

World Report 2025 - Mexico

President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, who took office in October, inherited a human rights crisis rooted in extreme violence by organized crime groups and widespread abuse by state agents with near total impunity. Her predecessor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-2024) made little progress addressing these challenges.

In September, Congress approved a series of constitutional changes proposed by López Obrador, including an expansion of the military's role in policing and a sweeping overhaul of the justice system, that could perpetuate abuses and severely undermine the rule of law.

Criminal Violence

There are extremely high rates of violent crime, including homicide, in many parts of Mexico. Six cities registered homicide rates [higher than 100 per 100,000 residents](#) in 2022. Nationally, the [homicide rate fell slightly](#), for the third year in a row, from 25.9 per 100,000 in 2022 to 24.9 per 100,000 in 2023, although the number of [reported disappearances](#) has increased. Security analysts estimate that around two-thirds of homicides are committed by organized crime. Two-thirds of homicides in 2023 were committed with firearms, according to official figures. Authorities estimate that [around 70 percent of firearms](#) used in crimes are smuggled into Mexico from the United States.

Judicial Independence

In September, a [constitutional amendment was approved](#) that will require all state and federal judges, including Supreme Court and Electoral Tribunal justices, to step down and be replaced through popular elections in 2025 and 2027. A new Judicial Disciplinary Tribunal will also be created with broad powers to sanction or remove judges. The [UN special rapporteur for the independence of judges](#) and lawyers and the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#) warned that the measure is likely to weaken judicial independence and undermine the right to a fair trial.

Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system is [extremely ineffective](#). Prosecutors [fail to effectively investigate or prosecute](#) or otherwise ensure accountability for the vast majority of crimes and human rights abuses, including abuses by state security forces and serious offenses like homicide and enforced disappearances. Just [16 percent of criminal investigations](#) were resolved in 2022, either in court, through mediation, or through some form of compensation. Victims often struggle to obtain accountability. Those accused of crimes are regularly subjected to serious abuses, including torture and excessive pre-trial detention.

Torture

Authorities often use torture to obtain confessions and extract information. In the most recent survey of incarcerated people conducted by Mexico's national statistics office [in July 2021](#), nearly half of respondents said that, after they were detained, police or soldiers had subjected them to physical abuse. Among those who had confessed to a crime, 38 percent said they did so only because authorities had beaten or threatened them.

Authorities received 6,226 criminal complaints of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in 2022, [according to the National Torture Observatory](#), a project run by a collective of human rights organizations. Only 82 cases that year led to criminal charges and only 10 resulted in a guilty or not-guilty verdict.

Arbitrary Detention

In September, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention [presented the findings](#) from its 2023 visit to Mexico. The working group [expressed concern](#) that “arbitrary detention remains a widespread practice in Mexico and is too often the catalyst for ill-treatment, torture, enforced disappearance and arbitrary executions.”

Authorities often misuse the *in flagrante* provision in Mexican law, which allows them to arrest a person caught in the act of committing a crime, by “[planting drugs in their homes, vehicles, bags, or clothes](#)” to detain people and question or torture them without a lawyer present, the working group found.

People accused of crimes often face extended periods of pre-trial detention. Approximately [37 percent of incarcerated people in 2023](#) were not convicted of any crime and more than 20 percent of those in pre-trial detention had been there for more than two years. Judges are legally required to order pretrial detention for those accused of more than a dozen categories of crime, without evaluating the circumstances of the case, which violates international human rights standards.

In November, Congress approved a constitutional amendment to expand the list of crimes requiring mandatory pre-trial detention, in violation of [rulings by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights](#), which had ordered Mexico to eliminate the practice.

Disappearances

In January, the government [closed the office of the National Human Identification Center](#), a government body operated by the National Search Commission, and fired many of its staff, journalists reported. The center was created in 2022 to address the lack of forensic capacity in many prosecutors’ offices which contributes to disappearances.

[More than 115,000](#) people were considered missing as of September 2024. Most have gone missing since 2006. Many missing people may have been killed and buried in the [nearly 5,700 clandestine graves](#) that activists and authorities have uncovered. Around 53,000 human remains were in storage, awaiting identification at the close of 2022. Other missing people may have been [marked as “unidentified”](#) and buried in municipal graves by authorities. In September, journalists found that [more than 72,000 human remains](#) had been labeled as unidentified by state morgues from 2006 to 2023. Most had been buried in municipal graves. In 2022, around [15,000 human remains](#) processed by morgues were not identified.

