

MEXICO. ELECTIONS 2024

ILLEGALITY. CRIME. VIOLENCE. INEQUITY



May 2024

SIGNOS**VITALES**
EL PULSO DE MÉXICO

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The Council is structured with an Executive Committee, and Advisory Committee of Specialists and a Communication Advisory Committee, and a Executive Director coordinates the operation of these three Committees.

One of the main objectives is the collection of reliable and independent information on the key variables of our economic, political and sociocultural context in order to diagnose, with a good degree of certainty, the state where the country is located.

Vital Signs intends to serve as a light to show the direction that Mexico is taking through the dissemination of quarterly reports, with a national and international scope, to alert society and the policy makers of the wide variety of problems that require special attention.



Weak or absent pulse can have many causes and represents a medical emergency.

The more frequent causes are the heart attack and the shock condition. Heart attack occurs when the heart stops beating. The shock condition occurs when the organism suffers a considerable deterioration, which causes a weak pulse, fast heartbeat, shallow, breathing and loss of consciousness. It can be caused by different factors.

Vital signs weaken and you have to be constantly taking the pulse.

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1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*Popular election of
more than 20,000
positions*



1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION



Almost six years into the federal administration, little progress has been made in democratic terms in Mexico. The grand projects and overrated proposals to create a stronger, safer and more prosperous country have remained merely a narrative that some believed in but that all of us endure. In this 2024, a year when institutional consolidation and unification were most needed, Mexicans find themselves facing the most complex and competitive electoral process in the country's history, characterized by enormous institutional conflicts and divisions, marked by unresolved internal disputes, a massive and unaccounted influx of "electoral" money and above all, a wides-

pread weakening of the institutions that give shape and meaning to democracy.

The combination of the national political scenario, coupled with relentless initiatives aimed at undermining and weakening everything that might have worked in the past —and which, in the opinion of a few, must be changed but remains unchanged— presents the perfect recipe for failure. Thus, we arrive at these elections with virtually all institutions in the country completely dismantled and diminished, especially those that should have been adequately monitored and strengthened for this moment, such as the Na-

We arrive at these elections with virtually all institutions in the country completely dismantled and diminished, especially the electoral INE and TEPJF.

tional Electoral Institute (INE) and the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (TEPJF). These institutions have been subject to an endless series of attacks and grievances from the federal executive branch for over six years.

At Signos Vitales, we have prepared this document, which provides a detailed analysis of the vulnerability of the 2024 electoral process, where over 20,000 officials will be elected at the national, state, and local levels. The document aims to offer a clear and concise overview of how various issues, such as the deterioration of Mexican electoral institutions, money and financing in electoral times, violence and organized crime interference in elections, are used. It also includes an analysis of the persistence of the current government in violating electoral law and the role of the media in electoral equity, as well as their limitations in the process.

Regarding the first section addressed in the document, Deterioration and Simulation within Electoral Institutions, it is asserted that in the last six years of government, Mexico has experienced a democratic setback, where the concept and value of institutions have been harmed and fragmented. The section also contextualizes the electoral process to be held

on June 2, 2024, which will elect, at the federal level, a President, 128 Senators, and 500 Deputies. At the state and local levels, nine Governors and 20,057 positions will be elected, including members of Local Congresses, Municipal Councils, Local Boards and Mayors (Municipal president). This exercise represents an effort by the country's institutions, which are undoubtedly overwhelmed in their budgetary, administrative and technical capacities. It details the budgetary scope and how it has evolved, with nearly static amounts but an increasing number of responsibilities that exceed the capacities of both the INE and the TEPJF.

The second section, Violation of Electoral Law, highlights that the current federal administration has been characterized by the centralization of power. Despite the president's open criticism of corruption in administrations prior to his term, he has been criticized for unilateral decision-making, discretionary and opaque use of the budget and the constant threat to institutions that serve as checks on his power. The president's style of governance has reflected a deep contempt for law and institutions. The reforms made to the constitution are a clear indication that, despite the president's promise not to amend the constitution, 2019 was the year with the highest number of

On June 2, 2024 will be elected, at the federal level, a President, 128 Senators, and 500 Deputies. At the state and local levels, nine Governors and more than 20 thousand positions.

constitutional amendments. This section analyzes the mechanisms and various methods employed by the president to continue concentrating power, as evidenced by the assault on democracy and the constant initiatives to reform electoral law.

The next section, Media and Electoral Equity, examines how electoral equity is threatened and the implications this has for both electoral processes and the strengthening of Mexican democracy. It also discusses how the media has influenced electoral contests, the role of political actors, the President of the Republic, the manipulation of information, inequality in access to media and manipulation of the electoral system.

A fourth section, Cash Economy: Money and Financing in Electoral Times, analyzes how the Mexican economy is caught between combating inflation and expanding demand, the latter fueled by the growth of remittances, the advance of social programs, reconstruction programs and the completion of the administration's flagship projects. As a result, the constant flow of these resources has led development banks to be more capitalized than at any other time in recent history. This section also argues that this liquidity is influenced by the proliferation of criminal mar-

kets. At least four of these markets are addressed: drug trafficking, migrant trafficking, fuel smuggling and extortion.

The section Electoral Violence: The Muscle of Organized Crime refers to the undeniable intervention of the federal executive in autonomous institutions, clientelism, premature campaigning and violence before, during and after the elections, which undermine the right to cast a free vote. Authorities have been unable to serve as a true counterweight to this critical situation. This situation enables a type of violence exerted by actors with political, economic or territorial control interests, aiming to influence the electoral process and its outcomes. This section identifies two types of risk factors that influence electoral violence: procedural and structural. The former refers to violence that occurs only during the electoral process, while the latter is related to the environment in which the process takes place.

In the final section, Organized Crime, State, and Electoral Processes, it is stated that Mexico did not formally recognize the presence of organized crime until very recently, but it has been involved in various electoral processes and its influence is increasingly significant. It is argued that the Mexican State has been

Cash Economy has grown in Mexico and has been influenced by the proliferation of criminal markets.

complicit in this advance, whether through collusion, omission or ignorance. This process has resulted in the loss of thousands of human lives, including civilians, criminals, police officers, federal agents and members of the armed forces. This surge in insecurity is leading to a situation where, halfway through the current electoral process, approximately one-third of the federal electoral districts have some form of protection from the federal government.

This report aims to contribute to the analysis and understanding of the 2024 electoral process, focusing primarily on equity, violence and law violations. Although the document presents and discusses various variables that hinder the process, it becomes evident throughout its reading that the most significant of these has been the federal executive's interference in institutional weakening and legal violations, as well as allowing organized crime to grow, taking on a decisive and dominant role in the country's life.

The federal executive's interference in institutional weakening and legal violations, as well as allowing organized crime to grow, taking on a decisive and dominant role in the country's life and endangering the electoral process.



2. DETERIORATION AND SIMULATION WITHIN ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS

*Thousands of people
demonstrated in
en defense of the
institutions*



Image: Pooto: Alejandro Rodriguez/Cuartoscuro at <https://politica.expansion.mx/elecciones/2023/03/02/que-sigue-despues-de-publicado-el-plan-b-electoral-promovido-por-amlo>

2. DETERIORATION AND SIMULATION

◀ WITHIN ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The Mexican context in 2024 is arduous and filled with challenges that directly impact institutional capacities. Undoubtedly, the upcoming federal, state and local elections will test the strength of the entire Mexican electoral system, but above all, they will reveal the true nature of Mexican electoral institutions. The nearly 20,000 positions at stake in this electoral contest represent the hope of millions of Mexicans who aspire to a better quality of life and prosperity. However, after enduring nearly six years of relentless attacks from the federal executive branch, Mexican institutions—particularly electoral ones—are in

a critical and fragile state, struggling to deliver the results they were originally created to provide. Despite the fact that many of these institutions are still standing, their capacities, reach and strengths have significantly diminished during this period and as a consequence, the quality of life of the population has not improved, while government achievements and outcomes have plummeted.

One of the most significant consequences of this excessive and irrational institutional weakening is its direct impact on the country's democratic behavior and progress. This, in turn, undermines the possibilities for Mexicans to live in a prosperous country with opportunities for development and growth. Although

the 21st century began with some signs of democratic progress, primarily due to the alternation of power, the last six years have represented a setback in the advancement and achievement of many variables that give democracy its shape and meaning. With a false notion of change, the process of institutional reconstruction and strengthening proposed under Lopez Obrador never materialized. Instead, lacking alternatives for real improvement and change, Mexican institutions have gradually lost their ability to generate results. The president's evident disregard for the Constitution and other laws has left a profound mark on the behavior of other leaders and decision-makers in the country, suggesting that the example set by the head of the Executive is the correct one.

In this context, two of the country's major institutions, the National Electoral Institute (INE) and the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (TEPJF), will soon face one of the most challenging tests in their history. With limited budgets, reduced human resources and clear organizational weakening, both institutions must oversee the largest and most complex election in Mexico's modern era. The main problem revolves around at least two critical aspects: controlling the excessive involvement of the president and being able to justify and validate the winners throughout

the contest. Although each federal entity has its own electoral bodies, these face even greater shortages and limitations than those faced by federal electoral bodies.

2.1 INSTITUTIONAL AND DEMOCRATIC CONTEXT IN MEXICO AHEAD OF THE ELECTIONS

In one way or another, after the 2000 elections, which marked the transition of power to the PAN after more than seven decades of PRI rule, it was believed and asserted that the concept of democracy could begin to be linked to the identity of Mexicans. However, with the arrival of Lopez Obrador to the federal government, a process of numerous changes in governance styles and methods began, opening a new path that sought to innovate the way in which priorities and agendas are set from the seat of power. The reality is that these unfortunate adjustments have caused disorder in how the government places public issues on its agenda, giving absolute preference to the president's preferences and whims over the actual realities experienced and endured by millions of Mexicans. This new way of structuring and exercising governance has been reflected in the limited reach and lack of effectiveness of public policies over the past six years, where the political project has taken

The main problem revolves around at least two critical aspects: controlling the excessive involvement of the president and being able to justify and validate the winners throughout the contest.

precedence over the real interests and needs of the population.

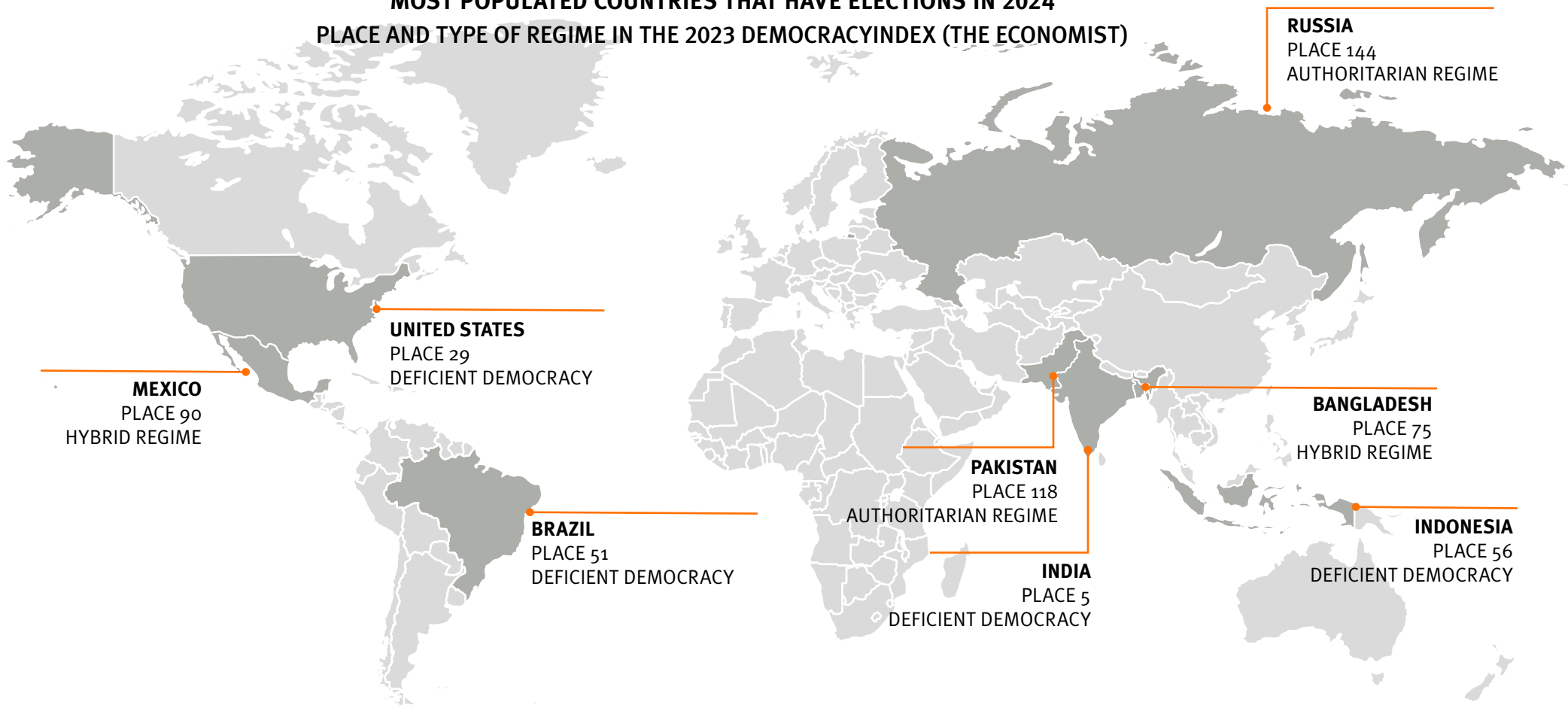
Over the past six years, Mexico has experienced a democratic regression, where the concept and value of institutions have been damaged and fragmented. According to The Economist's 2023 Democracy Index (2024), the condition of fully free and fair elections prevails in only 43 of the 76 countries that will hold elections in 2024 (27 of them are EU member states). Eight of the ten most populous countries in the world—Bangladesh (ranked 75th), Brazil (51st), India (5th), Indonesia (56th), Mexico (90th), Pakistan (118th), Russia (144th) and the United States (29th)—will hold national elections in 2024. In half of them, elections are neither free nor fair and many other intrinsic democratic requirements, such as freedom of expression and association, are absent.

Since The Economist began measuring democratic conditions in 2006, and until 2020, Mexico was considered a "flawed democracy." However, from 2020 to date, this research unit has classified it as a "hybrid regime." Our country has a score of 5.14 points, placing it as a hybrid case where democratic practices coexist with authoritarian traits. These are countries with elections but with governments that

harass the opposition and free press, exhibit widespread corruption and have a weak rule of law, with the independence of the judiciary under threat (Murayama, 2024). To make matters worse, fragile Mexican democracy must contend with the infamous element of insecurity. Three of the ten most dangerous countries in the world are in Latin America (Mexico ranks third, Brazil sixth and Colombia tenth) (Economist Intelligence, 2024). As expected, concerns about crime and violence in the region are among the highest worldwide.

The fact that the original purpose for which Mexican institutions were created has been undermined is an indication that the needs and problems these institutions should have resolved or contained have been neglected. Mexican democracy is undergoing a regressive metamorphosis, rather than a process of transition and growth. This scenario casts doubt on the mechanisms for selecting, monitoring and replacing governments, as well as ensuring the creation and effective implementation of policies or promoting positions that respect the relationship between society and the State. The demanded progress toward consolidating a full democracy has not been achieved. Mexico's path in democratic terms is based on building institutions capable of peacefully, legally

MOST POPULATED COUNTRIES THAT HAVE ELECTIONS IN 2024
PLACE AND TYPE OF REGIME IN THE 2023 DEMOCRACYINDEX (THE ECONOMIST)



and equitably resolving political conflicts while professionalizing governmental bureaucracies. These institutions are the product of citizen achievements that led to extensive debates among various political actors, who agreed to limit presidential power. Although some of Mexico's key democratic institutions already existed, they have been subordinated to the

will of the federal executive, while others were established to fulfill certain specialized tasks relevant to the Mexican state.

Democracy should represent much more than the simple election of rulers. It should express the possibility of strengthening key aspects, such as citizen

participation, the inclusion of minority groups, better education, full access to quality healthcare services and constant, solid and clearly directed economic growth, among many other aspects. In essence, democracy should improve individual opportunities for prosperity and well-being through the establishment of sufficiently strong, free, transparent, efficient and equitable institutions that reaffirm the relationship between the State and society, promoting pluralism, participation and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Since the turn of the millennium, the federal legislative branch has been characterized by its plurality and its ability to counterbalance presidential power. However, the 2018 election results marked a new stage of governance in Mexico, where the democratically composed Mexican Congress lost the incentives to challenge, debate or refute the executive branch's decisions and requests. As in other democracies, in Mexico, votes play a crucial role in shaping majorities and minorities. However, majorities are not authorized to weaken the constitutional order of a state, much less to limit established constitutional powers. Since the start of this administration, a systematic, programmed and targeted attack has been evident against all institutions that pose an obstacle to Lopez Obrador's project.

2.2 THE CHALLENGE OF A HIGHLY COMPETITIVE ELECTORAL PROCESS

On June 2, 2024, the largest and most competitive electoral process in modern Mexican history will take place. At the federal level alone, a President, 128 Senators, and 500 Deputies will be elected. Meanwhile, at the state and local levels, nine Governors and 20,066 positions will be filled, including members of Local Congresses, City Councils, Municipal Boards and Mayors. This process, by its nature, represents an enormous effort by the country's democratic institutions, which many believe exceeds the institutional capacities of the nation. The challenge for this electoral process is vast and will undoubtedly prove exhausting for a multitude of institutions that have been weakened in terms of capacity, budget, tools to achieve goals and that, above all, are perceived as worn out after six years of constant and senseless attacks. Both the National Electoral Institute (INE) and their counterparts in the federal entities face this process under the shadow of uncertainty about their ability to legitimize the results and successfully defend them. The situation is seen as a prelude to a deficient electoral process, where the only actor who controls, commands without respecting regulations, and generates uncertainty in the process is the president himself. The

Democracy should improve individual opportunities for prosperity and well-being through the establishment of sufficiently strong, free, transparent, efficient and equitable institutions that reaffirm the relationship between the State and society,

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF FEDERAL AND STATE ELECTIONS 1/2			
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC: 1	SETADORS: 128	CONGRESSWOMEN/CONGRESS MEN: 500	
STATE ELECTIONS			
AGUASCALIENTES	BAJA CALIFORNIA	BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR	CAMPECHE
27 Local councils 11 Municipal presidencies 12 Trusteeships 86 Councillorships	25 Local councils 7 Municipal presidencies 7 Trusteeships 63 Councillorships	21 Local councils 5 Municipal presidencies 5 Trusteeships 48 Councillorships	35 Local councils 13 Municipal presidencies 28 Trusteeships 110 Councillorships
COAHUILA	COLIMA	CHIAPAS	CHIHUAHUA
38 Local councils 76 Trusteeships 402 Councillorships	25 Local councils 10 Municipal presidencies 10 Trusteeships 94 Councillorships	1 Governorship ● 40 Local councils 123 Municipal presidencies 123 Trusteeships 866 Councillorships	33 Local councils 67 Municipal presidencies 67 Trusteeships 714 Councillorships
MEXICO CITY	DURANGO	GUANAJUATO	GUERRERO
1 Head of government ● 66 Local councils 16 Mayor's office 160 Councillors	25 Local councils	1 Governorship ● 36 Local councils 46 Municipal presidencies 52 Trusteeships 418 Councillorships	46 Local councils 84 Municipal presidencies 89 Trusteeships 608 Councillorships
HIDALGO	JALISCO	STATE OF MEXICO	MICHOACAN
30 Local councils 84 Municipal presidencies 96 Trusteeships 900 Councillorships	1 Governorship ● 38 Local councils 125 Municipal presidencies 125 Trusteeships 1231 Councillorships	75 Local councils 125 Municipal presidencies 136 Trusteeships 966 Councillorships	40 Local councils 112 Municipal presidencies 112 Trusteeships 874 Councillorships

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF FEDERAL AND STATE ELECTIONS 2/2			
MORELOS	NAYARIT	NUEVO LEON	OAXACA
1 Governorship ● 2 Local councils 33 Municipal presidencies 33 Trusteeships 153 Councillorships	30 Local councils 20 Municipal presidencies 20 Trusteeships 200 Councillorships	42 Local councils 52 Municipal presidencies 77 Trusteeships 473 Councillorships	42 Local councils 153 Municipal presidencies 187 Trusteeships 908 Councillorships
PUEBLA	QUERETARO	QUINTANA ROO	SAN LUIS POTOSI
1 Governorship ● 41 Local councils 217 Municipal presidencies 217 Trusteeships 1,810 Councillorships	25 Local councils 18 Municipal presidencies 36 Trusteeships 148 Councillorships	25 Local councils 11 Municipal presidencies 11 Trusteeships 117 Councillorships	27 Local councils 58 Municipal presidencies 64 Trusteeships 387 Councillorships
SINALOA	SONORA	TABASCO	TAMAULIPAS
40 Local councils 20 Municipal presidencies 20 Trusteeships 165 Councillorships	33 Local councils 72 Municipal presidencies 72 Trusteeships 485 Councillorships	1 Governorship ● 35 Local councils 17 Municipal presidencies 17 Trusteeships 51 Councillorships	36 Local councils 43 Municipal presidencies 57 Trusteeships 405 Councillorships
TLAXCALA	VERACRUZ	YUCATAN	ZACATECAS
25 Local councils 60 Municipal presidencies 60 Trusteeships 350 Councillorships	1 Governorship ● 50 Local councils	1 Governorship ● 35 Local councils 106 Municipal presidencies 106 Trusteeships 581 Councillorships	30 Local councils 58 Municipal presidencies 58 Trusteeships 547 Regiduria

Source: In-house elaboration with data from INE, 2023.

ease with which the institutional framework is being dismantled reveals the lack of deep-rooted presence of these institutions and the insufficient credibility regarding their importance in everyday life. Given the current scenario in Mexico, where the overall deterioration of the government is immense and where some political, electoral, economic and social institutions have been sacrificed, undermined or even disappeared, the pressing question is: how far can this go, and what else can the president destroy?

The ease with which the institutional framework is being dismantled reveals the lack of deep-rooted presence of these institutions and the insufficient credibility regarding their importance in everyday life.

How far can this go, and what else can the president destroy?

2.3 WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF THE INE AND THE ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL?

The constant attacks that have affected nearly all Mexican institutions have led many citizens to perceive a risk that the electoral process could be influenced directly from the National Palace. Although there is a specialized body, the National Electoral Institute (INE), responsible for organizing federal elections—including the presidential election—as well as coordinating with state electoral bodies for local elections, trust in its impartiality has been put to the test.

The INE has stood out for its efficiency and impartiality, boasting an alternation rate of 65%, the highest in its history since it assumed the organization of elections. The performance of this institution and the involvement of citizens in elections have led to a high level of recognition for the INE, making it the third most trusted institution in the country, only after the Armed Forces and the National Guard. According to data from INEGI (2020), 59.6% of citizens have some or a great deal of trust in the INE, while only 13% express having no trust at all in this institution.

THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL INSTITUTE NEW GENERAL COUNCIL COMPOSITION

NATIONAL ELECTORAL INSTITUTE GENERAL COUNCIL



Images: <https://centralectoral.ine.mx/2024/04/18/sesion-extraordinaria-del-consejo-general-realizada-el-dia-18-de-abril-de-2024/>

PRESIDENT COUNCILLOR



Guadalupe Tadei Zavala

ELECTORAL COUNCILLORS



Dania Ravel Cuevas



Martin Faz Mora



Carla Humphrey Jordan



Arturo Castillo Loza



Claudia Zavala Perez



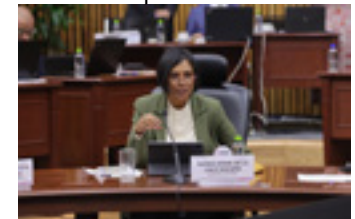
Jaime Rivera Velazquez



Rita Bell Lopez Vences



Ucc-Kib Espadas Ancona



Norma I. de la Cruz Magaña

**TABLE 2. EXPENDITURE BUDGET EXERCISE
IN ADMINISTRATIVE CLASSIFICATION OF THE
NATIONAL ELECTORAL INSTITUTE
(CONSTANT PRICES) (MILLIONS OF PESOS)**

2015	12,592.52
2016	10,787.66
2017	11,141.71
2018	18,778.81
2019	12,347.11
2020	13,844.94
2021	23,554.92
2022	18,702.72
2023	20,221.37
2024*	33,904.39

Note: The figures correspond to the total assigned to the institution (INE), in the Economic Programmatic Functional Analysis of the PEF 2024. Constant weights, base year 2023.

*By 2024, the category Democracy preserved and strengthened through the organization of national elections, the promotion of citizen participation and the promotion of the development of the party system, was assigned 22,322 million 879 thousand 716 pesos, the rest was allocated to guaranteed and timely prerogatives for political parties.

Source: In-house elaboration with data from SHCP (2015–2024) and INEGI s.f.e.



Despite this, the INE is one of the constitutionally autonomous bodies that has suffered the most public attacks from the ruling majority and, specifically, from the president during the current administration. The president's public disdain for the electoral authority is not recent; it dates back at least to previous elections in which Lopez Obrador competed and lost the presidency. Possibly due to the attack windows that have been opened from the National Palace, the INE is one of the institutions that receives the highest number of cyberattacks. It faces at least 32 attacks per minute. As of February, 2.6 million attacks had been recorded, and it is estimated that by the end of April, more than 5 million attacks on its technological systems will have occurred (Aroche, 2024).

The INE is one of the constitutionally autonomous bodies that has suffered the most public attacks from the ruling majority and, from the president during the current administration.

Furthermore, according to previous reports by Signos Vitales, the four main strategies the ruling majority has used to attack the INE are:

1. The Budgetary Route: Reducing or manipulating the budget allocated to the INE.
2. Threats to Dissolve the General Council of the INE or the INE itself.
3. Threats of Impeachment Against Electoral Counselors.
4. (In)Direct Threats to the Integrity of INE Counselors.

Although the INE's budget has remained relatively consistent, it can be confirmed that the trend has been increasing. Taking 2015 as a reference year, when \$12,592 million MXN were allocated, the 2024 budget stands at \$33,904 million MXN (General Secretariat, 2023). Over this nine-year period, it is important to note that the highest budget allocations have occurred during the current federal administration, specifically in the years 2018, 2021, 2022, and 2023, with amounts exceeding \$18 billion MXN: \$18.778 million MXN, \$23.554 million MXN, \$18.702 million MXN, and \$20.221 million MXN, respectively.

Despite this positive budgetary trend, the INE itself has warned that the resources it has are significant-

ly limited for the number of tasks assigned to and expected from this body. The reality is that the INE has never faced a "political-electoral" landscape like the one presented this year, where the workload has clearly multiplied, leading to a substantial budgetary burden, while the resources remain disproportionate.

The National Electoral Institute (INE) has also been affected by the assaults launched from the upper echelons of the federal executive branch, as well as from the majority group in the federal Congress. The vindictive nature with which this organization has been undermined has set a troubling precedent. In the eyes of the president, the INE has transformed from the institution that officially declared him the supreme leader of Mexico to the primary public enemy of the Fourth Transformation (4T). In virtually all the reports and alerts published by Signos Vitales, the strategy employed by the Executive to attack, discredit and diminish its adversaries has been detailed. This tactic can be summarized as directing allies from the morning press conferences. Orchestrated from the National Palace, the presidential communication program is not merely a series of informative sessions led by the head of the federal Executive but has instead become the formula for governing through stigmatization, polarization and the dissemination of falsehoods. In this

In the eyes of the president, the INE has transformed from the institution that officially declared him the supreme leader of Mexico to the primary public enemy of the Fourth Transformation (4T).

context, the INE has been the institution most severely attacked by the president.

The Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (TEPJF) is a specialized body within the Federal Judiciary, responsible for resolving electoral disputes and protecting citizens' political-electoral rights. Despite maintaining a relative distance from the Executive, the Tribunal has also been subjected to the president's underhanded tactics—especially now, as the conflict with the Judiciary (and its three main bodies¹) has intensified in the final stretch of the administration. Like the INE, the TEPJF has experienced relative budgetary continuity, despite the instability in the president's sentiments and the attitudes of Morena's Deputies in Congress. For 2024, the Tribunal has a budget of \$3,748.58 million MXN (General Secretariat, 2023), an amount that is nearly double the \$2,076.12 million MXN it had in 2015. Over this nine-year period, the Tribunal's budget has fluctuated, with its highest allocations in 2018 (\$3,019.15 million MXN), while the lowest allocations were recorded in 2016 (\$1,852.14 million MXN) and 2019 (\$2,040.25 million MXN).

¹ Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, Council of the Federal Judiciary and the Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Branch of the Federation.

TABLE 3. EXERCISE OF THE EXPENDITURE BUDGET IN ADMINISTRATIVE CLASSIFICATION OF THE ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL OF THE JUDICIAL BRANCH OF THE FEDERATION (CONSTANT PRICES) (MILLIONS OF PESOS)

2015	2,076.12
2016	1,852.14
2017	2,310.44
2018	3,019.15
2019	2,040.25
2020	2,200.96
2021	2,661.39
2022	2,650.61
2023	2,980.07
2024	3,748.58

Note: Constant pesos, base year 2023.

Source: In-house elaboration with data from SHCP (2015–2024) and INEGI s.f.e.



ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL OF THE FEDERAL JUDICIARY



Images: <https://www.te.gob.mx/front3/ContenidoSalas/salaSuperior>



Monica Soto Fregoso
Magistrate President



Felipe Fuentes Barrera
Magistrate



Felipe de la Mata Pizaña
Magistrate



Janine Otalora Malassis
Magistrate



Reyes Rodriguez
Mondragon
Magistrate

In budgetary terms, both for the National Electoral Institute (INE) and the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (TEPJF), this unwelcome continuity in resource allocation has not necessarily hindered their path to achieving their institutional objectives. However, it is important to note that the workload, demands, and needs of both institutions have increased over the years. Particularly in 2024, both organizations have publicly voiced their concerns, stating that they are not just operating at capacity but are financially short of covering all the requirements and obligations implicit in the electoral process (Damian, 2023; Meraz, 2023; Rojas, 2023).

The inaction of higher bodies, such as the Senate and local Congresses, in appointing the remaining magistrates for both federal and state electoral tribunals jeopardizes the certainty of the entire electoral process. The Senate of the Republic has postponed its constitutional responsibility to appoint the missing magistrates of the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (Coparmex, 2024). By that time, the Senate concluded its last ordinary session without fulfilling the 49 pending appointments for local electoral tribunals and the TEPJF (Cabrera, 2024).

At the local level, several states are approaching gubernatorial, local legislative, municipal presidency, trusteeship and councilorship elections with vacant positions in their Electoral Tribunal chambers. Such is the case in the seats of Guadalajara, Monterrey, Xalapa, Mexico City and Toluca, as well as the Specialized Chamber, each of which has a vacant electoral magistrate position. Moreover, the 32 local electoral tribunals have between one and three vacancies on their panels (Cabrera, 2024).

2.4 INSTITUTIONAL LIMITATIONS

The governance strategy implemented since 2018 has involved, among other actions, undermining a sector that was once trained, specialized and disciplined towards Mexican institutions. Despite the progress made in professionalization, the current administration has launched a series of actions that ultimately weaken the development of governmental talent, especially in areas requiring highly qualified personnel. The main actions include:

- » Eliminating competitive processes for positions previously part of the professional civil service.
- » Implementing salary cuts.
- » Abolishing positions.

- » Imposing stricter limitations on working in a similar job to that held in public service upon joining the private sector.
- » Eliminating bonuses and incentives for remaining part of the federal public administration (including constitutionally autonomous bodies –OCAs).

The historical account has made it clear that the excesses of previous governments generated widespread public discontent, justified by the unjustified luxuries of some officials. However, the legal modifications carried out by the current government undermine the very functioning of institutions, as is the case with the INE. From the outset, this organization has had to make adjustments focused on Chapters 2000 and 3000, covering items such as materials, office supplies, leases, parking, telephone services, electricity, among others, totaling 96,655,885 pesos, in addition to personnel services, without affecting substantive operations and compliance with institutional obligations, amounting to 126,669,451 pesos (Monroy, 2022). However, the primary condition for achieving the objectives set in public policy is to have a sufficient budget, in addition to the components of human and administrative resources. The success of public policy largely depends on the sufficient allocation of financial resources.

Although the full impact of these actions cannot yet be measured, the various measures orchestrated from the National Palace, with the support of the majority in Congress, have consistently reduced the incentives for pursuing a long-term professional career within the INE and TEPJF in particular, and the public sector in general. This has resulted in:

- » Loss of experience and administrative-operational memory.
- » Promotion of bureaucratic weakness (bearing the cost of the learning curve).
- » Limited capacity to address and respond to administrative and operational complaints.
- » Impairment of technical and operational capabilities and increased response times.
- » Discontent among officials who, without justification, have been accused of dishonesty for performing legal activities.

The Senate concluded its last ordinary session without fulfilling the 49 pending appointments for local electoral tribunals and the TEPJF (Cabrera, 2024).



3. VIOLATION OF THE ELECTORAL LAW

*In 2023,
19,394 "Servants of
the nation" under
the order of the
Presidency of the
Republic.*

Image: <https://elotroenfoco.mx/se-reune-amlo-en-guanajuato-con-los-siervos-de-la-nacion/>

3. VIOLATION OF THE ELECTORAL LAW

3.1 CONTEMPT FOR THE LAW:

HOW DOES THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT OPERATE?

As mentioned in other reports by Signos Vitales, the current federal administration has been characterized by a centralization of power. Despite the president's open criticism of corruption in administrations preceding his tenure, he has been criticized for unilateral decision-making, discretionary and opaque use of the budget and the constant threat to institutions that serve as checks and balances to his authority. Such is the case of the Constitutionally Autonomous Bodies (OCAs), where their dismantling has led to a substantial regression and an assault on Mexican democracy.

The government's operations have been marked by a context of institutional weakening and constant violations of the law. As the head of government and the Mexican state, the president has numerous responsibilities, including directing the country's domestic and foreign policy, commanding the Armed Forces and appointing or removing cabinet members. These responsibilities also encompass ensuring compliance with the Constitution and laws of the country, as well as maintaining political, social and economic stability, playing a decisive role in the democratic life of Mexico (Signos Vitales, 2023). However, the actions of the nation's highest authority have centralized power, concentrating decision-making and eliminating or weakening institutional checks and balances, all while continuously violating the law and the Constitution.

As we have noted in Signos Vitales (2023), the president's style of governance has demonstrated a profound disregard for the law and institutions. The constitutional reforms are a clear example that, despite his promise not to amend the Constitution, 2019 became the year with the highest number of constitutional reforms¹: 26 articles were amended, reaching a total of 63 articles modified by March 22, 2024 (Chamber of Deputies, n.d.).

Some of the various ways in which the federal executive has consolidated power include: i) Issuance of Presidential Decrees, ii) Violations of the Legal Framework and iii) Institutional Weakening. The agreements and decrees that the president has relied upon as a means of concentrating power are particularly concerning, as some openly contradict the Constitution. These include those related to the concentration of budgetary power in the president and those associated with militarization.

¹ Articles 2 (1st Amendment, 2nd Amendment), 3, 4, 10, 16, 19, 21, 22, 31 (1st Amendment, 2nd Amendment), 35 (1st Amendment, 2nd Amendment, 3rd Amendment), 36 (1st Amendment, 2nd Amendment), 41 (1st Amendment, 2nd Amendment), 52, 53, 56, 73 (1st Amendment, 2nd Amendment, 3rd Amendment), 76, 78, 81, 84, 89, 94, 99, 115, 116 and 122 (Chamber of Deputies, n.d.).

In summary, this section's analysis reveals the mechanisms and various methods used by the president to continue concentrating power, as evidenced by the assault on democracy and the constant initiatives to reform electoral law. This suggests that Mexico meets all the criteria and exhibits all the signs of experiencing democratic regression, where a democratically elected leader, legitimized by the popular vote, abuses and weakens democratic institutions, concentrates power, and changes the rules of the electoral game to remain in power (Dresser, 2024).



Source: "AMLO attacks again upon the elimination of "the mañanera"(morning conference) in YouTube". Photo Infobae at <https://partidero.com/amlo-vuelve-a-atacar-tras-eliminacion-de-la-mananera-en-youtube/>

3.2 AN UNCHECKED PRESIDENT

Regarding institutional weakening, the strategy has been the colonization and attempted extermination of checks and balances that represent opposition to the president's goals. In a democratic system, checks and balances are understood as the limits and powers that each public authority maintains to ensure the efficient functioning of the State, representing a process of independence of State powers from the President of the Republic. This democratization process has been under constant attack and threat during the current administration. As reported in Signos Vitales, one of the most visible characteristics of this federal administration has been the weakening of checks and balances through three main avenues: i) Budgetary Weakening, ii) Colonization of Autonomous Powers and iii) Pressure and Attacks on Institutions, Organizations and Individuals Perceived as Adversaries.

Budgetary strangulation and public attacks on various public institutions are symptoms of the president's intent to eliminate any constitutional, legal or institutional barrier that opposes his political project. There is evidence that the budgetary weakening of Autonomous Bodies continues to decline, even in 2024. These differences are reflected in the analy-

sis of the Federal Expenditure Budget (PEF) (SHCP, 2023a) and the Federal Expenditure Budget Project for the 2024 fiscal year (SHCP, 2023b).

According to the data compiled in Table 4, a series of changes were made to the Autonomous Branches for 2024, with further reductions. The most significant decrease was observed in the National Electoral Institute (INE), with a variation of -13.25% between the projected (PPEF) and approved (PEF) budgets. The Federal Economic Competition Commission (Cofece) experienced a substantial reduction of -11.3%, while the National Institute for Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data (INAI) saw a variation of -6.1%. Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), the Federal Telecommunications Institute (IFT) and the Attorney General's Office (FGR) showed no increases or reductions.

The most significant budgetary decrease was observed in the National Electoral Institute (INE), with a variation of -13.25% between the projected (PPEF) and approved (PEF) budgets.

TABLE 4. CHANGES IN AUTONOMOUS ORGANISMS (FIGURES IN MILLIONS OF PESOS)

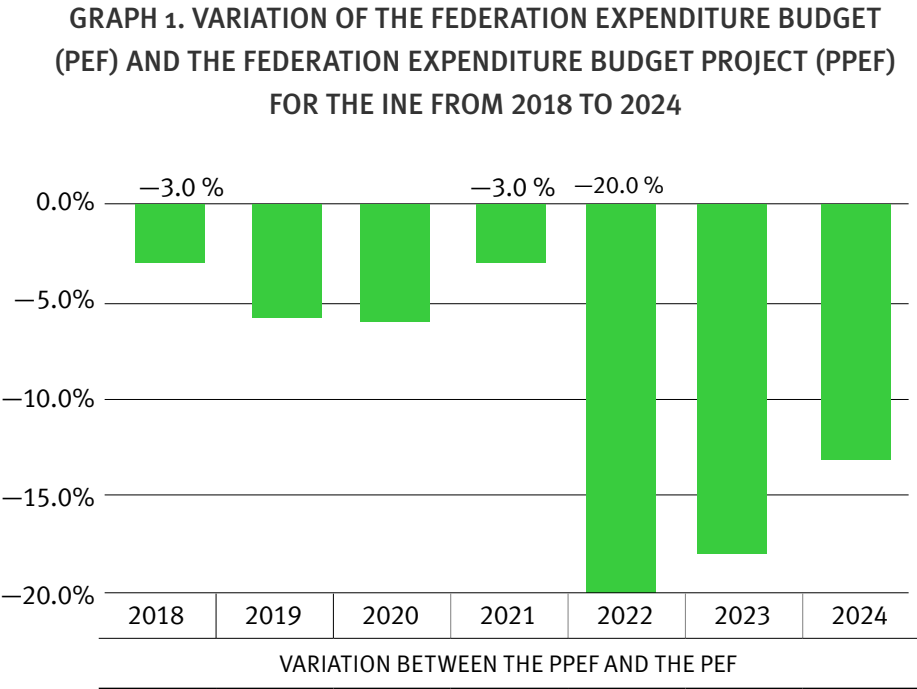
AUTONOMOUS ORGANISMS	PPEF	PEF	DIFERENCE	VARIATION (%)
INSTITUTO NACIONAL ELECTORAL (INE) National Electoral Institute (INE)	37,770.24	32,767.04	-5,003.20	-13.2
COMISION NACIONAL DE DERECHOS HUMANOS (CNDH) National Human Rights Commission (CNDH)	1,722.14	1,722.14	0.00	0.0
COMISION FEDERAL DE COMPETENCIA ECONOMICA (COFECE) Federal Economic Competition Commission (Cofece)	774.05	687.87	-86.18	-11.1
INSTITUTO FEDERAL DE TELECOMUNICACIONES (IFT) Federal Telecommunications institute (IFT)	1,680.00	1,680.00	0.00	0.0
INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE TRANSPARENCIA, ACCESO A LA INFORMACION Y PROTECCION DE DATOS PERSONALES (INAI) National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data (INAI)	1,168.40	1,097.35	-71.05	-6.1
FISCALIA GENERAL DE LA REPUBLICA (FGR) Attorney General's Office (FGR)	19,333.37	19,333.37	0.00	0.0
INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTADISTICA Y GEOGRAFIA (INEGI) National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI)	14245.3	14,245.30	0.00	0.0

Source: In-house elaboration with data from SHCP (2023a and 2023b).

