

The State of the World's Human Rights; Mexico 2024

Human rights defenders, journalists and protesters remained at risk of criminalization, excessive use of force, violence and death. Human rights violations by the military and National Guard continued, including possible extrajudicial executions; impunity persisted. Disappearances were a huge concern, but there were concerns that the government minimized the scale of the issue. Those searching for disappeared people were at serious risk. Arbitrary detention continued unabated and judicial independence was threatened by constitutional amendments. The rate of gender-based violence, femicides and transgender femicides was high. Access to abortion improved, but some states had yet to decriminalize it. Asylum seekers experienced delays in the processing of their applications and were denied their basic rights. Conditions at the border were increasingly dangerous for migrants to the USA waiting for immigration appointments. Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendants were constitutionally recognized. The government continued promoting the production and use of fossil fuels. The “Mayan Train” railway and Tulum International Airport remained in operation despite environmental concerns.

Background

In June, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo was elected as Mexico’s first female president. The election was the most violent ever, with at least 41 candidates murdered, according to Electoral Laboratory think tank.

Seventeen years since the military’s major involvement in public security operations started, the number of disappearances and murders in Mexico continued to increase. In September, Congress approved a constitutional amendment to place the National Guard under the control of the military (Secretary of National Defence, SEDENA), militarizing public safety.¹

In June, controversial changes to the laws on amnesty and *amparo* (judicial protection for constitutional rights) were enacted, allowing the president to grant amnesty, without restrictions, to anyone providing information for investigations, and banning certain temporary injunctions, even if they could be used to prevent human rights violations.

In September, a constitutional amendment was enacted allowing voters to elect judges at all levels and enabling the creation of anonymous or “faceless judges” for organized crime cases, undermining judicial independence, and the rights to justice and fair trial. In November, the Supreme Court dismissed a project to partially invalidate the judicial amendment. Seven out of 11 judges voted for limiting the scope, but a special majority of eight was required.

On 31 October, a constitutional amendment was approved that made future constitutional amendments impossible to challenge, even by the Supreme Court.

In November, the head of the National Commission on Human Rights was re-elected despite criticism of her administration by civil society.

Also in November, a constitutional amendment was approved to abolish various constitutionally autonomous agencies, including the National Institute for Transparency, Access to Information and Personal Data Protection.

Freedom of expression

During the year, at least nine human rights defenders were murdered, according to OHCHR, the UN human rights office. A report published in 2024 by NGO Global Witness stated that 15 land defenders and environmental activists were killed in 2023, making Mexico one of the most dangerous countries in the world for territory, land and environment defenders. The criminalization of human rights defenders continued and the outgoing president Andrés Manuel López Obrador stigmatized activists and civil society organizations. There was no progress in the investigation into the unlawful surveillance of lawyer Ana Lorena Delgadillo, journalist Marcela Turati and forensic expert Mercedes Doretti, who collaborated on the inquiry into the massacre of migrants in 2010 and 2011 in the city of San Fernando, Tamaulipas state. On 3 July, the Prosecutor's Office agreed a Non-Execution of Criminal Action against these three.

Journalists also continued to be at significant risk.² At least four journalists were killed in possible connection to their work, according to the organization Article 19. In January, personal information on more than 324 journalists was leaked and posted on a website. In his morning conference, then-president Andrés Manuel López Obrador disclosed the personal data of New York Times journalist Natalie Kitroeff, stating that his authority was more valuable than journalists' privacy.

Threats continued against journalist Alberto Amaro. On 4 June, police officers from Tlaxcala state followed and pointed a gun at him. The Oaxaca state government offered a public apology to the family of journalist Gustavo Sánchez Cabrera, murdered on 17 June 2021.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

The authorities continued using the judicial system to criminalize territory, land and environment defenders and students who participated in protests.

On 7 February, a judge from Salina Cruz region convicted the territory, land, and environmental defender David Hernández Salazar for attacks on communication routes and fire damage in the municipality of San Blas Atempa, Oaxaca state. On 14 May, however, the Sixth Collegiate Criminal Chamber of Oaxaca's High Court of Justice revoked his sentence. In July, after public pressure, the Altos District Prosecutor's Office of the municipality of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas state, determined not to prosecute six territory, land and environmental defenders from the Colonia Maya neighbourhood and the case was closed.