When families report disappearances, [authorities often fail to investigate](#). Victims’ families have formed more than 230 “[search collectives](#)” to investigate disappearances. Members of these collectives search prisons, hospitals, morgues, and often locate and dig up clandestine graves. They often face threats and violence. In February, human rights organizations reported, [at a hearing before the IACHR](#), that 16 members of these collectives had been killed during the López Obrador administration.

The government has been [slow to implement](#) many measures required by the [2017 Disappearances Law](#), such as the creation of the [national forensic database](#). Former president López Obrador repeatedly, falsely claimed the official number of missing people had been [exaggerated to harm him politically](#).

Poverty and Inequality

Mexico has one of the highest rates of income inequality in the world, [according to 2022 data from the World Inequality Lab](#). It also had the [lowest tax-to-GDP ratio of the OECD](#) and one of the [lowest in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) in 2022. The poverty rate fell under López Obrador's presidency, from 41.9 percent in 2018 to 36.3 percent in 2022, according to the [official poverty analysis agency](#), although extreme poverty remained unchanged and the number of people without access to health care more than doubled. The government and independent analysts have pointed to a [major increase in the minimum wage](#) and a [near-doubling of remittances](#) from Mexicans abroad as contributors to the drop in poverty.

Privacy and Access to Information

In November, Congress voted to [eliminate](#) the independent privacy and transparency watchdog, the National Institute for Transparency, Access to Information, and Data Protection. The UN special rapporteurs for privacy and freedom of expression [warned the proposal](#) would seriously undermine the rights to privacy and access to information.

Under former president López Obrador over [100 civilian government tasks](#) were transferred to the military, reducing access to information about public spending, since the military often refuses to comply with transparency and access to information rules, citing national security concerns. López Obrador also issued [executive orders](#) intended to [exempt the government from complying](#) with transparency requirements regarding certain megaprojects.

The military has used the spyware Pegasus to [unlawfully spy on human rights defenders](#), journalists, opposition party politicians, and [senior government officials](#). During the López Obrador administration, [journalists reported](#) that the attorney general's office used spyware capable of tracking cell phones without judicial authorization and that [Mexico City prosecutors](#) obtained the phone records of opposition politicians without judicial authorization.

Attacks on Journalists and Human Rights Defenders

Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists and human rights defenders. From December 1, 2018, to March 31, 2024, the Mexico office of the British human rights group [Article 19](#) [registered](#) 3,408 attacks or threats against journalists, 46 journalists killed, and four disappeared. Many journalists self-censor. In 2023, 14 human rights defenders were killed, according to the human rights group Comité Cerezo and [18 environmental or land defenders were killed](#) according to the organization Global Witness.

Authorities routinely fail to adequately investigate crimes against journalists and human rights defenders. The federal [special prosecutor's office to investigate crimes against journalists](#) had opened 1,758 investigations and obtained 41 convictions, including eight for homicide, from its creation in 2010 through August 2024. Most convictions have been obtained since the current special prosecutor was appointed in 2017.

Abuses by the Military

In September, Congress [amended the constitution](#) to eliminate the prohibition on the military exercising non-military functions outside wartime, give the military permanent control over the National Guard, the main federal law enforcement agency, and officially authorize the president to indefinitely deploy the military domestically at her discretion.

The military has been used for fighting drug trafficking and organized crime and conducting other government tasks for decades with extremely limited civilian oversight. Soldiers have been implicated in a [wide range of serious](#) abuses against civilians, including torture, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances. These accusations are [rarely effectively investigated](#) by civilian authorities. As of September 2024, there were 232,761 soldiers, marines, and National Guard members [deployed throughout the country](#).

From 2007 through July 2024, the Army reported [killing 5,696 people](#), whom it claimed were members of criminal groups. These killings are usually not independently investigated by civilian authorities.

