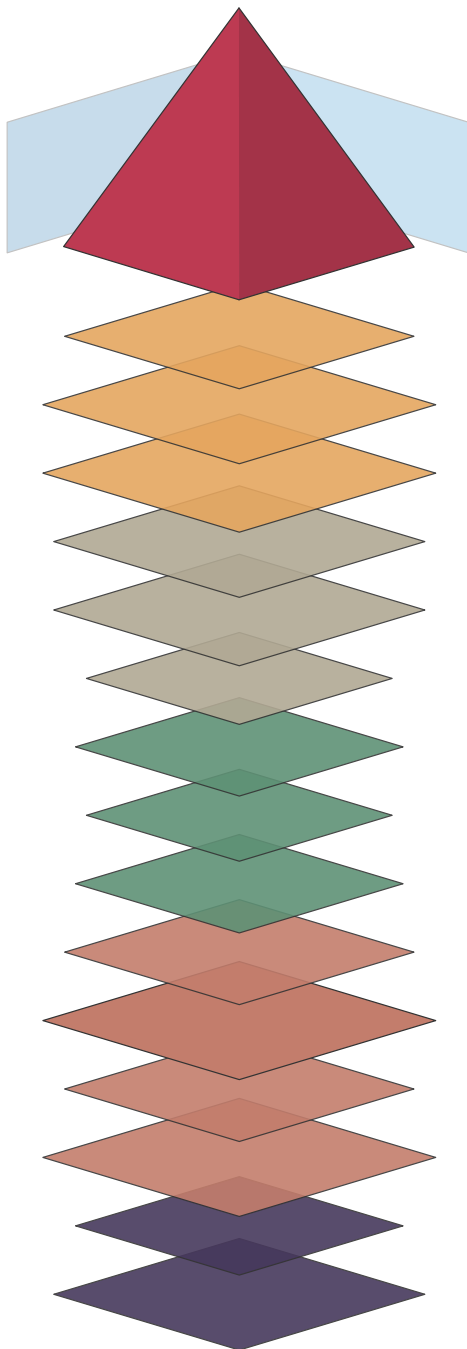


 **MEXICO**



 **7.57**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

**3<sup>rd</sup>** of 193 countries  
**2<sup>nd</sup>** of 35 American countries  
**1<sup>st</sup>** of 8 Central American countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **8.13**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	9.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	9.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	8.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	7.00
FLORA CRIMES	7.50
FAUNA CRIMES	7.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.50
HEROIN TRADE	8.00
COCAINE TRADE	9.00
CANNABIS TRADE	8.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	9.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.50

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **7.00**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	9.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	9.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	3.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00

 **4.21**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**



Funding provided by the United States Government.

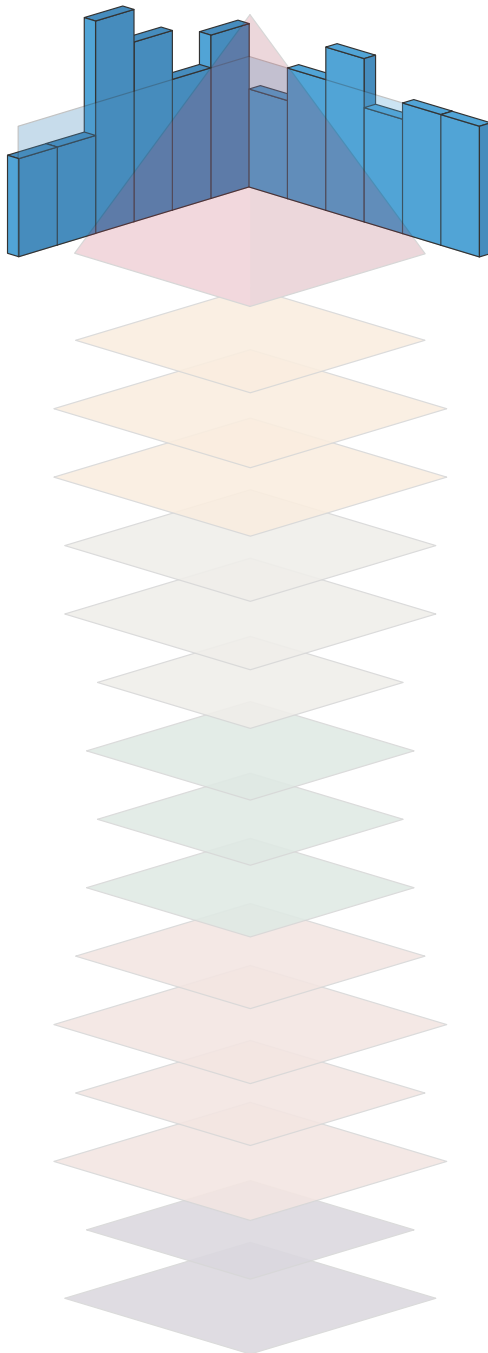


Funded by the European Union

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# MEXICO




## 4.21 RESILIENCE SCORE

124<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
25<sup>th</sup> of 35 American countries  
3<sup>rd</sup> of 8 Central American countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	3.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	3.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	6.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	4.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	4.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	5.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	3.50
PREVENTION	4.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	4.00