One of the most affected institutions has been the National Electoral Institute (INE). Graph 1 illustrates how the amounts requested by the INE have been among the most impacted, with a range from -3% to as much as -20% below what the institute requested compared to what it actually received. Although the gap for 2024 is smaller, it remains significant compared to the -5.8% variation recorded in 2019, at the beginning of the current administration.

The budgetary evolution of the amounts approved in the Annual Expenditure Budgets (PEF) for each year reveals that the National Electoral Institute (INE) has experienced some of the most significant budget cuts. The largest annual negative variations in the INE's budget were recorded in 2019 and 2022, reaching -39% in 2019 compared to the previous year and -31% in 2022 compared to 2021, as shown in Chapter 2 (Graph 2).

The attacks on democracy range from budgetary weakening to direct imposition and influence aimed at dismantling the organization. The National Electoral Institute (INE) is an autonomous public body responsible for ensuring free, fair and equitable elections in our country (Signos Vitales, 2023). The General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures



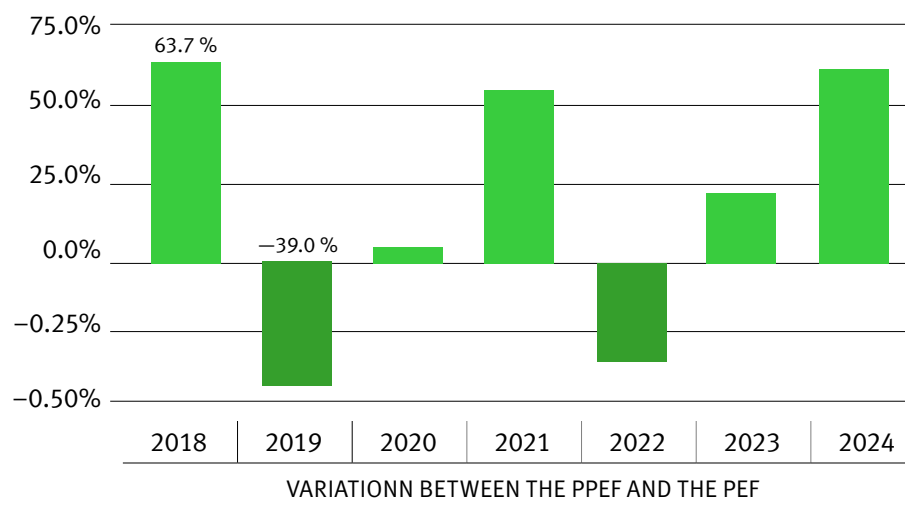
Source: In-house elaboration with data from SHCP (2023a y 2023b)

(LGIPE, 2014), in its Article 29, establishes the institute's objectives, which include:

- » Ensuring citizens' full exercise of their political-electoral rights and overseeing compliance with their obligations.
- » Safeguarding the authenticity of elections.
- » Contributing to the development of democratic life.
- » Preserving and strengthening the party system.
- » Acting as the sole authority for administering state time on radio and television, allocated to the institute's objectives and guaranteeing the exercise of the rights granted by the Constitution to political parties (among others) (Chamber of Deputies, 2014).

For an entity to be considered autonomous, budgetary autonomy alone is not sufficient; other elements must also be met. The Autonomous Constitutional Body (OCA) must not be subject to instructions from the Executive, Judicial or Legislative branches. Despite the clarity in the law regarding the functions of the branches of government and autonomous bodies in Mexico, recent years have seen systematic and constant violations of the law by the Mexican State as a whole, particularly by the current president. Some of these violations have been described in previous

**GRAPH 2. ANNUAL VARIATION OF THE INE BUDGET
2018 TO 2024**



Source: In-house elaboration with data from SHCP (2023a and 2023b)

reports by Signos Vitales (2023), such as violations of the Hydrocarbons Law, the National Guard Law, the Remuneration Law, among many others. The implications of these and other violations jeopardize the country's democracy.

Another example of the attacks on the INE is the continuous reform initiatives sent by the president to the Chamber of Deputies on political-electoral matters since 2022. The 2022–2023 political-electoral reforms are compiled in two challenged decrees listed below:

1. FIRST DECREE: Published on December 27, 2022, in the Official Gazette of the Federation, which reforms, adds, and repeals various provisions of the General Law of Social Communication and the General Law of Administrative Responsibilities.
2. SECOND DECREE: Published on March 2, 2023, in the Official Gazette of the Federation, which reforms, adds, and repeals various provisions of the General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures, the General Law of Political Parties, the Organic Law of the Federal Judiciary and issues the General Law of Electoral Means of Appeal (SCJN, n.d.).

According to a report by Integralia (Ugalde & Creuheras, 2022), some of the risks associated with

these initiatives include: 1) Limiting the operational capacity of the INE, 2) Weakening the position of the INE's President-Counselor and 3) Restricting the regulatory capacity of electoral authorities. (See Table 5 for details).

The Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN, n.d.) invalidated the second part of the 2022–2023 political-electoral reform package due to violations of the legislative procedure on June 22, 2023, specifically regarding the second decree (SCJN, 2023). The



Image: The Supreme Court invalidates de second part of the political-electoral reform at <https://www.capital21.cdmx.gob.mx/noticias/?p=40808>

TABLE 5. RISKS OF REFORMS TO ELECTORAL LAWS 1/2

RISKS	PROPOSAL	IMPLICATIONS
LIMIT THE OPERATIONAL CAPACITY OF THE INE	<p>The proposal included making modifications at three levels:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Central offices merging 17 areas into 12 (uniting some divergent ones such as the legal area with the Electoral Litigation Technical Unit and the Administration Directorate with that of the Electoral Professional Service); 2. Compact the 32 local boards by eliminating the secretary member and the organization member; 3. And by disappearing the 300 district boards (the territorial base for organizing elections) and replacing them with an operational committee. 	<p>Although it is true that there is room for bureaucratic reduction of the INE, the magnitude of the mandate of the reform is excessive and had to have been carried out before August 1, 2023. The reduction would have implied (in fact) the dismantling of the INE's career service (the professional electoral service) and would involve dismissing 85% of its little more than 2,500 members. Therefore, the effectiveness of the Institute to integrate and install more than 160 thousand polling stations during the federal elections would be severely affected.</p>
WEAKENING OF THE FIGURE OF THE PRESIDENT ADVISOR	<p>An attempt has been made to eliminate the Executive General Board, which is the operational arm of the INE and through which the president advisor guarantees the execution of the mandate of the General Council. In its place, it was proposed to create an Administration Commission, made up of five councilors (one of them the president councilor), the executive directors, as well as representatives of the political parties.</p>	<p>This creates the possibility of politicizing the implementation of the General Council's agreements and would give the electoral councilors an executive role, deforming their supervisory role.</p>
RESTRICTION OF THE SANCTIONING AND REGULATORY CAPACITY OF THE ELECTORAL AUTHORITIES	<p>Substantive, regulatory, and oversight powers would be lost, as well as to point out and sanction electoral offenses against political parties and/or candidates, since everything must be interpreted in accordance with "strict law."</p>	<p>The lack of sanctions would generate impunity and elections without a level playing field.</p>
THE BUDGETARY AUTONOMY OF THE INE IS WEAKENED	<p>It was proposed: 1) That all the Institute's resources be expressly labeled in the Expenditure Budget of the Federation (PEF) and 2) Order to liquidate and reintegrate the funds coming from two trusts established to pay the pensions of retirees, as well as for the maintenance and updating of the citizen service modules.</p>	<p>By labeling the institute's resources before the PEF, the INE loses operational capacity and independence from Congress.</p>

TABLE 5. RISKS OF REFORMS TO ELECTORAL LAWS 2/2

RISKS	PROPOSAL	IMPLICATIONS
THE PROPAGANDA CAPACITY OF PUBLIC SERVANTS IS EXPANDED	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First of all, the temporal and geographical restriction for public servants to submit their government reports would be eliminated (today they can only do so once a year and in the geographical demarcation that corresponds to them). 2. Secondly, the definition of "government propaganda" is modified to tie it to a budget year (what is paid is propaganda and what is not paid is not) and therefore the statements of all public servants, including those of the president, can be made during campaigns. 	Among the implications, it is considered a contrast to the principles of equity and neutrality provided for in the Constitution (Arts. 41 and 134).
AWARD TO ALLIES	<p>In order for the reform to be approved, requests from the PT and PVEM were included at the last minute.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To transfer votes between political parties that present common candidates through an agreement; 2. Parties could save money not spent in the year; and 3. The causes of loss of registration of political parties are made more flexible. 	The above has meant that in 2024 the registration of said parties is guaranteed since Morena assigns them the necessary voting percentage. Likewise, parties are allowed to keep unspent money instead of returning it to the Federation Treasury, which does not guarantee that this money will be used for the purposes proposed and limits the possibility of the INE supervising these resources.
THE POSITIVE	It included accelerating the process so that people deprived of liberty can vote, as well as including vulnerable groups (older adults, people with disabilities and indigenous people) through affirmative actions. It also aims to facilitate the voting of Mexicans abroad, through the use of the internet with a passport or consular registration.	Although the guarantee of the electoral rights of more citizens was sought, there are still irregularities that would hinder the process such as the use of fraudulent practices regarding voting from abroad.

Source: In-house elaboration with information from Integralia (2022).

constitutional reforms in electoral matters promoted by the Presidency of the Republic since 2022 have been based on the premise of reducing the cost of elections and preventing alleged electoral fraud.

Following the rejection of the first constitutional reform by the Congress of the Union (Plan A), the ap-

proval of legal modifications that constituted the so-called Plan B, and the SCJN’s declaration of unconstitutionality due to violations of the legislative process, the President once again presented a series of constitutional initiatives on February 5, 2024. These included a new version of his original constitutional reform on electoral matters (Table 6).

TABLE 6 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ELECTORAL REFORMS PROPOSED BY THE PRESIDENT			
	PLAN A	PLAN B	2024 INICIATIVES
SUBMISSION DATE	November 2022	December 2022	February 2024
ARTICLES AND/OR LEGISLATION THAT REFORMS	5, 41, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 60, 63, 73, 99, 105, 110, 111, 115, 116, 122 of the Constitution	6 secondary laws: 1) LGIPE, 2)LGPP, 3) LGSMIME, 4)LGMDE, 5)Federal Law of Popular Consultation and 6) General Law of Social Communication	35, 41, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 60, 63, 73, 99, 105, 110, 111, 115, 116, 122 of the Constitution
CONTEXT OF THE REFORM	Reform to reduce the cost of elections and avoid alleged electoral fraud. Disappearance of OCA and confrontation with the president of the INE. Morena and allies have a simple majority in the federal Congress.	The president was forced to present these initiatives due to the failure to approve the constitutional reform initiative.	The reform package is presented in the middle of the electoral process. The initiatives proposed in November 2022 (Plan A) are resumed with some additions. Morena and allies continue to retain the majority in the federal congress, which does not allow them to modify the Constitution on their own.

Source: In-house elaboration with information from Laboratorio Electoral (2024a).

The constant pressure and influence exerted by the president are evident in the new reform package submitted in February 2024, which includes the electoral reform initiative. This proposal introduces several changes to the National Electoral Institute (INE), including renaming it the National Institute of Elections and Consultations (INEC), which would absorb the functions of local electoral bodies (OPLEs). Meanwhile, the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (TEPJF) would take over the jurisdiction of local electoral tribunals, which would be dissolved.

Another significant change affects the highest decision-making body of the electoral authority, the General Council. The proposal includes reducing the number of electoral councilors from 11 to 7 and shortening their term from nine to six years, establishing that all councilors would be elected by popular vote. This new process would eliminate the current procedure in which the Chamber of Deputies, supported by a "specialized" committee, evaluates candidates' merits through written evaluations and interviews. Instead, councilors would be chosen directly by citizens' votes. The six-year term would be adjusted to coincide with federal and local constitutional elections.

This change would impose an enormous burden on poll workers, field assistants (CAEs), and electoral supervisors. Moreover, the selection process would shift from a merit-based system to a political campaign model, relying on persuasion rather than professional qualifications. This approach fails to guarantee the quality of the profiles that would make up the Council.

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3.2.1 COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS AGAINST THE PRESIDENT

The irony of the president's conduct during his term is evident, particularly in electoral processes, where his actions have led to numerous violations of electoral law. From September 2023 to March 26, 2024, the president accumulated 48 complaints filed with the Complaints and Reports Commission for interference in the 2023–2024 electoral process (Benitez, 2024). This is an unprecedented figure, considering the period analyzed.

The accusations against the president primarily relate to Article 134 of the Constitution, which establishes that public officials are obligated to use economic resources impartially at all times, without influencing political party contests. The complaints also include allegations of early campaigning and gender-based violence². Among other public officials' subject to complaints are Jesus Ramirez Cuevas, the Coordinator of Social Communication and Presidential Spokesperson, and the Center for the Production of Informative and Special Programs (Cepropie) (Benitez, 2024).

² Of the 48 complaints, 11 have been resolved, 18 have been dismissed and the rest are pending.



Source: "Lopez Obrador reacts to Xochitl Galvez phrases about "different culture" at <https://www.informador.mx/mexico/AMLO-reacciona-a-dichos-de-Xochitl-Galvez-sobre-cultura-distinta-20230821-0043.html>

<https://elpais.com/mexico/2023-08-07/lopez-obrador-asegura-que-ya-no-mencionara-a-xochitl-galvez-en-la-mananera.html>

The resolved complaints have led to the complete or partial removal of more than a dozen of the president’s morning press conferences. The INE, through the Complaints and Reports Commission, issued precautionary measures against President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador for using his speeches during the electoral process in his morning press briefings. These briefings are the president’s most commonly used (and perhaps his only and primary) means of communication, allowing him to influence elections and undermine the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and fairness in the ongoing Federal Electoral Process (INE, 2024c).

The Complaints and Reports Commission emphasized to the federal Executive that he must refrain, under any format or modality, from making statements, issuing comments, opinions, or remarks on electoral issues—whether positive or negative—ensuring that his conduct aligns with the constitutional principles of impartiality and neutrality. Furthermore, it specified that he should limit the dissemination of government propaganda to that which is exempted by Article 41 of the Constitution under the General Law of Social Communication (INE, 2024c).

AS OF 19 OF APRIL, 2024:

1,009	TOTAL OF SPECIAL SANCTIONING PROCEDURES (PES)
576	OF POLITICAL PARTIES
407	OF CITIZENSHIP
26	INVESTIGATED EX OFFICIO
904	REQUESTS FOR PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES
183	WERE DETERMINED AS INADMISSIBLE
99	WERE APPLICABLE

3.2.2 RESTRICTIONS ON PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES

The electoral campaign officially began on March 1, 2024, allowing candidates to openly solicit votes and present their proposals. Public officials must adhere to the law, which restricts their influence in elections during the 90-day period, including the president, who is legally required —like any other public official— to maintain an impartial position during this period. This is mandated by the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, which requires public officials to maintain neutrality in electoral processes.

The INE is the electoral authority responsible for overseeing and resolving sanctioning procedures that may involve public officials and/or public servants. These sanctioning procedures include: i) Ordinary Sanctioning Procedure (POS), ii) Special Sanctioning Procedure (PES) and iii) Special Sanctioning Procedure for Political Violence Against Women Based on Gender (VPMRG).

While the INE retains its authority to process, investigate, and resolve Ordinary Sanctioning Procedures (POS), its role in Special Sanctioning Procedures (PES) is more limited. Although the law stipulates that the INE is responsible for investigating and compiling

TABLE 7. SPECIAL SANCTIONING PROCEDURES (PES)

SUBJECT OF COMPLAINTS SUBMITTED	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS
Advance pre-campaign and campaign events	359
Improper use of the guideline	221
Violations of Constitutional Article 134	112
Hiring and/or acquisition of time on radio and television	40
Hiring and/or acquisition on digital platforms	0
Slander (Defamation)	49
Personalized promotion	11
Violation of the best interests of children	182
Violation of Agreements issued by the General Council of the INE	0
Failure to comply with the methodology in the publication of surveys	0
Failure to comply with the transmission guidelines ordered by the INE	5
Non-compliance with precautionary measure	3
Direct benefit in kind (gifts) for the electorate	0
Use of public resources	2
Expressions of a religious nature	0
Gender Political Violence	49
Dissemination of government propaganda	0
Other	64

Source: INE (2024a). Cutoff as of 19 April 2024.

the case file, once the file is complete, it is forwarded to the judiciary for resolution. Specifically, it is sent to the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (TEPJF), specifically to the Specialized Regional Chamber, which was created by the 2014 electoral reform.

Under the regulations, the subjects liable to sanctions under these procedures include: Political parties, Aspirants, citizen candidates, or any natural or legal person, Electoral observers, Authorities and public servants, Public notaries and Radio and television concessionaires (Articles 340 to 353 of the LGIPE). The conduct subject to sanctions includes violations of Article 134 of the Constitution, early campaigning, failure to comply with precautionary measures, among others.

As of April 19, 2024, a total of 1,009 Special Sanctioning Procedures (PES) have been registered, of which 576 were filed by political parties, 407 by citizens, and 26 were initiated ex officio, as detailed in Table 7. The substantive aspect of these cases mainly concerns issues related to equity in the contest, particularly violations of the principle of neutrality, which the president has specifically violated. He has been reported more than 300 times for unlawfully interfering in the electoral process, and in at least 30 in-

stances, his actions were determined to be in direct violation of the legal framework (ANIE, 2024).

Precautionary measures are actions taken by the electoral authority, legally established to prevent the harmful effects of reported actions or events that may constitute violations threatening the fairness of the electoral contest. The Complaints and Reports Commission of the National Electoral Institute (INE) is the body authorized to determine the admissibility or inadmissibility of requests for precautionary measures, in accordance with the projects formulated by the Technical Unit for Electoral Disputes (UTCE). As of April 19, 2024, a total of 904 requests for precautionary measures have been recorded. Of these, 183 were deemed inadmissible by the Complaints and Reports Commission, while 99 were accepted (see Table 8).

Precautionary measures are actions taken by the electoral authority, legally established to prevent the harmful effects of reported actions or events that may constitute violations threatening the fairness of the electoral contest.

TABLE 8. PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES					
REQUESTS FOR PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES	ELECTORAL PROCEDURE (PEF) 2023–2024	MEANING OF THE CQYD AGREEMENTS	PEF 2023–2024	CHALLENGES	PEF 2023–2024
Technical Unit for Electoral Litigation (UTCE)	517	Admissible	99	Upholds	46
Served by agreements of the Complaints and Reports Commission (CQyD) of the INE	344	Inadmissible	183	Dismisses	20
Pending items	43	TOTAL RESOLUTIONS (CQYD)	282	Overturns	13
TOTAL REQUESTS	904			PENDING	11
				TOTAL APPEALS	90

Source: INE (2024a). Cutoff as of 19, April, 2024.

The number of Ordinary Sanctioning Procedures (POS) reached a total of 328 (see Table 9). POS are procedures initiated as a result of complaints, reports, or ex officio by the electoral authority, aimed at investigating the commission of administrative offenses or violations in electoral matters, other than those reserved for the Special Sanctioning Procedure (PES) previously mentioned (Table 9).

A fundamental difference between the Special Sanctioning Procedure (PES) and the Ordinary Sanction-

ing Procedure (POS) lies in the urgency and speed with which the PES must be processed and resolved. Every reported violation under PES must be resolved before the conclusion of the election, whereas POS can be processed and resolved within longer time frames, independent of the election's conclusion (Lara, 2024).

One of the major challenges in terms of electoral justice during this process is assessing whether the interventions and/or interference by public officials,

including the President, had an impact on the electoral process itself. This challenge arises because electoral justice is marked by divisions among the members of the Superior Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (TEPJF) and by the lack of decisiveness or even delayed resolutions (ANIE, 2024).

3.3 GENDER EQUITY AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Gender quotas have become a fundamental criterion for Mexico's political and democratic life. The objective of gender equity is to bring about a cultural change that prevents the dominance of a single gender in the political sphere and in the decision-making processes of the country's democratic life. To achieve a balance in gender participation in Mexico, a 70% limit of legislators of the same gender was set in 1996, and in 2007, it was established that at least 40% of the candidates for the Legislative Power must be of the same gender (INE, n.d.1).

During the 2011–2012 electoral process, the Superior Chamber of the TEPJF imposed on political parties and coalitions the obligation to nominate a minimum of 120 and 26 candidate formulas (principal and al-

TABLE 9. ORDINARY PROCEDURES	
SUBJECT MATTER OF FILED COMPLAINTS	NO. COMPLAINTS
Advance pre-campaign and campaign events	0
Improper use of the guideline	0
Violations of Constitutional Article 134	0
Hiring and/or acquisition of time on radio and television	0
Hiring and/or acquisition on digital platforms	0
Procedures Against Political Parties for Non-Compliance with Their Obligations	8
Improper Affiliation	168
Ex Officio for Unknown Affiliation	148
Violation of Agreements Issued by the INE General Council	0
Non-Compliance with Methodology in the Publication of Surveys	0
Failure to Comply with Transmission Guidelines Ordered by the INE	0
Non-Compliance with Precautionary Measures	0
Direct In-Kind Benefits to the Electorate	0
Purchase of the Electoral Register	0
Religious Expressions	0
Gender Political Violence	0
Failure to Respond to Requests	2
Other	2
TOTAL	328

Fuente: INE (2024a). Corte al 19 de abril de 2024.

ternate) of the same gender for Deputies and Senators, respectively. Simultaneously, the then Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) issued an agreement to establish the criteria that political parties must adhere to in order to comply with the Tribunal's mandate. As a result of these measures, the percentage of female representation in Congress reached approximately 35%, meaning 185 women as Deputies and 42 as Senators, totaling 227 seats occupied by women, a historic achievement.

The enforcement of gender quotas not only led to an increase in female representation in legislative bodies but also represented progress in implementing actions aimed at: i) Promoting equality, ii) Eliminating stereotypes and Improving the living conditions of both women and men in the country (INE, n.d.1). In Mexico, gender parity in candidacies is a fundamental principle aimed at promoting equality between men and women in political participation. Some key aspects of gender parity in candidacies are established in: i) The Political Constitution, ii) The General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (LGIPE) and iii) State or local laws that adhere to a quota system for political parties, ensuring the equitable distribution of candidacies.

Regarding gender parity in gubernatorial positions, in 2023, there were nine female governors. In the current electoral process, gubernatorial elections will be held in nine states³, where the principle of parity must prevail once again. In at least five of the nine states, political parties must nominate women for this position. The gubernatorial candidacies in the nine states are presented in Table 10.

Despite significant advancements in gender equity, there is still clear evidence that Gender-Based Political Violence (VPMRG) remains a persistent issue in electoral matters. The 2024 electoral process is a clear example of how women continue to face vulnerabilities in various aspects. VPMRG is one of the main challenges hindering women's exercise of their political and electoral rights. Its impact on women's lives is a social problem that obstructs the consolidation of democracy and the effective exercise of citizenship.

According to Laboratorio Electoral (Electoral Laboratory) (2024b), the National Registry of Individuals Sanctioned for Gender-Based Political Violence indicates that September 2023 recorded the highest number of sanctioned individuals per federal enti-

3 1) CDMX; 2) Chiapas; 3) Guanajuato; 4) Jalisco; 5) Morelos; 6) Puebla, 7) Tabasco, 8) Veracruz and 9) Yucatan.

ty. While absolute parity criteria opened the door to women's participation and representation, the evidence reveals their vulnerability and the lack of guarantees for exercising their political-electoral rights—creating a barrier to substantive equality. Affirmative measures adopted by political parties indicate that, in 2024, at least 10,000 elected positions at all levels of government will be reserved for women.

According to the report presented by the Executive Secretariat of the INE General Council, regarding complaints and reports of gender-based political violence against women, a total of 352 complaints and/or reports were registered between April 14, 2020 and January 15, 2024. The most frequent incidents were: Social Media Attacks (132 cases), Obstruction in Performing Functions (42 cases) and Media Attacks (37 cases). These reports have affected 406 women, who were targeted by 712 alleged offenders (General Council, 2024).

The INE maintains a National Registry of Individuals Sanctioned for Gender-Based Political Violence (VPM-RG) to deter this type of violence, facilitate inter-institutional cooperation, and provide information before the registration of candidacies. According to INE monitoring, from August 2023 to April 19, 2024, 58 indi-

TABLE 10. GENDER OF CANDIDATES FOR GOVERNORSHIPS		
STATE	GENDER	CANDIDATES
Chiapas	2 women 1 man	Clara Brugada Santiago Taboada Salomon Chertorivski
Ciudad de Mexico	1 woman 2 men	Clara Brugada Santiago Taboada Salomon Chertorivsk
Guanajuato	3 women	Alma Alcaraz Libia Garcia Muños Ledo Yulma Rocha
Jalisco	2 women 1 man	Claudia Delgadillo Laura Haro Pablo Lemus
Morelos	3 women	Margarita Gonzalez Lucy Meza Jessica Ortega
Puebla	3 men	Alejandro Armenta Eduardo Rivera Fernando Morales
Tabasco	2 women 2 men	Maria Ines de la Fuente Lorena Beaurregard Juan Manuel Focil Javier May
Veracruz	1 woman 2 men	Rocio Nahle Jose F. Yunes Polo Deschamps
Yucatan	2 women 2 men	Vida Gomez Yasmin Lopez Renan Barrera Joaquin Diaz

Source: INE (2024B).

viduals were sanctioned by position, including: 3 Public Officials, 6 Journalists, 6 Councilors, 1 Substitute Councilor, 10 Citizens, 14 Mayors, 1 Municipal Secretary, 1 Local Deputy, 2 Treasurers, 5 Trustees, 2 Media Directors, 1 Federal Deputy, 1 Political Party Member and 5 Social Media Profiles (INE, 2024a).

The Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, specifically Article 38, Section VII (1917), establishes the conditions for suspending citizens' rights to hold office due to gender-based violence. Citizens' rights or prerogatives may be suspended in the following cases:

1. A final conviction for intentionally committing crimes against life and bodily integrity.
2. Crimes against sexual freedom and security.
3. Crimes affecting normal psychosexual development.
4. Domestic violence.
5. Equivalent or domestic family violence.
6. Violation of sexual privacy.
7. Gender-based political violence against women, in any form or type.
8. Being declared a delinquent debtor of child support payments.

Under these circumstances, the individual cannot be registered as a candidate for any elected office, nor can they be appointed to any job, position, or commission in public service.

3.4 VOTING FROM ABROAD: THE CHALLENGE OF INSTITUTIONAL OPACITY

Mexican citizens residing abroad will be able to exercise their right to vote, as in previous elections. Mexicans abroad can vote as stipulated in Article 329 of the LGIPE. In the upcoming elections, expatriate voting will be available for the Presidency of the Republic, Senate seats and nine governorships (Chiapas, Mexico City, State of Mexico, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla and Yucatan), as well as four local legislative seats⁴ (INE, n.d.2).

The Voter Registration System for Voting from Abroad (SRVE) recorded 226,661 registered voters who have requested to vote in the ongoing electoral process⁵ through one of the three methods provided by the INE: Online voting via the internet (158,353 voters), Postal voting (52,981 voters) and In-person voting

⁴ Mexico City (migrant council), State of Mexico (Proportional Representation Council), Jalisco (Proportional Representation Council) and Oaxaca (Migrant Council) (INE, n.a.2).

⁵ For 2018 there were 181,873 registrations.

at 23 consular offices (16,327 voters) (INE, 2024b). According to the INE, the entities with the highest number of registered voters are: Mexico City: 51,805 voters, Jalisco: 21,047 voters and State of Mexico: 16,457 voters.

The right to vote for citizens residing abroad has been affected by irregularities and inconsistencies identified by the INE, totaling 39,724 inadmissible registrations. The most common irregularities include:

1. Signature irregularities: 18,203 cases.
2. Irregularities in proof of address: 861 cases.
3. Failure to meet requirements: 12,574 cases.

Of these, only around 1,000 individuals have requested a correction. The opacity surrounding the process includes technical inconsistencies that could undermine electoral integrity. Arturo Castillo, President of the Commission for the Vote of Mexicans Residing Abroad, mentioned that in a past local election, "there was a case where a large number of registrations to vote from abroad were attributed to Mexicans living in Mexico who did not actually request them, preventing them from voting" (Castillo, 2024a).

According to the Third Report of the National Agreement for Electoral Integrity (ANIE), there are both advances and challenges in recognizing expatriate voting. The main challenge is the complexity of the registration process, which must be simplified regardless of the voting method used. The remaining challenges that require attention to strengthen expatriate voting include:

1. Representation of the migrant community's interests.
2. Discrepancy between issued voter credentials and entries in the Nominal List.
3. Lack of clarity in renewing voter registration.
4. Participation in candidate selection.
5. Limited promotion of independent candidacies.
6. Insufficient registration of effective residency abroad.

Recommendations include implementing reforms to overcome existing barriers and promote more equitable and representative participation in the political process, ensuring adequate representation for the 40 million Mexicans residing abroad. Achieving this will require collaboration with electoral authorities, Local Electoral Institutes, the Congress of the Union, local congresses and judicial bodies (ANIE, 2024).



Image: Information on the positions voted from abroad at <https://conectaarizona.com/elecciones-en-mexico-el-20-de-febrero-es-la-fecha-limite-para-registrarse-para-votar-desde-el-extranjero/>

3.5 DEFICIENCIES AND SHORTCOMINGS OF THE ELECTORAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The Mexican Electoral Justice System aims to ensure the rule of law in a democratic state, promoting free, authentic and periodic elections in accordance with the Constitution and the law (Sanchez, 2017). In Mexico, there are two primary electoral arbiters: The Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (TEPJF), responsible for reviewing, resolving and correcting electoral irregularities in adherence to the Constitution and the legal framework to protect citizens' political-electoral rights (Arenas *et al.*, 2003) and The National Electoral Institute (INE), responsible for organizing and administering electoral processes.

The TEPJF has overseen four presidential elections (2000, 2006, 2012, and 2018), operating under a jurisdictional rather than a political or strategic mechanism. Among these, the 2006 election was the most complex, due to the narrow margin of less than one percentage point between the top two candidates. This, along with other factors, pushed the Tribunal to its limits in terms of the number of cases it had to resolve. The other three elections were conducted with room for improvement but were navigated more easily and without the complications of 2006 (Lopez, 2023).

One of the most significant challenges in the 2024 elections has been the systematic violation of electoral laws. These rules, laws and regulations have been repeatedly breached, not just during this election, but since the beginning of the current administration. These violations have been promoted and directed by the President, primarily through his daily morning press conferences. The president's actions contrast sharply with his past criticism of his opponents (whom he calls "adversaries") for circumventing the law. His campaign promise that "no one is above the law" now stands as one of the greatest inconsistencies in his administration's conduct.

Following the 2021 elections, the president set and imposed a narrative that conflicted with the established electoral calendar. Although this is not the first time such a situation has occurred, this time it is different because it involves the highest-ranking decision-maker in the country. This is a position with vast and sufficient power, allowing the president to disrupt the political landscape at will (Lopez, 2023). The core risk in this election has been the conduct of the country's highest authority. Beyond the actions of electoral councilors and judges, the failure of political actors to adhere to the law, coupled with an indecisive INE and a TEPJF lacking the intelligence to

manage the electoral dynamic, have made this one of the most complex and influenced elections in recent history.

The deficiencies, limitations, and shortcomings of the electoral justice system have been evident through the crises it has experienced: In late 2023, Justice Reyes Rodriguez Mondragon resigned from the TEPJF presidency due to pressure from three other justices who claimed to have lost confidence in his leadership. This resignation created internal conflicts within the TEPJF (Perez, 2023). The INE faced challenges under the leadership of President Guadalupe Taddei, who struggled to coordinate with other electoral councilors for the appointment of the Executive Secretary, department heads, technical units and temporary offices, many of which were left vacant due to resignations following Taddei's appointment in April 2023. Disputes over family ties between some finalists and Morena led to divisions among councilors, preventing the formation of the General Executive Board (Perez, 2023). Consequently, the Tribunal had to amend the INE's agreement setting deadlines for filling these key positions (Perez, 2024).

Balancing regulatory standards, the principles of sanctioning law, and the need for reliable, clean, and democratic electoral processes remains a challenge for Mexico's democratic transition. The use of sanctioning mechanisms, such as the Special Sanctioning Procedure (PES) by the INE and the TEPJF, has improved in functionality. However, this appeal process still has shortcomings (Vazquez, 2022), which hinder the electoral justice system. One notable issue is the disparity between the regulations prohibiting certain actions and the judicial interpretation by electoral tribunals. The laws lack clarity on



Image: "Upper court session postponed amid dispute" at <https://www.proceso.com.mx/nacional/2023/12/6/posponen-sesion-de-la-sala-superior-en-plena-disputa-del-tribunal-electoral-319910.html>

specific behaviors that should be sanctioned, such as: Improper inclusion of minors in political advertisements and the Lack of subtitles in political advertisements, violating the rights of people with hearing disabilities. These prohibitions were judicially created, rather than explicitly outlined in the law. Although it is desirable to prohibit certain behaviors, it is not the role of the TEPJF to expand the scope of the law (Vazquez, 2022).

Another pressure on the Tribunal stems from the president's repeated attempts to reform electoral law. These reforms threaten the TEPJF by proposing the elimination of local electoral tribunals and introducing popular elections for Superior Chamber justices. The proposed system would allow: The President: To propose 10 candidates, The Congress of the Union: To propose 10 candidates and The Judiciary: To propose 10 candidates. This reform would also broaden the list of topics that cannot be subjected to popular consultation, including the fiscal system (rates and tariffs), while removing restrictions on electoral issues, making them subject to referendums (Castillo, 2024b).

Another significant proposal is the popular election of TEPJF justices, Supreme Court ministers, Circuit

Court judges, and District judges. While eligibility requirements include legal training, the absence of rigorous selection mechanisms could lead to unqualified individuals being elected, compromising the quality and impartiality of justice and opening the door to the politicization of the judiciary. According to an analysis by Laboratorio Electoral (2024a), this initiative could lead to populism and demagoguery,



Image: "Conflict at INE scales; Taddei rejects her own candidates to the Executive Secretariat" at <https://animalpolitico.com/politica/escala-conflicto-ine-taddei-rechaza-candidaturas-secretaria-ejecutiva>

with judicial candidates running electoral campaigns, which may pressure them to make decisions favoring specific interest groups. Additionally, increased turnover could destabilize the judiciary, hinder continuity in justice administration and negatively affect the quality of judicial decisions.

In its latest report, the National Agreement for Electoral Integrity (ANIE, 2024) identified one of the greatest challenges of electoral justice: determining whether the president's interventions directly affect electoral outcomes. Electoral justice is marked by divisions among the members of the Superior Chamber of the TEPJF, a lack of decisiveness in their rulings and, in the worst cases, delayed resolutions. The report explains how the Electoral Tribunal has missed opportunities to ensure proper election management by failing to enforce the Constitution and the law. For example: Refusing to create a file documenting irregularities affecting the presidential election, dismissing complaints by the INE's Technical Unit for Electoral Disputes in cases that warranted deeper investigation and Questionable application of regulations prohibiting early pre-campaign and campaign activities (ANIE, 2024).

3.6 THE "SERVANTS OF THE NATION" OR SERVANTS OF MORENA?

The "Servants of the Nation" (Siervos de la Nación), also known as National Servants, under the authority of the Ministry of Welfare, emerged shortly after Lopez Obrador's victory in the 2018 elections. Their main function has been to deliver social programs throughout Mexico. However, the reality is that before becoming "Servants of the Nation," they were actually servants of Lopez Obrador, promoting votes for Morena and for the president (Santiago, 2021), especially during the 2018 electoral process. For this reason, as warned by Signos Vitales (2020), this structure presents a political bias due to its partisan and electoral origin, where they function more as ideological emissaries of the president.

By 2023, this structure had grown to a total of 19,394 Servants of the Nation (Nuñez, 2023), all serving the President of the Republic, who that year coordinated several meetings with them, instructing them to act in a "perfect and precise" manner (Nuñez, 2023), because their performance was crucial for the continuation of his project. It is important to note that most of them receive a gross monthly salary of 11,224 pesos, which translates into an annual expenditure

of over 2.6 billion pesos from the national treasury (Nuñez, 2023).

Thus, in 2024, the territorial deployment of the Servants of the Nation is characterized by their burgundy vests and the delivery of social programs, even in advance, as was the case with the Senior Citizens' Pension, where beneficiaries received 12,000 pesos in a single payment, covering the months of March to June (Mendez, 2024). Such actions strengthen the connection between beneficiaries and public servants from the Ministry of Welfare, which poses an electoral risk, as it facilitates the inhibition and coercion of voter choice (Montes, 2024).

The "threat" made by President Lopez Obrador and the Morena candidate, Claudia Sheinbaum, suggesting that if the opposition won, social programs would be withdrawn, has been reported on multiple occasions, with indications that this message has also been transmitted through the Servants of the Nation to beneficiaries. For this reason, the candidate Xochitl Galvez submitted a request to the INE, asking the electoral referee to clarify that social programs would not be eliminated, regardless of the election outcome. However, this request was dismissed. The INE's argument was that there were already existing

regulations to this effect and that nothing more was necessary (Animal Politico, April 11, 2024). It is clear that there is a need to ensure the impartiality and social welfare focus of public servants who maintain close contact with the population, as this remains an important concern for guaranteeing their effectiveness and legitimacy.

CONCLUSIONS

This section describes how this government has operated to the detriment of due process and compliance with the law. The constant pursuit of power concentration has employed various mechanisms, primarily including budgetary weakening (as in the case of the INE) and attacks on institutions to eliminate checks and balances, even when this represents an assault on democracy. Furthermore, the initiatives to reform electoral laws aim, among other things, to curtail the capacities of the INE and to limit the actions of the highest electoral authority, the Electoral Tribunal.





4. MEDIA AND ELECTORAL EQUITY

*Las Mañaneras
have not been
cancelled even
though constant
law violations*

4. MEDIA

AND ELECTORAL EQUITY

Democracy demands plurality and competition among political actors and when it comes to a democratic electoral system, it is deemed equitable. This means that in any electoral contest, there must be clarity and certainty regarding the rules and the outcome. Any violation of legality undermines equity. However, when judging specific actions, it has been very difficult for courts to establish a consistent line between legal and illegal actions, even more so if legitimacy or lack thereof is introduced as an argument (Marvan, 2020).

The 1977 political-electoral reform marked the beginning of the construction of a new electoral system, ensuring that all parties had guaranteed access

to electronic media, especially radio and television. Since 2007, this access has been free of charge and is allocated using the same formula employed for distributing financial prerogatives⁶ (Marvan, 2020).

