

Mexico city climate change

Mexico is the 10th-most populated country with the 15th-largest economy and is also the 11th-most climate-polluting country in the world.

In international surveys conducted in 2022 and 2023, Mexico had one of the highest percentages of citizens worried about human-caused climate change at 92%, compared to just 63% of Americans.* And 88% of Mexican respondents reported that they consider climate change an important issue that their country should address as a priority, compared to just 58% of Americans. This concern may reflect that Mexico is highly vulnerable to droughts, heat waves, hurricanes, flooding, and food and water insecurity worsened by climate change.

But the Mexican government's climate policy record has been inconsistent. At times, the country's leaders have taken steps toward reducing its share of climate pollution, but its current and outgoing president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, commonly known by his initials AMLO, has tended to prioritize domestic fossil fuel resources over low-carbon alternatives.

The leading presidential candidate, with about 60% support in polling, is Claudia Sheinbaum. She's the former leader of Mexico City and an AMLO protégée, but also a scientist with a Ph.D. in environmental engineering who co-authored chapters in the Fourth and Fifth IPCC reports. She also plans to encourage private investment in renewable energy in Mexico.

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Felipe Calderón was elected Mexican president for the 2006-2012 term (the Mexican constitution limits each president to a single six-year term). He had served as the country's energy secretary in 2003-2004 and recognized the importance of addressing climate change. Under Calderón's leadership, Mexico adopted a voluntary climate mitigation target in 2008 and passed a General Law on Climate Change in 2012. Among other provisions, the law set targets to generate at least 35% of power with clean technologies by 2024 and to reduce climate pollution 30% below business-as-usual levels by 2020 and 50% below 2000 levels by 2050. Unfortunately, the former two goals have slipped out of reach.

Calderón's successor Enrique Peña Nieto had a more mixed record on climate and energy policy. His government passed a tax on carbon pollution, but it only applies to the additional emissions generated by

burning coal or oil instead of natural gas. Peña Nieto signed a constitutional Reform on Energy that was aimed at loosening the state-owned Federal Electricity Commission's (CFE's) monopoly over the national power sector, which has historically relied heavily on fossil fuels. That move opened up Mexico's electricity generation to private clean energy investment, and also its oil and gas reserves to external investors.

But AMLO moved to reverse those reforms when he replaced Peña Nieto in 2018, and he worked to maintain CFE's share of Mexico's power generation at a minimum of 54%. Clean energy investments in Mexico often come from foreign companies, and AMLO has expressed a preference for national "energy independence," which tends to favor domestic fossil fuel sources, which are also significant contributors to the federal budget. In fact, his energy ministry published rules for the national grid that would have prioritized energy security and fuel reserves (fossil fuels) over economic efficiency (cheaper wind and solar power). The Supreme Court of Mexico recently voided those rules.

Mexico's climate pollution predominantly comes from three sectors: transportation (30%), power (29%), and industry (27%). The country's power sector emissions have been rising, especially over the past two years as the government has prioritized fossil fuels and drought has reduced its hydroelectricity production. Mexico's share of clean electricity generation fell below 22% in 2023 after peaking at 27% in 2021 and thus will surely fall short of the 35% clean power target by 2024 set in its 2012 climate law. Most of the country's power comes from natural gas, and more than three-quarters is produced by burning fossil fuels. As a result, Mexico's overall climate pollution has risen about 33% above 2000 levels.

Climate Action Tracker, an independent project that monitors whether governments' actions measure up to the goals outlined in the Paris climate agreement, gave Mexico's climate policies its worst rating of "critically insufficient" due to a lack of ambition and weakening of policies and targets under AMLO's leadership. The project noted, "If all countries were to follow Mexico's approach, warming would exceed 4°C" -- a catastrophic level of global warming.

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Email: energystorage2000@gmail.com

WhatsApp: 8613816583346