## 7.57 CRIMINALITY SCORE

CRIMINAL MARKETS	8.13
CRIMINAL ACTORS	7.00

# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Mexico plays a crucial role in human trafficking between Central and North America, acting as a transit hub primarily for north-bound Central American victims who may face various forms of exploitation, including forced sex work and labour. Sex trafficking is widespread near the US-Mexico and Guatemala-Mexico borders, while forced agricultural labour is more common in Guerrero and Oaxaca where indigenous communities and people of African descent are exploited. Vulnerable irregular foreign nationals and middle-class Mexicans are at risk of being trafficked, with the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating these risks. An increase in criminal territorial control across Mexico, combined with increasingly rampant corruption, impunity, and institutional weakness in Mexican law enforcement agencies, have facilitated the expansion of Mexico's human trafficking market in recent years.

Mexico's human smuggling market remains active, driven by poverty, insecurity, and criminality across Central America, especially in the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened these factors, causing a further increase in north-bound irregular migration towards the US through Mexico. Although smugglers in north-eastern Mexico are linked to transnational organized crime groups, drug cartels, and corrupt officials, those in southern Mexico are often locals living along key smuggling routes. Women and children are also involved in facilitating irregular migration. The impact of Mexico's human smuggling market is localized, with notable demand in overcrowded Mexican border towns and southern cities such as Villahermosa, Palenque, Tenosique, Comitan, and Tapachula.

Mexican criminal groups rely heavily on extortion as a source of revenue, targeting individuals as well as small, medium, and large businesses. The rate of extortion has substantially increased in some Mexican states while declining in others. Extortion can also involve private citizens who falsely claim membership in criminal groups to obtain small extortion payments. Territorial extortion, known as *cobro de piso*, has become a low-cost revenue source for criminal groups. The food industry has been increasingly targeted, leading to food crises and supply chain disruptions. Extortion remains a significant concern in nearly all Mexican cities, with municipalities in the states of Michoacan, Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Morelos, Nuevo Laredo, and México experiencing the highest rates.

### TRADE

Mexico's arms trafficking market is highly consolidated, driven by ineffective arms legislation and the inflow of weapons from the US. Although the vast majority of seized illicit arms can be traced back to US manufacturers, there is a notable flow of grenades and RPG-7s from Central America. Legal purchases of firearms in the US by criminal and civil entities contribute to the accessibility of weapons and high levels of violence and criminality in Mexico. Although Mexican authorities are working to combat the issue, there is a lack of comprehensive policy and coordination between state and federal law enforcement agencies and with US authorities, which may allow the arms trafficking market to continue to expand domestically and regionally. This issue has been a point of contention in US-Mexico bilateral relations, with Mexican authorities launching civil lawsuits against US arms manufacturers. Although there has been an increase in weapons seizures along the US-Mexico border, this has not significantly reduced the vast supply of illicit weapons to domestic criminal groups in Mexico.

Counterfeiting and piracy have become some of the most profitable crimes in Mexico, with the country being one of the largest producer and consumer of counterfeit and pirated products in both Latin America and the world. The sale of inexpensive counterfeit goods is widespread across the country. It is estimated that more than 10% of all US-sourced counterfeit and pirated products sold worldwide are destined for Mexican markets. Despite severe damage to the Mexican economy caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the distribution of counterfeit pharmaceutical products was not affected and was even exacerbated by increased demand. However, despite some efforts being made, the convergence of criminal groups and customs authorities at various points of entry continues to complicate the fight against this crime. Additionally, the changing of labels in the illicit textile goods trade poses challenges for authorities in detecting counterfeit goods.

Mexico has become a key destination for the global illicit cigarette trade, with Chinese-sourced illicit cigarettes accounting for most of the consumption of illicit cigarettes not produced domestically. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation, as declining income and rates of social interaction among Mexican citizens led to a notable drop in legal cigarette sales and a rise in low-priced cigarette brands. This trend provided organized criminal actors with an additional source of revenue and a means of laundering other criminal proceeds. Illicit trade in excise goods extends beyond cigarettes, with more than a third of the alcoholic beverages consumed in Mexico being smuggled into the country.