The military has obstructed the investigation and prosecution of past human rights abuses, including the [2014 Ayotzinapa mass kidnapping case](#) and [widespread military abuses](#) committed during the Cold War. Investigators said the military has [hidden, destroyed, or denied the existence](#) of records of human rights violations and pressured authorities to drop criminal charges against soldiers implicated in abuses.

Access to Abortion

Access to abortion has expanded significantly but many people still face barriers. As of December, 19 states decriminalized abortion in all circumstances up to at least 12 weeks of pregnancy. In August, Aguascalientes state [reduced its limit](#) from 12 weeks to 6 weeks, effectively outlawing abortion access.

All states allow abortion in certain exceptional cases, such as rape. However, even in legally eligible cases, abortion bans with exceptions do not guarantee access, Human Rights Watch [found in August](#).

Barriers to access include healthcare providers denying or delaying services, withholding information, questioning the veracity of sexual violence survivors' statements, subjecting women to mistreatment, and imposing arbitrary requirements for access that contradict existing law and regulations. Fear of legal repercussions also deters both healthcare personnel and people seeking abortion.

The Supreme Court ruled in 2021 that the absolute criminalization of abortion is unconstitutional. In 2023, the court ordered Congress to expunge the abortion prohibition from the federal criminal code. As of September, Congress had not complied with the ruling.

Migrants and Asylum Seekers

People who transit Mexico to seek asylum in the US are now required to wait in Mexico for an appointment through a US government-run mobile phone application. Mexican soldiers and immigration agents detain or turn back migrants without appointments, Human Rights Watch [found in a report published in May](#). Authorities carried out [nearly 830,000 apprehensions](#) of migrants from January to July 2024—the highest number ever. Many migrants apprehended in northern Mexico, [around 10,000 per month](#), including those with appointments, are sent to southern Mexico by bus.

Migrants and asylum seekers are routinely targeted by criminal groups and Mexican officials for serious abuses, including sexual assault, armed robbery, kidnapping, and extortion.

Under former president López Obrador, the national refugee agency expanded its presence, from 4 offices in 2018 to 13 in 2024, with assistance from the UN refugee agency. The system remains overstretched. More than [140,000 people sought refugee status](#) in 2023, the highest number ever. The agency resolved just under 26,000 cases that year. In 74 percent of cases it granted refugee

status or complementary protection, but access to the procedure and its efficient functioning are still problematic.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Same-sex marriage is available in all 32 states. In 2024, Yucatán and Campeche states passed laws allowing transgender people to change their names and gender markers on birth certificates through a simple administrative process, bringing the number of states recognizing this right to 23.

In 2019, the Mexican Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling with clear guidelines on legal gender recognition, holding that it must be an administrative process that “meets the standards of privacy, simplicity, expeditiousness, and adequate protection of gender identity” set by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. In March 2022, the court [expanded](#) the right to legal gender recognition to include adolescents and other children.

Disability Rights

Mexico has made [some advances](#) in protecting the rights of people with physical and psychosocial disabilities in recent years. However, in many states, they are still denied full legal capacity and face other barriers to accessing justice, education, and exercising other fundamental rights. Many are forced to [rely on assistance from their families](#) or live in institutions, which is inconsistent with their right to live independently and be included in the community under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

In August, Mexico City became the [first of Mexico’s 32 states](#) to reform its civil code to eliminate guardianship and guarantee that everyone over 18 has full legal capacity to make decisions about their lives. In 2023, Congress approved a national code of civil procedure recognizing the right to full legal capacity.

Women with disabilities suffer disproportionate violence. In 2023, Congress approved reforms requiring domestic violence shelters to be accessible for women with disabilities.

Climate Policy and Impacts

As one of the world's top 15 emitters of greenhouse gases, Mexico is contributing to the climate crisis that is taking a growing toll on human rights around the globe. Former president López Obrador pursued a policy of investment in fossil fuels as a route to energy self-sufficiency. In 2022, Mexico updated its [emission reductions target](#) to allow for higher emissions levels than it had initially pledged in the 2016 Paris Agreement. The Climate Action Tracker [rated this pledge](#) as “critically insufficient” to meet the Paris Agreement goal to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

President Claudia Sheinbaum has [pledged to continue](#) investing in fossil fuels while also making efforts to reduce vehicle emissions, improve energy efficiency, and increase renewable energy production.