

MEXICO

CIVICUS MONITOR WATCHLIST

OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESTRICTIONS
TO CIVIC FREEDOMS





INTRODUCTION

Government authorities have vilified and reduced the space for those who hold them accountable, denounce human rights violations and demand change in Mexico. In recent months, authorities have [used](#) tax legislation to restrict funding opportunities for civil society, whom they often portray as adversaries, or as figureheads for opponents and foreign powers. Meanwhile, violence against the press has been allowed to [escalate](#) with little effort from the government to halt it. Within the first five months of 2022, 11 journalists have been killed.

These restrictions are taking place in the context of a wider history of disregard for ongoing human rights violations that affect so many in Mexico. Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are [stranded](#) in precarious conditions while exposed to excessive force, arbitrary detention and unlawful deportation by authorities. Women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people continue to face high levels of violence, while President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) [questions](#) the legitimacy of feminists and other movements urging his government to act. The President repeatedly lashes out at those who criticise his administration, using stigmatising rhetoric against human rights defenders (HRDs), journalists and protesters.

VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Violence against the press in Mexico has continued to spiral. For several years, the country has been among the [mostly deadly](#) in the world for journalists, and this year has been no different. At least 11 journalists have been [killed](#), sometimes in brazen attacks in broad daylight. Veteran journalist [Lourdes Maldonado López](#), shot and killed by gunmen outside her home in Tijuana on 23rd January, had told AMLO in a press conference in 2019 that she feared for her life and asked for protection. After the killings of video editor [Roberto Toledo](#) in January and director [Armando Linares López](#) in March, the staff of Monitor Michoacán decided to [shut down](#) the digital media outlet..

Outrage over the wave of murders has led to [protests](#) for justice and calls for more government action to ensure security for reporters under threat. The country has a protection programme for journalists and HRDs but coordination with local authorities is lacking, and the mechanism is often short of funding and staffing. This leads to delays and gaps in protection for the hundreds of people enrolled in the programme. Mexico also [lacks](#) a comprehensive policy enabling effective coordinated action to stop the escalating attacks. Impunity for these crimes is the rule. Since 2010, of the 105 investigations into killings of journalists by the federal Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression, only six have [led to](#) homicide convictions.

Communicators in Mexico also face frequent [harassment, threats and attacks](#) by state officials, security agents and non-state actors. Monitoring by free expression advocate group Article 19 [showed](#) that violence against journalists skyrocketed to unprecedented levels during the first three years of AMLO's administration.

ABOUT THE CIVICUS MONITOR

The [CIVICUS Monitor](#), an online platform that tracks threats to civil society in countries across the globe, rates civic space – the space for civil society – in Mexico as “**Repressed**”.

The data provides the basis for civic space ratings, which are based on up-to-date information and indicators on the state of freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. Countries can be rated as:

CLOSED

REPRESSED

OBSTRUCTED

NARROWED

OPEN



FUNDING RESTRICTIONS

In February 2022, a legislator of Mexico's governing party Morena [introduced](#) a bill reforming tax legislation to restrict foreign funding for civil society groups. The reform would ban CSOs working to influence laws and engaging in strategic litigation from receiving funding from foreign governments, associations or private companies. The text under consideration by the Chamber of Deputies would enable the government to revoke the non-profit status of organisations found to be non-compliant. In justifying the initiative, Morena [claims](#) without evidence that foreign powers have financed organisations in Mexico to “promote or stall” legislative change and that CSOs in the country have been used as a front by conservative groups to promote their interests.

If approved, the reform could [prevent](#) human rights defenders from carrying out important work challenging restrictive laws, debating public policy and seeking to improve rights protections. This effort was [preceded](#) by other measures taken under the current government to restrict funding and obstruct the work of civil society, such as removing tax incentives for donations to CSOs.

STIGMATISATION

Mexico's President and government officials have not only [failed](#) to condemn the violence against the press and human rights defenders, but they often display an openly hostile attitude toward these actors. Journalists, human rights defenders, protesters and groups that criticise the government consistently face stigmatisation. AMLO himself makes vilifying statements that disparage these actors and their work. In one example, in February 2022, the President [published](#) private information on a journalist and later described him and others who pen critical articles as “thugs, mercenaries, sellouts.”

López Obrador also seeks to undermine the legitimacy of groups demanding change, questioning his policies and denouncing human rights violations. As thousands of women [mobilised](#) to condemn inaction against femicides, AMLO [antagonised](#) the country's feminist movements, claiming that some conservatives disguise themselves as feminists and that these women-led protests did not exist before his term in government. Environmental activists protesting against the Tren Maya line linking Cancún and Tulum in the Yucatán Peninsula were [called](#) “phonies” and “impostors” by the President.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To Mexico's government:

- Shelve the proposed reform of Article 82 of the Income Tax Law and refrain from imposing undue restrictions on civil society funding and operations.
- Create a comprehensive policy to protect human rights defenders and journalists, and ensure adequate funding, resources and institutional support for protection mechanisms.
- Conduct impartial, thorough and effective investigations into all cases of killings, attacks, harassment and intimidation against journalists and human rights defenders, and bring the perpetrators to justice.
- Refrain from stigmatising civil society groups and activists simply for speaking out.
- Promote an enabling environment for civil society and the press and ensure that they are able to carry out their work without fear and harassment.

To the international community:

- Urge the government of Mexico to ensure that any legislative proposals comply with human rights norms and standards.
- Publicly raise concerns about proposed international funding restrictions for civil society, including in relevant debates at the UN Human Rights Council.
- Ensure proactive diplomatic intervention in response to threats against journalists, including by voicing concerns with the authorities and providing emergency support when required.