## ENVIRONMENT

Mexico's illegal trade in timber has become a highly lucrative industry, with criminal groups relying on it as a major source of revenue. The domestic and transnational trafficking of rosewood is a considerable issue, with Chinese mafia-style groups controlling the trade, which is facilitated by local Mexican criminal networks. Mexican authorities seize dozens of illicit rosewood shipments along Pacific ports and the Yucatan Peninsula annually, primarily destined for the Chinese furniture market. This market generates hundreds of millions of dollars in annual profits and has severe consequences for local communities, including extortion fees linked to protection quotas, kidnapping, and forced disappearance. With state regulation of Mexico's legal logging industry remaining limited, corrupt Mexican law enforcement officials have been known to engage in violence against local populations related to the market.

Mexico acts as a source, transit, and destination country for wildlife trafficking. The illegal wildlife trade in Mexico is closely linked to other organized criminal markets, particularly drug trafficking, posing a challenge for law enforcement authorities. Although Mexico has previously served as a transit country, Mexican wildlife species such as jaguars, golden eagles, totoaba fish, parrots, macaws, and reptiles are increasingly being trafficked to diverse destinations including North America, Europe, and Asia. The illicit totoaba fish trade, largely facilitated by Chinese mafia-style groups, generates hundreds of millions of dollars annually and is the most prominent wildlife trafficking operation in Mexico. The involvement of corrupt authorities in wildlife trafficking operations and market-related violence exacerbates the issue.

Theft of non-renewable resources such as oil and minerals is common, with criminal groups and corrupt officials within state-owned companies playing major roles. The Mexican government's efforts to combat the illicit oil trade have been minimally effective, with oil theft remaining a highly lucrative source of revenue for criminal groups. Fuel theft has been linked to tax evasion, and smuggling foreign-sourced fuel into Mexico has become a common practice. The involvement of criminal groups in fuel theft has triggered a rise in violence across the country, especially in states like Guanajuato and Puebla. In addition to oil theft, criminal groups have been engaging in illicit mineral extraction, particularly gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, and iron. Territorial disputes between cartels have created an atmosphere of violence for legitimate mining companies and local communities. Mexican drug trafficking organizations have also become involved in the trafficking of Mexican-sourced mercury to South American countries that have prevalent illicit gold mining markets.

## DRUGS

Mexican drug trafficking organizations dominate the US's heroin market, with almost all heroin seized and analyzed in the US originating in Mexico. Heroin production and trafficking occur primarily in north-western Mexico, in states such as Baja California, Sonora, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Queretaro, Colima, Michoacán, and Guerrero. However, in recent years, drug trafficking groups have shifted their focus to fentanyl trafficking, as it is cheaper and less labour-intensive to produce than heroin.

Mexican drug trafficking organizations are major players in the global cocaine trade, acting as brokers and transporters of the drug worldwide. Mexico is a significant transit country for cocaine from South America to the US and increasingly to the EU. Criminal groups have become more active in Central American and Colombian cocaine trafficking markets, and territorial disputes between them over control of north-bound cocaine shipment routes to the US have resulted in high levels of violence across Mexico.

Despite the legalization of cannabis in multiple US states and Canada, Mexico continues to constitute the US' largest foreign provider of cannabis. Moreover, Mexican drug trafficking organizations are heavily involved in the production and transportation of synthetic drugs, including fentanyl and methamphetamine. Although fentanyl can be sourced directly from China through clandestine online platforms and subsequently trafficked into the US, Mexican groups have increased their activities in fentanyl production in the country. Additionally, rising demand for various forms of synthetic opioids among US drug consumers has resulted in a considerable increase in the import of synthetic opioid components into Mexico, primarily smuggled into the country through seaports in Michoacán, Campeche, and Sinaloa. Mexican cartels are involved in methamphetamine trafficking to EU ports for further distribution inside and outside the EU.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Mexico is currently facing a surge in cyber-dependent crimes, with a large number of cyber-attacks launched through malicious software programs detected by the national guard. In recent years, federal institutions have experienced cyber-attacks, with their information systems being compromised or hijacked by criminal actors. These attacks have led to adverse reputational impacts on these institutions and have resulted in the leaking of terabytes of confidential information. Given the increasing use of technology and the internet, it is highly likely that cybercrime will continue to grow in Mexico.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes are a major issue in Mexico, affecting state institutions, private companies, and citizens. State institutions are allegedly involved in financial crimes such as tax evasion, which is associated with the embezzlement of hydrocarbon exports and/or imports. Private companies are often victims of fraud and corruption, resulting in significant financial losses. Finance-related cybercrime has increased significantly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Allegations of corrupt practices related to public contract appointments exist at both the federal and local government levels, elevating the risk of embezzlement and other financial crimes.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mexico's drug trafficking organizations are some of the most sophisticated mafia-style groups globally. They have substantial territorial control throughout the country and co-opt state institutions through bribery and intimidation. In addition to drug trafficking, these organizations engage in other criminal activities such as oil theft, human trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion, earning billions of dollars annually. Mexican drug trafficking organizations fuel violence across the country using a variety of firearms, including military-grade weapons, resulting in brutal territorial conflicts with competing drug trafficking organizations and state security entities. The state's no-confrontation policy and perceived impunity exacerbate retaliatory attacks against law enforcement initiatives. Despite internal fragmentation reducing the number of drug trafficking organizations engaging in transnational forms of organized crime, the remaining drug trafficking organizations continue to exert significant influence across the Americas, collaborating with foreign counterparts in Asia, South America, North America, and Europe.