On 2 August, the Mexico City General Attorney's Office notified territory, land and environmental defender Hortensia Telésforo Jiménez about an investigation against her for her participation in reclaiming a community library. On 5 September, people protesting in Mexico City about her criminalization suffered verbal attacks by local government officials from the Mexico City borough of Xochimilco and excessive use of force by police officers. Five protesters were detained and prosecuted. In February, the General Attorney's Office of Guanajuato notified seven students that they were being investigated for damaging public buildings at the University of Guanajuato during protests in 2023. On 13 March, the university dropped the charges.

The use of excessive force by the authorities during protests continued. On 20 June, the police attacked people protesting against a pig farm in the municipality of Perote, Veracruz state, causing the deaths of brothers Jorge and Alberto Cortina Vázquez. In March activists and media reported that police used tear gas in Colima, Chihuahua, Mexico City, State of Mexico, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla and Zacatecas; carried out attacks against feminist protesters in the state of Michoacán; ill-treated and arrested five protesters in the state of Nuevo León; and ill-treated and arrested at least 12 women protesting peacefully and two female journalists in the state of Zacatecas.

In August, the reparation process concluded for Libertad Reyes, África Torres, Sofía Ramírez, Enya Mota and Patricia Luna, who had been victims of excessive use of force and illegal and arbitrary detention by the police in the city of León, Guanajuato state, while protesting against gender-related violence on 22 August 2020.

Extrajudicial executions

Military forces continued to commit alleged human rights violations, potentially amounting to extrajudicial executions. Impunity persisted for these crimes.

According to the media and human rights defenders, on 26 April members of SEDENA attacked two young people travelling by car in Nuevo Laredo city, Tamaulipas state, causing the death of one of them. Witnesses and video surveillance cameras showed members of the National Guard entering a house on 9 June where two infants and four women were murdered in the city of León, Guanajuato state, according to media sources.

On 13 July, two members of the National Guard attacked four people travelling by car in Villa Hidalgo, San Luis Potosí state, causing the death of a child and injuries to an adolescent. On 1 October, six migrants were killed when military members fired at the vehicle in which they were travelling on the Villa Comaltitlán-Huixtla road, Chiapas state. SEDENA issued a public statement reporting that the two members who had opened fire were under investigation.

On 7 October members of SEDENA attacked a man driving a car and threatened to kill him, according to media sources.

According to human rights defenders, on 11 October members of SEDENA killed a woman after shooting at suspected cartel vehicles in Nuevo Laredo city, Tamaulipas state. On 12 October, members of the National Guard killed an eight-year-old girl and a woman in the same city.

On 5 December, a court confirmed the sentence against five military personnel involved in the extrajudicial execution of Jorge Antonio Mercado Alonso and Javier Francisco Arredondo Verdugo.

Enforced disappearances

The number of missing and disappeared people remained of grave concern. In 2024, the National Search Commission registered 13,588 new cases of missing and disappeared people, of whom 9,621 were men, 3,960 were women, and seven were unidentified. According to official figures, a total of 120,740 people had been registered as missing and disappeared between 1962 and the end of 2024.

The “census” of disappeared people – a government strategy supposedly to verify whether a person is genuinely missing or disappeared – continued, despite concerns by civil society organizations that the government was trying to deny the crisis and downplay the official number of missing and disappeared people. In March, the Ministry of the Interior reported that around 20,000 people had allegedly been found and almost 100,000 people were still disappeared or missing.

Relatives searching for disappeared people continued to face serious risks. The risks disproportionately affected women, who represented the majority of the searchers. During the year, at least one woman searching for her disappeared relative was killed and another was disappeared. In January, Lorenza Cano Flores was disappeared in Salamanca city, Guanajuato state. In February, Angelita Meraz León was killed in Tecate city in Baja California state. In February, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights held a public hearing about the protection of women searching for disappeared people, highlighting the serious risks they face, including enforced disappearance, killing, repression and threats.

The government refused to provide 800 military documents relating to the enforced disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero state, to their relatives. The former president stigmatized NGOs working on the case, including Centro Prodh, Tlachinollan and the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

The Mechanism for Truth and Historical Clarification presented two reports addressing grave human rights violations between 1965 and 1990. The August report recognized state responsibility for systematic human rights violations, identifying 8,594 victims of 11 types of grave human rights violations. The October report focused on grave human rights violations committed against political dissidents, identifying 1,103 victims of enforced disappearances.

In September, the Ministry of the Interior presented a report by the Commission for Access to Truth, Historical Clarification and the Promotion of Justice for Grave Human Rights Violations, eliminating the inclusion of nine groups of victims, including LGBTI people, sex workers, journalists and opponents of large-scale developments.