Currently, Article 41 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States (CPEUM) outlines the Mexican State's responsibility to guarantee equity in electoral processes and the construction of the political party system in Mexico⁷. This same article

⁶ In 1977, Article 6 of the Constitution was reformed for the first time to establish that the Right to Information will be guaranteed by the State. In this way, it was ensured that the concessionaires could sell airtime to the opposition parties without risking their respective concessions.

⁷ Article 41 of the Constitution, section II, first paragraph.

establishes the rules for the distribution of party attributions that adhere to equity criteria. Likewise, Section IV of Article 116 reproduces these demands for equitable conditions in the federal entities (Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, 1917).

To understand the principle of equity enshrined in the Constitution, it is essential to analyze Article 134⁸ (Marvan, 2020), which establishes the obligation not to use government resources for political or electoral propaganda purposes. Specifically, it states that any propaganda disseminated by public authorities, autonomous bodies and government agencies must be institutional in nature, with informational, educational, or social guidance purposes, without including names, images, voices, or symbols that imply personalized promotion of any public official (Political Constitution of the United Mexican States. Article 134, 1917).

In this chapter, we analyze the ways in which electoral equity is threatened and their implications: how the electoral contest has been influenced, the role of political actors, the President of the Republic, the methods of information manipulation, the inequality in access to the media and the manipulation of the electoral system.

8 Seventh paragraph.

4.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESIDENTIAL POWER

Media play a very important and decisive role in electoral processes. Their mission is to disseminate information about candidates, political parties and their electoral proposals. Political communication is a form of applied research that focuses on understanding the effects of media to optimize favorable political outcomes. On the other hand, it is understood in the sense that politics is an intrinsic condition of communication, which can be interpreted through power and control relations, concluding that: "There is no communication without politics" (Del Valle *et al.*, 2018).

We live in a constantly changing reality where the relationship between communication forms and politics shapes the consolidation of an info-communication model due to the diversification and flourishing of technologies. This diversification has enabled the use of a news-lie regime that is disseminated and reproduced in the media, diverting attention through a flow of marked intentions. This regime forms the basis of authoritarianism within democracy (Del Valle *et al.*, 2018).

In a democratic country, fundamental characteristics such as the existence of competitive pluralism,

the guarantee of equity in elections, the freedom of citizens to participate politically, the presence of an independent opposition to the government and the protection of freedom of expression are recognized. However, in Mexico, despite ongoing debates about democracy in recent years, concerns have arisen regarding potential threats to political pluralism. Examples of this include the overwhelming victory of a party with hegemonic tendencies and the reduction of key elements for equity among contenders due to attacks on institutions such as the National Electoral Institute (INE) and the Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF). Furthermore, criminal violence has affected the freedom of candidates to run for office and the possibility of participating in political positions, creating a real risk to citizens' physical integrity (Signos Vitales, 2021a).

4.1.1 THE PRESIDENTIAL MORNING PRESS CONFERENCES: THE GREATEST ELECTORAL MEDIA VIOLATION

The morning press conferences (commonly known as "mañaneras") have represented a new form of political communication during this administration. Although they were promoted as a way to communicate directly with citizens, rather than representing an ex-

ercise in transparency and accountability, they have become a tool for media control, aiming to influence the agenda and public discussion (Zapata, 2022).

The *mañaneras*, in addition to representing an abuse of power and media saturation, disrupt citizen dialogue and critical debate, reducing discourse to a mere interpretation by the federal president with partisan and ideological overtones. One of the latent risks during the electoral process is that the use of the *mañaneras* leaves the door open to violations of Articles 41 and 134⁹, which regulate the impartiality and equity of elections in the Constitution.

The National Agreement for Electoral Integrity (ANIE, 2024) has monitored the electoral context, the activities of political parties and those of the electoral authorities themselves. In its third report, ANIE has highlighted various risks identified through accurate diagnoses, warning about the direct involvement of the president in the electoral process, both in his morning press conferences and through presidential tours, which constitute a form of electoral prosely-

⁹ Article 41 establishes the principles of impartiality, equity and neutrality that must govern the electoral process, while article 134 establishes (among other things) that public resources must be allocated in an efficient, impartial, equitable and transparent manner, prohibiting the personalized promotion of candidates or public servants.

tism. ANIE states: "The equity of the electoral contest has been undermined by the president of the republic, who has been reported on more than 300 occasions for interfering in the electoral process and in at least 30 cases, his actions have been deemed to violate the current legal framework" (ANIE, 2024a, p.43).

The use of the president's morning press conferences to promote the party's agenda, with explicit support for the party's candidate, are some of the recurrent practices documented and sanctioned by the competent authority (Badillo, 2024). Despite the numerous complaints and sanctions imposed by electoral authorities, the president's recurring conduct in this regard creates a climate of uncertainty and distrust, affecting the legitimacy and equity of elections, violating the principle of neutrality by using public resources to favor his preferred party or candidate (ANIE, 2024).

It is clear that media have significant influence in shaping the agenda that impacts public opinion, which is why their operations should adhere to democratic principles. At Signos Vitales (2021c), we have pointed out that the strategy of the *mañaneras* is a form of governance through stigmatization, polariza-

tion and bias reproduction, making them a powerful communication tool that the opposition and citizens must challenge and counter.

4.2 OPACITY AND NEGLIGENCE OF THE MEDIA

2024 is a year marked by the largest electoral process our country has ever experienced, both in terms of the number of positions to be filled and the number of individuals on the nominal list eligible to exercise their right to vote. The social and political complexity of the country requires constant observation and meticulous monitoring.

The fight for media equity for all candidacies was a fundamental part of the democratic transition. However, time has shown that progress in electoral laws has been insufficient. A clear example is the analysis of total airtime¹⁰ on radio and television during the pre-campaign period (November 20, 2023, to January 18, 2024), dedicated to the then pre-candidates. During this period, the official's pre-candidate received the most airtime in the monitored radio and television spaces, accounting for 41.2% of the total





¹⁰ The total time devoted includes: 1) Time in newscasts (for radio and TV), 2) Time in entertainment and magazine programs (radio and TV), and 3) Time in debate, opinion, and analysis programs. (INE, n.d.a)

airtime, followed by the opposition pre-candidate Xochitl Galvez with 36.7%, while the pre-candidates from Movimiento Ciudadano received 12.7% and 9.2%, respectively (Table 11).

Specifically speaking about news programs, the television news programs examined allocated nearly 25 and a half hours to the then-presidential pre-candidates. Of this time, 42.6% was dedicated to Claudia Sheinbaum (10 hours and 49 minutes), 34.7% to Xochitl Galvez (8 hours and 49 minutes) and 23% was allocated to the candidates from Movimiento Ciudadano. In radio news programs, nearly 167 hours of news reports were broadcast, focusing on these pre-candidates. 40.64% of this airtime was dedicated to Sheinbaum, 36.7% to Xochitl Galvez and 22.6% to Samuel Garcia and Jorge Alvarez of Movimiento Ciudadano (MC).

Even at the level of political parties, this inequity was reproduced. During the pre-campaign period, Morena was the party that aired the highest number of scheduled advertisements on both radio and television (Graph 3).

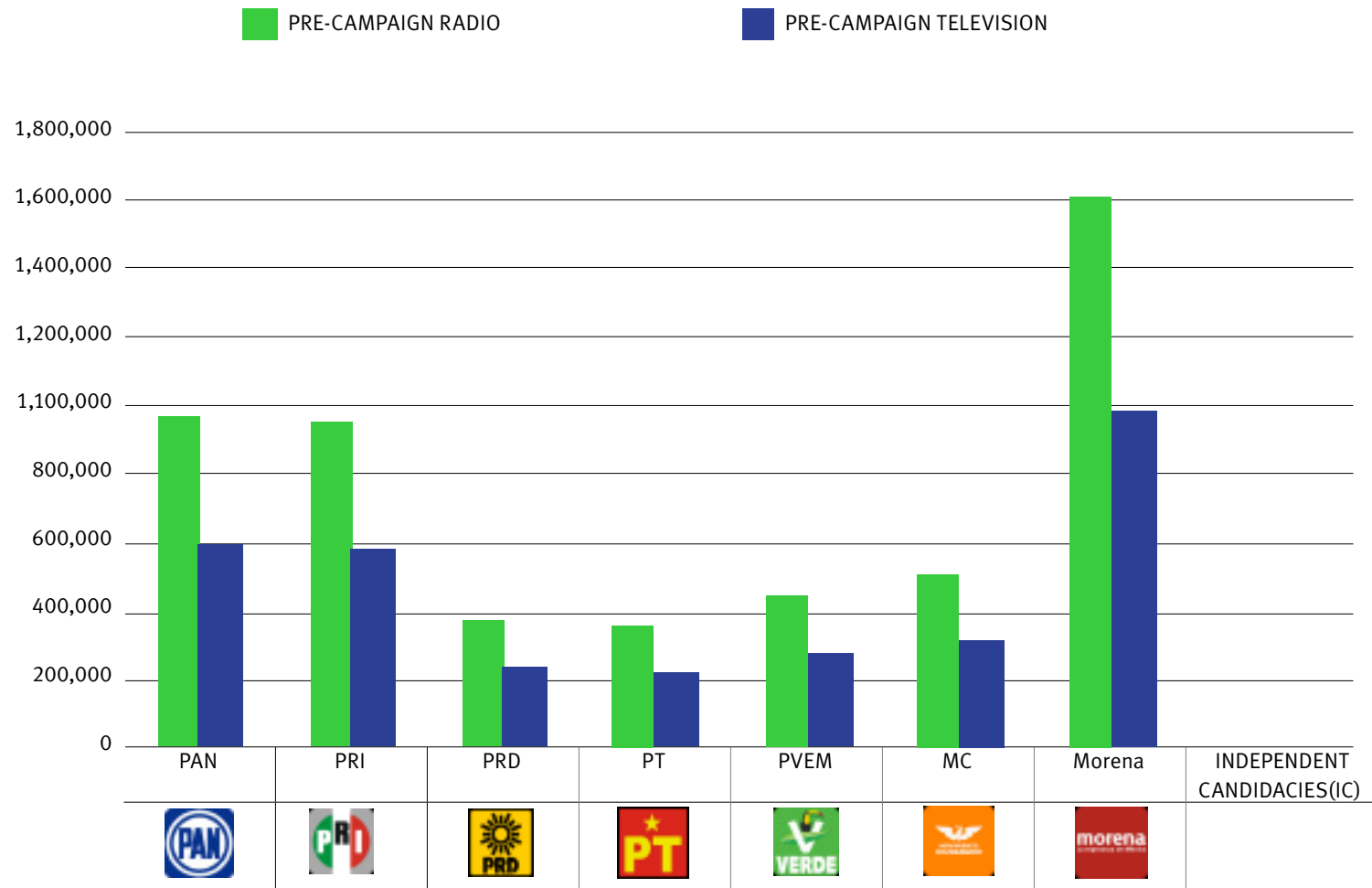
The previous table presents data from the pre-campaign period; however, negligence and opacity in the media have not stopped there. Despite legal re-

TABLE 11. TOTAL TIME DEDICATED PER PRE-CANDIDACY ON RADIO AND TELEVISION (NOVEMBER 20, 2023 TO JANUARY 18, 2024)		
PRECANDIDATE	TIME	(%)
 Claudia Sheinbaum	86:09:54	41.3
 Xochitl Galvez	76:37:22	36.7
 Samuel Garcia	26:31:56	12.7
 Jorge Alvarez	19:22:32	9.3
TOTAL	208:41:44	100.0

Source: In-house elaboration with information from INE (s.f).

Images:
Wikipedia

**GRAPH 3. NUMBER OF RADIO AND TELEVISION PROMOTIONAL SPOTS
SCHEDULED FOR THE PRE-CAMPAIGN PERIOD
(NOVEMBER 20, 2023 TO JANUARY 18, 2024)**



Source: Eln-house eaboration with data from INE (s.f)

strictions prohibiting the intervention of any public official, including the president, he has continued to support his candidate through various mechanisms from the National Palace, which have echoed in the media. The use of tactics such as direct disqualifications against journalists whose opinions he finds uncomfortable has raised serious concerns.

According to Trejo (2024), it is difficult to fully grasp how the president's statements have dampened critical voices in the media. However, his constant obsession with disqualifications has led to a situation where, over the course of 1,287 press conferences, the president has mentioned Carlos Loret de Mola 590 times, Enrique Krauze 590 times, Ciro Gomez Leyva 272 times, Hector Aguilar Camin 249 times and Joaquin Lopez Doriga 240 times. The president's verbal attacks on these and other journalists are part of an unfavorable journalistic assessment of his government's actions. These attacks have even led to the departure of some journalists, such as Azucena Uresti, who resigned from the Milenio newscast in January 2024, after maintaining a critical stance toward the government. These attacks are intended to favor the president's candidate at the expense of other candidates. The implications are serious and the concern has been such that even Organized Civil

Society has decided to closely monitor media coverage (VV. AA., 2024).

Part of what reproduces this context of opacity, in the midst of the president's direct interventions and attacks on journalists, reveals the negligence and weaknesses of the sanctioning instruments themselves. Evidence of this is that the complaint system before the INE has been used as a harassment

**OUT OF 1,287 CONFERENCES
LOPEZ OBRADOR HAS MENTIONED:**

590 TIMES	CARLOS LORET DE MOLA
590 TIMES	ENRIQUE KRAUZE
272 TIMES	CIRO GOMEZ LEYVA
249 TIMES	HECTOR AGUILAR CAMIN
240 TIMES	JOAQUIN LOPEZ DORIGA

mechanism to silence journalists and citizens. The Superior Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal issued a precedent (Electoral Tribunal, 2024) that recognizes freedom of expression as an essential element for the proper functioning of democracy. This ruling sets important parameters for balancing freedom of expression rights and assessing gender-based political violence in relation to freedom of expression, aiming to prevent the misuse of the sanctioning instrument (Special Sanctioning Procedure).

This situation has led to a reflection on at least three aspects regarding the effectiveness of the sanctioning instrument:

- i. Precautionary measures as censorship tools,
- ii. The inhibitory effect on the exercise of freedom of expression resulting from the sanctioning procedure and
- iii. The disproportionate burdens imposed by the Special Sanctioning Procedure on journalists and citizens. Together, these gaps represent a weakness in electoral law and undermine equity in elections (Calderon, 2024).

4.2.1 OPERATION OF THE INE

The behavior of the authorities that make up the electoral referees has remained under constant crisis. The governance of the highest decision-making body is still unresolved. There is an inadequate composition of the Executive Directorate bodies of the INE, as the General Executive Board is primarily composed of interim officers.

The exercise of powers by the President of the INE General Council has led to new appointments in the Executive Secretariat and the General Executive Board, but there has been a noticeable lack of consensus with other members of the Council and a clear lack of experience on the part of the new president, Guadalupe Taddei. These circumstances are a cause for concern, as they dilute the shared responsibility of the highest decision-making body in executing essential functions, leaving individuals without the necessary training in charge of critical tasks, which does not inspire confidence among political actors (ANIE, 2024).

There is evidence that the profiles of those designated as interim officers do not meet the necessary qualifications. An analysis of the profiles of ten individuals appointed by the current INE president, Gua-

dalupe Taddei, reveals that not all of them possess the appropriate profiles and experience for their positions. Although all of them hold academic qualifications at the bachelor's or master's level, four of them lack prior experience in electoral positions, which implies a steeper learning curve as they assume their new responsibilities (Table 12).

This has posed an additional challenge for those who lacked direct experience with electoral processes, regulations and procedures. The lack of experience became evident when the physical elements used to identify INE personnel did not arrive on time, along with the technological devices necessary for online monitoring during the training of Electoral Assistant Trainers (CAEs). The delays also led to the training process starting without the mobile phones typically provided to trainers, which affected the proper development of INE's tasks and highlighted the inadequate integration of the Institute's governing bodies, disrupting electoral logistics processes that previously delivered results (ANIE, 2024).

TABLE 12. PROFILE OF THE PEOPLE IN CHARGE OF DISPATCH AT THE INE		
Area directed by managers	Area of expertise of designated persons	Experience or studies in electoral matters
Executive Secretary	Administrative posts and institutional purchases	No
Executive Directorate of Administration	Administrative Sciences	No
Executive Directorate of Prerogatives and Political Parties	Specialist in Constitutional Law	Yes
IT Services Technical Unit	Electronic Systems	Yes
Executive Directorate of the National Electoral Professional Service	Electronic Systems	Yes
Technical Unit for Transparency and Protection of Personal Data	Electoral political communication	Yes
Technical Inspection Unit	International relations	No
Electoral Litigation Technical Unit	Law	No
National Coordination of Social Communication	Social Communication	Yes
Legal and Normative Unit	Parliamentary Law, Elections and Legislative Studies	Yes

Source: National Agreement for Electoral Integrity (ANIE) (2024a9).

4.3 AUTHORIZED TIMES VS. ACTUAL TIMES

Article 165 of the General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (LGIPE) establishes that:

Within federal electoral processes, from the start of the pre-campaigns until election day, the INE shall have at its disposal 48 minutes per day on each radio station and television channel; and 2) The broadcast of messages on each radio station and television channel shall be distributed within the programming schedule from six in the morning to midnight. In cases where a station or channel broadcasts for fewer hours than those indicated in the schedule, three minutes per hour of broadcast shall be used (LGIPE, 2014).

Additionally, Article 169 of the LGIPE states that:

1) Of the total available time referred to in paragraph 1 of Article 165 of this Law, during federal electoral campaigns, the Institute shall allocate to political parties a total of 41 minutes per day on each radio station and television channel; and 2) The remaining seven minutes shall be used for the purposes of the Institute and other electoral authorities (LGIPE, 2014).

Media monitoring is regulated by Article 185 of the LGIPE, which establishes the INE General Council's obligation to monitor broadcasts of pre-campaigns and electoral campaigns on radio and television programs. The purpose is to collect information that allows for an understanding of the characteristics of public discussion and the INE has fulfilled its obligation by publishing periodic reports.

4.3.1 PRE-CAMPAIGNS

For the Pre-Campaign of the 2023–2024 Federal Electoral Process, the monitoring and analysis of 73 programs were planned, of which 59 were news programs, 10 were entertainment or magazine programs and 4 were debate, opinion and analysis programs. The period covered by the pre-campaigns, from November 20, 2023, to January 18, 2024 (cumulative period), for the Presidency of the Republic, reveals the following:

1. A total of 35,703 monitored pieces were recorded on pre-campaigns, of which 26,019 were on radio and 9,684 on television.
2. The total airtime dedicated to presidential pre-campaigns was 836 hours, 45 minutes and 11 seconds.

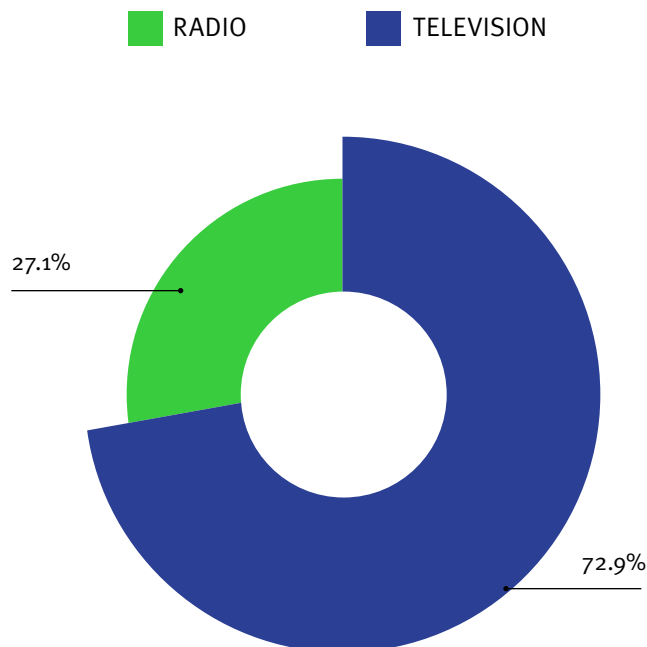
3. The pre-candidate with the most airtime on radio and television was Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo.
4. The political party with the most airtime on radio and television was Movimiento Ciudadano.
5. The coalition with the most airtime on radio and television was "Sigamos Haciendo Historia" (SHH).
6. Six instances of phrases mentioning threats or attacks against candidacies were recorded. Of these, five occurred on radio and one on television (INE, n.d.b).

The distribution of airtime by media type (radio or television) is illustrated in Graph 4.

Graph 5 shows the radio and television stations providing media access by federal entity. The states with the highest radio coverage are: Sonora, Michoacan, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Jalisco and Coahuila. Regarding television coverage, the states with the highest coverage are: Sonora, Tamaulipas, Chiapas, Chihuahua and Michoacan.

Likewise, the data analysis revealed that the number of scheduled advertisements for the federal electoral process is higher for Morena on both radio and television (Graph 6).

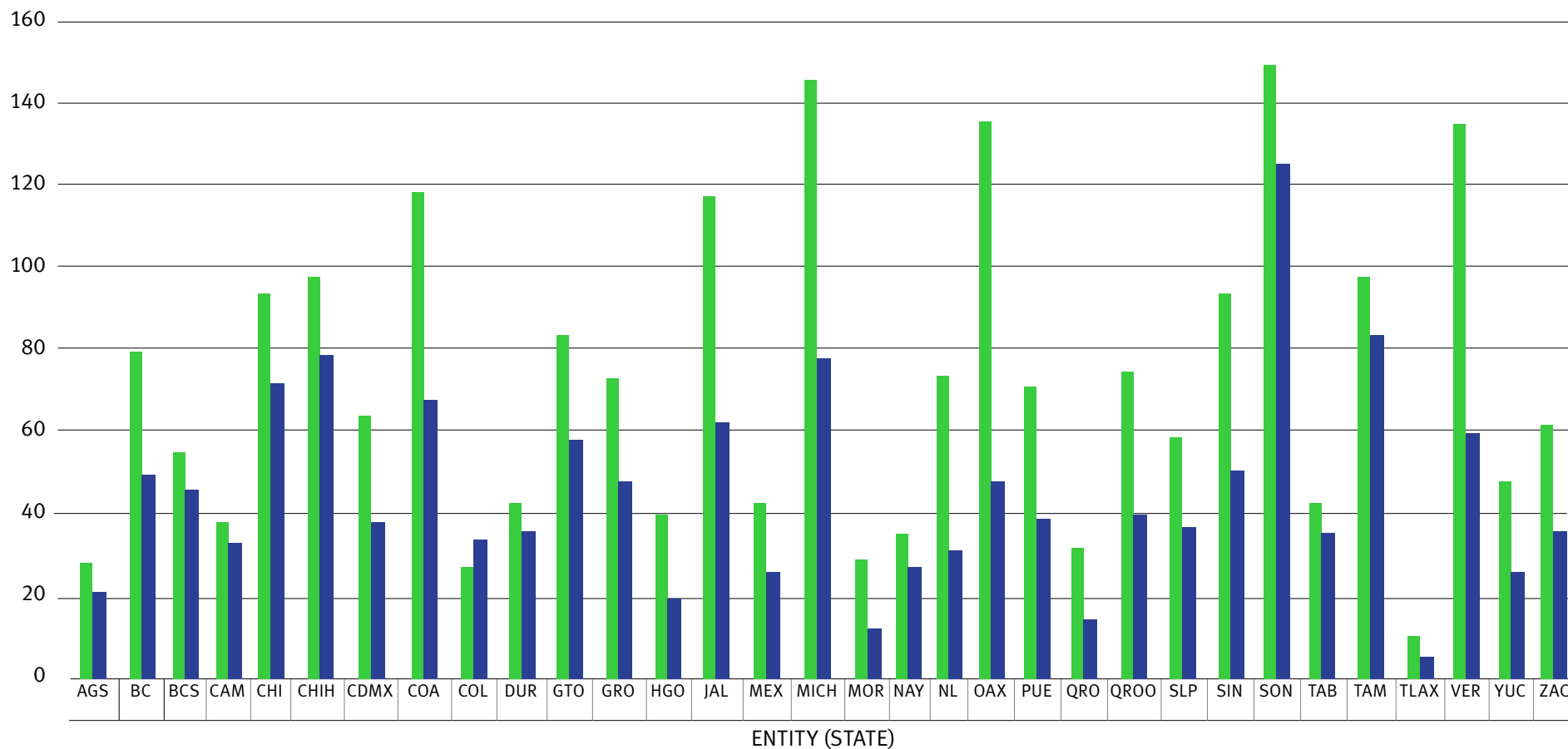
GRAPH 4. ACCESS TO MEDIA: RADIO AND TELEVISION
AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL



Source: In-house elaboration with data from INE (s.f)

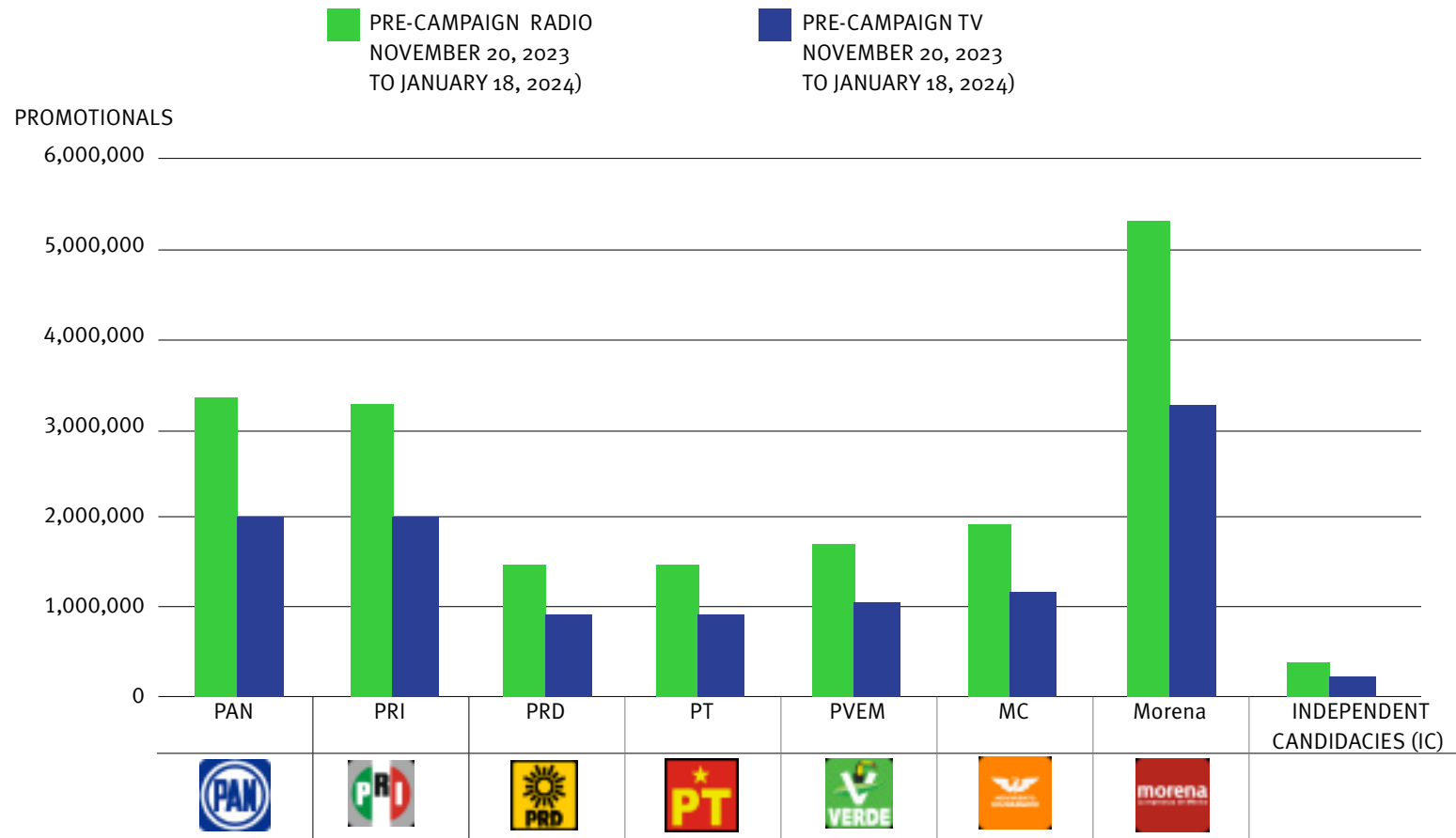
GRAPH 5. ACCESS TO MEDIA (RADIO AND TELEVISION) BY FEDERAL ENTITY

RADIO TELEVISION



Source: In-house elaboration with data from INE (n.a.2)

**GRAPH 6. NUMBER OF PROMOTIONAL ADVERTISEMENTS SCHEDULED
FOR THE FEDERAL ELECTORAL PROCESS**






Source: In-house elaboration with data from INE (s.f)

4.3.2 CAMPAIGNS

The available information reveals that during the cumulative campaign period¹¹ from March 1 to April 21, 2024, involving the three presidential candidates for Mexico (Claudia Sheinbaum, Xochitl Galvez and Jorge Alvarez Maynez), there is a clear continuation of media inequality. The candidate who continues to dominate media presence is Claudia Sheinbaum, with 41.5% of the total airtime, followed by Xochitl Galvez with 37.2% and finally, Jorge Alvarez, who received only 21.2% (Table 13). These percentages closely reflect the airtime in news programs¹², while the time allocated in debate, opinion and analysis programs has even more strongly favored the official candidate.

The analysis by coalition also reveals that Claudia Sheinbaum is the one who has had both the greatest time and number of monitoring pieces on radio and television (Graph 7).

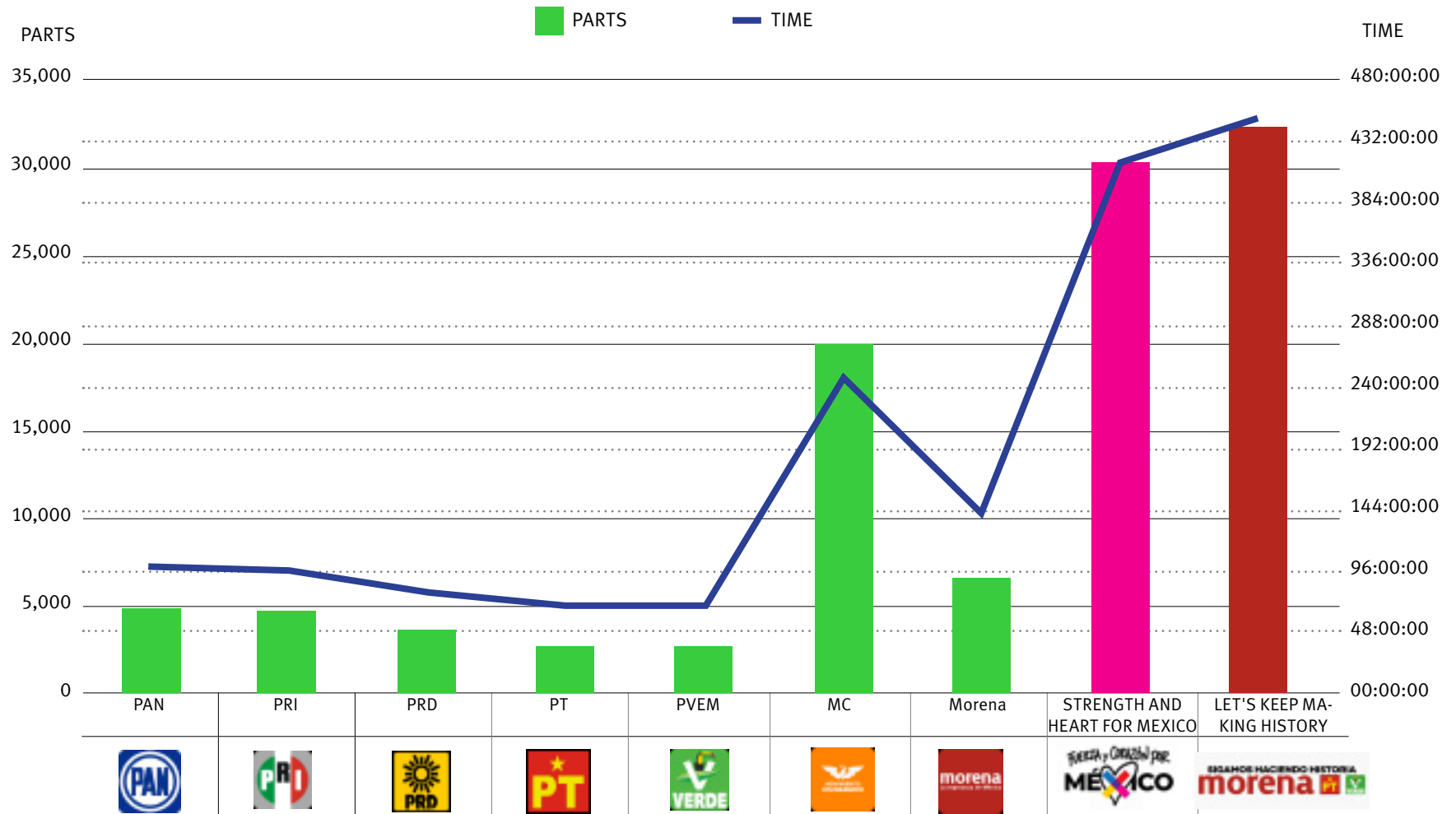
TABLE 13. TIME AND PERCENTAGE OF TRANSMISSION BY CANDIDATE IN DEBATE, OPINION AND ANALYSIS PROGRAMS		
PRECANDIDATE	TIME	(%)
Claudia Sheinbaum 	5:39:13	50.8
Xochitl Galvez 	4:38:46	41.8
Jorge Alvarez 	0:49:25	7.4
TOTAL	11:07:24	100.0

Source: In-house elaboration with data from INE (s.f).

¹¹ Campaign period: from March 1 to May 29. The analysis we present includes the information from the Sixth cumulative report from March 1 to April 21, 2024 (INE, n.d.3).
¹² Claudia 41.39%, Xochitl 37.2% y Jorge 21.4% (INE, n.d.3).

Images: Wikipedia

GRAPH 7. TIME AND MONITORING PIECES (RADIO AND TV) PERIOD FROM MARCH 1 TO APRIL 21, 2024



Source: In-house elaboration with data from INE (s.f.3)

The importance of monitoring ensures equity in the electoral contest and tracks the quality of discourse and messages that contribute to democratic debate, promoting the use of non-discriminatory and non-sexist language (ANIE, 2024).

4.3.3 MONEY TALKS: BENEFITING THOSE WHO HAVE MORE

Although the rules of equity are designed to promote a level playing field and prevent the ruling party from having more advantages than those directly derived from its position, leveling the playing field and ensuring equitable conditions in the electoral competition is a complex task. The OECD recommends following four fundamental policies to prevent inequality during elections:

- i. Balancing public funding (both direct and indirect),
- ii. Controlling private funding received by parties or candidates,
- iii. Setting limits on campaign spending and
- iv. Establishing controls to prevent the diversion of state resources beyond those related to public funding (OECD, 2014).

The Mexican Constitution establishes that equity is based on the predominance of public funding over

The importance of monitoring ensures equity in the electoral contest and tracks the quality of discourse and messages that contribute to democratic debate, promoting the use of non-discriminatory and non-sexist language (ANIE, 2024).

private funding. To achieve this, it establishes a formula for the distribution of public funding: thirty percent is distributed equally among registered political parties, while the remaining seventy percent is allocated according to the votes obtained in the last federal election. So far, this proportion has not been challenged by opposition parties. In Mexico, public funding granted to political parties is divided into three categories, each intended for different activities and calculated specifically, as shown in the following table:

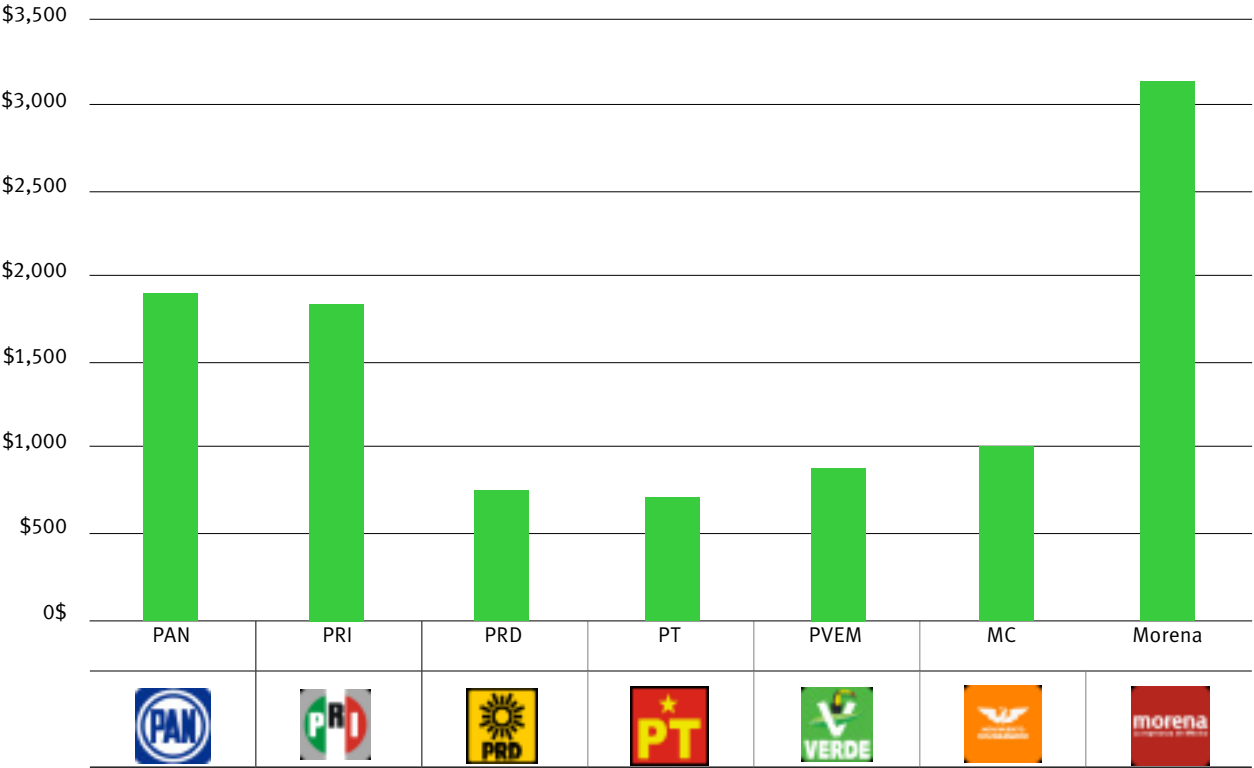
TABLE 14. ACTIVITIES OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND PROPORTION OF ALLOCATED AMOUNTS

ACTIVITIES	DESCRIPTION	DISTRIBUTION OF AMOUNTS	COMMENTS
ORDINARY ACTIVITIES	Expenses made by the parties on a daily basis to promote citizen participation, the dissemination of political culture and the political leadership of women. In this area, the parties obtain what is necessary for their ordinary expenses: salaries and wages of staff, rental of furniture and real estate, stationery, fuel, etc.	The total number of people registered on the electoral roll, as of July 31 of the previous year, is multiplied by 65% of the daily value of the Measurement and Update Unit (UMA).	30% of the amount obtained is distributed equally among political parties with current registration. The remaining 70% is distributed proportionally, depending on the percentage of votes that the political party obtained in the immediately preceding election of deputies.
SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES	The Law provides that of the resources provided to political parties, a portion must be allocated for education, training, socioeconomic and political research activities, as well as editorial publications.	It is equivalent to 3% of the total amount corresponding each year for the category of permanent ordinary economic activities.	30% is distributed equally. The remaining 70% is distributed proportionally based on the percentage of votes that the political party obtained in the immediately preceding election of deputies.
CAMPAIGN EXPENSES	Every 3 years (in elections) an amount is determined to be used exclusively for the promotion of candidacies for positions elected by the electorate.	When the election is for the presidency of the republic, senators and federal deputations, 50% of the amount corresponding to the maintenance of permanent ordinary activities is granted.	If the election is for federal deputies, 30% of the calculation obtained is granted for public financing of permanent ordinary activities.