Smaller Mexican criminal networks have mainly emerged from crises of violence and tend to cooperate with larger mafia-style groups. Internal fragmentation within Mexican drug trafficking organizations has led to the creation of numerous loosely structured criminal networks, making them difficult to track. In recent years, state efforts to capture and kill criminal leaders have increased because of the emergence of community self-defence groups in Guerrero and Michoacán. These criminal networks engage

in various forms of local criminal activity, including extortion, auto theft, oil theft, human trafficking, human smuggling, illicit mining, and drug sales. Organized crime factions are also believed to be partly responsible for the uptick in disappearances witnessed in recent years. Moreover, they still play crucial roles in the transnational drug trafficking market by providing transportation and security services to well-established drug trafficking organizations and engaging in proxy wars between dominant groups.

Mexico is plagued by state-embedded corruption, with officials at various levels facilitating organized criminal activities such as drug trafficking, oil theft, and extortion. This collusion not only funnels substantial amounts of illicit revenue to high-ranking officials but also undermines law enforcement agencies, hindering the country's fight against organized crime. There are also reports suggesting the persistence of corrupt practices within federal institutions tasked with combating organized crime. However, corruption at the local level, including among state and municipal officials, remains a more significant concern because of the lower financial cost of collusion with low-level officials and their deeper knowledge of the territories they govern. Drug trafficking organizations have been successful in exerting notable influence over Mexico's democratic process, allegedly going to great lengths to ensure the election and/or re-election of key political allies, including murdering politicians perceived as threats.

Private sector actors in Mexico, large and small businesses, engage in criminal activities such as tax fraud and money laundering to generate illicit revenue. Internal fraud is prevalent among private sector businesses. These actors also commit environmental crimes, including illicit mining. Private sector actors are known to engage in corrupt practices in an effort to either obtain services, permits, and licences, or to avoid sanctions. Foreign criminal actors have a limited presence in Mexico, largely because of extreme territoriality among Mexican criminal groups. Those present primarily engage in business dealings and other forms of collaboration with Mexican drug cartels. However, a notable number of criminal actors from Eastern Europe, Italy, and Asia have been arrested in the Riviera Maya and on the Yucatan Peninsula in recent years, and Salvadoran mafia leaders seeking refuge from strict regulations in El Salvador have been known to operate from inside Mexico.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Mexican government has relied on militarization to combat organized crime, but with little success. Its efforts to fight state-embedded corruption and organized crime have been symbolic, and there is no comprehensive strategy against organized crime. Corruption and collusion between criminal groups and state-embedded actors exacerbate criminal impunity, and state initiatives to combat criminality and violence across the country have not been successful. The country's homicide rate remains high, and cases of femicide, violence against journalists, and other crimes have increased. Political violence has also become common, with criminal groups threatening and assassinating political candidates. The current leadership won the elections with an anti-corruption campaign but has since consolidated power, reducing state transparency and accountability. Although laws and policies aim to curb corruption, criminality and impunity persist, and implementing federal transparency legislation is a substantial challenge. Concerns have been raised over corruption and autonomy with the military's control over ports and customs activities. Conflicts have arisen between autonomous bodies and state institutions over the latter's failure to provide information about excessive use of force and human rights violations committed by its officers.

