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FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot Mexico March 2026

Context

This report covers the period of 01 Dec 2025 - 31 March 2026.

In 2026, the government of President Claudia Sheinbaum is in the first third of its six-year term, which will end on 30 September 2030. This period coincides with a significant electoral cycle: in 2026, local elections will be held in various states, whilst in 2027 federal mid-term elections will take place to renew the Chamber of Deputies, in addition to local elections in several states.

The enabling environment for civil society in Mexico continues to be marked by restrictive trends, in a context characterised by the persistent targeting of human rights defenders and journalists, primarily by organised crime in collusion with local authorities, as well as by the growing territorial presence of this group, which limits the exercise of freedom of expression and assembly in various regions of the country.

Added to this are tensions arising from Mexico's geopolitical position vis-à-vis the United States, amid an increasingly tense international landscape, with pressures regarding security, migration and cooperation that create a challenging environment for groups and organisations working on migration and human rights issues, particularly along the country's northern and southern borders, where controls have been tightened by the military presence and efforts to curb migration to the United States.

Furthermore, the political context is shaped by the US mid-term elections due to take place in November 2026; with a wave of repression against protests within the US over Trump's policies, the ruling party's rhetoric in the run-up to the elections appears to be hardening on anti-migration issues. Another factor to consider is the review of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), provided for in the agreement itself as a mechanism to assess its continuation, which formally began on 16 March 2026 and envisages an initial phase of discussions lasting until approximately 1 July this year. This process is significant for Mexico due to its heavy reliance on trade with the United States, as well as the pressures arising from potential regulatory changes and the uncertainty affecting investment. These dynamics are intertwined with institutional and regulatory challenges that have social, economic and political implications for Mexico.

Finally, ahead of the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup, the country is under increasing international scrutiny, which highlights both social and economic tensions, such as those observed at the reopening of the 'Estadio Azteca'[1] on 28 March; these protests demonstrate the importance of civil society's role in advocating for its causes.

1. Respect for and protection of fundamental freedoms

[1] For sponsorship reasons, the Azteca Stadium is to be renamed "Banorte", and during the FIFA tournament in June 2026 it will be known as "Mexico City Stadium".

The start of 2026 coincides with a period of high international visibility for Mexico in the run-up to the World Cup, whilst domestically structural problems such as violence, the crisis of enforced disappearances and forced displacement persist.

In this context, the exercise of fundamental freedoms—particularly freedom of expression, the defence of human rights and social mobilisation—continues to face a complex environment marked by risks for journalists, human rights defenders and citizen groups.

A significant development in the field of human rights advocacy in recent weeks was the murder of Rubí Patricia Gómez Tagle, the nineteenth 'mother searcher' to be killed since 2020. Her murder is part of an alarming trend of violence against search groups in the country. Various reports by human rights organisations have warned that 2025 was one of the deadliest years for search groups in Mexico, whilst other organisations have reported to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the alarming situation faced by these groups.

The crisis of disappearances remains one of the structural factors shaping the enabling environment in Mexico. A year on from the discovery of Rancho Izaguirre, various organisations have launched memory and documentation initiatives such as "Las Prendas Hablan" (The Clothes Speak), which seeks to highlight the scale of the disappearances and the role of the groups in reconstructing the truth. At the same time, activists, academics and organisations have submitted shadow reports to the United Nations' international human rights mechanisms to denounce the situations that pose a threat to democracy and the exercise of fundamental rights in the country.

In this vein, the recent report by the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CDF) concluded that there are "reasonable grounds" to believe that enforced disappearances continue to be committed in Mexico, requesting that the situation described in Mexico be referred to the UN General Assembly to support the State in eradicating this crisis. The Mexican government's response was to reject this assessment, as it considers that the CDF has overlooked the progress made since 2018, continuing with its dismissive rhetoric on this issue – a pattern that has persisted across several administrations.