Source: In-house elaboration with information from the Electoral Laboratory (2024a).

GRAPH 8. TOTAL FEDERAL FINANCING FOR ELECTIONS IN 2024
(A+B+C+D)*

BILLIONS OF PESOS



Note: *((A) refers to ordinary activities; (B) to specific activities; (C) to Franchises (postal and telegraphic) and (D) to campaign expenses

Source: Electoral Laboratory (2024).

At the national level, the total amount allocated per political party for the 2024 elections is distributed as shown in Graph 8. This reveals that the party with the highest funding for these elections is Morena.

At the local level, the five entities with the highest funding for political parties are:

1. State of Mexico with 1,204 million pesos.
2. Mexico City (CDMX) with just over 827 million pesos.
3. Jalisco with 689 million pesos.
4. Puebla with 503 million pesos.
5. Nuevo Leon with more than 436 million pesos.

Conversely, the five entities with the lowest funding for political parties are:

1. Colima with 60 million pesos.
2. Baja California Sur with just over 63 million pesos.
3. Nayarit with 85 million pesos.
4. Campeche with 82 million pesos.
5. Quintana Roo with 91 million pesos.

At the local level, Morena receives the largest share of funding, with more than 2,335 million pesos, followed by:

1. PRI with just over 1,535 million pesos.
2. PAN with a similar figure (1,535 million pesos).
3. Movimiento Ciudadano with 834 million pesos. Local parties with 1,082 million pesos.
4. Local parties with 1,082 million pesos.
5. PRD with around 422 million pesos.
6. PT with 409 million pesos.

This totals 8,752 million pesos (Laboratorio Electoral, 2024).

In sum, Morena receives nearly one-third of the total funding when considering both federal and local levels, amounting to approximately 5,500 million pesos (28.82%). The Labor Party (PT) is the political party with the least resources, receiving only 5.92% of the total funding.

CONCLUSIONS

Although equity in the media is established by law and the Constitution, the forms and mechanisms of violations and attacks on equity in the electoral contest are a tangible reality. The interventions of the highest authority in Mexico during the campaigns clearly demonstrate the complete inability to respect the law and to remain neutral during this process. The implications range from the loss of impartiality and equity in the competition, pressure on the media, the misuse of sanctioning procedures, political polarization and the weakening of democratic institutions. It is essential that a leader with such significant influence in the country respects the autonomy of electoral institutions and refrains from unduly influencing the electoral process. Guaranteeing fundamental rights requires strong democratic institutions, an active and vigilant citizenry and a full rule of law that, under a culture of democracy and accountability, can achieve the development of the social Mexico we all aspire to.

“The equity of the electoral contest has been undermined by the president of the republic, who has been reported on more than 300 occasions for interfering in the electoral process and in at least 30 cases, his actions have been deemed to violate the current legal framework”

ANIE, 2024a. p.43.



5. CASH ECONOMY: MONEY AND FINANCING IN ELECTORAL TIMES

*The use of cash in
the economy has
increased by 44%
since 2018*

5. *CASH ECONOMY:* MONEY AND FINANCING IN ELECTORAL TIMES



The Mexican economy is caught between the fight against inflation and the expansion of demand, the latter fueled by the growth of remittances, the advancement of social programs, reconstruction programs and the completion of flagship projects under the Lopez Obrador administration. The constant flow of these resources has led to the development banks becoming more capitalized than at any other time in recent history. In January 2024, these banks reached 304.6 billion pesos in cash and bank deposits, the highest recorded amount. This cycle of expansion coincides with the 2023–2024 federal electoral process, where thousands of public offices are being contested, including the Presidency of the Republic.

This has resulted in a greater use of cash in the economy, even though the economy itself has not grown at the same rate. As we have argued, this is not enough to fully explain the phenomenon. As a consequence of this process (the growth rate of money demand exceeding economic growth), money is changing hands at a slower rate than in the past. However, high-denomination bills (1,000 pesos) are circulating in greater quantities and at a faster rate than ever before, following a route that seems to run, at least in the last five years, from the south to the center and north of the country. Additionally, evidence suggests that the largest cycle of monetary expansion occurred between 2021 and 2023, giving the impression that be-

tween the midterm elections and 2023, the so-called “mother of all battles” was fought.

We have also argued since early 2023 that this liquidity is being influenced by the proliferation of criminal markets. In this section, we highlight at least four of these markets: Drug trafficking, Human smuggling, Fuel smuggling and Extortion (protection rackets). We emphasize these markets due to their impact on the current account, their contribution to local economies and their intersection with transnational criminal routes, which could have greater influence ranging from financial to spatial impacts.

5.1 MONEY FLOWS LIKE PANCAKES

The amount of banknotes and coins in circulation in Mexico has grown by 43.7% in real terms during this administration, even though the economy itself has only grown by 4%. This behavior is completely atypical and demonstrates the increasingly widespread use of cash in daily transactions.

Banknotes and coins in circulation continue to grow, even at a faster rate than other monetary aggregates. In general, the M1 monetary aggregate, which includes banknotes and coins in circulation and demand deposits in banks and savings and credit insti-

tutions, is now the largest among these aggregates in the Mexican economy. As of February 2024, M1 amounts to 7.427 trillion pesos. This amount is distributed among: Households: 5.043 trillion pesos, Non-financial private companies: 2.233 trillion pesos and Other non-bank financial intermediaries: 151 billion pesos (Banxico, n.d.a). The majority of the most liquid assets are in the hands of households (67.9% of M1) (Banxico, n.d.a).

This means that, on average, the banknotes, coins and money in accounts held by household's amount to 39,065.9 pesos per person. If the 5 trillion pesos were distributed only among the population aged 15 and over (those who can work), the average would be 50,603 pesos per person. Meanwhile, companies maintain, on average, a higher cash flow; if the 2.23 trillion pesos were distributed equally among the 5,096,322 companies in the country (INEGI, 2023c), each would have 438,261 pesos in cash and bank accounts (assuming all had access to financial services).

From late 2016 to early 2020, M1 had a presence similar to that of M2 (the second largest aggregate) (time deposits held by residents)¹. However, since April

¹ Includes deposits with a residual term of up to 5 years in banks, popular savings and credit institutions and credit unions; debt investment fund shares; and creditors by re-

Banknotes and coins in circulation continue to grow, even at a faster rate than other monetary aggregates (which include banknotes and coins in circulation plus demand deposits in banks and savings and credit institutions).

2020, M1 has surpassed these instruments without necessarily implying that companies or households face a lack of savings. In this sense, the Mexican economy enjoys abundant liquidity despite a greater presence of other payment methods besides cash. Nevertheless, the financial capital of households and companies (M2) has also grown by 15.1% between December 2018 and February 2024 (Banxico, n.d.a).

In real terms (discounting inflation), as of February 2024, the value of the most liquid assets (M1) is 27.4% higher than in December 2018, while the Mexican economy has not grown even one percentage point on average during the same period. In the same period, the amount of banknotes and coins in circulation has grown by 43.7% in real terms (Banxico, n.d.a). In the last quarter of 2023, M1 represented 21.5% of GDP, compared to 17.3% of GDP in the last quarter of 2018 (Banxico, n.d.a). This contrasts with recent statements by the Central Bank Governor before the Senate, who claims that money demand has increased due to economic growth.

As we have noted in Signos Vitales, this growth in cash usage and liquidity began during the great lockdown, as it did in other emerging economies.

However, the growth continued along this path even though the cost of money increased, primarily starting in 2021. This means that the opportunity cost of not using money has become increasingly high due to rising interest rates. The target rate reached 11.25% at the end of March 2023 and remained at that level for a year.



Image: Use of cash and liquidity has grown since the pandemic started at <https://www.marthadebayle.com/v3/radiov3/sosv3/todo-sobre-los-billetes-y-monedas-en-mexico/>

5.1.1 FEDERAL ELECTORAL PROCESSES AND THE MONEY CYCLE

When the midterm federal elections of the current administration took place (June 6, 2021), the growth rate of the most liquid assets (M1) was already slowing down (annual real variation of 5%), although it continued to grow. This behavior is largely attributed to cyclical factors, as evidence indicates that liquidity in the economy tends to increase during federal electoral processes. Just one month after the start of that electoral process (January 2021), the annual growth rate of M1 reached 18.5%, the second-highest rate since the 2003 midterm elections (20.5% annual variation in March 2002). Meanwhile, focusing solely on the monetary base, the annual growth was unprecedented, reaching 20.9% in February 2021 (Banxico, n.d.a).

During the period analyzed (December 2001 to February 2024), the year 2018 stood out as an exception to the general trend. The growth of the monetary base in that year was unusually low. In fact, it recorded the weakest monetary expansion during a federal electoral process since 2000. The annual growth rate for M1 and the monetary base reached their peak just one

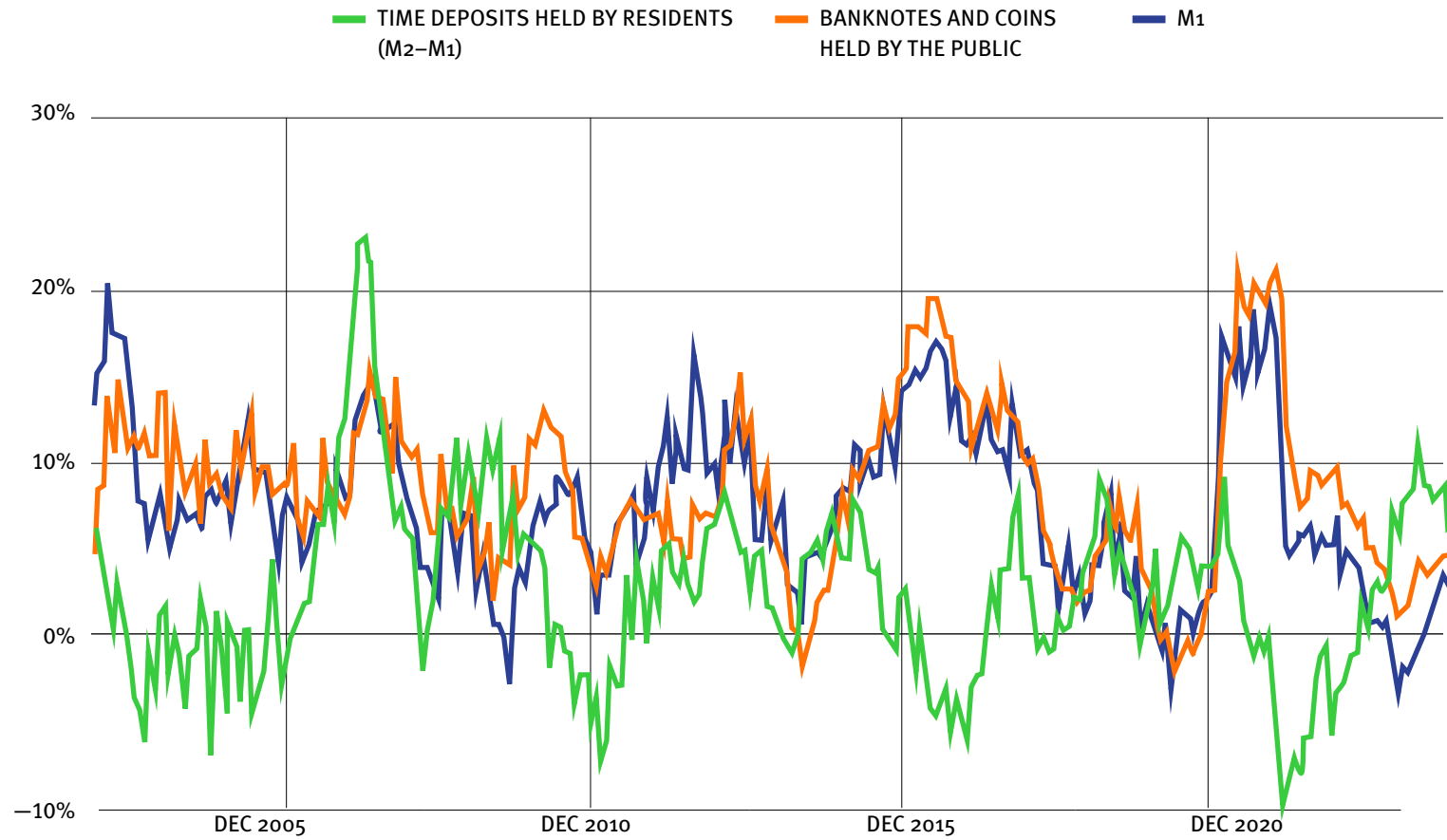
month before the federal election of that year, standing at 7.6% and 7.3%, respectively (Banxico, n.d.a).

As recent studies have highlighted, the growth of the monetary base can be linked to increased government spending during electoral processes. According to the evidence, GDP —and specifically public sector spending— tends to grow above its historical average during the two quarters preceding elections and then slows down or even declines during the two quarters following them (Medina, 2024). Additionally, the Bank of Mexico has acknowledged the influence of remittance growth and direct transfers from the federal government on money demand (Graph 9).

5.1.2 AND WHAT ABOUT MY 1,000-PESO BILLS?

As described in the Signos Vitales report, *Mexican Economy Under Review*, this period of strong growth in the monetary base has been characterized by a significant increase in the printing of 1,000-peso bills (the highest denomination in the country) (1,000 pesos = 52 USD). In contrast, lower-denomination bills have grown at lower rates. Between December 2018 and March 2024, the number of 500-peso bills (the most widely circulated) grew by 77.4%. During the same period, the growth of 1,000-peso bills reached

GRAPH 9. MONEY CYCLES, M1 AND TIME MONETARY INSTRUMENTS IN MEXICO
(ANNUAL REAL VARIATION, %) (DECEMBER 2001 – FEBRUARY 2024)*



Source: In-house elaboration with information from Banxico. *Forward monetary instruments plus M1 equal M2, the second most important monetary aggregate.

372.3%². Currently, 363.2 billion pesos are in circulation in 1,000–peso bills, compared to just 76.9 billion pesos in December 2018 (Banxico, n.d.b). In real terms, the growth in value is 262.9%.

One result of the increased printing of bills is that they now represent a larger proportion of GDP. From another perspective, this means that with more bills in circulation, they change hands at a slower rate (since the economy grows at the same rate as before). Economists refer to this as the velocity of money. Historical data shows a downward trend in money velocity (bill printing grows faster than economic activity), but this decline slowed after the lockdown period. Between December 2018 and December 2023, the velocity of money decreased by –26.8%.

This means that money —of all denominations, on average— changes hands at a slower rate. However, the recent slowdown in the decline of money velocity may be due to the increased use of 1,000–peso bills. In other words, in daily life, cash transactions of significant amounts are being settled with 1,000–peso bills. Between December 2018 and March 2024, the average lifespan of a 1,000–peso bill (discounting the time it was not in circulation) —from the moment

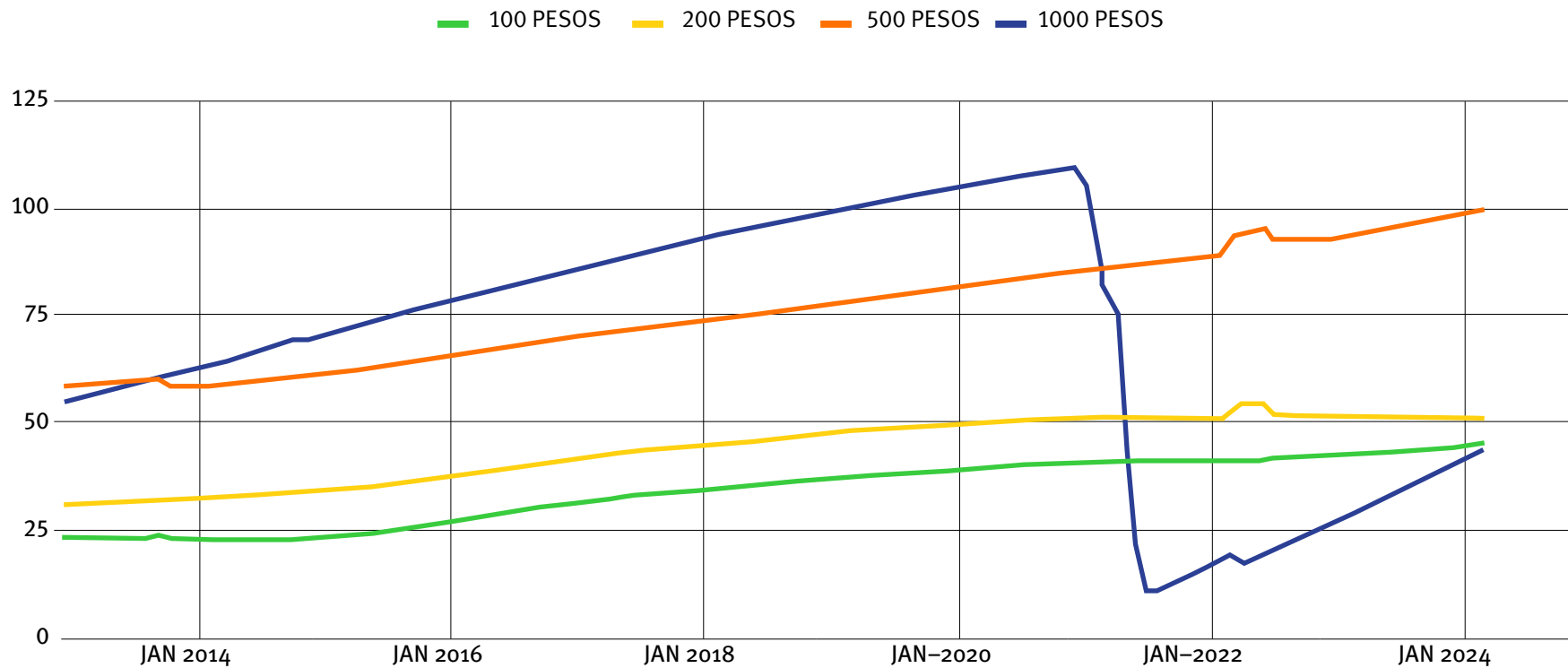
Banxico issues it until it is withdrawn— decreased by –55.4%, going from 99.4 months to 44.3 months. In the same period, however, the 500–peso bills saw their circulation duration increase, from 78.2 months to 98.6 months, representing a 26.1% growth (Banxico, n.d.c) (Graph 10).

Although the official figure reported by Banxico considers all families of 1,000–peso bills, we rule out that the reduction in the average circulation time is primarily due to a massive withdrawal of older series of 1,000–peso bills. This conclusion is based on the following reasons:

1. Three Series of 1,000–Peso Bills: There have been three series of 1,000–peso bills issued, labeled CD, F and G, in that order of issuance. Since July 2008 and September 2021, there has not been a single bill in circulation from the CD and F series, respectively.
 - » By May 2021, the F series bills reached a peak of 32.06 million pieces, only to rapidly drop to zero pieces in just four months (Banxico, n.d.c), drastically impacting the average circulation time during 2021.
2. Historical Minimum Circulation Duration: This situation aligns with the historical minimum of 9.9

² With seasonally adjusted figures.

GRAPH 10. MONTHS IN CIRCULATION (DISCOUNTING THE TIME IT WAS NOT IN CIRCULATION)
BY BANKNOTE DENOMINATION) (DECEMBER 2012 – MARCH 2024)



Source: In-house elaboration with information from Banxico.

months of circulation for 1,000–peso bills in August 2021, at which time 45.7 million pieces of the G series were already in circulation (Banxico, n.d.c). Since September of that same year, only G series bills have been in circulation.

3. Maximum Circulation Duration in 2020: In December 2020, the circulation duration for 1,000–peso bills reached a historical high of 110.1 months, even though there were only 11.8 million pieces of the G series in circulation (Banxico, n.d.c).
4. The Most Recent G Series: The most recent series of 1,000–peso bills, G series, has been in circulation since November 2020, is the only one that continues to grow and is the only bill withdrawn by the bank due to wear and tear.

According to information from the Bank of Mexico and in response to the information request 330030724000174, we know that between December 2018 and February 2024, 1,000–peso bills were deposited in financial institutions of the Mexican financial system³. In total, two-thirds (66.7%) of these bills were deposited in just ten states (less than one-third

³ The Bank of Mexico has refused to offer information on the distribution by financial institution (deposit and withdrawal) and on April 17 of this year the Transparency Committee of said bank decided to classify the information as confidential.

of the country's states): Mexico City (CDMX): 21.5%, Guerrero: 8.9%, Veracruz: 6.8%, Quintana Roo: 5.9%, Puebla: 5.3%, State of Mexico: 4.1%, Jalisco: 3.9%, Morelos: 3.9%, Sinaloa: 3.3% and Oaxaca: 3.1%

During the same period, the Bank of Mexico withdrew these bills in the following manner: Mexico City (CDMX): 22.6%, Nuevo Leon: 9.7%, Guerrero: 6.3%, Veracruz: 5.9%, Jalisco: 4%, Oaxaca: 3.8%, Puebla: 3.7%, Michoacan: 3.5%, Guanajuato: 3.5% and Quintana Roo: 3%. These regions account for 66% of the total and although this is not a complete geographical reconfiguration between the locations of deposit and withdrawal, Nuevo Leon stands out, while Morelos and Sinaloa show a significant drop in their share of deposits (together accounting for only 2.5% of total withdrawals).

Nuevo Leon is particularly noteworthy because it is one of the states with the highest internet access and a wide range of payment methods. Its history does not indicate a high demand for 1,000–peso bills, unlike other major regions like CDMX, State of Mexico, or Jalisco. Recently, however, the demand for 1,000–peso bills in Nuevo Leon has reached unprecedented levels: 194 million pesos in January 2024 and 117 million pesos in February 2024. During the entire

analyzed period (December 2018 to February 2024), only 1.175 billion pesos in 1,000–peso bills were demanded in Nuevo Leon. Yet in the last four months alone, deposits have reached 499 million pesos, representing 42.5% of the total. Despite this increase in demand, the Bank of Mexico's withdrawals of 1,000–peso bills in Nuevo Leon during the same period amount to 34.3 billion pesos, which is 29.2 times the deposited amount.

Furthermore, we know that the Navy Secretariat (Secretaria de Marina) is the sole provider of cash transportation services, with payments for this service consistently rising. In 2023, the Bank of Mexico paid 109,686,400 pesos for these services, the highest figure on record for the institution. Given the increasing volume of bills, it is expected that a greater number of flights by the Navy will be required.

5.1.3 CASH REGISTERS OR ATM ACTIVITY

As a result of the health crisis, the use of ATMs has declined in the country. Between 2018 and 2023, the number of recorded transactions dropped from 1,902.7 million transactions to 1,696.1 million transactions, a decrease of –10.9%. Notably, by the end of 2023, the number of transactions was almost the same as in the second quarter of 2020 (during the

lockdown), just 1.2% higher⁴. Simultaneously, the total amount operated also fell in real terms (–13.9% or –120.7 billion pesos) (Banxico, n.d.d).

However, as we have noted, the demand for cash has increased. With rising prices and a sharper decline in the total amount, average transactions are 3.5% below the level recorded at the end of 2018. These figures do not fully explain the increased demand for money. It is important to mention that the last quarter of 2020 recorded the highest amount per transaction (2,183.2 pesos) (Banxico, n.d.d).

Nevertheless, the behavior of this variable is not uniform across the country. At the municipal level, results can vary dramatically. Some states and municipalities regained their pre-health crisis activity faster than others. The fact is that ATM activity, which used to be an indicator of economic activity at the state or even borough level, is not as useful despite the country's propensity for cash use.

In 2023, an average of 36,894 transactions were conducted per ATM nationwide (61,889 ATMs); this figure translates to an average of 4.2 transactions per hour per ATM (assuming they operate 24 hours a day,

⁴ With seasonally adjusted figures.

every day of the year). This statistic pertains to ATMs of multiple banking (private banks) and should not be confused with the growth of Bank of Welfare (Banco del Bienestar) installations.

The top 5% of the most used ATMs in the country significantly exceed the national average. For example, in the same year, in the municipality of San Carlos Yautepec in Oaxaca, 127,493 transactions were recorded, but this municipality only has one ATM. Consequently, in this municipality with 11,662 inhabitants, an average of 14.6 transactions were made per hour, which means one transaction every 4 minutes and 7 seconds, 365 days a year (assuming it operated 24 hours a day). This is currently the most in-demand ATM in the country and the local population has likely noticed it. Even the number of transactions is high in itself; in 2023, an average of 120,960 transactions were conducted in each municipality nationwide where there is at least one ATM (CNBV, 2024a).

This municipality is not an isolated case. In 75 municipalities across the country, the top 5% of the most in-demand ATMs are found (including the ATM in San Carlos Yautepec). On average, in this 5%, 7.8 transactions were made per hour —one transaction every 7 minutes and 40 seconds throughout 2023. For

the next five percent, the average transaction time increases by 15.3%, but remains high: on average, one transaction every 8 minutes and 50 seconds. Between 2018 and 2023, ATM transactions in these 150 municipalities grew by 54.7%. The majority (82.7% or 124 municipalities) are distributed among 10 states:

- » Chiapas 19,
- » Hidalgo 12,
- » State of Mexico 20,
- » Michoacan 5,
- » Oaxaca 11,
- » Puebla 15,
- » Tabasco 10,
- » Tlaxcala 5,
- » Veracruz 22
- » and Zacatecas 5 (CNBV, 2024a).

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5.2 CASH MOVEMENTS AND THE FINANCIAL SYSTEM

5.2.1 HIGH LIQUIDITY IN BANKING

Although, according to official information, most cash are in the hands of households, this does not prevent financial institutions from maintaining a higher amount of cash than in the past. A clear example of this is the cash reserve held by development banks in Mexico. As of February 2024, the total amount of cash and cash equivalents (cash and bank deposits) was 188.6 billion pesos, but just a month earlier, the amount reached a historical high of 304.6 billion pesos, while in December 2018, it was only 114.7 billion pesos (CNBV, 2024b).

For most of 2022, the growth in cash availability experienced a slump, but in 2023, this variable's behavior was unusual. The annual growth rate (February 2024 vs. February 2023) was 21.7% and in January 2024, it reached 113%, while in multiple banking, the same variable grew by -3.27% in real terms (CNBV, 2024b).

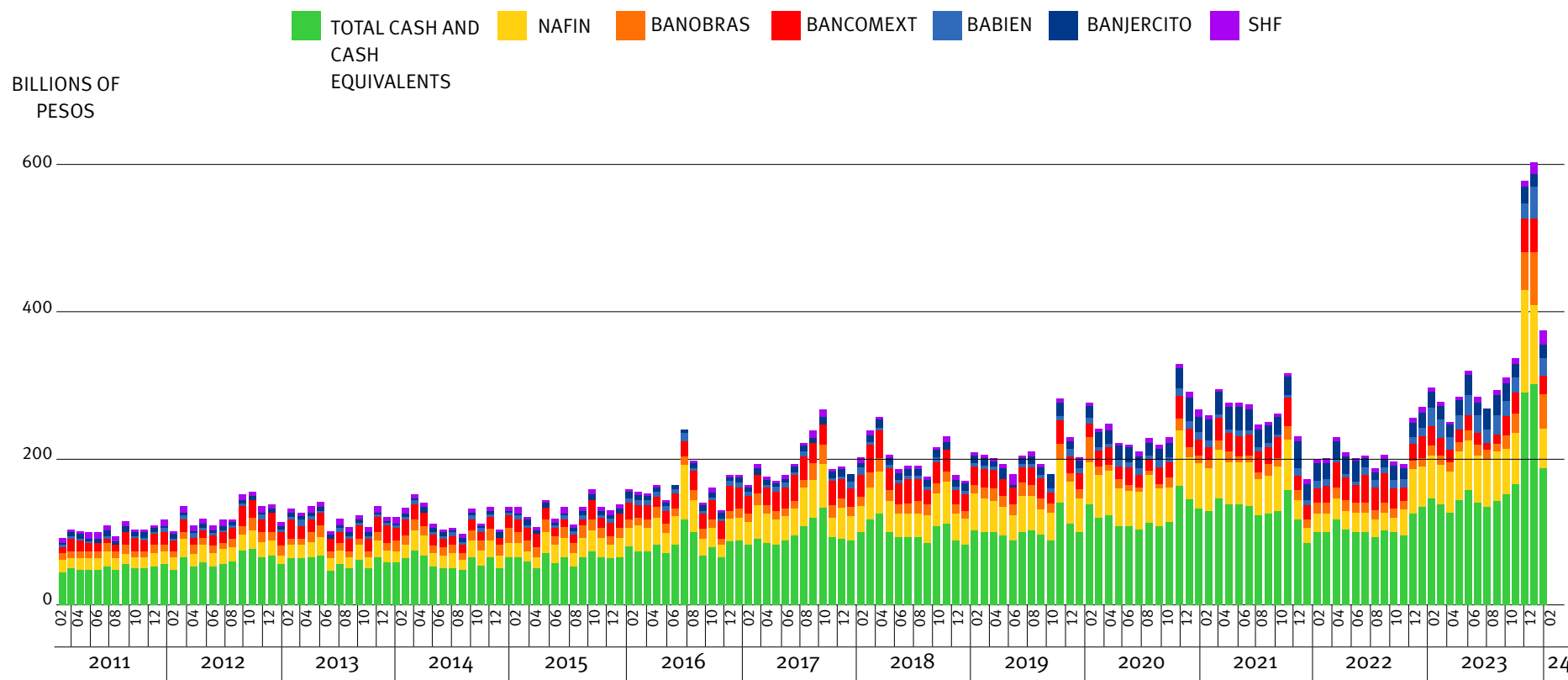
It could be assumed and rightly so, that the growth in cash availability results from a higher concentration of operations by the Bank of Welfare (Babien), as it is responsible for paying social programs and

in some cases, these payments are made in cash (as confirmed by the Superior Audit Office of the Federation). However, the availability of liquid assets is not only related to Babien; in fact, these assets only represent 14.3% of all development bank cash (26.9 billion pesos) (CNBV, 2024c). Babien's figures have grown, but not to the extent of other actors.

When cash and its equivalents reached their peak in January 2024, the growth in liquid asset holdings in development banking was mainly explained by increases in these assets at Nacional Financiera (Nafin), Banco Nacional de Obras y Servicios Públicos (Bano-bras) and Banco Nacional de Comercio Exterior (Bancomext). These three institutions accounted for 228.2 billion pesos in cash and equivalents (74.9% of the total for development banking) (CNBV, 2024c), a remarkable fact considering that none of them are directly related to the federal government's social programs. Instead, they are primarily focused on financing infrastructure projects and foreign trade (Graph 11).

The central point of the discussion is that every inflow must have a source (liability). In this context, the source of income for banks can primarily come from four sources: loans (the core function of banking), the sale of other assets (to convert them into more liquid

GRAPH 11. CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS OF DEVELOPMENT BANKS BY FINANCIAL INSTITUTION
(BILLIONS OF PESOS) (FEBRUARY 2011 – FEBRUARY 2024)



Source: In-house elaboration with information from (INEGI, s.f.j).

assets or replace older ones), debt, savings collection, or direct government subsidies (transfers from the federal government). Notably, we observe a clear difference in the strategies of the institutions in question to acquire more liquid assets.

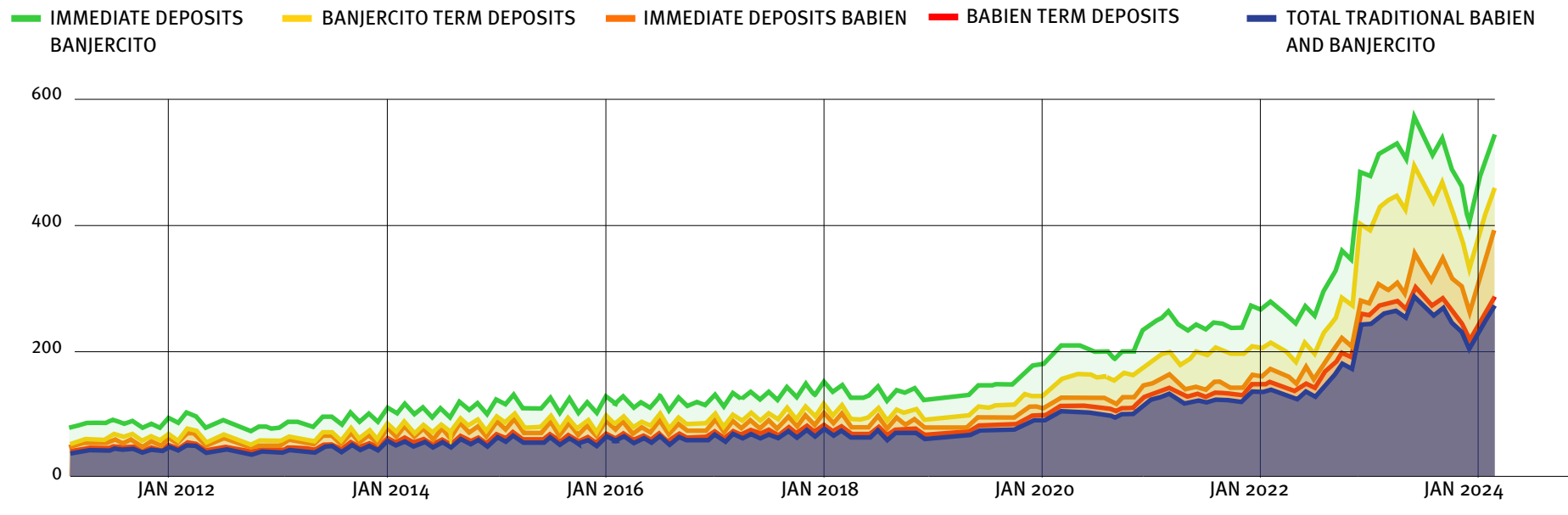
In the cases of the National Bank of the Army, Air Force and Navy (Banjercito) and the Bank of Welfare (Babien), a clear increase in their deposit collection (liabilities) is evident; it can be said that account holders have a greater amount of funds in their accounts. At Banjercito, deposits have increased from 44.1 billion pesos in December 2018 to 151.3 billion pesos as of the end of February 2024. Furthermore, it reached a peak of 224.4 billion pesos in March 2023 and has since shown a downward trend (CNBV, 2024b).

It is important to clarify that the decrease in Banjercito's deposits is due to a decline in demand deposits, but not in time deposits. According to the institution itself, this decline is due to the outflow of funds to cover payments for federal government projects. Time deposits have offset the overall decline and are mostly deposits from the general public (75.4% in February 2024) (CNBV, 2024c), which suggests that these are not primarily military savings (Graph 12).

Similarly, Babien shows a notable increase in deposit collection (between December 2018 and February 2024, traditional deposits grew from 16.2 billion pesos to 121.8 billion pesos), primarily in demand deposits (rising from 9.2 billion pesos to 106.4 billion pesos during the same period). This result was expected, especially since this institution has become the main intermediary for direct government transfers to the general population. Nevertheless, a significant portion of these funds tends to turn into financial savings (12.6% of the total deposits as of January 2024), which continues to show an upward trend (CNBV, 2024c). Up to this point, both Babien and Banjercito show significant similarities in their balance sheets. However, a large part of the growth in Babien's liabilities is due to repurchase agreements, where, as of February 2024, it has liabilities totaling 39 billion pesos, up from just 16.3 billion pesos in December 2018 (CNBV, 2024c).

Unlike the two previous institutions, the rest of the development banks have financed themselves through the issuance of debt certificates. As of December 2018, these certificates amounted to 140 billion pesos, rising to 320 billion pesos in February 2024. This growth is explained by the issuance behavior—primarily from Bancomext, Banobras and Na-

GRAPH 12. TOTAL TRADITIONAL DEPOSITS (TERM DEPOSITS AND IMMEDIATE DEMAND)
OF BABIEN AND BANJERCITO (BILLIONS OF PESOS) (FEBRUARY 2011 – FEBRUARY 2024)



Source: In-house elaboration with information from CNBV.

fin (accounting for 95.4% of the total or an increase of 171.7 billion pesos) (CNBV, 2024c). On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that during the analyzed period, the only bank among those mentioned that has received subsidies (excluding income from surpluses) is Babien, which received 1.751 billion pesos by the end of 2023 and 146.8 million pesos between January and February 2024 (CNBV, 2024c). Without this subsidy, the institution's financial results would have been

negative last year. Additionally, maintaining liquid assets has not only a high opportunity cost for these financial institutions but also leads to increasing costs for security, transportation and custody of valuables. Babien alone spent 1.273 billion pesos on security and transportation of valuables in 2022 and 2.201 billion pesos at the end of 2023 (Babien, 2024). This is likely the case for development banks as a whole, as observing the "other administrative and promotional

expenses" account shows a notable increase in recent years. At the end of the 2023 fiscal year, these expenses amounted to 5.77 billion pesos, the highest reported amount on record (in 2022, the same concept totaled 3.244 billion pesos) (CNBV, 2024c). All of this is considered despite the fact that for Banjercito, the custody of valuables does not generate income (as stated in its latest report dated December 31, 2023), which means that the cost of cash transportation is undervalued (at market prices).

5.2.2 MONEY BY THE TRUCKLOAD AND OTHER VULNERABLE ACTIVITIES

Although we have more information about the transportation of valuables in the public sector, this does not mean that other economic agents do not engage in this activity (businesses, households, multiple banks and other financial agents). According to the latest Activity Report of the Financial Intelligence Unit (UIF) (January–February 2024), by the end of 2023, the unit had received 2,018,900 reports of money or valuables transportation or custody (a vulnerable activity), making it the third-highest year for reports since records began. However, 2022 remains unprecedented, with the UIF receiving 3,766,300 reports of this type (UIF, 2024).

Since the entry into force of the Federal Law for the Prevention and Identification of Operations with Illicit Proceeds, the 2021–2023 period has reported the highest number of such transfers (recorded by the UIF). Despite the growth in this activity slowing down, only in the first two months of 2024, the number of reports of this type was close to the total for all of 2018, with 329,200 vs. 356,800, respectively (UIF, 2024). This period of growth coincides with the most pronounced and prolonged cycle of currency circulation increases (M1 and currency in circulation) in recent Mexican history. The total number of reports received by the UIF in 2023 for the transportation or custody of money or valuables accounted for 23.1% of all reports of vulnerable activities. This was followed by service or credit card reports with 20.3% (1,772,700 reports) (UIF, 2024).

In addition to this activity, there are five other activities related to liquid assets that should be of interest in the current political and economic context, as they may facilitate the use of cash or its equivalents: the use of cashier's checks, international transfers, cash dollars, significant transactions and transactions with virtual assets.

By the end of 2023, the Financial Intelligence Unit (UIF) had received 2 million 18,900 reports of money or valuables transportation or custody (a vulnerable activity), making it the third-highest year for reports since records began.

In 2023, for three of the five activities and reports cited in the previous paragraph, the highest number of reports or notices on record was reached: 14.7 million significant transactions, 8.95 million reports of international fund transfers and 284,800 transactions with virtual assets. Although the use of checks has been declining, last year saw a considerable rebound, as the UIF received 471,600 reports of cashier's check transactions in 2023, up from 380,900 the previous year (UIF, 2024). It is worth noting that for the UIF to receive reports of these check transactions, the issuance or payment must be for an amount equal to or greater than ten thousand dollars.

Similarly, for the UIF to receive reports of significant transactions and international fund transfers, the former must involve highly liquid assets worth at least 7,500 dollars and the latter must involve transfers of at least one thousand dollars each. This means that these are not just any international transfers, contrary to the supposed controls often mentioned by various specialists in the field.

In the most conservative scenario, during 2023, 8.954 billion dollars in remittances were sent in amounts exceeding one thousand dollars (individually), accounting for 14.1% of total remittances (UIF, 2024).

In the first two months of 2024, 1,656,500 reports of this type have been received (UIF, 2024), making it highly likely that this year will set a new record, approaching 10 million transactions. Consequently, the proportion of transactions exceeding one thousand dollars relative to total remittances will continue to rise if the latter trend slows. In other words, it is assumed that these are not transfers intended to cover the daily expenses of households in Mexico. Anyone receiving just one of these transfers per month (as is likely occurring) would be above the poverty line (Graph 13).