Arbitrary detention and unfair trials

In July, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention expressed concern about the systematic use of arbitrary detention in Mexico; the use of *arraigo* (precautionary detention without charge) and automatic pretrial detention; the militarization of public security; and the excessive use of force during detention, among others.

A constitutional amendment was approved in December to expand automatic pretrial detention for crimes such as extortion, smuggling and activities relating to false invoices, as well as certain drug-related crimes.

Women's and girls' rights

Sexual violence and femicide remained prevalent and proper investigations into these crimes were lacking. Approximately 3,427 women were murdered in 2024, according to the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, and approximately 829 of these were considered feminicides.

The authorities published decrees to promote women's and girls' rights. On 18 January, the decree to reform the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence came into force, aiming to prevent and punish violence against women.

On 15 November, a constitutional amendment to promote gender equality was published. Specifically, it established substantive equality in access to rights; highlighted that the state has stronger duties of protection towards women, adolescents, girls and boys; established the gender perspective in public security and justice; promoted gender parity in the federal, state and municipal government; and required Congress to reduce the gender pay gap.

Sexual and reproductive rights

The states of Chiapas, Estado de México, Jalisco, Michoacán, Puebla, San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas adopted legislation decriminalizing abortion. Judicial decisions in the states of Yucatán and Nayarit ordered local congresses to adopt legislation decriminalizing abortion, but implementation remained pending. By the end of the year, abortion was legal in 19 out of 32 states and decriminalization was in progress in two states.

In August, however, the Aguascalientes state congress reduced the number of weeks of pregnancy in which abortion could be accessed from 12 to six, contrary to a Supreme Court ruling.

LGBTI people's rights

In April, amendments to the Criminal Code and the General Law on Health were approved, banning so-called “conversion therapy”.

The year was one of the most dangerous for transgender women, with at least 59 transgender femicides reported by the media and civil society organizations. According to data published in 2024 by the organization Transgender Europe, in 2023 Mexico was the second most dangerous country in the world for transgender people after Brazil.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

The Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) received 78,975 asylum applications during the year. The largest number of applications came from nationals of Honduras, followed by Cuba, Haiti, El Salvador, Venezuela and Guatemala. Lack of accommodation forced many asylum seekers to live on the streets near COMAR's offices in Mexico City. After neighbours protested, the authorities decided to move offices, suspending the processing of asylum claims for approximately two months and increasing the backlog of asylum applications.

Civil society organizations expressed concern over the failure of the National Institute of Migration to expedite visitors' cards for humanitarian reasons to asylum seekers, preventing them from accessing their rights to health, education and work.

The authorities continued to collaborate with the USA in implementing policies that undermined the right to asylum and the principle of non-refoulement. Mexico's northern borders became increasingly dangerous for people waiting for an appointment to request asylum in the USA. People waiting at the border were often victims of extortion, abducted and experienced discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence by both state and non-state actors.³

Indigenous Peoples' rights

A constitutional amendment was enacted on 30 September recognizing the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Mexican communities to self-determination and free, prior and informed consultation. Civil society organizations expressed concern over the omission of certain rights, such as to territory, which added to structural inequalities and could make the reform difficult to implement.

Civil society organizations reported internal displacement of Indigenous People caused by violence in the states of Michoacán (at least 110 Indigenous People), Chihuahua (251 Indigenous People) and Chiapas (at least 8,190 people displaced, most of whom were Indigenous). Approximately 600 people from Chiapas crossed the border to Guatemala to seek safety.

Right to a healthy environment

The government continued promoting the production of fossil fuels to reduce gas imports. It reported in August that the processing of crude oil would reach 340,000 barrels per day at the Dos Bocas oil refinery in Tabasco state.

The “Mayan Train” intercity railway across the Yucatán Peninsula, inaugurated in December 2023, continued to operate despite concerns about contamination of water and soil, the impact on animals' migration routes and habitats, the negative effects on the biodiversity of the region and Indigenous Peoples' access to food. Tulum International Airport – also opened in December 2023 – continued

to operate despite concerns around the effects of pollution and noise on wildlife habitats and the right to a healthy environment.

On 15 February, the congress of the state of Tabasco approved an amendment of a decree to relocate members of the El Bosque community. The community was evacuated in 2023 due to sea level rises attributed to climate change. At the end of the year, 51 families had received new homes.

1. *Mexico: National Guard. Analysis of the National Guard Reform Initiative*, 19 September (Spanish only) ↩
2. “‘No one guarantees my safety’: the killing of Rubén Pat”, 6 March ↩
3. *USA: CBP One: A blessing or a trap?*, 8 May ↩