ([UC, May 2025](#)).

Concerns over institutional independence deepened in June 2025, when Mexico held its first nationwide judicial elections. Over 2,600 judges, including nine

Supreme Court justices, were selected by popular vote. The process was marked by low turnout and controversial candidates and was criticized for risking politicization and weakening judicial autonomy ([OAS, 06 June 2025](#)).

Christianity remains deeply rooted in Mexican society. Roman Catholicism is the largest denomination. However, government policies and civil society pressure have increasingly restricted public religious expression. While religious freedom is constitutionally protected, rulings and legislation have restricted medical conscientious objection, regulated religious symbols in public spaces, and sanctioned faith-based views on marriage, family and life issues. Christian leaders and activists defending faith-based values often face legal repercussions ([Excelsior, 02 March 2025](#)), censorship, and public hostility.

Christian leaders are also increasingly exposed to widespread violence and cartel control. Many have denounced crime, supported peacebuilding, contributed to disarmament efforts ([El País, 10 January 2025](#)), and mediated local conflicts ([Detroit Catholic, 12 December 2024](#)), making them targets of killings ([OLIRE, 25 October 2024](#)), threats, extortion ([Zenit, 22 June 2025](#)), and attacks. In indigenous areas, Evangelicals who reject ancestral customs face discrimination and violence ([The Pathway, 29 August 2024](#)), often without state protection. Despite the challenges, churches continue to serve society at significant personal and institutional risk.

¹ Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

² Other refers to all the rest to make up 100%: Gina A. Zurlo, ed., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2025

How the situation varies by region

Major cartels and local factions operate throughout Mexico, controlling territory and fueling insecurity. Their presence in all states increases the vulnerability of Christian leaders, especially those promoting peace or rejecting cartel demands.

In Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Veracruz, Yucatán, and Zacatecas, Christians—particularly converts—face community-imposed punishments including exclusion, service denial, and forced displacement, often without state protection.

States like Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Mexico City, Mexico State, Oaxaca, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz report higher levels of church vandalism and hostility toward Christians expressing faith-based views.

Who is affected?

COMMUNITIES OF EXPATRIATE CHRISTIANS

This category is not included in the WWL scoring and analysis.

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

This group consists mainly of Roman Catholics, with smaller Orthodox, Presbyterian, and Anglican groups. They face hostilities and pressure from organized crime and local corruption, including against clergy. In indigenous areas, some are restricted from sharing their faith. They also face growing secular intolerance, including attempts to silence their public participation and acts of church vandalism.

CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY

This group includes cross-denominational converts. Those who leave indigenous syncretistic traditions or criminal backgrounds often face threats, detention, or displacement. State protection is often lacking or inadequate.

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Renewalists face hostility in indigenous and cartel-controlled areas. They are also targeted for defending faith-based views under a climate of secular intolerance.

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CRIME

Criminal groups operate with near-total impunity in many regions of Mexico, often infiltrating or replacing local authorities. Christians who denounce violence, preach on justice, or engage in community advocacy are seen as threats. They face retaliation including surveillance, extortion, church raids, death threats, abductions, and killings. Church leaders are particularly vulnerable due to their public role, and intimidation tactics are increasingly violent. This context severely restricts the Church's ability to operate safely in areas under criminal control.

CLAN OPPRESSION

In indigenous communities, local leaders often enforce ancestral or syncretic customs, sometimes reinforced by Catholic shielding, with limited state oversight due to the legal autonomy of these communities. Christians who reject these norms face sanctions such as forced displacement, fines, social exclusion, denial of services, detention, physical violence, and destruction of property. Vulnerability increases where community leaders align with criminal groups. Although state institutions have taken steps to protect affected individuals, these efforts often lack follow-up and enforcement, leaving many without effective protection.

SECULAR INTOLERANCE

Christians face pressure to limit public expressions of faith, especially when holding public office or engaging in political or ethical debate. Although not legally prohibited, participation is often discouraged by ideological groups and some authorities. Resistance also exists toward the Church's mediation with criminal actors. Hostility rises when Christians express convictions on life, family, or sexuality, including in workplaces and schools. Church properties suffer vandalism, but investigations are rare and superficial. In the health sector, legal and institutional obstacles increasingly hinder conscientious objection, placing Christian professionals in complex ethical and professional situations.

How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Ongoing organized violence presents many challenges, including femicide, increased family violence and trafficking. Girls may be trafficked under the “mask” of dowry and are easy targets for abduction and sexual slavery by armed groups. In the past years, in indigenous communities, forced marriage has been a common risk as is physical and verbal abuse of converts. These dynamics perpetuate cycles of violence, insecurity and socio-economic issues for women and girls.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Forced Marriage
- Trafficking
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual

MEN

Within the context of ongoing violence and organized crime, young men and boys are under significant threat of forced recruitment into gangs, homicide and extortion. In areas controlled by criminal groups, indoctrination and forced recruitment is a danger; those who resist face threats, abduction and killing. Men risk intense pressure and violence as the heads of families and churches, with leaders most frequently victims of fines and extortion. They are targeted for their community work and speaking out against illegal activity. Converts from indigenous backgrounds face beatings, harassment, and community rejection.

Male typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Economic harassment via fines
- Economic harassment via work/job/business
- Forced to flee town/country
- Imprisonment by government
- Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – verbal



WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2026	30	71
2025	31	71
2024	37	68
2023	38	67
2022	43	65

The overall WWL score for Mexico remains at 71 points, even though the violence score rose from 14.6 to 15.4. This increase was mainly driven by a higher number of incidents in categories that had rarely been recorded in previous years—such as imprisonment of Christians, sexual harassment, attacks on Christian-owned businesses and external forced displacement—together with a peak in the number of Christians killed in the country according to WWL data, while several other categories of violent incidents decreased. When the Church is seen as a destabilizing factor for criminal activities, it becomes more vulnerable to being a frequent target of these groups. Additionally, the country continues to report concerning levels of rejection of Christians within several indigenous communities. Likewise, intolerance towards Christian expressions is increasing in the country, often justified in the name of protecting state secularism. Average pressure remained at the very high level of 11.2 points, reflecting persistent structural vulnerabilities for Christians across several spheres of life.

Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **20 October 2024:** Tzotzil priest Marcelo Pérez Pérez, defender of indigenous rights and mediator in Chiapas, faced persistent threats. Despite repeated warnings, he was murdered in San Cristóbal de las Casas when two armed men on a motorcycle opened fire on his vehicle after a church service ([IACHR, 24 October 2024](#)).
- **08 March 2025:** During International Women's Day protests, cathedrals in Guadalajara, Toluca, Cuernavaca, Oaxaca, San Luis Potosí, and León were vandalized with graffiti, arson was attempted, and slogans hostile to the Church's stance on women's reproductive rights were displayed ([Aciprensa, 08 March 2025](#)). Clashes occurred with Catholic laypeople seeking to protect the buildings.
- **17 April 2025:** In Petlacalancingo, Guerrero, communal authorities and residents destroyed a septic tank and an outdoor bathroom belonging to an evangelical man, citing his Christian faith and local bans on public services for non-participants in traditional rites.



WWL Year	Christians physically/mentally abused	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country
2026	163	39	40	138
2025	230	24	193	852

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period – for full results see the violence section of the country's corresponding WWL Persecution Dynamics. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* or 1000*) is given which in reality could be significantly higher. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*.

PRIVATE LIFE

In areas under criminal control, Christians who promote peace, reject violence, or leave criminal lifestyles risk being monitored, threatened, or attacked. Their gatherings and online content are viewed with suspicion. In indigenous communities, Christians from non-accepted groups face punishment for sharing their faith or possessing religious materials, often reported by relatives. Social interactions are monitored and may be sanctioned. Online, biblical views on life, family, or sexuality provoke polarization, while interdenominational hostility targets converts or members of other Christian communities.

FAMILY LIFE

Organized crime threatens Christian families through forced displacement, child recruitment, and targeting of children to pressure parents. In indigenous communities, Christian parents are often prohibited from raising their children in their faith; children may be removed or denied an education. Christian children in these settings also face bullying, rejection, or pressure to abandon their beliefs. Family separation occurs during expulsions or imprisonment. Across the country, certain state-mandated sexual education programs on reproductive rights have limited Christian parents' right to educate their children in line with their faith.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Christians are monitored and interrogated by criminal groups and indigenous authorities seeking to suppress religious activity. In cartel-controlled areas, they face extortion, forced cooperation, or retaliation, especially when resisting criminal influence. In indigenous communities, “non-

accepted” Christians are fined and excluded for refusing religious practices. Both contexts use economic exclusion, denying contracts, permits, or subsidies, to exert pressure. In some workplaces, under the defense of “non-discrimination policies”, Christians face pressure to participate in activities that may violate their conscience.

NATIONAL LIFE

Article 24 of the constitution protects religious freedom but restricts public and political expression. Legal limits on conscientious objection and accusations of discrimination inhibit faith-based speech. Christian initiatives supporting youth and migrants are frequently obstructed by criminal groups, often without sufficient state response. In indigenous areas, customary law overrides national guarantees, enabling abuses without effective protection. Across all contexts, corruption, collusion and weak law enforcement perpetuate impunity. These conditions contribute to widespread self-censorship among Christians in the public sphere.

CHURCH LIFE

Church leaders and their families face severe risks in cartel-controlled and indigenous areas, including threats, extortion, forced displacement, and killings—especially after public denunciations. Criminal and ethnic authorities monitor preaching, and worship by “non-accepted” churches is punished. Church activities are increasingly disrupted by violence or rescheduled due to insecurity. Faith-based teaching on life, family, or conscience is closely watched by ideological groups, who accuse religious leaders of being “haters” or “discriminators” and deliberately interfere with their public presence.



International obligations & rights violated

Mexico has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under the following international treaties:

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ([ICCPR](#))
2. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ([ICESCR](#))
3. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ([CAT](#))
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#))
5. Convention on the Rights of the Child ([CRC](#))

Mexico is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christian converts from indigenous communities experience pressure and violence from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian children from indigenous communities are harassed because of their parents' faith (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christian leaders are monitored and their activities actively watched (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Christian female converts from indigenous communities are at risk of forced marriage (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)

Situation of other religious minorities

In October 2024, in a shopping mall in Villahermosa, Tabasco, Estrella, a young Mexican Muslim woman, was assaulted by a European woman ([Infobae, 25 October 2024](#)). After confirming she was Muslim, the woman insulted her, saying “disgusting, go back to your country” and pulled her, tried to snatch her phone, and left her with scratches.



Open Doors in Mexico

Open Doors supports believers in Mexico through:

- Spiritual support: Security and sustainability training for church leaders; Standing Strong Through the Storm biblical persecution training; basic theology courses
- Legal advocacy: Training on human rights defense and negotiation; legal representation for persecuted Christians before authorities, especially in indigenous areas
- Economic empowerment: Vocational training, workshops, seed capital, and facilitation of funding for sustainable projects
- Trauma care: Therapeutic and biblical counseling for healing and reintegration



ABOUT THIS DOSSIER

- The content of this Country Dossier is based on detailed analysis carried out by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. This dossier may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2026 Open Doors International.
- All 50 Country Dossiers – along with the latest update of WWL Methodology – can be accessed [here](#).
- The WWL 2026 reporting period was 01 October 2024 - 30 September 2025.