Mexico has a history of cooperating with the US in fighting organized crime along the border. The current administration has continued this partnership, working with US authorities to combat issues like irregular migration. However, uncertainty surrounds the government's approach to organized crime and security. The arrest of a former secretary of the Ministry of National Defence for alleged collusion with organized crime in the US led to the administration imposing strict limits on foreign agents' interactions with Mexican authorities, preventing US Drug Enforcement Administration agents from operating in the country. Mexico has ratified several international treaties linked to fighting organized crime, demonstrating its commitment to international cooperation. However, Mexico's legislative apparatus has significant structural deficiencies that hinder law enforcement authorities' ability to combat various forms of organized crime.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Mexico's judicial system is plagued by corruption and inefficiency, which have weakened anti-organized crime efforts. High levels of pre-trial detention and major judicial backlogs are a result of the inefficient processing of court cases. There are also concerns about judicial autonomy, given the appointment of Supreme Court of Justice judges with close political ties to the executive. Additionally, the

country struggles with investigating and prosecuting serious crimes despite recent judicial reforms. Overreliance on single eye-witness testimonies makes the outcomes of criminal cases relatively easy to manipulate.

The Mexican government has made efforts to improve law enforcement and combat organized crime, including through US-funded trainings, improvements in intelligence infrastructure and strategy planning. However, corruption and human rights abuses continue to hinder these initiatives. Public trust in law enforcement is low, and the replacement of the federal police with the national guard has been criticized for focusing on policing undocumented people, and for excessive force and human rights violations. The national guard is perceived as ineffective in reducing criminality and violence. The fight against organized crime is seen as a federal responsibility, limiting investments in local public security structures. The Mexican and US governments have agreed on a mechanism to increase collaboration in the fight against organized crime, with the US focusing on synthetic drug trafficking and Mexico on arms trafficking.

Mexico shares land borders with the US, Guatemala, and Belize, making it a crucial transit point for illegal activities such as drug and arms trafficking. Despite collaboration with the US Customs and Border Protection Agency, the National Customs Agency of Mexico is weak because of a lack of funding and institutional capacity. Many border crossings are controlled by organized crime groups engaged in cross-border activities with impunity. In some regions, organized crime has entirely replaced the state's territorial sovereignty, leading to the absence of the rule of law. Mexico's national guard has shifted its focus to containing migration flows, neglecting efforts to combat organized criminal elements who are exploiting migratory patterns and border porosity.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Mexico's legislative framework for anti-money laundering (AML) has proven ineffective because of corruption and a lack of institutional capacity. Investigations and prosecutions of money laundering cases, particularly those of a transnational nature, are rare, resulting in low conviction rates. The conflict between Mexico's Financial Intelligence Unit and the Attorney General is alleged to have hindered the development of a comprehensive AML framework. Illicit drug revenue generated from transporting drugs across the US-Mexico border is a key source of criminal revenue, with laundered funds passing through Mexican financial institutions. Organized crime groups in Mexico invest in financial and physical assets such as property and businesses, using various strategies such as forging



invoices or misrepresenting the value of goods or services to facilitate money laundering.

Mexico's commission for economic regulation is responsible for economic regulatory activities aimed at preventing illicit business practices. However, the government's reluctance to propose new commissioners in various institutions has reportedly impaired their capacity to fulfil their respective duties. This situation has affected the implementation of up-to-date legal frameworks addressing foreign investments and cryptocurrencies.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Mexico's victim and witness support mechanisms are lacking, with little attention paid to supporting victims of human rights violations, human trafficking and forced disappearances. Although the Mexican government has made efforts to prosecute traffickers and identify victims, it has failed to allocate sufficient funds to victim assistance. Overall authorities did not consistently employ a victim-centered approach and the services made available and provided to victims were inadequate.

The Mexican government's current policies for preventing criminal activity are ineffective because of limited law enforcement capacity and a lack of comprehensive strategies. Despite claiming crime prevention as a priority,

the government's impact on record-high levels of violence remains uncertain. Efforts to prevent low-income people from turning to organized crime, such as community engagement initiatives and social programmes, have had limited success, and a specific comprehensive strategy aimed at preventing human trafficking is lacking.

The weakness of Mexican civil society can be attributed in part to the limited resources available to independent media and NGOs. Journalists and media employees are at high risk of violence and homicide, and the government has been hostile towards civil society actors, freezing federal funding for hundreds of non-profit organizations. The government's failure to condemn or combat violence against journalists and media employees has been seen as tacit approval of these crimes, exacerbating high levels of violence and impunity across the country. Collusion between organized criminal actors and corrupt state officials further threatens the safety of journalists, media employees, and civil society actors who frequently receive threats or are subjected to violence.

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