Violence linked to organised crime has also led to episodes of high tension affecting the practice of journalism. In February, following the operation related to the death of the leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), attacks were recorded against journalists covering the events, once again highlighting the vulnerability of the press in contexts of armed violence and territorial disputes.

Another phenomenon that continues to impact the exercise of rights is internal displacement caused by violence. Groups have warned of the worsening of forced displacement in states such as Chihuahua and Sinaloa, where entire communities have had to abandon their territories due to the presence of criminal groups. In some cases, community initiatives have emerged to support affected populations, such as cultural projects aimed at helping displaced children.

At the same time, the freedom to demonstrate remains intact. In recent weeks, protests have taken place in Puebla to defend trees at risk due to the construction of a cable car system; although no repression has occurred, the response from the authorities has been inadequate, and the groups have obtained an injunction against the impact on green spaces. Meanwhile, the demonstrations in the State of Morelos following the femicide of a female student at the Autonomous University of the State of Morelos (UAEM) have taken place without a timely response from the university authorities, with the student movement demanding effective mechanisms to address sexual harassment and academic bullying.

In the context of preparations for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the federal government has stepped up coordination with local authorities and FIFA to design security operations aimed at preventing risks during the event. This type of deployment began to be observed in previous events, such as the reopening of the Azteca Stadium on 28 March, where demonstrations by local residents, collectives and civil society organisations took place, expressing a range of public demands, from concerns about gentrification in surrounding areas to calls for justice from 'collectivos de madres buscadoras', as well as criticism of the social benefits of the World Cup. The protests took place under extensive security measures and with no reports of repression, reflecting how the organisation of the international event is beginning to influence both the management of public security and the dynamics of protest and public expression in the public sphere.

One positive outcome resulting from collective action is the cancellation of the Vista Pacífico energy project in Topolobampo, Sonora, following social and environmental concerns about its potential impacts; this movement, which emerged as #BallenasoGas, sets a precedent in the fight for environmental rights.

2. Favourable legal and regulatory framework

During the period analysed, the legal and fiscal framework applicable to CSOs in Mexico has shown a trend towards greater operational complexity, accompanied by uncertainty regarding the application of criteria by the authorities.

Recent updates to tax regulations have reinforced administrative obligations for authorised grantees, particularly regarding the accreditation of activities, transparency and consistency between tax reports, which has increased compliance burdens for organisations.

At the operational level, in the study entitled "Voices from Compliance" carried out by "Manifiesta tu Ciudadanía", various organisations have highlighted more restrictive and inconsistent administrative processes, particularly regarding the accreditation of their activities. This procedure is necessary to demonstrate to the authorities that organisations are effectively carrying out the activities for which they were established, such as social assistance, education or research. Following the removal of previous accreditation mechanisms, the process has become longer, with no standardised criteria across federal and state agencies, as well as a lack of clarity regarding which authorities are empowered to issue these certificates. This has created legal uncertainty for operations and higher administrative costs, affecting small organisations or those with limited institutional capacity in particular.

In this very document, which is the result of this accreditation process, there remain gaps between the actions that are a priority for organisations and those activities formally recognised by the authorities. This discrepancy leads to potential non-compliance by CSOs, which limits their access to benefits such as authorisation to receive tax-deductible donations and may result in sanctions against them; this can be resolved by simplifying and strengthening the mechanisms for accrediting activities.

In this context, a recent development highlighted tensions in the application of the regulatory framework with the revocation of donor status for over a hundred CSOs, on the grounds of non-compliance with requirements regarding the accreditation of activities; among the affected CSOs are some with a significant public presence and critical stances towards the federal government. In light of this situation, a group of CSOs has requested the opening of a formal channel of dialogue with the tax authorities to review the application of these measures. The organisations have pointed out that, in their experience, the social sector faces levels of supervision they consider disproportionate, even greater than those applied to economic activities classified as higher risk, such as bars or casinos.