5.2.3 DELINQUENCY AND SUPPORT IN FONACOT AND INFONAVIT

In addition to the increase in the use of cash, both in the private sector and the public sector, we have noted the growth in the overdue loan portfolio (in amount and as a proportion of the total) of Infonavit (Institute of the National Housing Fund for Workers). Also noteworthy is the aggressive expansion of credit by Fonacot (National Fund for Workers' Consumption) in the last year, especially in the political-electoral context and its relationship with the money cycle.

At first glance, it is evident that management at Infonavit has been deficient over the past five years.

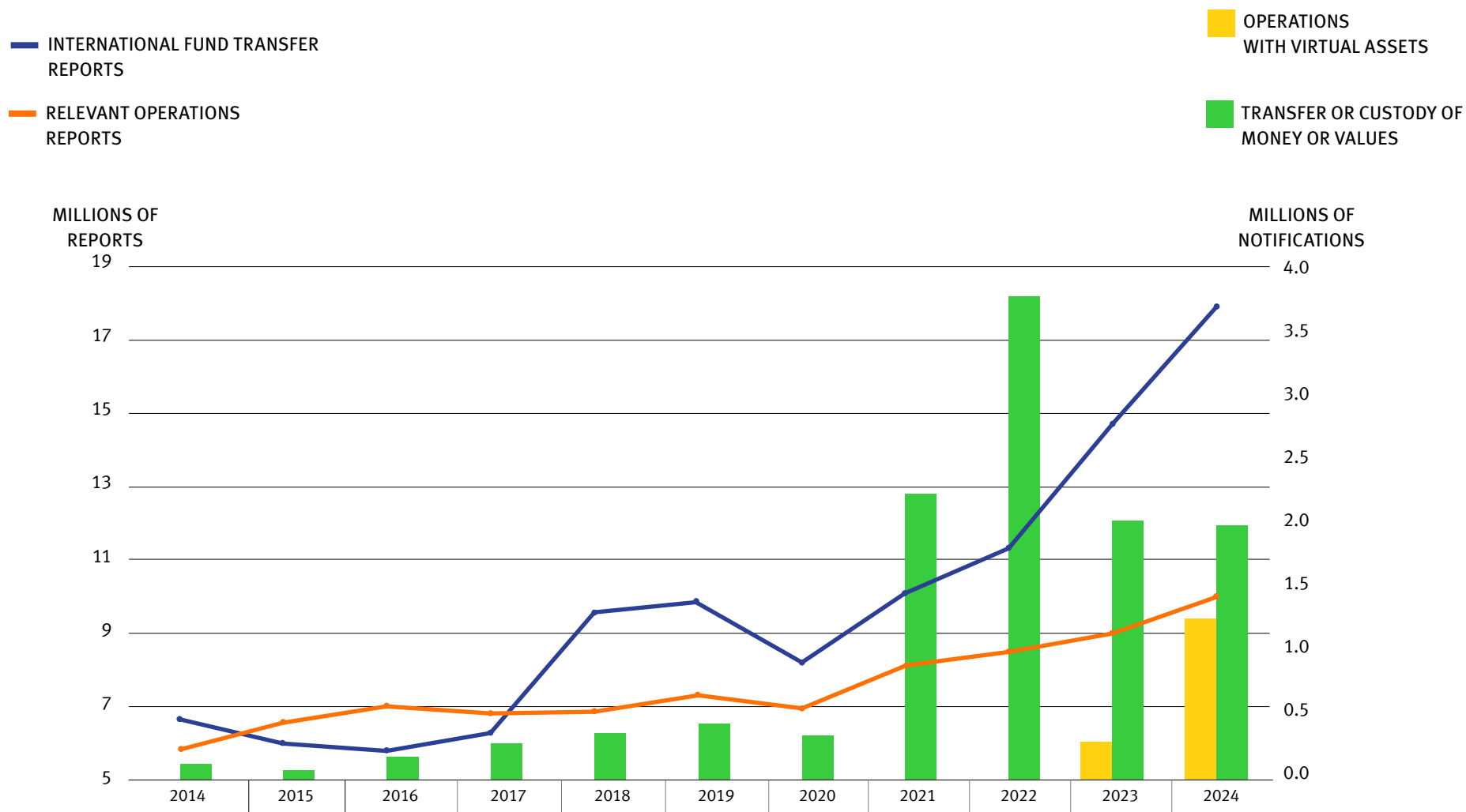
The loan portfolio has deteriorated significantly, both in amount and quality. At the end of 2018, the overdue portfolios of Infonavit and Fonacot stood at 105.5 billion pesos (Infonavit, 2024) and 1.051 billion pesos (Fonacot, 2024), respectively. The delinquency rate (overdue portfolio to total portfolio ratio) was 7.6% in the first case and 5.1% for Fonacot. By the end of 2023, the deterioration of Infonavit's portfolio is evident: overdue portfolios amount to 305.4 billion pesos and 2.014 billion pesos for Infonavit and Fonacot, respectively; the delinquency rate has reached 17.5% for Infonavit (Infonavit, 2024), while Fonacot's aggressive credit expansion has allowed it to reduce its delinquency rate to 4.3% (Fonacot, 2024).

Losses have not been evenly distributed and the weight of the loss has varying impacts on the deterioration of the overall loan portfolio. For Infonavit, delinquency is primarily observed in the southern and central regions of the country: Campeche (19.4%), Mexico City (20.3%), Guerrero (21.2%), State of Mexico (20.2%), Morelos (19.1%), Oaxaca (20.6%), Quintana Roo (18.9%), Tabasco (26.2%) and Veracruz (21.4%). However, three northern states are also in a similar situation: Coahuila (18.5%), Sonora (22%) and Tamaulipas (20.5%).

Perhaps the most striking case is Tabasco and rightly so, since the delinquency rate was 12.4% five years ago. However, it should also be clarified that there is no state in the country where mortgage delinquency has not increased over the same period. The overdue portfolios of six of the aforementioned states (Coahuila, Mexico City, State of Mexico, Sonora, Tamaulipas and Veracruz), along with those of Chihuahua, Jalisco and Nuevo Leon, account for 59% (180.2 billion pesos) of Infonavit's overdue portfolio (Infonavit, 2024).

On the other hand, the expansion of consumer credit (Fonacot) is mainly observed in the last three years (2021 to 2023). In 2021, the total loan portfolio was 28.7 billion pesos and by the end of 2023, it had reached 47.1 billion pesos. Although the delinquency rate for consumer loans has decreased, the total amount has increased significantly. Both in the current and overdue portfolio, the northern region stands out, where 21 billion pesos have been placed, representing 44.6% of the total portfolio. It is also in this region where the overdue portfolio has seen the largest increase in the last year, rising from 317.4 million pesos to 1.016 billion pesos. As a result, the northern region accounts for 50.4% of the overdue portfolio and has the highest delinquency rate in the country (5.1%) (Fonacot, 2024).

GRAPH 13. RELEVANT OPERATIONS, INTERNATIONAL FUND TRANSFERS, OPERATIONS WITH VIRTUAL ASSETS AND NOTICES OF TRANSFER OR CUSTODY OF MONEY OR SECURITIES (2014 – 2024*) (MILLIONS)



Source: In-house elaboration with information from UIF.

*Data from 2024 correspond to a Vital Signs forecast..

If that were not enough, Infonavit has announced that, in this final stage of the administration, it will absorb 50% of loans with an outstanding balance of less than or equal to 25% of the original balance. It is true that effort is rarely rewarded in this country, but what is the point of covering half of a debt that would very likely be paid in full, especially given the deterioration of Infonavit's loan portfolio?

5.3 THE RISE OF CRIMINAL MARKETS

5.3.1 REMITTANCES: WITH LOVE FROM HAWAII AND VERMONT

Remittances have been a topic of discussion in recent years. The 83.9% growth (an increase of 28.9 billion dollars) in the last five years (Banxico, n.d.e) and Mexico's position as the second-largest recipient in the world (second only to India) are reasons enough to study the phenomenon. At Signos Vitales, we have closely monitored their behavior. The results obtained, along with subsequent journalistic investigations, only highlight the federal authorities' inability to fully explain a phenomenon that continues to raise questions the deeper the analysis goes.

Recent journalistic investigations conducted on both sides of the border (United States and Mexico) have

exposed the modus operandi of various transnational criminal organizations operating in Mexico, primarily the Sinaloa Cartel. They have also confirmed the invisibility of these transfers as noted by the recipient communities and their municipal authorities, as remittances do not seem to materialize (or liquidate) in the locations indicated by administrative records. Examples include the municipalities of Ojuelos de Jalisco or Copainala and Bochil in Chiapas, where the funds are not visible, nor are the migrants (regardless of their nationality). On the contrary, what has become clear is the Sinaloa Cartel's ability to form networks of recipients (Ore, August 18, 2023)⁵.

Equally important is the fact that since the end of last year, figures have shown considerable adjustments without prior notice. At the beginning of this year, a notice on the data source website indicated that the statistics had been modified. As a result, we would expect to know with greater "accuracy" where the remittances originate (U.S. states). It is worth noting that in our 2023 alert, we highlighted the case of Minnesota, where we mentioned that the recent growth in remittances was unusual and could be a hub. In fact, journalistic investigations have found that a branch

Infonavit has announced that, in this final stage of the administration, it will absorb 50% of loans with an outstanding balance of less than or equal to 25% of the original balance.

⁵ It can also be seen: <https://www.nmas.com.mx/noticieros/programas/en-punto/videos/aumenta-envio-remesas-disminuye-dinero-incautado-narco/>

of the Sinaloa Cartel operates in Minnesota, systematically sending illicit funds to Mexico (N+, May 10, 2023). The adjustments to the figures have also led to other findings, which we detail below:

1. The evidence shows that it is highly likely that the information reported by some money transmitters originated from Minnesota and Arizona. This means that the actual source of a significant portion of funds was different from these locations.
2. Significant (and drastic) adjustments are observed in the figures for some U.S. states. Particularly noteworthy are states like Hawaii, where the Mexican community, although it has grown significantly in recent years (a population of 51,074 people of Mexican origin), only an estimated 10.2% were born in Mexico (5,186 Mexicans)⁶ and 41.1% of them have already obtained naturalization (2,133 people). Yet in 2023, they sent 254.4 million dollars, equivalent to 20.2% of the gross income of the entire population during the year. This suggests that nearly half

⁶ The population of Mexicans on the island is very peculiar and only 37.7% of the population of Mexican origin was born on the island. The vast majority migrated either from abroad or from within the United States, mainly from the West and South of the country: 16,404 and 6,296, respectively; Of the total of those who arrived from outside the country (5,186 Mexicans), only 849 arrived since 2010 (16.4%).

of the remittances from the island come from U.S. citizens of Mexican origin⁷.

- » Regarding the proportion of funds sent from the United States and their relationship to the size of the population, the cases of Maine, Vermont and Puerto Rico are particularly noteworthy, given their extremely low Mexican populations: 7,638, 3,975 and 7,900 people of Mexican origin, respectively. In these three cases, the amount transferred as a proportion of gross income in 2023 was 46.1%, 91.8% and 32.2%, respectively. The annual variations were 142.3%, 1,993.8% and 796.5%, respectively; and the amount transferred was 240.2 million dollars (mdd), whereas in 2022 it was only 49 million dollars. These proportions, as annual variations, are extremely high by international and regional standards.
- » The same situation occurs in other states we previously mentioned with a small population of Mexican origin, such as Georgia (which, after the adjustment in figures, is now the third most important state after California and Tex-

⁷ Considering that income is distributed evenly. This means that, assuming that 10.2% of the population (5,186 Mexicans) use 100% of their income, it would be necessary for the remaining 10% to be sent by another population group (such as US citizens of Mexican origin).

as), South Carolina, Iowa, New Jersey and Ohio. The variations in a single year (2023 vs. 2022) are 39.3% (642.3 mdd), 48.9% (232.6 mdd), 96% (242 mdd), 40.9% (323.1 mdd) and 148% (683.8 mdd), respectively. In other words, while figures show a decrease of –179.6 million dollars (mdd) (an annual variation of –21.7%) in the amount sent from Minnesota (Banxico, n.d.f), other states more than compensate for the loss. In just one year, remittances practically doubled (or more) in several states. This suggests that the true origin of these remittances may have been the latter states. However, the variation is extremely abrupt for a single year.

- » This variation, especially in cases where remittances have doubled or more, led to a situation where, in a single year, the share of remittances as a percentage of the gross income generated by the entire Mexican population was at least twice the average of remittances sent from the United States to Mexico (a rate close to 7% of gross income). A clear example of this is Alaska, where this rate increased from 6.5% to 14.2% of total gross income during the year. For this to happen, the amount grew by 117.7% between 2022 and 2023 (an increase of 52.9 million dollars).

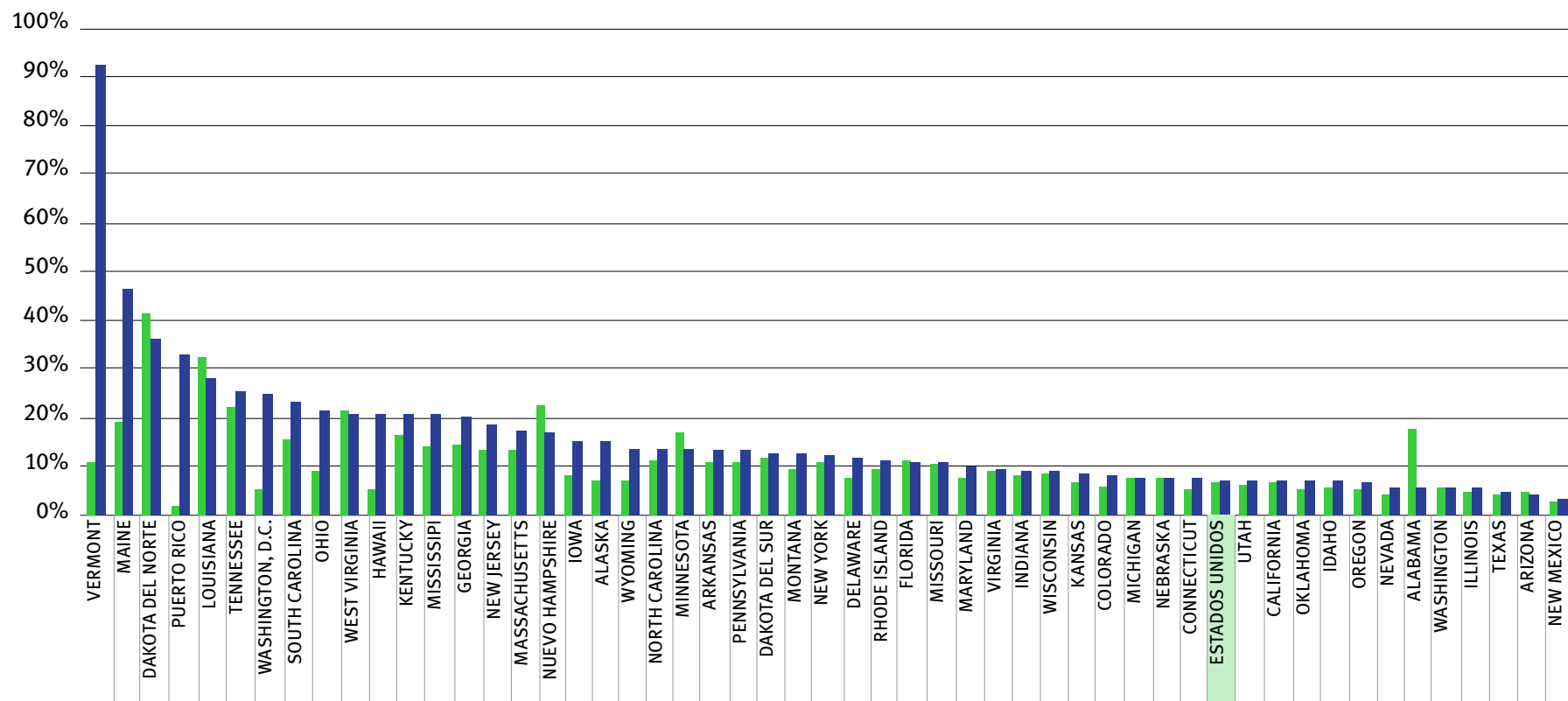
3. The adjustment of figures only applies to the origin, that is, to the United States and not to the destination in Mexico. After the review of the statistics, the most affected state is Arizona, not just Minnesota. In the last half of 2023, remittances from Arizona plummeted rapidly compared to the same period last year, both in absolute and relative terms, dropping from 1,151 million dollars to 586.7 million dollars (an annual variation of –49%) (Banxico, n.d.f). If it continues its long-term trajectory, this state will rank eighth in importance (as it was in 2018) and will cease to be the third in rank, as it was in 2022. This is noteworthy considering that Arizona has one of the largest Mexican populations in the United States (half a million people born in Mexico and a total of just over 2 million of Mexican origin) (USCB, 2022).

It is crucial that money transmitters in Mexico report the location where the remittance is actually liquidated, rather than providing information based on the location of their servers. A clear example of this is Tijuana (presumably the second-largest recipient of remittances in Mexico at the municipal level), as we have previously stated (Graph 14).

GRAPH 14. REMITTANCES BY STATE OF ORIGIN AS A PERCENTAGE OF GROSS INCOME
OF THE MEXICAN-ORIGIN POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES (%) (2022–2023)

2022 2023

REMITTANCES TO
TOTAL INCOME (%)



Source: In-house elaboration with information from Banxico

The above has also led us to the following conclusions, which are worth applying to other financial markets: This exercise makes it clear that the reporting (regarding personal transfers) provided by financial institutions is not entirely reliable at the subnational level. Therefore, it is vital that the responsible authorities in Mexico and the United States properly perform their supervisory duties, as to some extent, we lack precise knowledge of where remittances are actually cashed in our country. Statistics reported based on the location of the server, rather than where the funds are cashed, can facilitate logistical operations for professional money launderers because we do not know their true location.

Doubts remain about the volume and amount received by more than 220 municipalities located along the Mexican Pacific coast and central region, leaving the "hidden" destination of more than 4.4 billion USD in question. We are confident that an adjustment to the destination locations would lead to many surprises (some unexpected) and others that are not so surprising. Thus, performing this adjustment in Mexico would very likely result in a reordering at the state level, but especially at the municipal level.

This stands in contrast with the statements of various experts on the subject and the Bank of Mexico itself, who emphasize that the variation is observed in 2020, during the health crisis, when in reality, the increase in Minnesota was primarily seen between 2022 and 2023 (post-lockdown), when U.S. government aid had ended in most states. The server was always there (since before 2022), but the adjustment to the figures did not occur before 2022. Money transmitters (companies handling remittances from the United States) have been consistent in this regard, showing that the variation for this state is observed in the last couple of years with the consequences described above.

Similarly, the "updated" evidence first changes the relationship between remittances and total income by U.S. state and second and perhaps of greater interest to those studying the topic (migration and remittances), is that the propensity to send remittances increases with the greater U.S. population of Mexican origin. This means that there are 10 U.S. states where the people sending remittances are most likely U.S. citizens of Mexican origin (or even of another nationality), rather than undocumented Mexicans.

In 2023, 2.538 billion USD were sent from these 10 states, while in 2018 it was only 977 million USD (a

159.8% increase). So far, another seven states are in this transition, from which an additional 2.681 billion USD were transferred (a growth of 101.2% in the same period) (Banxico, n.d.f). In this sense, this significantly changes what we knew about the subject, in that Mexicans (born in Mexico) residing in the United States, primarily on the East Coast and North-Central region (border with Canada), would no longer be the main transmitters of funds sent from that country.

In any case, assuming they are Mexicans, it is the children of Mexicans (born in the United States) who are carrying out these transfers. In a more severe scenario, we could say that Mexican cartels collaborate with criminal networks (in the United States) to operate these funds. For this reason and as we have stated, it is unlikely that this is solely a matter of Mexicans (born in Mexico) on the other side of the border; collaboration (collusion) with citizens of other nationalities is becoming increasingly evident.

5.3.2 THE DARK SIDE OF MIGRATION DISGUISED AS REMITTANCES

Organized crime has taken control of various activities in its quest for territorial dominance. One of these major businesses is migration. The routes to the United States are not limited to drug trafficking;

they have also expanded to human trafficking. Unfortunately, the exodus from the South, Central America and the Caribbean has been exploited by criminal groups and even entire governments. Extortion and kidnappings of migrant groups have become a booming business.

Authorities will have to face the fact that it is highly likely that a significant majority of migrants who decided to leave their countries of origin due to poverty, organized crime or climate change will eventually reside in Mexico. Mexico is already a country of origin and destination. According to the World Bank, around 43% of migrants and refugees live in low- and middle-income countries, while 40% live in high-income countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (World Bank, 2023).

For this reason, at Signos Vitales, we have argued since 2022 that a significant portion of remittances are collected by migrants in transit. The law on the matter does not prevent this and national accounting (balance of payments) includes these transfers within the so-called remittances. Sending remittances is not an exclusive event; it is a many-to-many exercise (many-to-many origins—nationalities). In mid-2023, the World Bank acknowledged this phenomenon.

A significant portion of remittances are collected by migrants in transit.

Between January and September 2021, 76.1% of the remittances received by migrants passing through Mexico were destined for smugglers (1,853.4 million USD) and corrupt immigration authorities (1,116 million USD), totaling around 2,969.4 million USD (Ratha, D., 2021).

For Signos Vitales, the importance of these funds is not who receives them but the final destination (use) of these resources. Back in 2021 and only between January and September of that year, 76.1% of the remittances received by migrants passing through Mexico were destined for smugglers (better known as "*polleros*" or "*coyotes*") (1,853.4 million USD) and corrupt immigration authorities (1,116 million USD), totaling around 2,969.4 million USD (Ratha, D., 2021). In that same period, Mexico received 36,359.2 million USD in remittances (Banxico, n.d.e), meaning the rents captured by corrupt officials and human traffickers were equivalent to 10.7% of total remittances. This figure tells us that the use of remittances to conceal human trafficking and corruption already exceeded money laundering (allegedly originating from drug trafficking).

At the beginning of 2023, we pointed out that due to these migratory flows, remittances sent to Chiapas continued their upward trend, making it the fourth-largest recipient in the country, only after Guanajuato, Michoacan and Jalisco. In 2023, remittances cashed in that state amounted to 4,367.6 million USD, with a growth of 416.9% over the last five years. In 2018, they were only 845 million USD. The municipality of San Cristobal de las Casas alone went

from receiving 102.3 million USD to 887.1 million USD in the same period (a growth of 767.2%) (Banxico, n.d.g). The evidence suggests that a significant portion of the payments made by migrants are cashed in this state.

5-3-3 BLACK MARKET FOR FOSSIL FUELS

In our latest report, we have shown that various markets are experiencing supply and demand imbalances and one of these, due to its significant importance in the daily lives of millions of Mexicans and businesses, is the fossil fuel market: gasoline and diesel. Over the past five years, Mexico's economy has grown very little, but the growth of some activities stands out from the overall economic average and even from the historical average (over the past three decades, since the entry into force of NAFTA). One of these activities is transportation (2.8% on average per year), particularly freight transportation (3.8% on average).

The growth in freight transportation activity and the aggregate supply of fossil fuels (domestic production plus imports and inventories) appear to have no relationship whatsoever. The latter has stagnated for several years. On the contrary, the lubricants market (base oils and finished oils) shows a considerable surplus (over-supply) estimated at 81.1% (4.46 mil-

lion barrels) (Signos Vitales, 2024) and according to the same evidence collected by the SAT, this imbalance is due to fuel smuggling⁸.

According to SAT data, it was possible to determine that between 20 and 30 out of every 100 liters of gasoline come from the black market (fuel theft and smuggling). Recent data provided by the U.S. government cast doubt on the official information when these figures are compared, even among the statistics generated in Mexico: the merchandise trade balance and information from Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex) and the Ministry of Energy.

As of October 2023, Pemex reported having imported 1,707.3 million USD worth of gasoline and another 943.8 million USD worth of diesel. However, in the trade balance records, these same imports are recorded at 1,095 million USD and 782.9 million USD, respectively. The accumulated difference of 772.5 million USD may not seem significant, but the discrepancy was just beginning. By December of that same year, the accumulated discrepancy (for both fuels) reached 1,193.8 million USD. The dollar difference (between what Pemex reported and the administrative records of customs) is the highest on record

8 Fossil fuels are introduced to Mexico as oils to evade taxes.

in the current account and Pemex statistics (an excess of 142.9%).

Between October 2023 and February 2024, the accumulated discrepancy amounts to 3,008.9 million USD. In other words, Pemex has been paying a foreign supplier without these transactions being reported in the merchandise trade balance; these transactions should necessarily go through customs (at least in the record—customs declarations). Therefore, from October 2023 to date, Pemex alone has funneled around 52.5 billion pesos⁹ into the black market for fossil fuels.

Meanwhile, the volume of gasoline exported from the United States to Mexico, as reported by the Energy Information Administration (EIA), is close to the volume of Pemex imports. In this sense, if Pemex has a monopoly on the import of gasoline and diesel (at least legally), the unreported volume (resulting from Pemex's import amount), in which Pemex is involved, must come from a country other than the United States. It is presumed, then, that Pemex is absorbing a significant portion of the black market for fuels after capturing the legal import market, which accounts for around 31.2% of the market value.

9 Considering the monthly average exchange rate published in the Official Gazette of the Federation (DOF).

5.3.4 EXTORTION AND PROTECTION RACKETS

Over the past five years, extortion targeting workers and entrepreneurs across all economic regions of the country has become a constant aspect of daily life. From street vendors to large companies, all can become targets of organized crime. The so-called "protection racket" has become a significant source of income for various organized crime groups. In 2018, 6,721 investigation files for extortion were recorded and throughout the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto, 38.6 thousand extortions were committed. By the end of 2023, 10.3 thousand extortions had been recorded (a 53.8% increase compared to 2018), making it the second-highest figure only after 2022 (a marginal difference of seven extortions). During the current federal administration (2019–2023), 46.2 thousand extortions have been recorded, 19.7% more than during the entire previous administration.

The number of victims has also increased as a result of the rise in this crime. In 2018, there were 6.9 thousand victims and by 2023, this number had risen to 10.9 thousand (a variation of 59.2%). The number of victims per investigation file has grown by 3.5% during the same period, going from an average of 1.03 to 1.06 victims per file. This administration has be-

come the one with the highest number of extortions committed in recent history, with the most victims recorded. However, 2024 will undoubtedly set a precedent because it will determine how much more violent it is compared to the past. So far, the figures for the first two months of 2024 indicate that the number of extortions will be very close to those of the last two years.

The increase in extortion in Mexico has been primarily concentrated in the central and northern regions of the country, with a notable decline in the central-northern region over the past year (–20.4% or –384 extortions) (SESNSP, 2024), which largely explains the deceleration in the same period¹⁰. Over the past five years, the central region has been the most affected by this crime, with an increase of 136.8%. By the end of 2023, it accounted for 60% of all extortions in the country (SESNSP, 2024).

¹⁰ We use the regionalization of the Bank of Mexico, which is described below: in the north are Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Sonora and Tamaulipas; the northern center includes Aguascalientes, Baja California Sur, Colima, Durango, Jalisco, Michoacan, Nayarit, San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa and Zacatecas; The center is made up of Mexico City, the State of Mexico, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Morelos, Puebla, Queretaro and Tlaxcala; and the south considers Campeche, Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz and Yucatan.

5.3.5 ILLEGAL MONEY: THREE YEARS OF CAMPAIGNS, CRIMINAL MARKETS AND ELECTORAL PROCESSES

It is worth noting that the monetary expansion began shortly after the great lockdown, probably for precautionary reasons, as Banxico argues. But this was followed by the 2021 midterm electoral process and the elections for 15 governorships, most notably the gubernatorial election in Michoacán¹¹. This election marked the first time that the interference of organized crime in an electoral process was officially recognized. A year later, it was followed by the presidential recall referendum and this wave of propaganda concluded with the gubernatorial election in the State of Mexico (the entity with the largest voter roll in the country, with 13 million 037 thousand voters, representing 13.2% of the total electorate) (INE, 2024) and the early pre-campaigns of Morena's aspiring candidates (Marcelo Ebrard, Adan Augusto Lopez and Claudia Sheinbaum) who made their presence felt throughout the country.

¹¹ First precedent of the interference of organized crime recognized by the Superior Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Branch of the Federation, for which the vote in four mayoralties of Michoacán was left without effect.



Images:

"More than 20 states register cases of collection of 'floor charge' in Mexico. Photo: Cuartoscuro/archivo." at <https://www.heraldodemexico.com.mx/nacional/2024/2/15/senado-busca-castigar-con-12-anos-de-prision-el-cobro-de-piso-mapa-de-los-estados-mas-afectados-por-este-delito-578312.html>

"Indiscriminate collection of floor charge in Mexico. Photo: Cuartoscuro" at <https://zetatijuana.com/2023/09/Mexico-en-https://zetatijuana.com/2023/09/indiscriminado-cobro-de-piso-en-mexico/>

However, as pointed out by Ciro Murayama (former INE councilor), they were never officially called (or recognized as) pre-campaigns, which allowed them to escape the scrutiny and oversight of the National Electoral Institute (INE). All of this happened before the start (formal) of the 2023–2024 federal electoral process. The amount of unregulated money of unknown origin must have been enormous and according to the same former councilor, it is evident that the funds available to Morena have been insufficient (almost 2,500 million pesos of public financing in 2024 and 1,800 million pesos received in 2023).

To give just one example, there was no requirement for each billboard to have an identifier to be registered and quantified. It is highly likely that citizens will never know the origin of the funding for the thousands of painted walls in support of one candidate or another. It was not until July 2023 that the INE issued guidelines to trace the funds involved in this process and that of the Broad Front.

Nevertheless, we have the precedent of when the INE's Technical Audit Unit did its job and documented more than seven hundred billboards and posters with advertisements for the President in the recall referendum campaign, which included stations and cars of the Mexico City Metro System.

[This system] informed the INE that advertising in its facilities is operated by the company ISA Corporativo S.A. de C.V., which has an administrative permit for this purpose granted by the Ministry of Finance [of the same city]. In turn, the company informed the INE that the person who contracted the recall referendum advertising in the metro was a citizen named Luz Alicia Ramos Pineda (Murayama, October 1, 2023).

It turns out that Ramos is the legal representative of GP Construcciones, which had contracts with the Mexico City Government for over 60 million pesos between 2019 and 2021 (Murayama, October 1, 2023).

This situation is also noteworthy given the persistent discretion in government purchases, which are accompanied by rising public spending and deficits (the highest in the last three decades). As pointed out by MCCI (Mexicans Against Corruption and Impunity), in 2023, the torrent of direct contract awards accounted for 80% of all contracts —amounting to 213.9 billion pesos— following the same trend seen throughout the Lopez Obrador administration and that of his predecessors (Gomez, 2024).

This organization also points out that in the same year,

the federal government unusually increased the legal limits for exempting public tenders by up to 153%; in 8,662 of the contracts awarded through exception procedures, there is no justification for why a public tender was not conducted, totaling 116.2 billion pesos. Additionally, MCCI found that the data indicates a possible simulation of competition. 2023 has been the year in which the most open tender contracts were published on CompraNet after the contract had already begun. According to this center, there were 632 contracts and the institution that most replicated this practice of simulated competition was the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) (275 contracts worth 45,641 million pesos) (Gomez, R., 2024).

During the 2021 midterm election, spending on subsidies and social programs surged during the first quarter of that year. A total of 171.8 billion pesos were disbursed; of this amount, 27.15 billion pesos cannot be geographically located (compared to just 8.1 billion pesos in 2020). According to Enrique Cardenas and information from Mexico Evalua, it appears that these additional 19 billion pesos were allocated to unspecified locations, not determined by the established programs, but rather at discretion (Cardenas, E., June 10, 2021). It is worth noting that during



Source: "AMLO denies early campaign acts of the Morena National Council at <https://www.forbes.com.mx/amlo-niega-actos-anticipados-de-campana-por-acuerdos-del-consejo-nacional-de-Morena/>

the current federal electoral process, the Banco del Bienestar (Babien) is responsible for direct transfers to the beneficiaries of social programs.

This bank has not only recently received subsidies, as we have shown, but also, according to Mexico Evalua, the government has withdrawn 28 billion pesos from development banks so far in this administration to finance the expansion of Babien, at the cost of weakening financing for productive investment and leading institutions such as Nafin and Bancomext to constant operational deficits. As also documented by Mexico Evalua, this is not a new practice. However, between 2019 and 2022, this practice worsened and the transfer of resources between banks has only favored Babien with 20.9 billion pesos, coming from Nafin (7.5 billion pesos), Banobras (12.1 billion pesos), Bancomext (6.4 billion pesos) and Banjercito (2 billion pesos) (Mexico Evalua, 2023).

Manuel Molano clearly explains, with a personal experience, the federal government's intervention in the upcoming elections, aligning with what has been discussed throughout this alert:

A few days ago, Infonavit sent me a notice, explaining that it is possible to recover excess payments made on a mortgage loan that my wife and I paid



Image: "Propaganda at the metro station Xola of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador" because of the revocation of mandate. Photo: Cuartoscuro at <https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/nacional/2022/04/05/revocacion-de-mandato-quien-se-queda-en-el-lugar-de-amlo-si-pierde/>

off ahead of the term set in the contract. Also, some elderly people around me are happy because... in March, they will receive a double payment [of the social welfare pension]... The Mexican government has just issued a bond worth 7.5 billion dollars... The fact is that the government spends before the elections so that the ruling party can use public

spending as a sweetener to make voters consider voting for them. As every six years, we see the floodgates of public spending wide open (Molano, M., January 10, 2024).

As Molano rightly points out, unfortunately, many governments around the world do the same. *Given that there are a bunch of elections this year, it would be worth checking which governments will pull out the purse strings to stimulate the ballot box because that will prevent global inflation from easing and therefore, interest rates from falling (Molano, M., January 10, 2024).*

Regarding program beneficiaries, such as Infonavit, we have submitted information requests to that institute to learn about the political and economic scope of the discounts offered (geographical distribution, financial aspects and target population). As mentioned, many of these loans belong to workers who have paid into the system for much of their working lives and who are likely being tempted by principal reductions, effectively inviting them to reconsider their vote (it is not just about the use of cash).

The pronounced cycle of monetary expansion has not been coincidental. In addition to government spending, the amount of dollars entering the Mexican econ-



Images: "Infonavit has relieved the debt of 1.7 million workers" Photo: Cuartoscuro at <https://www.capital21.cdmx.gob.mx/noticias/?p=13236>

omy from illegal sources (in some cases unknown), the volume of smuggled goods and black markets largely require the use of cash. In this context, territorial control is of interest to organized crime because, according to Guillermo Valdes, it also allows them to develop new illegal markets as lucrative as drug trafficking, including the following activities:

1... taking control of highways and roads (in the face of the National Guard's passivity) to steal trucks carrying all kinds of goods, which are then sold in the markets they also control, expanding the value chain of their illicit economic empires.

2... fuel theft, or 'huachicol,' which has grown like never imagined by General Eduardo Leon Trauwitz, who operated this illicit business from the security area at Pemex during the previous administration. So much fuel is stolen that criminal groups force the National Association of Gasoline Retailers to have legally established gas stations sell it.

3...A third business is human trafficking of Central American migrants, who are robbed, stripped, kidnapped, raped and murdered before being abandoned in deserts or trailer boxes (Valdes, G., February 9, 2024).

Similarly,

criminal cartels participate in electoral processes in various ways: they put forward their candidates and eliminate adversaries (in 2010, they assassinated the PRI candidate for the governorship of Tamaulipas, Rodolfo Torre Cantu), they suppress voting through fear, they finance campaigns for all parties and even operate on election day to ensure their favorites win, as they did in full view of everyone in the 2021 gubernatorial elections in Sinaloa and Michoacan (Valdes, G., February 9, 2024).

Organized crime has also created, in Valdes' words, a parallel tax system to the government, known as the protection racket. According to this expert, criminal organizations not only have hitmen collecting this criminal tax from *tortilla* shops, chicken shops, markets, pharmacies, taxi stands, or gas stations, but they also use business organizations to collect fees.

Similarly, the consulting firm Integralia, in its first report on political violence (February 2024), summarizes what has been discussed above and estimates that

the states with the highest risk of organized crime intervention in local elections have: i) a concentration of illicit markets, ii) criminal groups in armed

conflict, iii) a weak rule of law, iv) the holding of municipal elections and v) key municipalities for crime, highly competitive (Integralia, 2024).

Based on the above, the consultancy identifies six states with a very high risk of organized crime intervention in local elections, given the convergence of the factors mentioned above in their territories: Guerrero, Michoacan, Colima, Jalisco, Chiapas and Morelos. It also identifies nine other states with a high risk of intervention: Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Zacatecas, Guanajuato, State of Mexico, Tabasco and Veracruz (Integralia, 2024).

The states with the highest risk of organized crime intervention in local elections have:

*i) a concentration of illicit markets,
ii) criminal groups in armed conflict,
iii) a weak rule of law,
iv) the holding of municipal elections and
v) key municipalities for crime, highly competitive (Integralia, 2024).*

5.4 AN EMERGING RISK: ANOTHER SYSTEM (ELECTRICITY) CRASH

One of the risks for the upcoming election day, beyond public security, is related to the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity. In 2018, the average duration of power outages was two minutes and by the end of the third quarter of 2023, it had increased to 13.5 minutes (a variation of 675%). During the same period, the amount of unsupplied energy rose from 1,491 megawatt-hours to 9,351 megawatt-hours (a variation of 527.2%) (Gante, D., November 27, 2023). According to experts consulted by Signos Vitales, there is no immediate (very short-term) solution. The problem will persist even assuming that the Mexican economy does not grow. This issue has two main causes: insufficient electricity generation and lack of investment in electricity transmission and distribution.

As we have also noted, both causes stem from poor management (planning) not only of the electrical system but of the energy sector as a whole. For example, a very serious mistake by the former Secretary of Energy and now Morena candidate for the governorship of Veracruz, Rocio Nahle, was to claim that there was an excess of electricity generation capacity (30,000

MW) (Mariano, E., May 18, 2020), when in reality, industry standards dictate that electricity system planning must be based on peak demand, which occurs at higher temperatures. This is not a trivial matter, as electricity demand tends to increase for cooling systems; even the servers of banks or the INE itself require higher energy consumption for this reason. In this context, the now-defunct daylight saving time serves as a reminder of this issue.

Nahle was persistent in her errors, which were frequent during the recent federal administration. For instance, she canceled the development of two transmission lines that would have allowed clean energy to be transported from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to central Mexico and from Sonora to Baja California. Nahle also supported the proposal by CFE Director Manuel Bartlett to prevent private actors from generating more electricity. As a result, CFE, to accommodate Pemex, resorted to using the most obsolete plants. These plants burn fuel oil (a refining byproduct), which Mexico produces in excess, as the federal government has also acknowledged. It is important to note that these cancellations were not replaced by any other projects and the consequences are now evident.



Image; Thermoelectric infrastructure “Ing. Jorge Luque”. Photo: Cuartoscuro at <https://yancuic.com/2019/02/11/modernizara-cfe-60-plantas-termoelectricas-en-el-pais/>

The problem with electricity generation largely stems from the age of power plants and the failure to replace them with new ones, either through public or private investment. This is further compounded, in the context of climate change, by water scarcity. Drought has limited hydroelectric generation; as of October 2023, hydroelectric technology generated only 5.67% of the country's electricity, while in the same month of 2021 it accounted for 15.7% of total generation. In just one year, electricity generation from this technology has fallen by –68.1% (IMCO, 2023). In addition, as we have pointed out, between 2018 and 2022, there has been a backlog of approximately 4,370 kilometers in transmission lines. According to the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), for every percentage point of GDP growth, 800 kilometers of transmission lines are needed annually (ICC Mexico, 2023).