Meanwhile, in March 2026, former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador launched a fundraising campaign to support Cuba through a civil association called "Humanidad con América Latina"; this action raised questions due to the speed with which he reportedly obtained authorisation to receive tax-deductible donations. The case was highlighted by sector stakeholders as an example of potential asymmetries in access to tax relief, in contrast to the lengthy and complex processes faced by most organisations. This incident reopens the debate on the discretionary use of the regulatory framework against CSOs and challenges the government's narrative portraying the CSO sector as opaque within a context of democratic erosion.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

In terms of access to resources, difficulties in accessing funds remain constant; however, some innovative initiatives have emerged, such as the issuance of a social bond by the Dondé Foundation on the Institutional Stock Exchange (BIVA), focused on education, financial inclusion and social development, reflecting a growing interest in innovative financial mechanisms to channel resources towards social causes. However, these instruments are often accessible only to organisations with greater institutional capacity and access to complex financial structures, whilst a large proportion of CSOs continue to face barriers to accessing sustainable financing.

During the 89th Banking Convention, stakeholders from the financial sector and CSOs highlighted the importance of social investment and philanthropy towards initiatives with social impact, including the role played by CSOs. It was noted that the banking sector has channelled nearly 8 billion pesos (452.7 million USD[2]) since 2020. In addition to initiatives where the Mexican Banks Foundation seeks to reduce structural gaps through impact models in partnership with CSOs—launching an initial call for proposals for the sector in 2027 and consolidating this model by 2030—this opens up further opportunities for the financing and impact of the sector's actions. However, these proposals highlight that, although recognition of the social sector in these areas is significant, the challenge remains of translating this discourse into more accessible and sustainable funding mechanisms, particularly given the reduction in and availability of public and international resources for CSOs.

In both cases, there is a clear need to expand and democratise funding mechanisms, so that access to resources does not depend exclusively on the size or degree of professionalisation of organisations, but rather responds to the diversity, geographical reach and realities of the sector.

With regard to international funding, one year on from the USAID cuts linked to the political agenda of Donald Trump's administration, contributions to CSOs have fallen by 50%, primarily affecting those dedicated to causes such as human rights, migration and democracy. This limits their operational capacity, whilst a more restrictive political environment in the US and a discourse of 'domestic terrorists' have created risks for international donors such as the Open Society Foundations, which has received threats from the current US administration.

4. An open and receptive state

[2] Calculated based on the Fix exchange rate published in the Official Gazette of the Federation on 19/03/2026 *Banxico SIE*

By the end of 2025 and during the first few months of 2026, the relationship between the federal government and various actors—such as opposition parties, civil society organisations and academic sectors—continues to be characterised by limited openness to dialogue. Although the official narrative maintains a less confrontational tone than under the previous administration, an institutional dynamic persists in which channels for dialogue with critical voices remain scarce or sporadic, particularly in key public decision-making processes.

One of the most significant debates in this area has been the discussion surrounding the electoral reform proposed by the federal government. Since late 2025 organisations, experts and political figures have expressed concern that the reform could undermine the autonomy of the National Electoral Institute (INE) and upset the institutional balance of the electoral system. Alarm grew following statements by officials close to the government who questioned the continued validity of the electoral body's current model.

However, the legislative process took an unexpected turn when the reform initiative promoted by President Claudia Sheinbaum failed to make headway in Congress, as it did not garner the necessary support, even within the ruling coalition. This outcome marked a turning point in the public debate on the future of the electoral system and the autonomy of the INE.

Subsequently, on 17 March 2026, the president announced the presentation of an alternative known as 'Plan B', aimed at reconfiguring the original electoral reform proposal. The following week, a modified version was approved in the Senate with mainly administrative and budgetary adjustments relating to the INE, falling far short of the structural scope initially proposed by the Executive. Various analysts have pointed out that this process highlighted tensions between the ruling party and its legislative allies, which ultimately led to a significant watering down of the initiative's content. Beyond the political dynamics, the debate raised concerns about the potential impact that some of the initial proposals would have had on the institutional balance of the electoral system and on the powers of the INE, a key player in organising democratic processes and engaging with CSOs. Furthermore, various sectors noted that the legislative process offered limited opportunities for effective participation by CSOs, academia and the public, reinforcing the trend towards largely symbolic consultation processes regarding reforms with significant institutional impact.