The problem with generation is already severe, but transmission is even worse, as private producers cannot contribute here. CFE holds a monopoly over this activity and has not invested. Between 2018 and 2021, the transmission network grew by only 2.3% (2,531 kilometers) and between 2020 and 2021, it grew by just 0.05% (52 kilometers) (Signos Vitales, 2023). This can be summarized as follows: increasing generation capacity or reopening the market (for

electricity generation) is of little use if electricity cannot be delivered where it is needed. This is not a minor issue and requires significant legislative changes and the reactivation of a strong investment program.

By the end of 2021, there were 87 declarations of Emergency Operating States (EOE) and 2,097 Alert Operating States (EOA). The increase in just one year was 70.6% and 16%, respectively. However, three out of four EOAs occurred in the north of the country, where Hermosillo accounted for 14.7% of the events.



Image: Rocio Nahle, exsecretary of Energy at <https://www.diariodexalapapa.com.mx/elecciones-2024/abogados-de-veracruz-afirman-que-rocio-nahle-garcia-no-es-victima-de-violencia-politica-en-razon-de-genero-11729512.html>; Manuel Bartlett, CFE director at <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2019/08/29/manuel-bartlett-tiene-una-fortuna-16-veces-mayor-a-la-que-manifesto-en-su-declaracion-patrimonial-segun-periodista/>

As we observed last year, the metropolitan areas of Monterrey and Queretaro reported 8.6% and 2.6% of EOE's, respectively.

Similarly, the National Center for Energy Control (Cenace) determined that the lack of infrastructure in the National Transmission Network (RNT) accounts for the largest share of EOAs (72.2%) and to a lesser extent—but still significant—due to RNT failures (25.4%) (Signos Vitales, 2023). Likewise, RNT failures account for the highest percentage of EOE's (83.9%), while only 2.3% are caused by weather conditions (Signos Vitales, 2023). The most recent available data (as of the end of 2022) maintains a similar proportion: only 2.9% of EOE's are due to weather and the rest are due to RNT failures and lack of infrastructure (Cenace, n.d.). In short, rising temperatures do not in themselves cause failures in the transmission network; rather, it is the increase in demand and the network's inability to carry that electricity that leads to system failures.

It is concerning that election planning is carried out, according to the Basic District Typology of Electoral Complexity (TBDCE), based on social and economic variables that do not take into account latent risks such as the lack of electricity and the danger of prolonged blackouts at critical moments. Throughout

this report, we have emphasized the issue of public security, but to this must be added the electricity deficit and failures in the National Transmission Network (RNT). The omission of these variables introduces a significant downward bias in the risk map, particularly in central and northern regions of the country and especially in metropolitan areas, where, although it may be easy to cast a vote due to pre-existing conditions like road infrastructure and internet access (which could imply access to electricity), this right and others, such as access to information, may be violated by rising violence and power outages.



Image: "Blackouts are registered in 13 states" at <https://criterios.mx/registran-apagones-en-13-estados/>

According to surveys conducted in 2023 with members of the Mexican Association of Industrial Parks (AMPIP), 91% of all industrial parks reported having experienced issues related to the electricity supply. The most frequently mentioned states were: Mexico City, Nuevo Leon, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Guanajuato and Jalisco. In three of these states, elections will be held not only for the Presidency of the Republic but also for governor and many other positions; the total nominal list of these states is 29,328,068 citizens, which represents 29.8% of the national nominal list. These six states also concentrate 29.3% of federal electoral districts (88 in total). According to the same association, the states with the highest number of operational parks coincide with the main locations where new industrial parks are being developed and likewise with the areas of highest electricity demand (AMPIP, 2023). At Signos Vitales, we have anticipated that this situation is also one of the main obstacles to attracting foreign investment.

According to Signos Vitales experts, last year the peak instantaneous demand was reached on June 20, hitting 53 GW and there were blackouts. As previously mentioned, CFE has stopped investing and its plants increasingly experience breakdowns and failures. Since the heat season has arrived earlier in

2024—as observed during the month of May, when blackouts and alert and emergency events occurred on several days—the peak demand reached only 49 GW. At that level, the operating reserve margin dropped to 3% (the minimum should be 6%), which meant the system was on the verge of collapse. If peak demand once again surpasses the 53 GW seen last year, as Signos Vitales experts estimate, then in the weeks of May and June we can expect persistently high temperatures, which would represent a high risk of more and more blackouts.

In the face of a potential blackout, the INE has stated that for election day it plans to spend over 20 million pesos to rent around 100 power generators to prevent the PREP (Preliminary Electoral Results Program) from going offline. According to INE President Guadalupe Taddei, electrical disruptions have been anticipated since the beginning of the electoral process, as it is known that in some districts —due to their geographic location— it will be necessary to install a generator (Perez, M., May 9, 2024). Assuming these 100 generators are distributed and each one covers a federal electoral district, the INE's plan would not be enough to cover two-thirds of the federal electoral districts. Furthermore, if these generators are assigned to the regions with the greatest social and economic disad-

It is concerning that election planning is carried out, based on social and economic variables that do not take into account latent risks such as the lack of electricity and the danger of prolonged blackouts at critical moments (Basic District Typology of Electoral Complexity (TBDCE)).

vantages, as one might expect based on the TBDCE, particularly in the south, the coverage bias remains skewed downward. On the other hand, if the INE's plan is insufficient to protect the federal PREP system from unexpected events in certain regions of the country, these risks will also apply to local electoral bodies (OPLEs) in the states where elections for governor, municipal presidents and other local positions will be held.

The controversy over recent and growing failures in the national electricity system is not limited to organizing the electoral process but also affects the electorate's mood just days before the elections, as may be the case in Jalisco. According to the state's governor, Enrique Alfaro, instability in the national power grid caused two transformers at the plant that pumps water from Lake Chapala to break down, resulting in water supply disruptions in some neighborhoods of the Guadalajara metropolitan area (Romo, P., May 9, 2024). For three consecutive days, electrical failures were responsible for water shortages in at least 170 neighborhoods of one of the country's largest cities and Alfaro has raised the possibility of sabotage (Meza, M., May 13, 2024).

As can be seen from the above, the effects of the electrical system crisis range from the possible lack of certainty in federal and local preliminary results, to the vote counting in polling stations that might be without electricity during critical hours, to the provision of other services such as drinking water —and even financial and telecommunications services— that are essential before, during and after the electoral process.

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CONCLUSIONS

The expansion of government spending and the proliferation of criminal markets in Mexico are demanding a greater amount of money, which is constantly being moved (this does not necessarily mean that more goods or services are being purchased). These money routes are reaching places that were unimaginable five years ago, such as Nuevo Leon. The demand for money or securities transportation or custody services has grown considerably; in 2018, the UIF received 329.2 thousand notices of this type, while in 2022, it recorded 3.77 million notices (a historic high) (an increase of 1044%). We estimate that in 2024 there will be around 2 million notices, making it the main vulnerable activity. This select club of those who move large amounts of cash includes both private and public institutions (development banks and Banxico).

Furthermore, the information from the payment system raises doubts about the demand for banknotes and coins and deserves answers from financial authorities. In the 75 municipalities with the highest demand (last quintile) for the use of ATMs, one transaction was made every 7 minutes and 40 seconds throughout 2023, the vast majority of which

are located in the south, center and central-north of the country. But the growth in demand for this notable set of ATMs is somewhat atypical; in reality, the amount operated in all ATMs nationwide is far from pre-lockdown levels (−13.9%). In other words, the operations that increase the money supply are not passing through these ATMs and are not low-value transactions (day-to-day transactions with an average of around 2,000 pesos).

The rise of criminal markets, among which extortion, smuggling of goods (mainly fossil fuels), human trafficking and drug trafficking stand out, coincides with the 2023–2024 federal electoral process, making the immersion of transnational organized crime in this process one of the greatest risks to Mexican democracy, given the inability of the Mexican state to confront it or its indifference or probable association, especially when it requires territorial control in some activities. For example, given the diversification and expansion of criminal markets, the profits from human trafficking may be very close to those from drug trafficking.

This state of vulnerability is largely due to the lack of funding sources to combat organized crime at the local level. The vast majority of municipalities in the

The rise of criminal markets, among which extortion, smuggling of goods (mainly fossil fuels), human trafficking and drug trafficking stand out, coincides with the 2023–2024 federal electoral process, making the immersion of transnational organized crime in this process one of the greatest risks to Mexican democracy.

country, many of which are the poorest (from Chiapas to Michoacan), depend on federal funding, mainly from Branch 33, which is intended to reduce poverty through infrastructure works. This has become an additional incentive for organized crime, which, in turn, capitalizes on the rigidity of funding sources.

At the same time, the incursion of organized crime coincides with a greater presence of development banks in the Mexican financial system and other financing mechanisms and strategies (presumed illegal) by the federal government. These include the expansion of consumer and housing credit through Fonacot and Infonavit, respectively, which could affect the financial health of these institutions. The lack of transparency and the discretion with which the public budget is exercised give rise to illegal campaign financing schemes, such as the one that occurred in the recall referendum. Added to this is the lack of knowledge among Mexicans about the source of funding for Morena's pre-campaign, which could be a severe blow to Mexican democracy.

It is also extremely concerning that there is a gap in the administrative records of foreign trade and those of Pemex, given that between October 2023 and February 2024, the accumulated discrepancy amounts to

52.5 billion pesos. This can have two implications: Pemex simulates foreign trade operations (with countries other than the United States) or introduces fossil fuels (gasoline and diesel) into the country illegally, meaning it is taking over the black fuel market (around 31.2% of market value) (fuel theft plus smuggling).

Finally, an emerging risk for the electoral process on election day is the increasing and more prolonged duration of blackouts caused by a lack of energy during periods of high demand, which are exacerbated by heatwaves, due to a lack of investment in electricity generation and distribution.



6. ELECTORAL VIOLENCE THE MUSCLE OF ORGANIZED CRIME

*This electoral
process has been
the most violent in
recent history*



6. ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

THE MUSCLE OF ORGANIZED CRIME

The respect for democracy has been one of the main banners under which this government has been promoted, sold and positioned. However, in reality, the scenario and the facts are quite different. The undeniable intervention of the federal executive in autonomous institutions, clientelism, early campaigning and violence before, during and after elections undermine the right to exercise a free vote and the authorities have been unable to provide a true counterbalance to this critical situation.

Electoral violence is a global phenomenon that has been present in very diverse countries over time because the struggle for power can frequently turn violent (Aguayo, *et al.*, 2024, p.11). This type of violence

is exercised by actors with political, economic, or territorial control interests, intending to influence the electoral process and outcome. In turn, two types of risk factors are identified that influence electoral violence: procedural and structural. The first refers to violence that occurs only during the electoral process, while the second is related to the environment in which the process takes place (Aguayo, *et al.*, 2024).

Thus, violent partisan entities and criminal violence are identified as the main factors for political violence in Mexico (Aguayo, *et al.*, 2024, p.12). Structural risk factors are the ones that most influence electoral violence in Mexico, a country where organized crime has been strengthened thanks to the corruption and pro-



tection of the governments in power. The violence exerted by organized crime —and violent partisan entities— has hindered the process toward a democratic country for more than three decades (Meltis, 2024).

In this context, access to the exercise of power through elections has driven candidates to compete through legal but also illegal mechanisms (Lizama, 2018). In addition to murders—which, along with enforced disappearances, are the most extreme forms of violence—electoral violence is also exercised through threats, vote-buying, ballot box theft, record tampering and voter coercion (Lizama, 2018). These practices not only have a direct impact on the election results. The use of electoral violence directly and

indirectly affects citizens living in permanently violent and insecure environments, as it creates an atmosphere of fear and distrust among citizens, which can lead to political apathy and reduced participation in the electoral process.

The lack of justice, combined with the presence of judges, magistrates, police officers and military personnel involved with organized crime, constitutes a substantial challenge to eradicating violence. This situation perpetuates a pernicious cycle, as the continuous strengthening of organized crime grants greater capacity to impose candidates and co-opt public officials, who, in turn, tolerate and perpetuate violence and its escalation. Therefore, as long as these condi-

Source: "Organizations and defenders against electoral violence in Puebla" en <https://ibero.mx/prensa/organizaciones-y-defensores-contra-la-violencia-electoral-en-puebla>

"Citizens guard a van that transported electoral material (EFE)" en <https://noticieros.televisa.com/ultimas-noticias/puebla-reporta-mayor-indice-denuncias-electorales/>

tions persist, the country will continue to face significant difficulties in the fight against violence and the promotion of the rule of law and, consequently, in the consolidation of a true and long-desired democracy.

6.1 GROUPS THAT EXERCISE ELECTORAL VIOLENCE TO GAIN POLITICAL CONTROL

According to experts, violent partisan entities and organized crime are the main perpetrators of electoral violence in Mexico (Aguayo, *et al.*, 2024). The ultimate goal is to influence the election process and results, either by imposing the victory of a candidate who represents political and territorial control interests (Aguayo, *et al.*, 2024) or by removing or obstructing candidates who are not convenient for them (Animal Politico, Data Civica, Mexico Evalua, 2024).

Based on information from Data Civica, records of electoral violence acts from December 29, 2017, to March 19, 2024, attribute these acts to armed groups and armed commands (68.9%). However, there is no specific identification of these groups (see graph 15). Given the complexity of conducting a thorough investigation for each case, the Votar entre Balas project by Data Civica relies on journalistic sources,

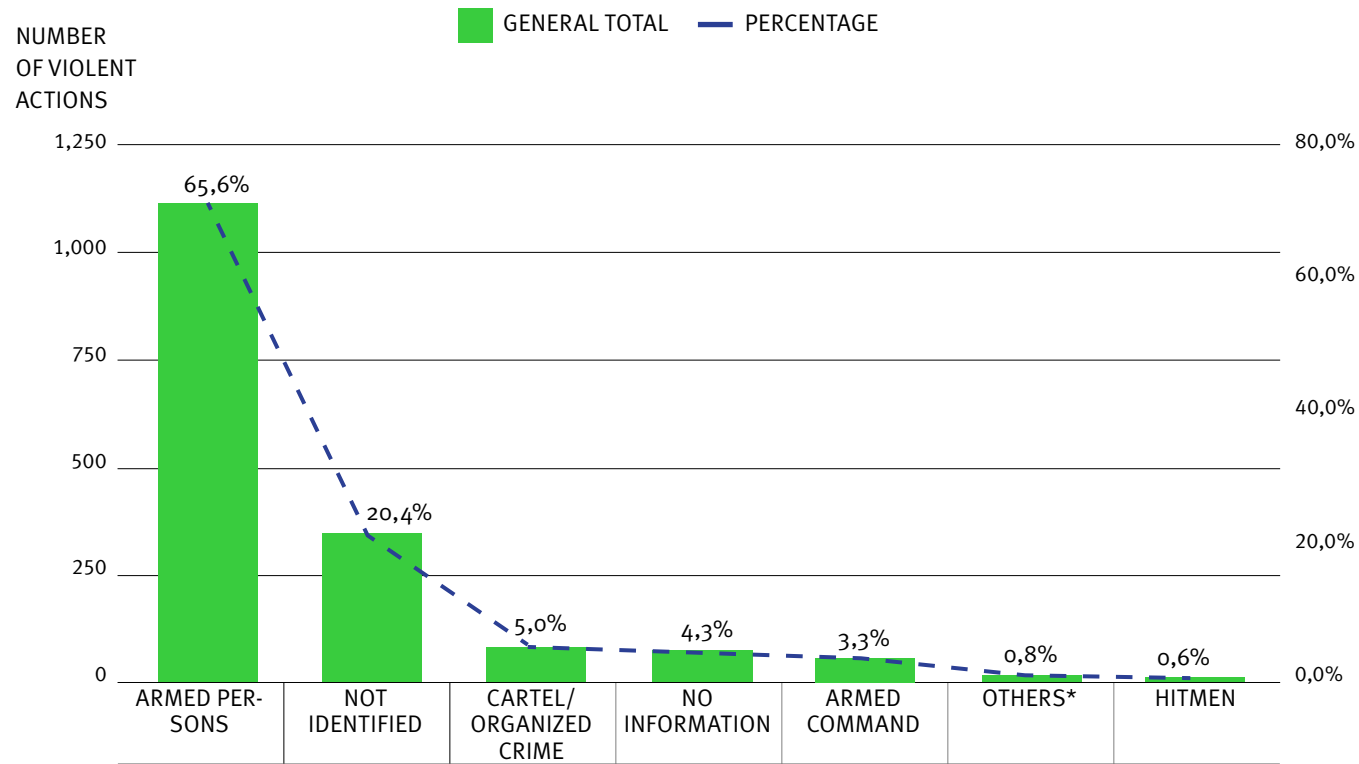
which only identify 9.5% of the perpetrators in violent events. Thus, only 5% of violent actions have been identified as originating from organized crime.

The "Votar entre Balas" project (Vote among bullets project) fills a gap that the current government has failed to cover: having timely statistics on political-electoral violence. Therefore, the above graphs indicate a lack of institutional capacity or coercive mechanisms by the State to correctly identify and attribute violent acts to their perpetrators (Graph 15).

It is important to note that the lack of specific identification of those responsible for these actions may suggest deficiencies in security and justice systems, which could compromise the effectiveness of investigations and the enforcement of the law in cases of electoral violence. However, the significant operational strain and the decline in institutional capacities of both systems have further hindered the ability to collect and generate a single, clean and reliable set of information.

Furthermore, political and electoral violence has affected a number of officials at all three levels of government, including civil protection officers, agents of the Attorney General's Office, municipal and state police officers, directors of various municipal depart-

**GRAPH 15. NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF VIOLENT ACTIONS,
ACCORDING TO TYPE OF AGGRESSOR (2018 – 2024*)**



Note: * Others include the items: Committee for the Defense of Indigenous Peoples; Community members of Capacuaro; New People; Criminal leader; and PRD Militants** With cut-off date of March 19, 2024

Source: In-house elaboration with data from Data Civica.

ments, field officials of state governments, staff from various agencies such as IMSS, CFE and the Ministry of Public Security, as well as family members, among others. Nevertheless, nearly half of the victims (48%) were public officials, most of whom were categorized as police officers (see Graph 16).

It is worth noting that electoral violence is not exclusively directed at political actors but also directly impacts journalists, members of churches, local authorities and many other individuals who shape and give meaning to a democratic system (Bravo, n.d.). In the last ten years, 29 members of the church have been killed in Mexico, almost a third of whom were murdered during this administration (Villegas, 2022). Additionally, during the same period, 86 journalists have been executed, with 42 of these murders occurring in the last six years, equivalent to an average of seven journalists killed annually since 2019 (Article 19) (see Graph 17).

In line with this, the assassination of political figures and public officials has increased significantly in recent years. The civil organization Data Civica, through its project Voting Among Bullets, has monitored violent actions since December 2017. Thus, from 2018 to 2023, the number of assassinations of political actors

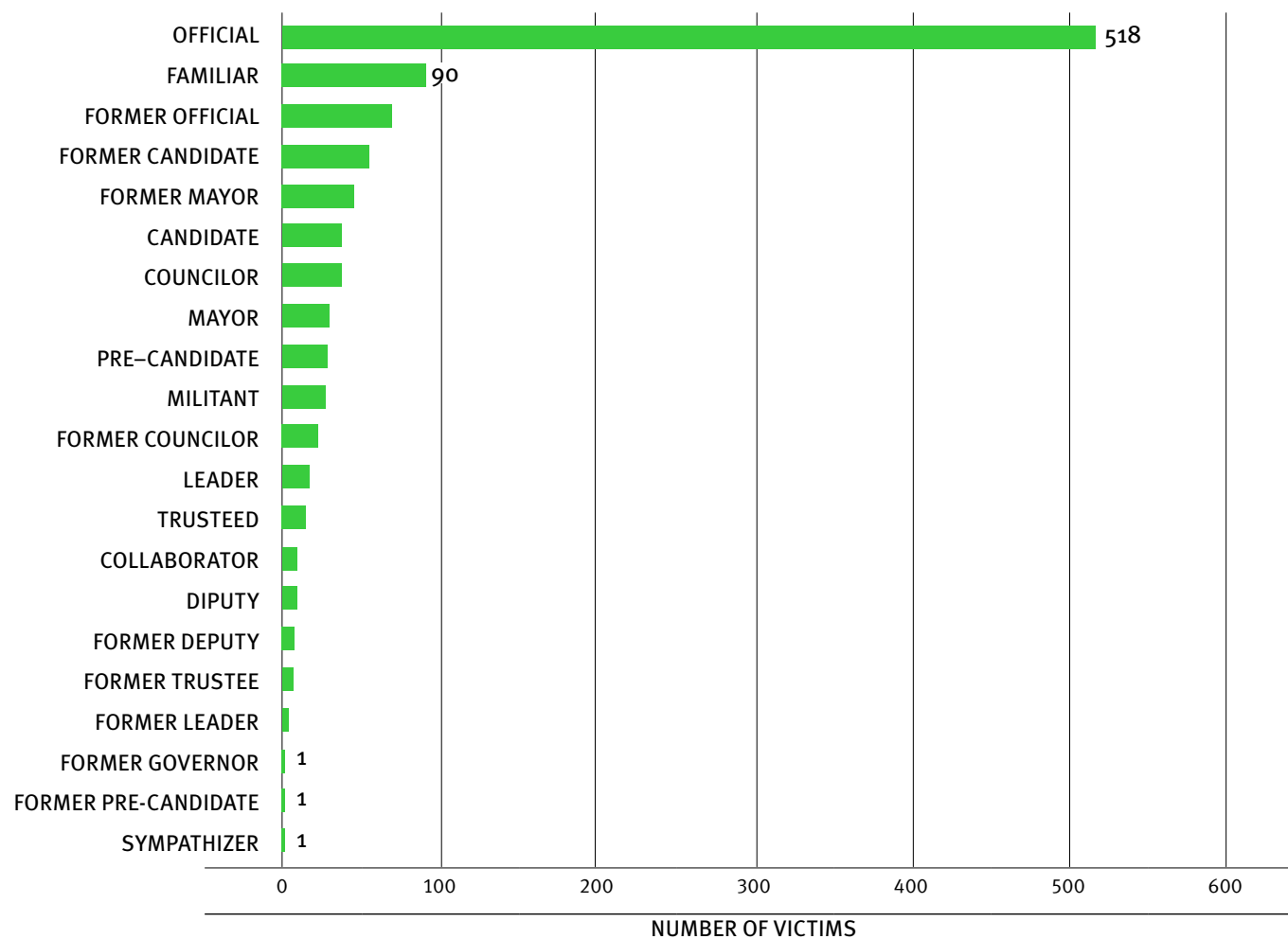


Images: Murdered candidates: Rene Tovar, candidate for mayor for Cazones, Ver. at <https://formato7.com/2021/06/07/en-cazones-remigio-tovar-asesinado-el-viernes-gana-con-mas-de-5-mil-votos/>;

Noe Ramos, candidate for mayor for Ciudad Mante, Tamps. at <https://www.elsoldelcentro.com.mx/elecciones-2024/asesinan-al-candidato-del-pan-a-la-alcaldia-de-ciudad-mante-tamaulipas-11786497.html>;

Gisela Gaytan, candidate for mayor for Celaya, Gto. at <https://www.milenio.com/politica/elecciones/cual-fue-la-estrategia-de-seguridad-presentada-por-gisela-gaytan>;

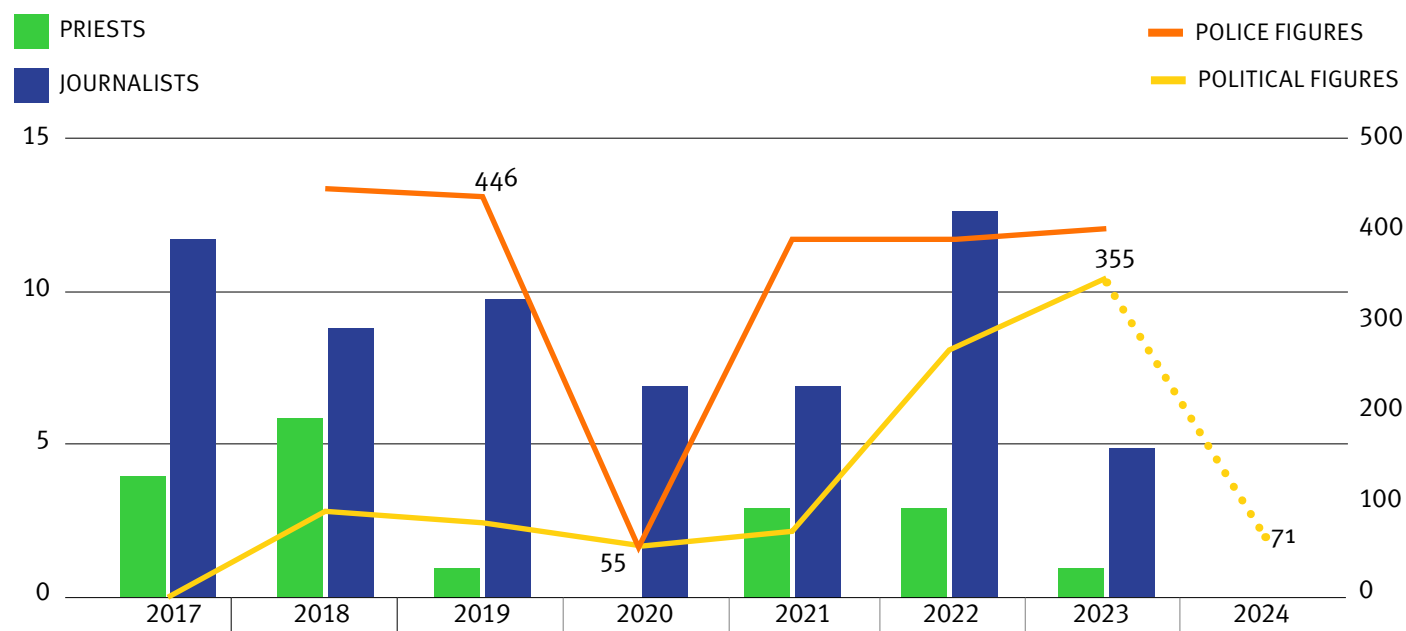
GRAPH 16. NUMBER OF MURDERS, BY POSITION OF THE VICTIM (2018–2024*)



Source: In-house elaboration with information from Data Cívica.

Note: With cut-off date of March 19, 2024

GRAPH 17. NUMBER OF MURDERS, BY TYPE OF OCCUPATION
(2017–2023)



Source: in-house elaboration with data from Artículo 19 (s.f.); Zenit (2022); Data Civica (s.f.); Causa en Comun (s.f.).

From 2018 to 2023, the number of assassinations of political actors rose by 377.7%

From 94 murders in 2018 to 355 in 2023, almost one per day.

rose by 377.7%, increasing from 94 murders in 2018 to 355 in 2023, almost one murder per day (Graph 17).

Finally, based on the Register of Murdered Police Officers (Causa en Comun, n.d.), except for 2020 (likely due to issues related to the health emergency), every year since 2018 has been extremely violent for police officers, with over 400 officers killed annually. These

figures are even higher than the combined total of murdered journalists, priests and political actors. However, little is said about it. Who kills them? Why are they killed? Is it just one criminal entity playing a leading role, or are there several?

6.2 THE ROLE OF ORGANIZED CRIME IN ELECTORAL CONTROL

During the period of the hegemonic party regime, organized crime enjoyed state protection. However, the alternation of political power created uncertainty for the cartels and affected the protection they once received from the state. Additionally, military groups operating within security institutions transitioned to civilian police forces. "In this way, although electoral democracy was established in Mexico in 2000, security and justice institutions did not undergo transformation" (Meltis, 2024). This time lag has meant that progress is dictated by the slowest actors—those institutions and organizations that have failed to achieve operational maturity or robustness and lack



Image: "Jesuits Joaquin Mora, 80 years old, and Javier Campos, 79 years old, were murdered on June 20, 2022". Photo: Sociedad de Jesus at <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/c5124jz06y00>

the basic tools and resources to adapt to new demands nationwide.

With the arrival of former President Felipe Calderon and his initiative to combat organized crime, known as the "War on Drugs," levels of violence experienced an unprecedented increase (Meltis, 2024). From then on, violence not only intensified in certain regions of the country but also solidified areas and control by organized crime and drug trafficking. Although the escalation of violence initially occurred during Calderon's administration, subsequent governments have failed to implement effective and decisive strategies to combat organized crime, plunging the country into a zone tainted by extortion, crime, protection rackets, murders and threats.

In an interview conducted by Carlos Bravo Regidor with Sandra Ley and Guillermo Trejo, organized crime needs the state to weave protective networks where information is exchanged and impunity prevails, a concept they refer to as the "gray zone of criminality" (Bravo, n.d.). This analytical perspective differs from that of other researchers who argue that the strengthening of organized crime is inversely proportional to the strengthening of the state. However, for Ley and Trejo, the gray zone of criminality exists when there is complicity between organized crime and the state.

This complicity occurs when security forces (agents, police officers, armed forces, etc.) lack sufficient incentives to "fight criminals on equal terms" (Bravo, n.d.) and begin collaborating with criminals, whose goal in elections is to influence the victory of candidates colluding with them or who are part of their network. In return, they gain impunity for their criminal acts, as well as political and territorial control. In many areas of the country, this complicity becomes evident when examining the record of reported criminal acts and the little or no response from the relevant authorities.

6.3 ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN MEXICO: THREATS, DISAPPEARANCES AND DEATHS

As previously mentioned, electoral violence in Mexico has been present for more than three decades. However, in recent years, it has reached unprecedented levels. According to information from the Senate of the Republic (2021), the 2021 electoral process recorded the highest number of violent actions against political actors. From the start of the 2021 electoral process until election day, when 20,415 local and federal positions were contested, violent actions occurred (Aguayo, *et al.*, 2024).

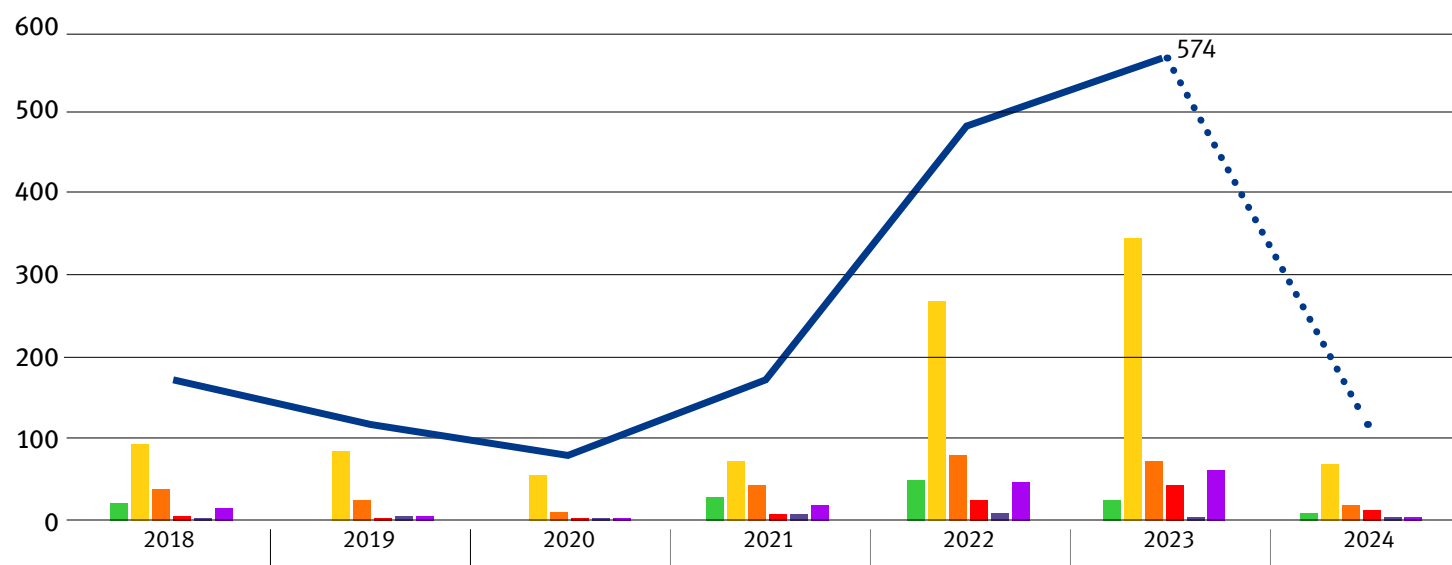
For this year's 2024 election, approximately 98 million people are expected to vote, as 20,286 positions of popular election will be contested (INE, 2023), including the Presidency of the Republic and the highest number of municipal presidencies in history (Integralia, 2024). It is worth noting that holding municipal elections is a high-risk factor for organized crime intervention in these processes, as mayors serve as the appropriate conduit for providing greater impunity at the local level, granting the necessary freedom to continue criminal activities (Integralia, 2024).

Although 2021 was one of the most violent electoral processes, subsequent years have far surpassed the violence of that period (see Graph 18). A particularly alarming fact is that the normalization of violence, both for society and the state, has made the murders of political actors and citizens in general just another statistic. In this regard, from 2021 to 2022, the number of murders of political actors increased by 375%, meaning 201 more people were killed than in 2021. This Graph is, at the moment, not only lamentable but also condemnable and yet it continues to rise as the process draws nearer (Graph 18).

From January 1 to March 19, 2024, just two and a half months into the year, the violence figures almost

**GRAPH 18. NUMBER OF VIOLENT ACTIONS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL PER YEAR,
ACCORDING TO TYPE OF ACTION**

YEAR	THREAT	MURDER	ATTACK	ATTEMPT	DISAPPEARANCE	KIDNAPPING	TOTAL
2018	20	94	38	6	1	12	171
2024	7	71	17	10	3	5	113



Source: In-house elaboration with data from Artículo 19 (s.f.); Zenit (2022); Data Civica (s.f.); Causa en Comun (s.f.).

match those of all of 2018. Before the end of the first quarter of 2024, 71 political actors have been killed and attacks and disappearances have increased, with 10 attacks (4 more than in 2018) and 3 disappearances (2 more than in 2018). Similarly, one month before the start of the 2021 electoral process (August), a rise in violence is observed. After that, the number of violent actions fluctuates between 2 and 20 (see Graph 19). However, in May, one month before the election day, it spiked to 52; of these, 8 were murders, 20 armed attacks, 17 threats, 4 attacks and 3 kidnappings.

On the other hand, during the 2023–2024 electoral process, 300 violent actions have been recorded. October 2023 and February 2024 show the highest peaks. In October, one month after the start of the electoral process and in February, the inter-campaign period, during which parties resolve internal differences to select candidates (Central electoral, n.d.). During this same period, 172 people have been killed, 18 of whom were candidates or pre-candidates in the current electoral process.

6.3.1 MAPPING VIOLENCE IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES

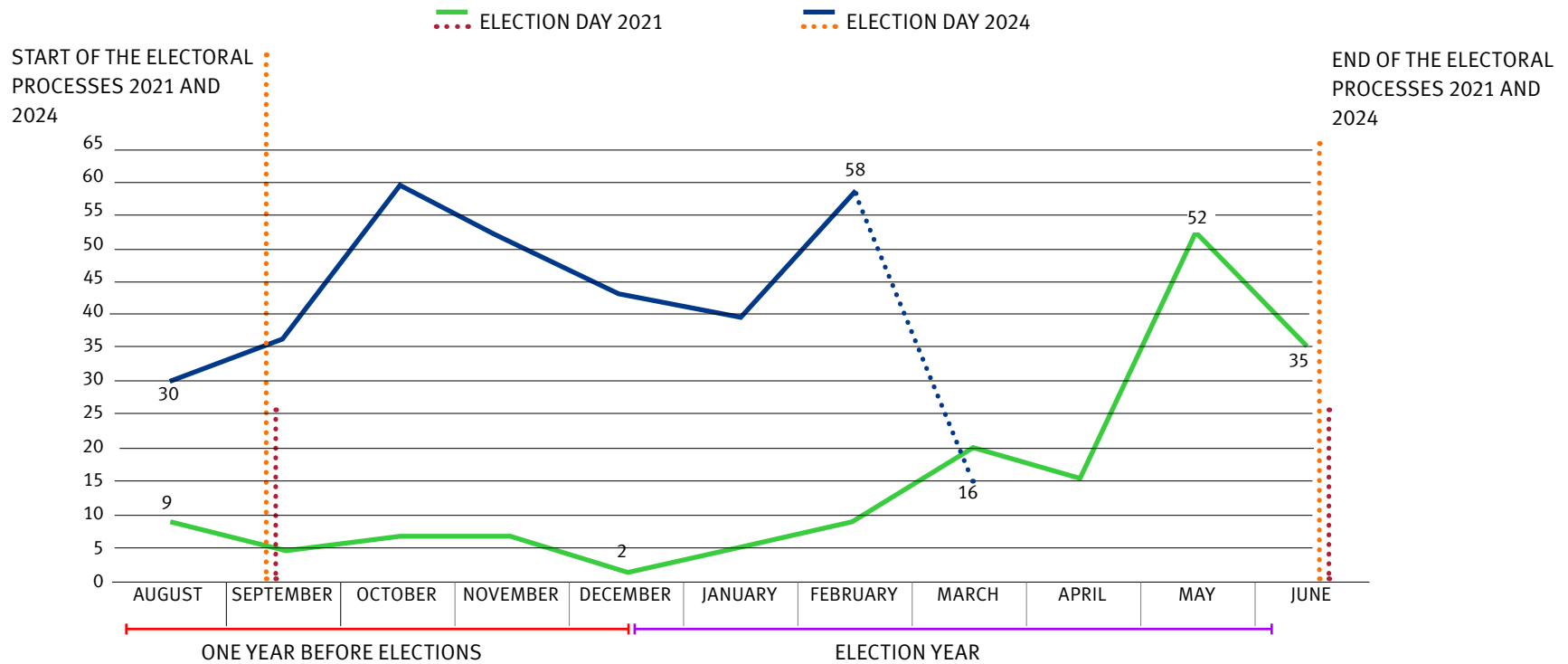
Based on the analysis of Data Civica information, violence at the state level behaves differently in the years 2018, 2021 and 2024. While there are states like Baja California Sur, Yucatan, Campeche and Durango where political violence is either nonexistent or minimal, others such as Oaxaca, Veracruz, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Guerrero and Chiapas have experienced recurrent violence during electoral years.

In 2018, there were 171 attacks in 22 states of the Mexican Republic, with 55% of them being murders. Oaxaca was the state with the most violence, recording 28 incidents (see Map 1), followed by Guerrero and Puebla, with 19 and 18 events, respectively.

By 2021, Veracruz became the state with the most violent actions (see Map 1), totaling 31, followed by Jalisco with 18 and Guanajuato with 14 actions. In that year, 178 violent events were recorded in 24 entities, 41% of which were murders. So far in 2024 (until March 19), 113 attacks have been recorded in 20 states. Of these, 63% resulted in murders, with Guanajuato, Guerrero and Chiapas being the states where political violence has impacted more than the other 17 states, with 22, 18 and 14 violent incidents, respectively.