In parallel, another issue that sparked public debate was the approval of the reform to reduce the working week to 40 hours. Although the federal government has presented the measure as a step forward in labour rights, CSOs, labour groups and specialists have pointed out that the legislative process only partially incorporated the demands put forward by movements such as the National Front for the 40-Hour Week and the "I'm for the 40-Hour Week" campaign, which in recent years have promoted forums, proposals and spaces for dialogue to ensure a more immediate implementation of the reform. Among the main criticisms are the gradual nature of its implementation, scheduled to take up to six years, and the lack of clearer definitions on aspects such as rest days or the effective limits of the working week. Consequently, this debate has been highlighted as an example of the tensions between the agenda promoted by civil society organisations and the state's capacity to substantively incorporate these demands into legislative reform processes.

On the issue of security, a gap persists between the official narrative and civil society's assessments, reflecting a contrast in the state's openness to evidence. Whilst the federal government maintains that the Ministry of Security and Citizen Protection has managed to reduce intentional homicides by 42% between September 2024 and January 2026 as a result of its strategy, organisations such as México Evalúa warn that violence as a whole has increased over the last decade when indicators such as disappearances and femicides are taken into account. This divergence in methodology and narrative highlights not only

differences in measurement, but also challenges in incorporating independent perspectives into public debate and accountability processes.

Furthermore, civil society organisations have highlighted the absence of formal mechanisms for participation in strategic processes such as the renegotiation of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). Various groups have warned that the lack of dialogue with the federal government could limit the incorporation of social, environmental and labour perspectives into a process with significant implications for the country.

Within the context of the discussion on judicial reform, the debate surrounding the concept of "faceless judges" has highlighted tensions between institutional proposals and human rights standards. During Senate hearings in February 2026, organisations such as the Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Centre and experts warned that this concept could be unconstitutional and contrary to basic principles of due process, as it prevents the identity of the adjudicators from being known. Although the issue has been the subject of public debate, the case highlights the limitations in effectively incorporating civil society's concerns into key legislative processes taking place between February and April 2026.

At the state level, diverse dynamics have also been observed in the relationship between authorities and citizens. A recent example was the referendum on the recall of the governor held in the state of Oaxaca at the end of January this year. Although the exercise mobilised broad sections of the population and activated a mechanism of participatory democracy, it was also accompanied by allegations of irregularities and the use of government resources during the process.

5. Public culture and favourable discourse towards civil society

During the period analysed, the narrative and discourse regarding civil society in Mexico have continued along the same lines, albeit not as confrontational as in the previous six-year term, though still characterised by a tendency to downplay and disparage this sector.

However, it is interesting to note the reactions and discourse of the ruling party in response to recent international assessments; for example, the Chapultepec Index of Freedom of Expression and the Press, compiled by the Inter-American Press Association, places the country at a level of high restriction, identifying both the federal executive and state-level authorities as key actors in dynamics that undermine freedom of expression. In this regard, Freedom House records a decline in Mexico's score from 63/100 in 2019 to 58/100 in 2025, maintaining its status as 'partly free' with significant setbacks, whilst the V-Dem study classifies the country as an "electoral autocracy", highlighting the concentration of power, pressure on the media and increased restrictions on CSOs.

The ruling party typically responds to such international assessments with narratives that seek to discredit them or question their legitimacy. As was the case recently with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's report, the government has tended to reject these external assessments, rather than opening up avenues for dialogue or institutional review.

This scenario is accompanied by an intensification of political rhetoric from the ruling party, which has launched communication campaigns aimed at strengthening its support base, in which it positions political opponents and public figures as adversaries of the country. Some of this content has been subject to action by the INE, which ordered the suspension of one of

these adverts. Furthermore, the narrative has expanded onto the international stage, incorporating media outlets such as Fox News into this confrontational discourse, thereby escalating the issue internationally; for although this US media outlet has disparaged Mexico, this action has transcended the national level.

At the local level, expressions such as the display of banners in Oaxaca labelling legislators from the ruling coalition as "traitors" for failing to vote in favour of the president's electoral reform create a discursive environment that tends towards disparagement and polarisation, even within its own members and coalitions.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

In 2026, the digital environment in Mexico continues to face tensions between the strengthening of the state's technological capabilities and the protection of rights such as privacy, freedom of expression and access to information. Various CSOs have warned that some recent policies on telecommunications and digital governance could expand surveillance capabilities without sufficient safeguards; one such report is "Challenges and Prospects for Activism and Digital Rights 2026".

One of the issues causing the greatest concern is the start of the implementation of mandatory mobile phone number registration. Organisations specialising in digital rights have pointed out that this measure may pose risks to privacy and the protection of personal data, as well as having a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations, such as migrants or people in transit, who could face additional obstacles in accessing basic communication services.

The debate has intensified following recent court rulings regarding the use of personal and biometric data. On the one hand, a court granted a provisional injunction against the obligation to provide data for the CURP ([3]) and biometric data, setting an important precedent by recognising that the collection of biometric data must withstand constitutional scrutiny. On the other hand, a federal court overturned a suspension against mobile phone registration, ruling that the public interest in security prevails. These decisions reflect an environment of growing legal uncertainty, in which the expansion of digital identification mechanisms coexists with persistent concerns regarding privacy, data protection and potential misuse of personal information.

At the same time, experts have warned that the dynamics of interaction on social media are increasingly taking place in private digital spaces with opaque rules. In these environments, content moderation decisions may facilitate the spread of disinformation, anti-rights discourse or political polarisation, posing challenges for the democratic governance of the digital space.

In response to these risks, civil society initiatives have also emerged aimed at preserving access to public information. One example is the Amnesia Latam platform, launched by Mexican organisations to safeguard and maintain the availability of public databases in the face of the risk of institutional information loss, thereby contributing to transparency and access to open data.

[3] CURP (Unique Population Registry Code): a unique alphanumeric code assigned by the Mexican government to every resident of the country for the purposes of administrative identification and registration in various public procedures and services

These processes reflect a digital environment in flux, where risks associated with the expansion of surveillance mechanisms, the growing power of major technology platforms, and civil society's efforts to strengthen digital security and the right to information coexist.

Challenges and opportunities

The short-term challenges for civil society in Mexico are concentrated in an environment where structural constraints and institutional tensions persist. Of particular note is the need to strengthen and expand channels for dialogue and participation in the context of significant reforms—electoral, judicial and labour—where engagement with critical stakeholders has been limited.

Added to this is a central and cross-cutting challenge: security. The persistence of violence, disappearances and territorial control by criminal groups constrains the exercise of rights and the very functioning of civic space, demonstrating that it is not possible to consolidate enabling environments without minimum conditions of social peace. In this regard, the need to explicitly incorporate public security as a key focus of analysis within the Mexican context becomes particularly relevant.

At the same time, the international and political context presents both pressures and opportunities. The approach of the 2026 FIFA World Cup places Mexico under global scrutiny that could trigger both social tensions and protests, as well as windows of visibility for civil society agendas.

Likewise, the renegotiation of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, alongside US foreign policy on security, migration and trade, will continue to influence the domestic environment. Internally, emerging rifts within the ruling coalition, recent legislative disagreements and the intensification of the electoral contest point to a more competitive and polarised political landscape. In this context, civil society faces the challenge of maintaining its capacity for advocacy amidst these tensions, whilst seizing opportunities to advance key agendas at a time of high national and international visibility.

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