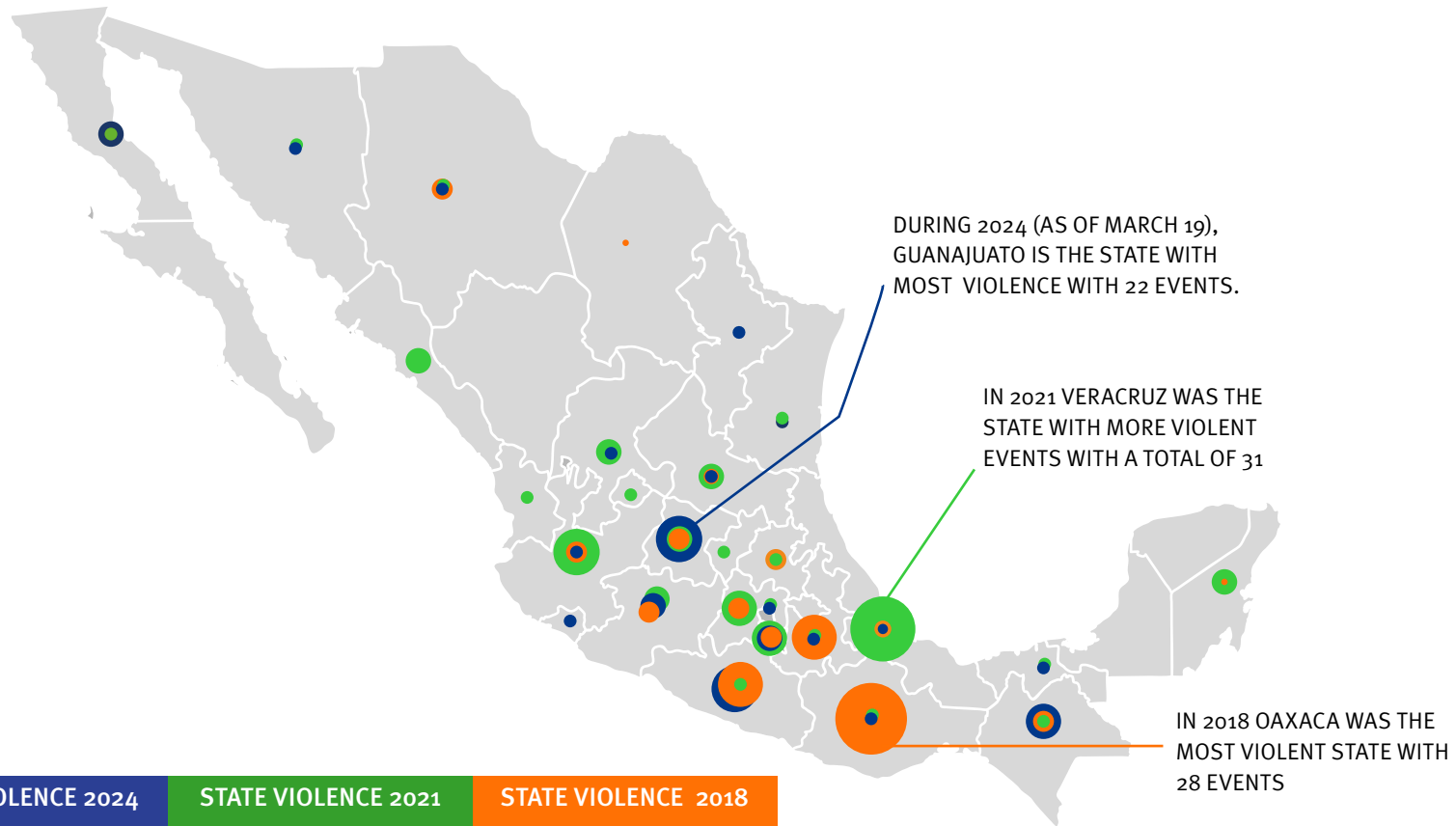
In the 2023–2024 electoral process, 300 violent actions have been recorded.

GRAPH 19. NUMBER OF VIOLENT ACTIONS NATIONWIDE
DURING THE 2021 AND 2024 ELECTORAL PERIODS



Source: In-house elaboration with information from Data Civica; General Council, (2023); Segob, (2020).

MAP 1. NUMBER OF VIOLENT EVENTS BY STATE (2018, 2021 AND 2024*)



STATE VIOLENCE 2024		STATE VIOLENCE 2021		STATE VIOLENCE 2018	
1-5		1-5		1-5	
5-10		5-10		5-10	
10-15		10-15		10-15	
15-20		15-20		15-20	
				20-25	
				25-28	

Note: 2024 considers until March 19.

Source: In-house elaboration with information from Data Civica

In general, it is observed that violence has concentrated in the south-central region of the country in the years 2018, 2021 and 2024. Starting in 2024, some states where political violence had not been recorded began to show signs of violence, such as Nuevo Leon and Colima. In others, where violence already existed, it increased, including Baja California, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Chiapas, Tabasco, Sonora, Tamaulipas and Mexico City. In exceptional cases like Oaxaca, violence decreased from 2018 to 2024. Although the levels of violence this year have risen alarmingly, it is necessary to complete the electoral process to conduct a comparative analysis.

6.4 THE MUNICIPALITY: THE NEST OF EVIL

In the research conducted by Aguayo, 2024; Integralia, 2024; Badillo, 2024; Animal Politico, Data Civica & Mexico Evalua, 2024, it is asserted that political violence is concentrated in municipalities.

Criminal groups primarily target municipal governments to establish their authority, as this allows them access to valuable resources (such as police collaboration) to: i) operate with complete impunity, ii) diversify their activities and iii) neutralize their rivals. (Integralia, 2024).

According to Animal Politico *et al.* (2024), attacks by organized crime on political actors are more frequent in territories where there are conflicts between different criminal groups or political fragmentation. Consequently, organized crime has managed to gain

much deeper control processes in the municipalities that it seeks to dominate: threats to mayors demanding their informal protection and a percentage of their budgets” (Animal Politico et al., 2024).

This highlights the cost of a fragile and corrupt democracy, where a large portion of the population, uninvolved in electoral processes and organized crime, pays a very high price for the consequences of this reality.

From 2018 to 2024, more than 70% of the annual records of violence belonged to municipal-level positions (see Graph 20). This demonstrates the focus of violence at the local level, as this is how organized crime operates, attempting to control from the smallest scale (Animal Politico *et al.*, 2024).

In the first quarter of 2024 (from January 1 to April 1), there have been 16 attacks on pre-candidates and candidates for mayoral positions. Of these, 11 were murders, 2 were armed attacks and 3 were assassination attempts (see Table 15). Chiapas, Guerrero, Jalisco

The struggle for territory among different criminal groups has led to an increase in electoral political violence.

co and Michoacan account for 72.7% of the murders, with two murders each.

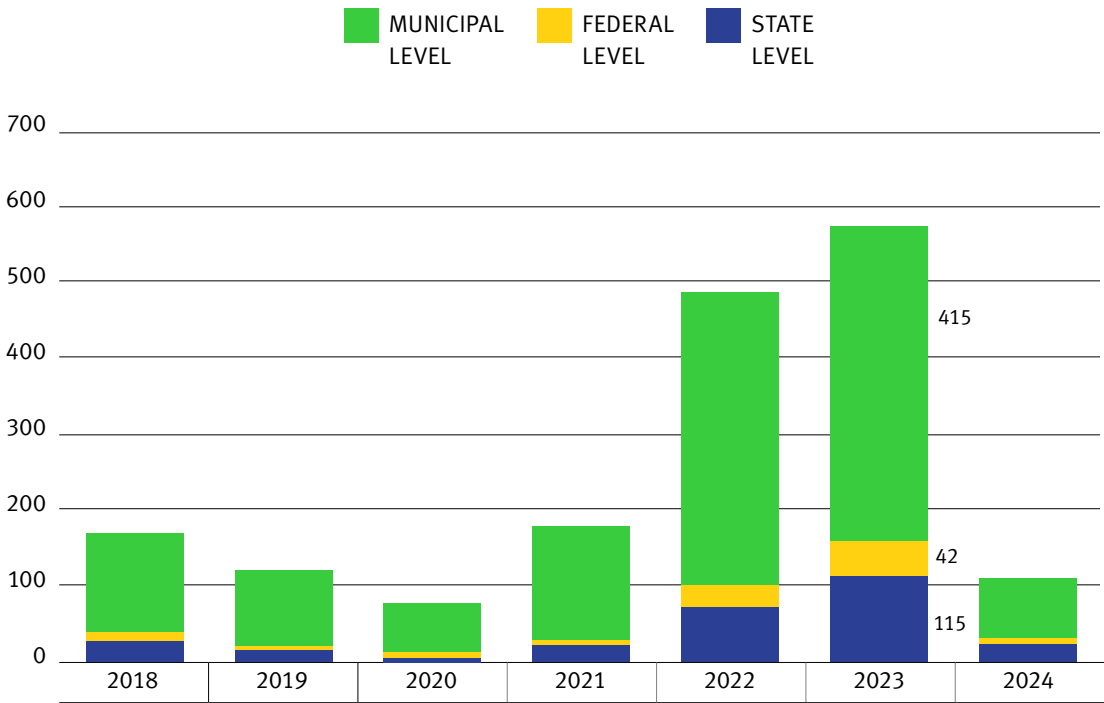
It is important to note that in 12 of the 16 analyzed cases (75%), the political parties of the victims differ from the party to which the incumbent mayor belongs (see Table 15). Similarly, when comparing the parties of the mayor and the governor, it is observed that in 10 of the 16 cases (62.5%), the parties at the municipal and state levels are opposed. This indicates that the attackers are often individuals and political forces opposed to the governor, highlighting political fragmentation in these municipalities.

Despite the extreme violence in some municipalities, the security protocol for candidates issued by the INE does not include municipal victims, who are the ones most frequently targeted (Animal Politico *et al.*, 2024).

6.4.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF TERRITORIAL AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Organized crime has evolved over the years. It has shifted from solely engaging in drug trafficking to encompassing other sectors of illegality, such as arms trafficking, human smuggling, kidnappings, extor-tions and now even operating illicitly through strategic positions within the government (MPICD, 2021).

GRAPH 20. NUMBER OF VIOLENT EVENTS, BY LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT (2018 – 2024)



Source: In-house elaboration with information from Data Civica
Note: 2024 considers until March 19.

TABLE 15. CANDIDATES AND PRE-CANDIDATES FOR MAYOR, VICTIMS OF SOME TYPE OF AGGRESSION 1/2
(JANUARY 1–MARCH 19, 2024)

NAME OF THE VICTIM	TYPE OF EVENT	VICTIM'S POSITION	VICTIM'S PARTY	CURRENT GOVERNMENT PARTY (MUNICIPAL)	CURRENT GOVERNMENT PARTY (STATE)	STATE	MUNICIPALITY
David Ray Gonzalez Moreno	Murder	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	PAN	Morena	Morena	Chiapas	Suchiate
Sergio Hueso	Murder	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	MC	Morena	Morena	Colima	Armeria
Jaime Vera Alaniz	Murder	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	PVEM	Morena	MC	Jalisco	Mascota
Porfirio Hernandez Aparicio	Armed Attack	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	Morena	PES	Morena	Puebla	Jalpan
Erick Catalan Rendon	Armed Attack	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	Morena	PRI-PRD	Morena	Guerrero	Chilpancingo
Miguel Angel Zavala Reyes	Murder	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	Morena	PRI-PRD	Morena	Michoacan	Maravatio
Armando Perez Luna	Murder	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	PAN	PRI-PRD	Morena	Michoacan	Maravatio
Alfredo Gonzalez Diaz	Murder	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	PT	Morena	Morena	Guerrero	Atoyac de Alvarez
Gabriel Orantes Villatoro	Attempt	Candidate for Mayor	Morena	PVEM	Morena	Chiapas	San Fernando
Corina Esther Garza Arreola	Attempt	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	PVEM	PRI	Morena	Tamaulipas	Jimenez
Tomas Morales Patron	Murder	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	Morena	PRI-PVEM	Morena	Guerrero	Chilapa de Alvarez
Diego Perez Mendez	Murder	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	PRI	PRI	Morena	Chiapas	San Juan Cancuc
Humberto Amezcua	Murder	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	PAN	PRI-PAN-PRD	MC	Jalisco	Pihuamo

TABLE 15. CANDIDATES AND PRE-CANDIDATES FOR MAYOR, VICTIMS OF SOME TYPE OF AGGRESSION 2/2 (JANUARY 1 – MARCH 19, 2024)							
NAME OF THE VICTIM	TYPE OF EVENT	VICTIM'S POSITION	VICTIM'S PARTY	CURRENT GOVERNMENT PARTY (MUNICIPAL)	CURRENT GOVERNMENT PARTY (STATE)	STATE	MUNICIPALITY
Jaime Gonzalez Perez	Murder	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	Morena	Morena	Morena	Puebla	Acatzingo
Crispin Agustin Mendoza	Attempt	Pre-Candidate for Mayor	Partido del Bienestar	PRD	Morena	Guerrero	Alcozauca de Guerrero
Bertha Gisela Gaytan Gutierrez	Murder	Candidate for Mayor	Morena	PAN	PAN	Guanajuato	Celaya

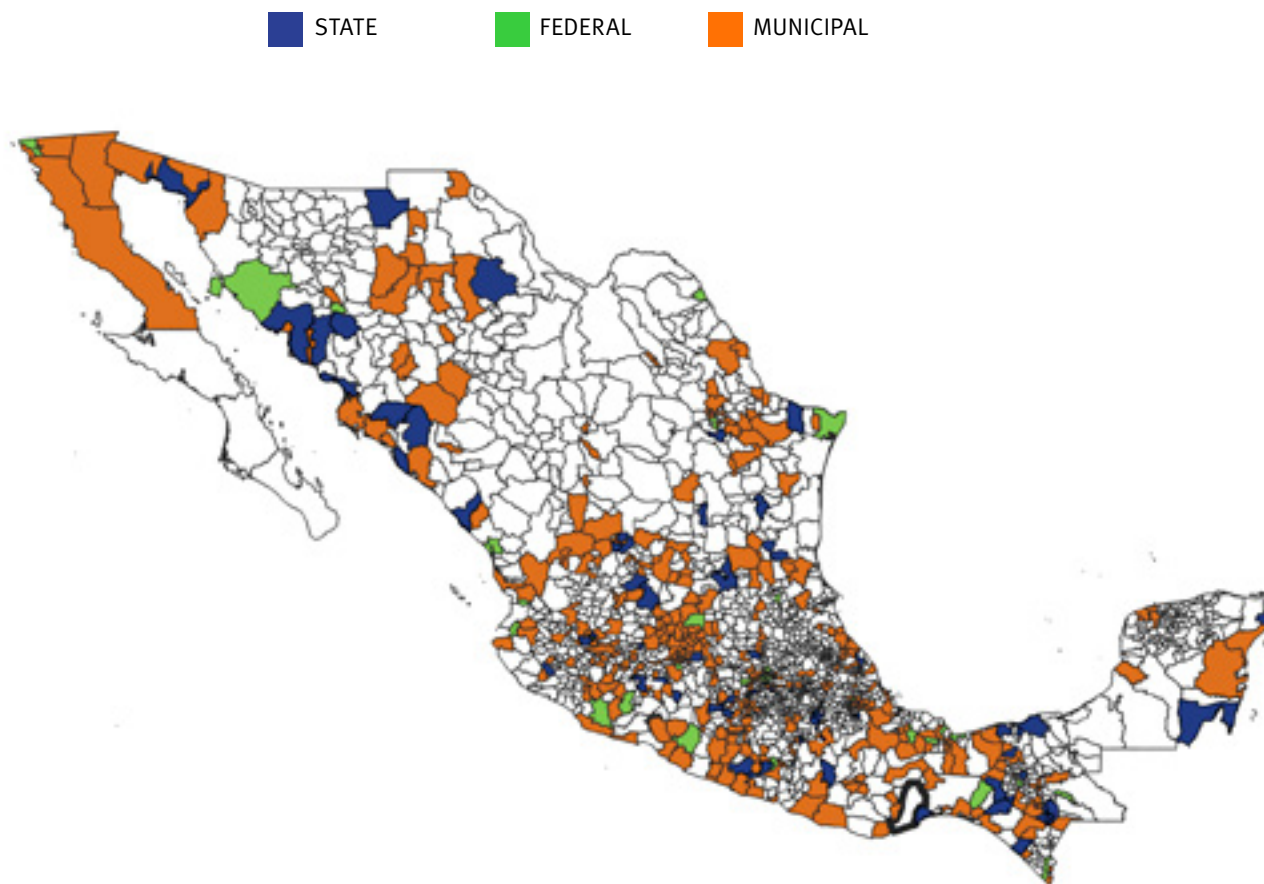
Source: In-house elaboration with data from Data Civica; INE s.f.; Local news.

Territorial control has become a fundamental power for organized crime, as it allows them to carry out these illicit activities with complete impunity. Two critical elements for achieving territorial control are corruption and violence (Cortes, 2021). Once a criminal group has established its dominance over a territory using methods such as fear, violence and corruption, they create an environment of impunity that enables them to conduct the trafficking of any type of illicit goods (Cortes, 2021). To achieve territorial control, organized crime's strategy has been to start with the smallest territories: localities or municipalities (Animal Politico *et al.*, 2024).

The struggle for territory among different criminal groups has led to an increase in electoral political violence. From 2018 to 2024, acts of violence against political actors at the municipal level have spread across the country, covering new territories each year (see Map 2). This indicates a lack of territorial control by the State, as neither the Armed Forces nor the police forces are adequately trained to combat organized crime (Guerrero, 2023).

Likewise, in certain areas of states such as Jalisco, Durango, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Sonora, Guerrero, Michoacan and Guanajuato, there is clear evidence of the presence of organized crime in terms of territorial control (see Table 16).

MAP 2. DISTRIBUTION OF VIOLENT ACTIONS BY GOVERNMENT LEVEL OF THE VICTIM
2018–MARCH 2024



Note: 2024 considers until March 19.

Source: In-house elaboration with information from Data Cívica.

Territorial control by organized crime is a serious affront to the fundamental rights of people living in those areas. The presence of criminal groups not only threatens the lives and freedom of residents but also undermines other basic rights, such as access to justice, education, health and employment:

Criminal control of the territory is manifested in this scenario through the existence of informal checkpoints, widespread extortion (known as 'cobro de piso'), the growth of drug dealing, the seizure of all kinds of properties, the increase in disappearances of people and the proliferation of clandestine graves (Guerrero, 2023).

Furthermore, the forced displacement of more than 274,000 people (INEGI, 2020a) between 2015 and 2020 due to criminal insecurity and violence reflects the magnitude of the negative impact these phenomena have on people's quality of life. The constant fear and sense of vulnerability create an environment of hopelessness and distrust, preventing communities from thriving and developing properly.

TABLE 16. PLACES WITH PRESENCE OF TERRITORIAL CONTROL BY ORGANIZED CRIME, ACCORDING TO CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION	
PLACE	GROUP(S) CONTROLLER(S)
Jalisco highlands	CJNG
Border mountain range between Durango and Sinaloa	Related groups to Cartel de Sinaloa
Wooded area between Chihuahua and Sonora	La Linea and the Cartel de Sinaloa
Tierra Caliente in the border of Guerrero and Michoacan	CJNG, La Nueva Familia Michoacana, Carteles Unidos
Various segments of the corridor in Guanajuato (Apaseo el Grande, Celaya, Cortazar, Salvatierra, Salamanca, Irapuato)	CJNG, Cartel Santa Rosa de Lima

Source: In-house elaboration with information from Guerrero, 2023.

6.4.2 EXTORTION AND CORRUPT POLICE

For several years now, news about extortion in hundreds of municipalities across the country has begun to gain prominence, as this type of extortion has become increasingly common. The impact of this situation has been significant for the population of the affected cities or towns, as it has created an environment in which reporting criminal activities is hindered by fear of reprisals. This state of widespread fear has resulted in a notable inhibition of citizen participation in crime reporting, as residents fear for their safety and that of their families.

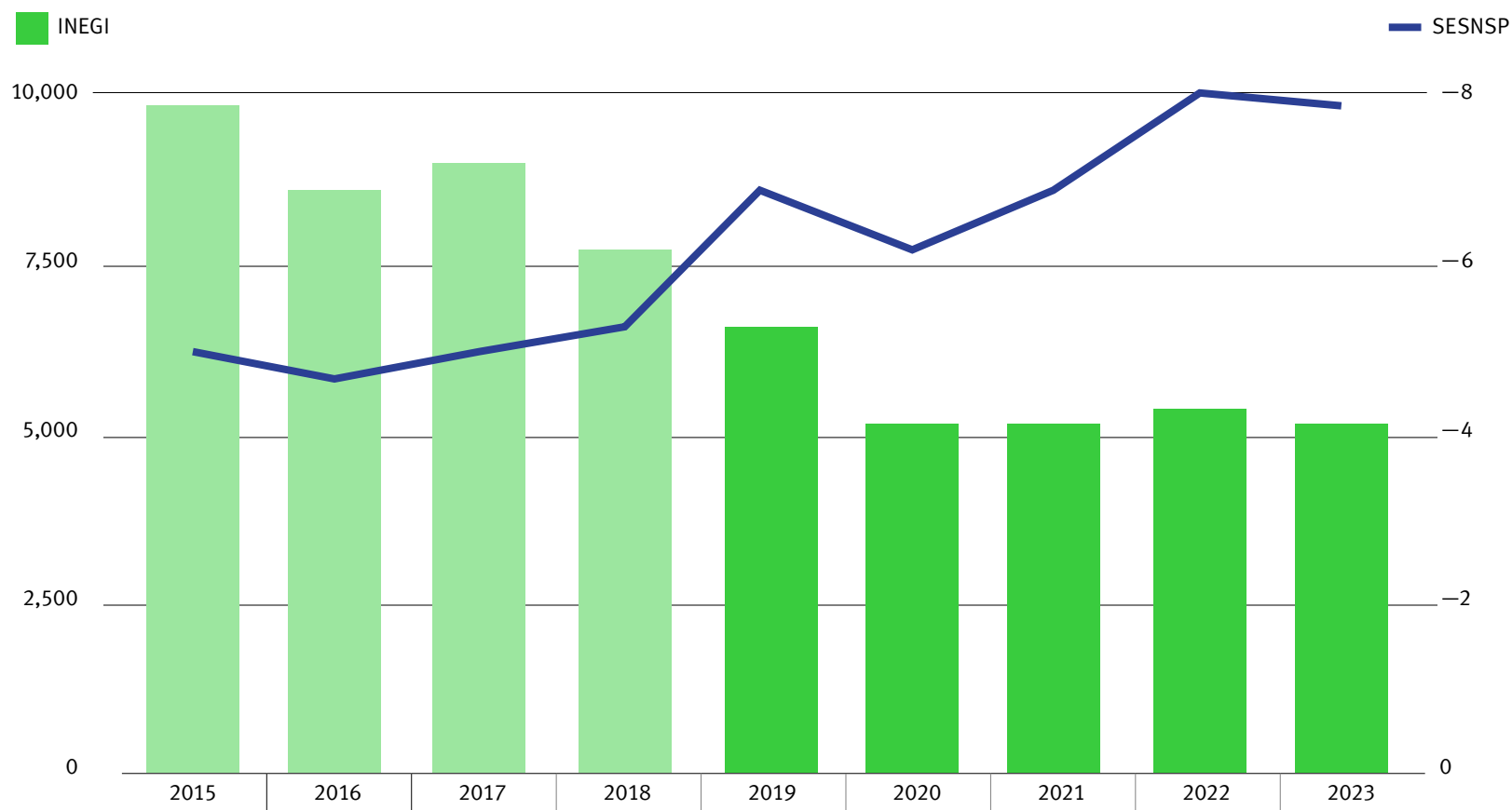
According to the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, extortion has been on the rise in recent years (2015–2024), reaching its highest graph in 2022, with 10,343 extortion crimes (Graph 21). However, this graph can be misleading, as it only represents reported crimes.

On the other hand, INEGI, through the National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Security (ENVIPE), presents much higher figures for extortion, reaching its highest figure in 2015, with 9,850 crimes per one hundred thousand inhabitants. It is important to note that this latter figure is a rate per one hundred thousand inhabitants and includes individuals



Source: "Members of the organized crime burn shops and vehicles in Michoacán" at <https://www.elsiglodetorreon.com.mx/noticia/2023/miembros-del-crimen-organizado-incendian-tiendas-y-vehiculos-en-michoacan.html>

GRAPH 21. CRIME INCIDENCE RATE PER HUNDRED THOUSAND INHABITANTS DUE TO EXTORTION



Source: In-house elaboration with data from INEGI, 2023; Conapo (s.f.); SESNSP (s.f.).

who have been victims of criminal acts, regardless of whether they report them.

Based on the above, the graphs between INEGI and SESNSP differ significantly when both figures are converted into rates per 100,000 inhabitants. For example, in 2015, the Secretariat reported 4.9 extortion crimes per 100,000 inhabitants², while INEGI reported a rate of 9,850 crimes for the same year. This highlights that, despite the high number of extortion crimes, most victims do not report them, for reasons already mentioned. Additionally, it demonstrates a concerning lack of response from the authorities responsible for public security. Despite the few complaints filed, the general perception is that police actions are neither effective nor adequate to address the criminal problem in these municipalities.

In this regard, the citizen complaints received by the institution responsible for public security in 2020 (INEGI, 2021) amounted to 16,615, of which 69% were concentrated in five states: Mexico, Coahuila, Oaxaca, Morelos and Guanajuato (Table 17). By 2022, the number of complaints decreased to 12,226 and although the State of Mexico saw a reduction in its figures, it

² Rate calculated based on Conapo population projections.

TABLE 17. STATES WITH MORE THAN 3% OF CITIZEN PUBLIC SAFETY COMPLAINTS COMPARED TO THE NATIONAL TOTAL

	2020	2022
NATIONAL TOTAL	16,615	12,226
STATE PERCENTAGE		
State of Mexico	35.6%	28.4%
Coahuila	15.7%	1.1%
Oaxaca	6.1%	0.7%
Morelos	5.8%	8.2%
Guanajuato	5.6%	10.1%
Queretaro	3.3%	8.2%
Quintana Roo	3.3%	4.2%
Jalisco	3.2%	6.6%
Aguascalientes	2.7%	2.7%
Nuevo Leon	2.2%	8.0%
Chihuahua	2.1%	6.9%
Puebla	1.9%	3.1%

Source: In-house elaboration with data from INEGI, 2021; 2023a.

remained in first place, followed by Guanajuato, Querétaro, Morelos and Nuevo Leon (INEGI, 2023a).

At the same time, the collusion of public security elements with crime undermines efforts to combat crime and erodes any progress made in the fight against crime. During 2020, 328 municipal public security institutions filed complaints with the Public Prosecutor's Office against 1,496 of their public employees for the alleged commission of a crime (INEGI, 2023b). By 2022, 127 institutions reported 1,246 public servants for the presumed commission of some crime (INEGI 2024).

Victims of these criminal acts find themselves in an especially vulnerable position, facing not only the threat of violence perpetrated by criminals but also the possibility that those they turn to for protection may be involved in the same criminal activity.

CONCLUSIONS

Electoral violence in Mexico, mainly perpetrated by violent partisan entities and organized crime, seeks to influence election results, favoring certain candidates while obstructing others. Although most violent acts are attributed to unidentified armed groups, only a small proportion are directly related to organized crime. This suggests a lack of institutional capacity to identify those responsible and reveals deficiencies in security and justice systems, compromising the effectiveness of investigations and law enforcement.

Electoral violence is rooted in structural factors grounded in corruption and the strengthening of organized crime. The state's inability to effectively combat organized crime and ensure justice undermines citizens' rights. Furthermore, this type of violence affects not only political actors but also journalists, members of churches, public officials and police officers, whose number of murders has increased significantly in recent years. Despite this, little is said about violence against police officers, whose annual death toll far exceeds those of journalists, priests and political actors. The complicity between organized crime and the state, known as the "gray zone of criminality," often arises due to a



lack of incentives to confront criminals, resulting in collaboration between security elements and criminal groups. This complicity translates into impunity, political and territorial control and is reflected in the limited response from authorities to criminal acts.

The alarming increase in electoral violence in Mexico in recent years has reached unprecedented levels. During the 2021 electoral process, the highest number of violent actions against political actors was recorded, marking a critical point in the country's electoral history. Now, in 2024, around 98 million voters are expected to participate, with 20,286 elected positions being contested, including the Presidency of the Republic and the highest number of municipal presidencies. It is important to emphasize that the holding of municipal elections represents a particularly high risk for the intervention of organized crime, which seeks to use mayors as a channel to obtain impunity at the local level and perpetuate their criminal activities. Although 2021 was considered one of the most violent electoral processes, subsequent years have far surpassed that level of violence. From 2021 to 2022, the number of murders of political actors increased by 375%, a trend that unfortunately continues to rise as the current election day approaches.



Source: "Mexico disarm the local police and is replaced by the military; will this stop violence? at <https://www.latimes.com/espanol/mexico/la-es-mexico-desarma-a-la-policia-local-en-acapulco-y-la-reemplaza-por-militares-frenara-eso-la-violencia-20180927-story.html>

Additionally, during the 2023–2024 electoral process, 300 violent actions have been recorded, with the highest peaks occurring in October 2023 and February 2024, coinciding with the start of the electoral process and the inter-campaign period. Of these actions, 172 were murders, including 18 candidates or pre-candidates for some elected position. These data demonstrate the severity of the problem of political violence in Mexico and the urgency of implementing

effective measures to ensure the safety of political actors and the general public during electoral processes. The fight against electoral violence and the territorial control of organized crime requires a comprehensive response that addresses both the structural causes and the specific manifestations of violence. This includes strengthening democratic institutions, combating corruption, improving law enforcement capacity and promoting citizen participation in building a fairer and safer society.

In this regard, some of the public policy proposals put forward by Animal Politico, Data Civica and Mexico Evalua are highlighted:

- » The federal government and state governments must strengthen municipal governments through the development of public policies that contribute to strengthening their administrations and their police forces, as well as implementing measures that promote improvements in training, professionalization and working conditions of their forces.
- » It is also crucial that judicial authorities monitor and sanction cases of political-criminal violence to demonstrate a real commitment to protecting vulnerable authorities and dismantling protection networks.

- » Likewise, political parties must assume their responsibility in nominating candidates, avoiding profiles linked to violence, collusion and impunity, thus contributing to the integrity of the electoral process.
- » Finally, a fundamental role of the INE in terms of security should be to generate and share electoral risk maps at the national, state and municipal levels with political parties, security and justice institutions, civil society and other stakeholders, ensuring that information is public and up-to-date.



7. ORGANIZED CRIME, THE STATE AND ELECTORAL PROCESSES

*The organized
crime shows social
muscle among
poorest people*

Image: Photo: Dassaev Tellez Adame (Cuartoscuro) at <https://elpais.com/mexico/2023-07-16/el-crimen-organizado-exhibe-musculo-social-entre-las-clases-mas-pobres-a-meses-de-las-elecciones.html>

7. ORGANIZED CRIME, THE STATE AND ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Organized crime has been involved in various electoral processes and its influence is increasingly significant. In Mexico, the formal recognition of the presence of organized crime is a very recent development. In 2021, the gubernatorial election in Michoacán set a precedent in electoral matters. The Superior Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary acknowledged the facts based on testimonies of intimidation and annulled the voting in four municipalities of that state.

During that time, the electoral process in Michoacán coincided with a surge in internally displaced people due to violence stemming from conflict between armed organized crime groups, representing 46.7%

of total mass displacements nationwide. But Michoacán was not the exception. Displacement is spreading across a broader expanse of national territory, including places where it was previously uncommon. Organized crime's need to control greater territory is generating hundreds of thousands of displaced individuals — more than any other cause.

The Mexican State has been complicit in this advance, through collusion, omission, or ignorance. In any case, the process has cost thousands of human lives, including civilians, criminals, police officers, federal agents and members of the armed forces. This increase in insecurity has led to a situation in which, halfway through the current electoral process,

around one-third of federal electoral districts require some form of protection from the federal government. The private security business is also booming. As of January 2024, the revenues of private security companies were 42% higher than in 2018 (INEGI, 2024) and services for armored protection had increased by 23.4% over 2018 levels (UIF, 2024).

The loss of institutional capacities —including financial oversight— combined with the underfunding and de-professionalization of the authorities responsible for combating and preventing money laundering, may be facilitating the influx of funds of unknown (and often illicit) origin into the Mexican economy, creating a cash flow looking for a channel, with electoral processes being a prime opportunity. So far in this administration, for every 100 pesos in fines imposed by the CNBV, only 16 pesos and 40 cents have been collected.

The federal government has not only weakened the CNBV and other financial institutions, but also paralyzed hundreds of municipalities across the country by withdrawing public security funds at the local level. By the end of 2023, for every federal agent who lost their life, five municipal police officers had died. Added to this is the incapacity of municipalities —due to their greater financial vulnerability— to face organized

crime. The poorest municipalities are attractive to criminals not only because they are harder to access and their crimes go unnoticed, but also because they manage an annual fund of more than 90 billion pesos.

It must be remembered that municipalities receive infrastructure funds to address their social and economic shortcomings and in many cases, these are their primary source of financing (around 1,500 municipalities nationwide). This may explain why criminals seize the revenues from these funds and install their own directors and public works secretaries. Poverty is becoming a goldmine for organized crime.

7.1 ACKNOWLEDGING THE WHITE ELEPHANT

According to Ruben Aguilar, the presence of organized crime in electoral processes is not new, but it has intensified during the current federal administration.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, 1,271 politicians have been killed across the country, including 144 aspirants, pre-candidates and candidates. Of these, 81% were competing for municipal offices (mayor-ships, council seats and trusteeships); 14% were running for federal or gubernatorial positions; and the remaining 6% were seeking federal legislative seats (Aguilar, R., February 10, 2023).

Poverty is becoming a goldmine for organized crime.

However, we use the term "organized crime" here rather than "drug trafficking," for the reasons outlined above and confirmed by various national and international organizations and experts: crime in Mexico has diversified its portfolio of goods and services beyond drug trafficking and its presence has expanded into various markets. Guillermo Valdes, former national intelligence director, states: "Territorial control also enables the development of new illegal markets as lucrative as drug trafficking" (Valdes, G., February 9, 2024). According to the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Mexico now has the highest presence of criminal markets in the world (GI-TOC, 2023).

As magistrate Felipe de la Mata³ notes, organized crime has infiltrated electoral processes in Mexico and the first step is to recognize it. In that sense, the 2021 gubernatorial election in Michoacan set a precedent, though it did not result in a change in the winner. In that electoral process, the vote was annulled in four municipalities of the state due to evidence of intimidation and voter coercion. These were the municipalities of Mugica, Gabriel Zamora, La Huacana and Nuevo

Urecho, all located in local district 22. The annulled vote represented 2.71% of the total state vote (46,953 annulled ballots out of 1.7326 million total) (de la Mata, F., December 11, 2021). The margin between the winner and the runner-up was only 2.7%⁴.

Following this case, the National Electoral Institute (INE) was instructed to, within its jurisdiction, create a national electoral policy to prevent risk factors for electoral violence. This could include a series of measures and protocols, notably: establishing coordination agreements with public security authorities, generating risk maps and creating vetting filters to prevent individuals affiliated with criminal groups from participating.

So far, opposition political parties have called on the INE to publish its risk map, if such a document exists. In this regard, Signos Vitales submitted an information request (330031424001669). According to the institute's response, it does not have a risk map because it lacks the authority to create one. "In addition, [the INE] does not create maps or atlases with electoral risk information." However, according to the INE, the institute does produce the Basic District Typology

³ Magistrate of the Superior Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Branch of the Federation (TEPJF), the highest instance in electoral matters in Mexico.

⁴ For more details, you can see the matter SUP-JRC-166/2021

of Electoral Complexity (TBDCE) (2023)⁵, which does not include variables such as violence or public safety⁶, but is a planning tool for operational functions and resource allocation at the district level. It classifies the 300 federal electoral districts into five categories based on their electoral complexity: very high, high, medium, low and very low.

According to information provided by the INE, there were 32 federal electoral districts classified as having very high complexity in 2023, 22 of which (68.75%) are located in just four southern states: Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca and Veracruz. In contrast, the north only has two districts in this category: Linares (Nuevo Leon) and Hidalgo del Parral (Chihuahua); the remaining eight districts are located in central and north-central states: Michoacan, Durango, San Luis Potosi, Nayarit, Estado de Mexico and Puebla. In the 2018 and 2021 federal elections, there were 23 and 22 such dis-

⁵ The TBDCE calculation algorithm allows obtaining a district (geographical) classification, which can be translated into a map.

⁶ The TBDCE is made up of four dimensions: education, population distribution, indigenous culture and accessibility. These dimensions are in turn made up of the following variables: illiteracy, schooling, rural population, population dispersion, indigenous population, indigenous localities, communication routes, travel time, surface area, extraordinary boxes and internet access.



tricts, respectively. This represents a 39.1% increase over 2018, marking the highest number ever recorded by the INE.

When including districts with both high and very high complexity, the distribution shifts considerably. There are 70 districts in these categories (23.3% of the total federal districts), the same number as in the 2018 federal elections. In the north, only two additional districts (with high complexity) are added to those mentioned earlier: Cuauhtemoc (Chihuahua) and Rio Bravo (Tamaulipas). Southern concentration decreases to 52.9% and is distributed across a larger num-

Source: "Elections 2021 in Mexico; OAS calls to eradicate violence" at <https://www.ruletarusa.mx/tiroalblanco/elecciones-2021-violencia-electoral/>

ber of states (adding two districts from Yucatan and Tabasco); when considering both high and very high complexity districts, central and north-central regions account for 41.4% of the total (Graph 22).

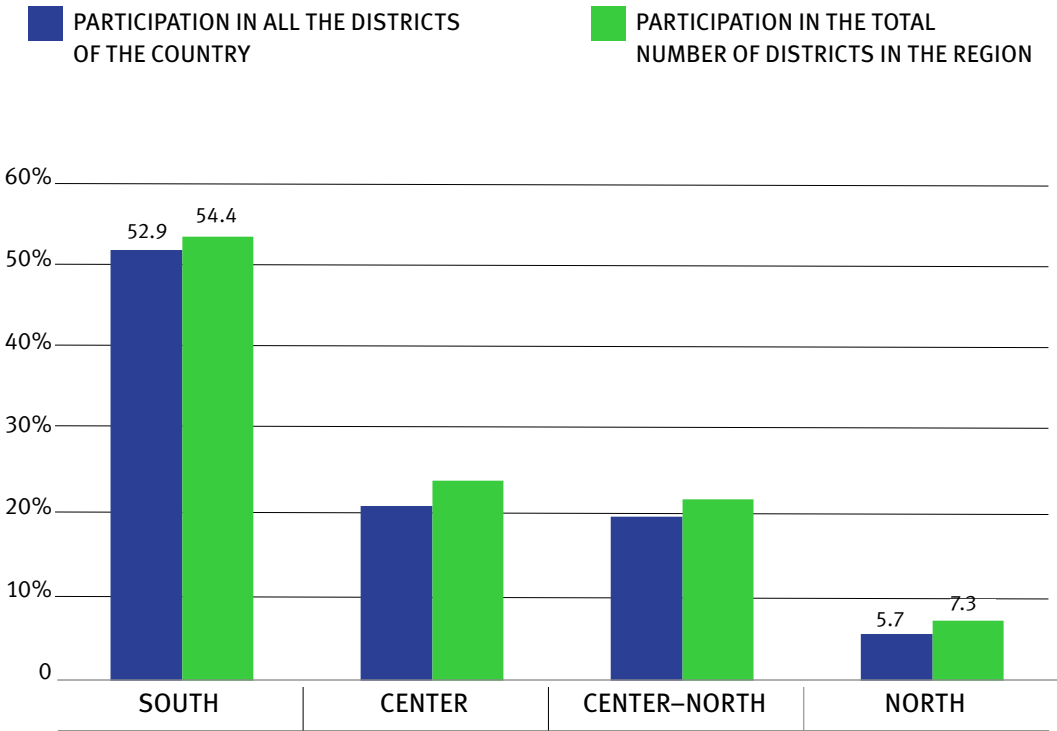
7.1.1 INVOLVEMENT OF ORGANIZED CRIME AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

The precedent set in Michoacan made it clear that organized crime has various ways of interfering in electoral processes and influencing local and even district-level outcomes. This interference is not limited to the transfer of financial and human resources but also includes mechanisms related to intimidation, ranging from threats and forced displacement to loss of life.

In this regard, according to the Internal Displacement Observatory, 2021 recorded the highest number of people displaced due to violence. That year, 42 such episodes were documented, 31 of which were caused by organized crime groups. These 31 events resulted in 21,443 people being displaced in the states of Chiapas, Chihuahua, Durango, Nayarit, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacan and Zacatecas, accounting for 74.1% of the total displaced persons (CMDPH, 2022).

Within these states, Michoacan alone saw 13,515 people displaced, equivalent to 46.7% of all mass dis-

GRAPH 22. HIGH AND VERY HIGH ELECTORAL COMPLEXITY BY REGION
(% OF THE NATIONAL TOTAL AND % OF THE REGIONAL TOTAL)



*Unlike the participation in the total of the country's districts, the participation in the total by region does not add up to 100% because it corresponds to two of the five categories of electoral complexity.

Source: In-house elaboration with information from INE through a request for information.

placements recorded in 2021. As a result of this and the clashes between armed groups involved in drug trafficking, the affected populations span at least 28 municipalities and 82 localities. Following Michoacan are Chiapas and Zacatecas, with 7,117 and 3,693 displaced persons, respectively. These three states account for 84% of the displaced persons in 2021 (CMDPH, 2022).

Between 2017 and 2021, a total of 52,013 displacements caused by organized armed groups have been documented, making it the primary cause, followed by political violence, social conflicts and territorial disputes, which have led to 26,805 new displacements in the same period. In the first case, the number of mass displacement events increased from 17 to 31, while the second cause saw an increase of 3 events (from 7 to 10), showing a more stable pattern between 2019 and 2021 (CMDPH, 2022). According to the same CMDPH, many internally displaced persons see the possibility of seeking asylum in the United States as the only option for safety.

Preliminary information from the first half (January to June) of 2023 indicates that 26 mass episodes of internal displacement due to violence were recorded across eight states: Chiapas, Chihuahua, Guerrero,

Michoacan, Oaxaca, San Luis Potosi, Tamaulipas and Zacatecas. These events have affected at least 7,710 people. This averages to one episode per week and 43 internally displaced persons per day (UNHCR, 2023). It is estimated that mass displacements increased by 60% in the last year and affected states like San Luis Potosi, which had not been among the most affected in the past five years. By the end of 2023, 13 states have reported cases of internal forced displacement in the last five years (Espinosa and Olmos, 2024)⁷.

7.1.2 LOSS OF FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT CAPABILITIES: CNBV, BANK OF MEXICO AND INE

At Signos Vitales, we have documented errors, omissions and inconsistencies in the information presented by the Bank of Mexico regarding personal transfers (commonly known as remittances). In the latest update (review) from early 2024, conducted by financial institutions from the United States, information continues to raise doubts about the origin of these transfers at the state level— from the United States. Mexico urgently needs a review of the destination data. We have documented that a significant volume of these transfers is being used by transnational organized crime to launder funds (just over 7%) or capture rents

⁷ In addition to the entities mentioned above, there are Veracruz and Sinaloa.

From January to June of 2023, 26 mass episodes of internal displacement due to violence were recorded across eight states.

due to the exodus of people (migrants) caused by violence and crime in other Central, South American and Caribbean countries (more than 10% of the total).

Organized crime is using various methods to introduce its income into the Mexican economy. These methods include foreign trade operations, where erroneous invoicing plays a crucial role, which, although previously used, has now been enhanced. The latest report from the Financial Intelligence Unit (UIF) and international investigations support our claims. Moreover, on April 22 of this year, the Mexican government had to impose temporary tariffs ranging from 5% to 50% on the importation of goods classified under 544 tariff headings related to steel, aluminum, textiles, footwear, wood, plastic, chemical products, paper, glass, electrical materials, transportation equipment, furniture, among many others⁸. This is not just about the so-called "super peso". Black markets, such as those for fossil fuels, continue to thrive despite the cancellation of import permits by private entities.

There is also evidence that failures in the Mexican financial system may be extending to the payment system. The use of ATMs shows considerable anoma-

lies (atypical data) in the last five years when spatial analysis is conducted at the local level. Authorities must clarify whether the indiscriminate use of ATMs in the south is a reality or if financial institutions are inadequately reporting this information. If so, it raises questions about their motives. Otherwise, such operations should have already attracted the attention of Mexican financial authorities, as communities with a large number of families in poverty or extreme poverty are conducting more transactions than the average citizen, even more than in the country's largest cities⁹. This is an unusual, unlikely and hard-to-believe fact (at least 75 municipalities are in this condition).

In this context, the inappropriate behavior of executives, officials, employees and legal representatives of financial institutions in Mexico is not surprising. According to the UIF, in the past year, there were 742 reports of Internal Concerning Operations (by employees of financial institutions), while the highest number recorded was 859 in 2018. In the first two months of 2024 alone, there have already been 180 such reports (UIF, 2024), so if the trend continues, there could be over a thousand reports by the end of the year.

⁸ For more details see the Official Gazette of the Federation (DOF): https://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5724207&fecha=22/04/2024#gsc.tab=0

⁹ It should be noted that commercial banking is no longer the main transmitter of remittances, making it unlikely that these types of transfers are involved.

In the three aforementioned cases (methods), these are administrative records (personal transfers, customs declarations and ATM operations) of great relevance that can have systemic repercussions, such as customs records and significantly affect the perception of economic performance (through the current account and national accounts). The responsible institutions —the Bank of Mexico, the National Banking and Securities Commission (CNBV) and the National Customs Agency (ANAM), the latter under military command— have been decapitalized to varying degrees.

At the CNBV, the loss of talent (human capital) has been notable since the implementation of the Federal Republican Austerity Law. Between 2019 and 2023, this Commission has experienced at least 77 rotations —among departures, dismissals and reassignments— at the managerial level (Vice Presidencies and General Directorates) and the Presidency (three Presidents). Between 2019 and January 2024, sanctions against financial entities decreased by 65% compared to the previous administration (4,990 vs. 14,659 sanctions) (Gamez, M., April 4, 2024). Organized crime, understood as a network operating financial, technological and human resources, may well be celebrating. The introduction of funds of unknown origin into the Mexican financial system could

be more of a reality now than at any other time in recent history.

Between 2019 and 2023, the CNBV imposed 1,021 monetary fines related to anti-money laundering prevention, totaling 177 million 36 thousand pesos. In the same period, only 28 million 952 thousand pesos have been paid (128 fines or 12.5% of the total fines), equivalent to 16.4% of the total value of the imposed fines (CNBV, 2024).

Another problem is the departure of specialized personnel from strategic oversight positions. Having formally started the 2023–2024 federal electoral process, the Technical Audit Unit of the INE remained headless. According to former INE councilor Ciro Murayama,

The current INE presidency requested the resignation of Jacqueline Vargas, as well as the director of risks of that Unit, a key area for detecting, for example, operations of shell companies or invoice factories towards parties and candidates.

The last heads of this Unit (Lizandro Nuñez and Jacqueline Vargas) had extensive careers in supervising financial operations and the Tax Administration System (Murayama, C., October 1, 2023), having proven their impartiality in several electoral exercises.

Another problem is the departure of specialized personnel from strategic oversight positions. Having formally started the 2023–2024 federal electoral process, the Technical Audit Unit of the INE remained headless (C. Murayama).

7.2 REGIONS AND TERRITORIES MOST AFFECTED AND INSTITUTIONALLY WEAKENED

The institutional and technological capacities of the Mexican state have been undermined during the current federal administration. This loss of capacity disproportionately affects local governments due to the financial weakness of municipalities and the elimination of direct transfers related to public security. All of this is primarily reflected in the rise of high-impact crimes and violence against police forces. Without a doubt, this six-year term will record the highest number of human lives lost since the Mexican Revolution—all of this without accounting for the growing number of disappeared and arbitrarily detained individuals.

7.2.1 THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG: INTENTIONAL HOMICIDES

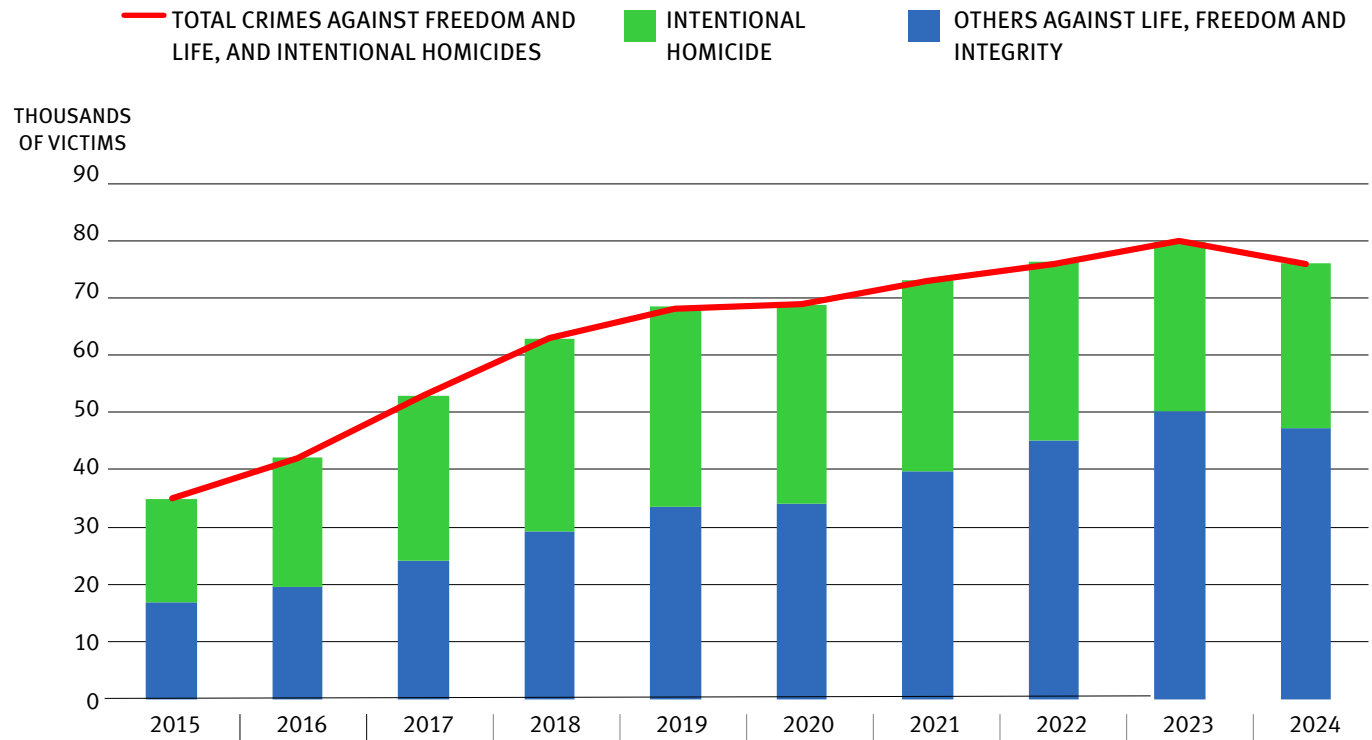
Violence in Mexico has extended into the electoral sphere, whether in local or federal contests. Criminal groups clash over territorial control due to the inherently territorial nature of certain activities; a clear example is the escalation of violence in the state of Chiapas. In the first quarter of 2024 alone, 206 intentional homicides were recorded, the highest number for a first quarter in this state, whereas in the same

quarter of 2018, there were 146 intentional homicides (a 41.1% increase) (SESNSP, 2024).

So far this year, 7,155 intentional homicides have been committed; 68% of these homicides occurred in 10 states (just under one-third of all entities): Baja California (8.3%), Chihuahua (6.9%), Guanajuato (10.4%), Guerrero (5.7%), Jalisco (6.4%), State of Mexico (8.7%), Michoacan (6.1%), Morelos (5.8%), Nuevo Leon (4.5%) and Sonora (5%). Seventy-three percent of all intentional homicides were committed with a firearm and 69.8% of those firearm-related homicides occurred in the aforementioned 10 states. Although this rate may appear high, it has remained relatively steady with a slight upward trend. In 2018, 70.9% of intentional homicides were committed with a firearm (SESNSP, 2024).

Now then, although these states have a high rate of firearm-related crimes relative to the national total, there are four other states where the rate of firearm homicides exceeds the national average (73%). These are Campeche (82.6%), Colima (92.2%), Oaxaca (82.9%) and San Luis Potosi (77.5%). Conversely, states such as Baja California Sur (10%), Coahuila (35%), Durango (28.6%), Hidalgo (53.2%), Nayarit

GRAPH 23. HOMICIDES AND CRIMES AGAINST FREEDOM AND LIFE
(THOUSANDS OF VICTIMS) 2015 – 2024*



*The number of victims of others against life, freedom and integrity are the result of the sum of crimes against freedom and life; The 2024 figure is an estimate of Vital Signs based on the information available.

Source: In-house elaboration with information from SESNSP.

(37.5%), Queretaro (50.9%) and Yucatan (9.1%) report the lowest rates of firearm-related homicides.

As can be seen, despite the high perception of violence in the country, official statistics indicate a decrease in the homicide rate. However, several civil society organizations have pointed out that the data remains alarming and raises doubts about its accuracy. This concern is based on the rise of other crimes, which may be being classified under categories that do not correspond. Here we emphasize “other crimes against personal freedom” and “other crimes against life and bodily integrity.”

In 2018, 21,087 and 8,064 of these types of crimes were recorded, while in 2023 the numbers had risen to 33,647 and 16,478 for crimes against freedom and life, respectively (increases of 59.6% and 104.3%). The growth in other crimes against freedom is particularly evident between 2021 and 2023 (24,778 such crimes in 2023) (SESNSP, 2024). This phenomenon may be related to the increase in the number of disappeared persons. If the trend continues in 2024, the behavior of this crime will be very close to that of 2023. Unlike the former, other crimes against life have increased steadily, maintaining their long-term upward trajectory since the major lockdown.

7.2.2 POLICE MURDERS

By the end of 2023, at least 412 police officers had been murdered, with 50.2% of the homicides occurring in six states: Guanajuato (14.6%), Guerrero (9.7%), Zacatecas (7.8%), Michoacan (6.8%), Jalisco (5.8%) and Veracruz (5.6%) . Since 2018, these homicides have decreased by –8.8% (40 fewer murders) and since records began, municipal police forces continue to account for the most casualties, followed by state forces. Between 2018 and 2023, the proportion of municipal and state police officers murdered relative to the total changed from 49.3% to 53.7% and from 43.8% to 37.9%, respectively. The average age of these officers was between approximately 37 and 38 years old (CC, n.d.).

However, over the past five years, violence against police officers has taken on a different connotation (geographical distribution), as some regions—mainly in the center of the country—have seen considerable improvements, while others have experienced overwhelming deterioration. For example, the setbacks in states such as Zacatecas, Nuevo Leon, Colima, Michoacan and Sonora are alarming, with increases of 255.6%, 162.5%, 142.9%, 75% and 46.2%, respectively. Until 2018, a total of 53 police officers had

been reported murdered in these states, but by the end of 2023, that number had risen to 117 (a 120.8% increase) (CC, n.d.).

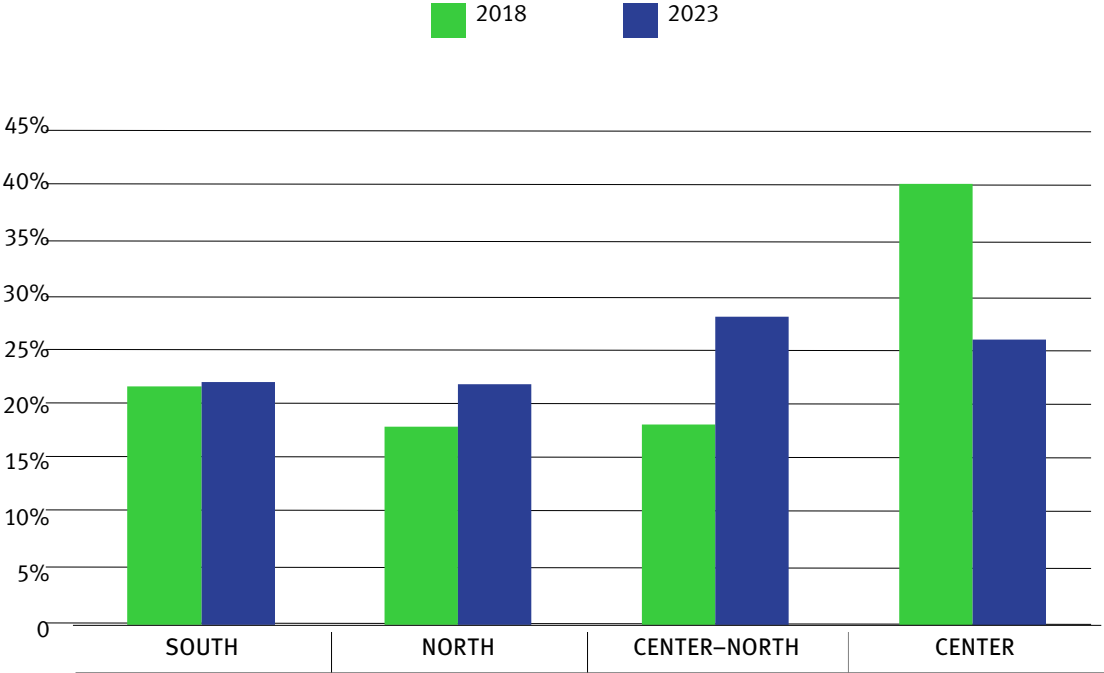
This has resulted in a shift over the past five years in the concentration of violence against police officers, moving from the center to the center-north and northern regions of the country. In 2018, these two regions accounted for 18.6% and 18.4% of the murders, respectively, but by the end of 2023, these figures had risen to 28.6% and 22.3%. Unlike in previous years, for the first quarter of 2024, the state of Chiapas appears as the third most violent state for police officers, with seven recorded murders, surpassing Guerrero, Jalisco and Michoacan, which recorded 4, 6 and 4 murders, respectively (CC, n.d.).

On the other hand, according to experts consulted by Signos Vitales, less violence does not necessarily mean that organized crime is absent from the region; on the contrary: it may be indicative of an achieved stage of "Pax narca" between the government and criminal groups.



Image: "The bodies of six agents rest at the Puebla–Orizaba, highway, very close to a clandestine fuel take". Photo: Puebla Roja en www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/huachicoleros-matan-6-policias-en-amozoc/.avif

GRAPH 24. POLICE OFFICERS MURDERED BY REGION OF THE COUNTRY
(2018 VS 2023) (% OF THE NATIONAL TOTAL)



Source: In-house elaboration with information from CC.

POLICE OFFICERS MURDERED IN 2023

412 POLICE OFFICERS MURDERED

50.2% DISTRIBUTED IN:

14.6% GUANAJUATO

9.7% GUERRERO

7.8% ZACATECAS

6.8% MICHOACAN

5.8% JALISCO

5.6% VERACRUZ

7.2.3 WEAKENING OF LOCAL POLICE FORCES

The disappearance of funding sources intended for the training and strengthening of local police forces adds to the deteriorating financial state of municipalities and federal entities, weakening their capacity to uphold the rule of law. From 2012 to 2023, federalized spending on public security decreased from 12.5% to 8.9%. In this context, the elimination of Fortaseg (Subsidy for the Strengthening of Performance in Public Security) in 2021 was a highly serious event, despite it being in breach of a Constitutional mandate.

Although President Lopez Obrador categorically denied the elimination of this subsidy, he was later proven wrong. Civil society organizations, such as Mexico Evalua, have studied in detail the impact of this decision. With the elimination of this fund, around 300 of the most violent municipalities in the country—where 90% of high-impact crimes occur—were left unprotected (Mexico Evalua, 2022). Resources allocated to local public security are negligible—barely \$22.5 per year (60.1 billion pesos), roughly 6% of what the United States allocates (\$388 per capita per year) (Mexico Evalua, 2022).

Working conditions for local police forces remain dismal. Less than a quarter of municipal police officers

have access to housing support, funeral expenses, or retirement savings funds. For example, although female officers have greater access to childcare than their male counterparts, they represent only 7.2% (Mexico Evalua, 2022); 50% receive only an annual bonus, vacation, vacation bonus and life insurance; less than 10% have access to housing credit and retirement pensions, all while earning an average monthly salary of approximately 13,639 pesos (Alcala, E., 2023).



Source: "Disappearance of Fortaseg infringe public security in municipalities" at <https://www.eluvigia.net/general/2020/9/21/desaparicion-de-fortaseg-vulnera-seguridad-publica-de-municipios-355131.html>

7.3 FINANCIAL WEAKNESS AND INABILITY TO CONFRONT CRIME

According to experts consulted by Signos Vitales, municipalities with lower revenue-generating capacity, due to limited diversification of funding sources, become easy targets for organized crime, as their governments are more likely to be co-opted by criminal organizations. On top of this, the disappearance of funds for the training and equipping of local police forces exacerbates the problem. The available revenue of municipalities (own-source revenue plus federal transfers) —that which they can use for any type of expenditure, including public security— is on average 64.9% (considering Mexico City, the figure is 70.4%). However, almost entirely (60.9% of available revenue) consists of federal funds (INEGI, n.d.), revealing the need for major reform.

As of 2022, 1,582 municipalities had a financial margin below the national average (48% vs. 64.9%) (INEGI, n.d.). Many of these municipalities are home to the poorest Mexicans. As a result, the public finances of these municipalities rely heavily on federal transfers, which are earmarked specifically for poverty alleviation through infrastructure spending (these resources cannot be allocated to equipping, training, or hiring

police officers). This, in turn, creates yet another incentive to capture revenues from public works projects. In other words, it becomes an incentive to impose public works directors or secretaries. In fact, this incentive amounted to 98.7 billion pesos in 2023, of which 70.8% was distributed across 10 states: Chiapas (15.4%), Guanajuato (3.2%), Guerrero (8.3%), Hidalgo (2.8%), State of Mexico (8.5%), Michoacan (3.6%), Oaxaca (8.8%), Puebla (7.4%), San Luis Potosi (2.8%) and Veracruz (10%) (SHCP, 2024).

This same condition of poverty limits other essential aspects needed to uphold the rule of law. Some 48.2% of these municipalities' revenue comes from federal transfers (INEGI, n.d.). In this sense, the states with the highest poverty rates—such as Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla—fall into this category; thus, the first three skew the data downward for the southern region of the country.

In addition to the south, many municipalities in the central and central-northern regions also share this condition, including 98 municipalities in Michoacan (86.7% of the state's municipalities) and 28 in Zacatecas (half of the state's municipalities). Therefore, it is no coincidence that the municipalities of Mugica, Gabriel Zamora, La Huacana and Nuevo Urecho are

experiencing problems of violence related to organized crime. Their revenue-generation capacities are 49.2%, 47.5%, 53.4% and 55.3%, respectively (INEGI, n.d.), yet they receive large amounts of funding for public works. Overall, the southern and central-northern regions have the highest proportion of municipalities constrained by weak public finances —92.8% and 60% of their municipalities, respectively (INEGI, n.d.). The northern region, by contrast, has the lowest proportion of fiscally weakened municipalities (around 37.4%) (INEGI, n.d.).

While the regional analysis helps us understand how widespread financial weakness is across large territories, several states in both the central and northern regions may elude scrutiny. States that stand out for low internal revenue-generating capacity include Baja California Sur (80% of its municipalities), Durango (82.1%), Guanajuato (76.1%), Hidalgo (71.1%), Nuevo Leon (87.8%) and San Luis Potosi (91.4%). However, within these states, there are also municipalities on the opposite end of the spectrum, with great capacity to deal with various adversities and non-deterministic events —such as San Pedro Garza Garcia (Nuevo Leon) and Los Cabos (Baja California Sur)— whose own-source revenues amount to 93.1% and 88.8% of their total income, respectively (INEGI, n.d.).

7.4 PROTECTION OF CANDIDATES AND DEMAND FOR PRIVATE SECURITY

The current electoral process has been characterized as the most violent in Mexico's recent history, which has been accompanied by an increase in demand for security, particularly from candidates for elected office. According to the Secretary of Security and Citizen Protection (SSPC), Rosa Icela Rodriguez, as of April 16, 2024, 273 protection requests from candidates have been attended to, with none rejected to date. Of this total, in 250 cases, security is provided by the military, while the remaining 23 were declined by the candidates themselves (Benitez, D., April 17, 2024).

Among the candidates receiving protection are the two female candidates and the male candidate for the Presidency of the Republic, 10 gubernatorial candidates, 32 senatorial candidates and 110 candidates for federal deputy positions. This indicates that up to 110 federal electoral districts (one district per federal deputy) could be involved, representing 36.7% of the total (approximately one-third of the national territory). According to the same Secretariat, at the local level there are already 99 protection requests from mayoral candidates and 17 from local legislative candidates (Benitez, D., April 17, 2024). Despite the great-

er perceived risk at the local level, due to the factors previously explained, this is where the number and proportion of requests are lowest relative to the total number of municipalities (4% of municipalities at most). This is due to the federal government having delegated this responsibility to the states.

Secretary Rosa Icela Rodriguez has stated that protection for local candidates is the responsibility of state governments. In other words, where the risk is highest, the level of protection is lowest, largely due to delays by both federal and state authorities in defining jurisdictional responsibilities —this may explain the significant shortfall in protection at the municipal level.

Additionally, in the same briefing, it was mentioned that assigned bodyguards do not receive per diems for lodging and meals, since the National Guard claims that these agents make use of their own facilities (barracks) (Benitez, D., April 17, 2024). In response, opposition party leaders and senators (PAN, PRI and PRD) have spoken out, stating that bodyguards abandon candidates at night, which they have termed “half surveillance” or a “protection simulation plan” (Rodriguez, L., April 13, 2024).

The demand for security, whether public or private, may also be fueling the purchase of protective equipment. According to the Financial Intelligence Unit (UIF), since 2021 and through last year, demand for armored protection services has been increasing (classified as a vulnerable activity). In 2023, the UIF received 2,287 notifications for these services and as of the first two months of 2024, 408 such notifications have already been recorded. If the upward trend continues, it may approach the historical high of 2,646 notifications in 2020, the year of the pandemic lockdown (UIF, 2024). However, it is important to interpret this growth with caution, as the identities of those contracting these services are unknown.



Image: "Attacks against candidates shake elections in Mexico" at <https://www.latimes.com/espanol/mexico/articulo/2021-05-27/ataques-contra-candidatos-estremecen-elecciones-en-mexico>

As of January 2024, revenues of companies providing investigation, protection and security services are 41.9% higher than those recorded in December 2018 (INEGI, 2024). It is worth noting that the trend has been rising since early 2021, which coincided with the midterm electoral process and the reactivation of various sectors of the economy.

Specifically, there has been a clear rebound in the hiring of personnel by private companies (a 10.4% increase since December 2018), which in turn has raised their expenses, though to a lesser extent (a 3.7% increase over the same period) (INEGI, 2024)¹⁰. This is an undesirable situation, but the rise in insecurity has had, as one of its side effects, a renewed demand for personnel, which had previously been constrained¹¹ and had shown a slightly downward trend during the previous federal administration.

There has been an increase of 10.4% –since December 2018– in the hiring of private security companies.

¹⁰ With seasonally adjusted series.

¹¹ Two factors that could have contributed to this behavior are confinement and recent labor reforms, mainly labor subcontracting.

7.5 THE DEAD ALSO COUNT: ELECTORAL ROLL, VOTER REGISTRY AND POPULATION

According to researcher Hector Hernandez Bringas (Regional Center for Multidisciplinary Research at UNAM), there are 4.7 million active INE voter IDs belonging to people who have died in the last 10 years (Rodriguez, L., April 21, 2024). According to the same researcher, this discrepancy arises from the difference between the population over 18 years of age reported by Conapo (National Population Council) (93,423,011 Mexicans) (Conapo, n.d.) and the INE's electoral roll (98,409,061 Mexicans as of March 27, 2024)¹². The gap with the voter registry (population over 18) is even greater, with 5,129,697 individuals potentially eligible to vote (INE, 2024).

Hernandez also points out that this phenomenon could result from the INE not having cross-referenced death certificates with Civil Registry records to deactivate these IDs (both from the Registry and the Electoral Roll). While the reasons for this possible lag are clarified, the discrepancies persist. According to the most recent information published by the INE (as of March 27, 2024), the difference has reached 4,986,050 Mex-

¹² The nominal list used by Hernández was 98,194, 255 Mexicans, which is why the calculations presented by SV differ to some extent from those made by the researcher.

icans; the potential surplus of individuals eligible to vote in the June 2 election is 5.3% (excluding citizens residing abroad who have activated their IDs). As the researcher notes, in a close race, this figure could be decisive in tipping the balance in any direction, even favoring the candidate with the least chance of winning the presidential election, since it could have a greater impact at the state level.

This surplus is not distributed evenly, as with many of the phenomena studied here; 10 states in the country account for 67.6% of the likely surplus population holding valid voter IDs: Mexico City (12.7%), Jalisco (8.3%), Michoacan (7.4%), State of Mexico (7.1%), Guanajuato (7%), Chiapas (5.7%), Guerrero (5.3%), Chihuahua (4.8%), Puebla (4.7%) and Veracruz (4.6%). If these differences were used to one's advantage—assuming that state or local governments, or some other actor (say, organized crime), could intervene (given this information) in the electoral process—the party that would benefit most would be Morena (including its ally, the Green Party) with 76.1% (3,793,249 voters); the coalition formed by PAN, PRI and PRD accounts for 16.3% of the surplus (811,350 voters) and the remaining 7.7% belongs to MC (381,451 voters).

Assuming this surplus of voters directly translates into votes, this excess already gives the governing party's candidate a net advantage of 2,981,899 votes over the opposition coalition's candidate (Morena's surplus voters minus the opposition coalition's surplus voters); the net difference is even greater over the MC presidential candidate (3,411,798 votes). Furthermore, this difference could not only give the official candidate an advantage, but also result in a greater number of legislators via proportional representation, that is, it could lead to imbalances in state and federal legislatures.

Through voting, this surplus can cause imbalances in local, district and even state elections. In nine states, there will be elections for governor and in six of these, the surplus relative to the population is close to or exceeds five percentage points: Chiapas (7.6%), Mexico City (8.7%), Guanajuato (7.8%), Jalisco (6.7%), Puebla (4.9%) and Tabasco (6.8%). These surpluses pose a risk to the democracy of those states, as they eliminate any opportunity to legally contest or invalidate an election. Similarly, internal differences may represent greater risks than the general averages, as the gaps in some cases are much higher than the average (5.3%).

An example of this is that in 16 states, the surplus is over 5%; in addition to those mentioned in the previous paragraph, the following stand out: Chihuahua (8.3%), Durango (7.1%), Guerrero (11.2%), Michoacan (10.9%), Oaxaca (7.1%), Tabasco (6.8%), Tamaulipas (7%) and Zacatecas (11.3%). The cases of Guerrero, Michoacan and Zacatecas are exceptional (atypical) for showing double-digit discrepancies (an average of 11%). In stark contrast, in Baja California Sur, a large portion of the voting-age population lacks a voter ID (−3.1%), which may affect local election outcomes by restricting the right to vote (Table 18).

There are 4.7 million active INE voter IDs belonging to people who have died in the last 10 years.

The potential surplus of individuals eligible to vote in the June 2 election is 5.3%. In a close race, this figure could be decisive in tipping the balance in any direction (Rodriguez, L., April 21, 2024).

CONCLUSIONS

The federal government has dismantled local police forces and facilitated the entry of resources of illicit origin, as well as their probable movement through the financial system itself, due to lax financial supervision and the weakening of the CNBV (with the enactment of the Federal Law of Republican Austerity) and the omission by the Bank of Mexico. Given this weakness, many of these resources may enter the 2023–2024 electoral process more easily due to the loss of oversight capacities at the INE.

The growing territorial influence of organized crime stems from its greater diversification in the portfolio of goods and services, its increased ability to access various sources of financing (including public funds), the rise in income these activities are generating and the possibility of laundering money without the imposition of severe penalties. In contrast, the weakening of municipal funding sources has coincided with the dismantling of local police forces.

In its territorial expansion, organized crime is capturing revenues whose intended use is most likely to reduce poverty through infrastructure projects, which explains the heightened competition to impose criminal organization operatives in public works depart-

**TABLE 18. NOMINAL LIST, POPULATION OVER 18 YEARS OF AGE, STATE GAP, EXCESS BY ENTITY (%)
AND WEIGHT IN THE NATIONAL GAP (%) * 1/2**

FEDERAL ENTITY (STATE)	NOMINAL LIST (MEX- ICANS WITH VALID CREDENTIAL)	POPULATION OVER 18 YEARS OF AGE (CONAPO)	GAP (NUMBER OF PEOPLE)	EXCESS BY ENTITY (%)	WEIGHT IN THE NATION- AL EXCESS (% OF THE TOTAL)
Zacatecas	1,266,678	1,137,833	128,845	11.3%	2.6%
Guerrero	2,644,436	2,378,865	265,571	11.2%	5.3%
Michoacan	3,751,543	3,384,195	367,348	10.9%	7.4%
Ciudad de Mexico	7,932,951	7,300,177	632,774	8.7%	12.7%
Chihuahua	3,084,526	2,847,379	237,147	8.3%	4.8%
Guanajuato	4,834,168	4,482,997	351,171	7.8%	7.0%
Chiapas	4,004,774	3,720,286	284,488	7.6%	5.7%
Baja California	3,199,439	2,976,906	222,533	7.5%	4.5%
Durango	1,398,650	1,305,328	93,322	7.1%	1.9%
Oaxaca	3,118,109	2,912,066	206,043	7.1%	4.1%
Tamaulipas	2,850,413	2,663,752	186,661	7.0%	3.7%
Tabasco	1,812,474	1,697,120	115,354	6.8%	2.3%
Jalisco	6,627,538	6,211,612	415,926	6.7%	8.3%
San Luis Potosi	2,187,140	2,064,633	122,507	5.9%	2.5%
Tlaxcala	1,043,261	984,978	58,283	5.9%	1.2%
Colima	585,438	556,387	29,051	5.2%	0.6%
Puebla	4,982,403	4,748,619	233,784	4.9%	4.7%
Nayarit	951,644	909,606	42,038	4.6%	0.8%

TABLE 18. NOMINAL LIST, POPULATION OVER 18 YEARS OF AGE, STATE GAP, EXCESS BY ENTITY (%) AND WEIGHT IN THE NATIONAL GAP (%)* 2/2					
FEDERAL ENTITY (STATE)	NOMINAL LIST (MEX- ICANS WITH VALID CREDENTIAL)	POPULATION OVER 18 YEARS OF AGE (CONAPO)	GAP (NUMBER OF PEOPLE)	EXCESS BY ENTITY (%)	WEIGHT IN THE NATION- AL EXCESS (% OF THE TOTAL)
Aguascalientes	1,098,345	1,050,989	47,356	4.5%	0.9%
Sinaloa	2,361,856	2,260,107	101,749	4.5%	2.0%
Veracruz	6,082,527	5,854,169	228,358	3.9%	4.6%
Campeche	694,843	671,264	23,579	3.5%	0.5%
Hidalgo	2,387,701	2,312,142	75,559	3.3%	1.5%
Coahuila	2,411,909	2,339,489	72,420	3.1%	1.5%
Mexico	13,036,964	12,683,646	353,318	2.8%	7.1%
Sonora	2,293,254	2,233,921	59,333	2.7%	1.2%
Queretaro	1,901,383	1,860,439	40,944	2.2%	0.8%
Quintana Roo	1,461,793	1,459,014	2,779	0.2%	0.1%
Nuevo Leon	4,470,992	4,505,467	-34,475	-0.8%	-0.7%
Yucatan	1,766,873	1,797,883	-31,010	-1.7%	-0.6%
Baja California Sur	613,906	633,626	-19,720	-3.1%	-0.4%
Republica Mexicana	98,409,061	93,423,011	4,986,050	5.3%	100%

*Negative variations mean the probable presence of a deficit in credentialing. The information from the List and the Nominal Register are as of March 27, 2024.

Source: In-house elaboration with information from Conapo and INE.

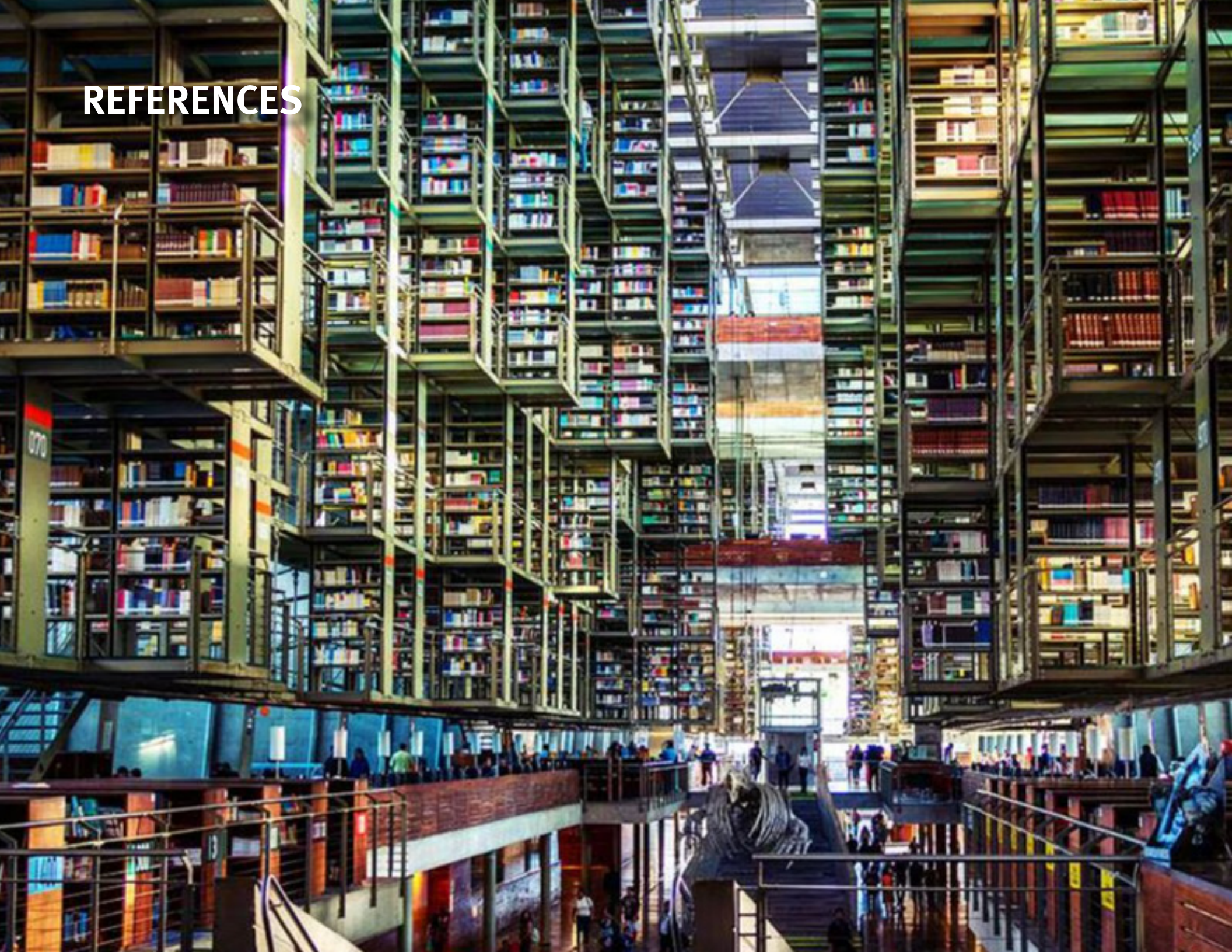
ments and ministries. This pool amounts to at least 90 billion pesos, making poverty highly lucrative in many respects.

On the other hand, we observe that the electoral complexity estimated by the INE underestimates the difficulty of carrying out the June 2 elections in the face of organized crime's influence in the north of the country and in states with smaller territorial size, which could pose greater difficulties for citizens when casting their vote —greater than those perceived by the electoral authority— due to security risks, as is the case in the states of Colima and Morelos. In other words, electoral complexity (as measured by the INE) maintains a downward bias in the north and center of the country because it does not include public (in) security in election planning; in contrast, the social, economic and geographic characteristics of the south and center-north are sufficient to offset the omission of the insecurity variable, since complexity is already high or very high there. The INE can safely assume that in these regions there will be greater difficulty in holding the June 2 elections; however, the INE's tools generally estimate that the complexity in 2024 will be the same as in the 2018 elections, while criminal groups continue to diversify the forms of violence and insecurity continues to grow.

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