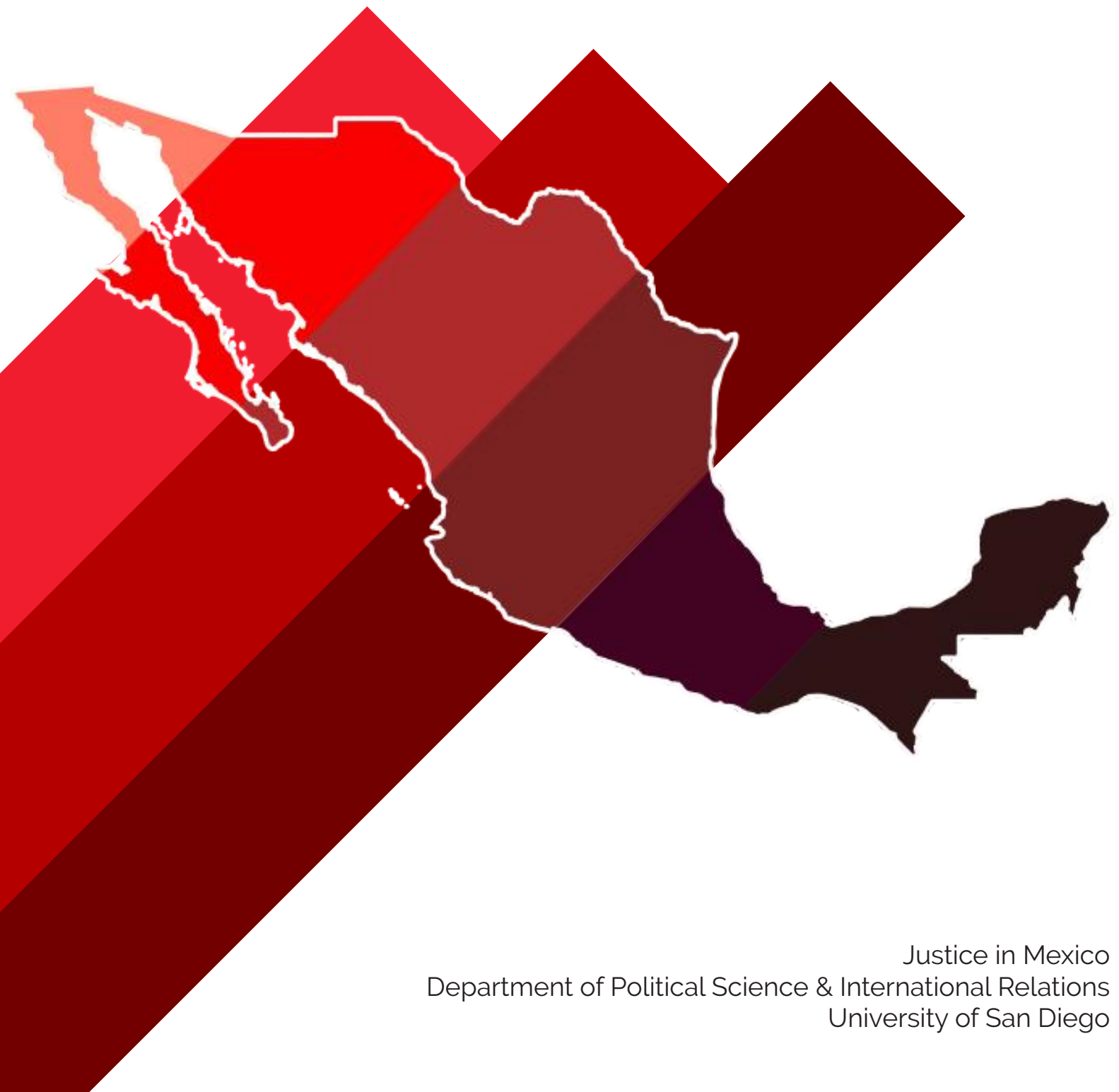


Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico

2020 Special Report



Justice in Mexico
Department of Political Science & International Relations
University of San Diego

Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico: 2020 Special Report

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ABOUT JUSTICE IN MEXICO

Started in 2001, Justice in Mexico (www.justiceinmexico.org) works to improve citizen security, strengthen the rule of law, and protect human rights in Mexico. We generate cutting edge research, promote informed dialogue, and work to find solutions to address these enormously complex issues. As a U.S.-based initiative, our program partners with key stakeholders, experts, and decision makers, lending international support to help analyze the challenges at hand, build consensus about how to resolve them, and foster policies and programs that can bring about change. Our program is presently based at the Department of Political Science & International Relations at the University of San Diego (USD), and involves university faculty, students, and volunteers from the United States and Mexico. From 2005-2013, the project was based at the USD Trans-Border Institute at the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, and from 2001-2005 it was based at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California San Diego.

About the Report:

This is the second edition of *Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico*. Like last year's report, this study builds on 10 years of reports published by Justice in Mexico under the title *Drug Violence in Mexico*. The *Drug Violence in Mexico* series examined patterns of crime and violence attributable to organized crime, and particularly drug trafficking organizations, as well as other related issues, such as judicial sector reform and human rights in Mexico. At the 10 year mark, in 2019, this series of reports was retitled "Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico" to reflect the proliferation and diversification of organized crime groups over the last decade and the corresponding wave of violence. As in previous years, this report compiles the most recent data, and analysis of crime, violence, and rule of law in Mexico to help inform government officials, policy analysts, and the general public.

Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico

2020 SPECIAL REPORT

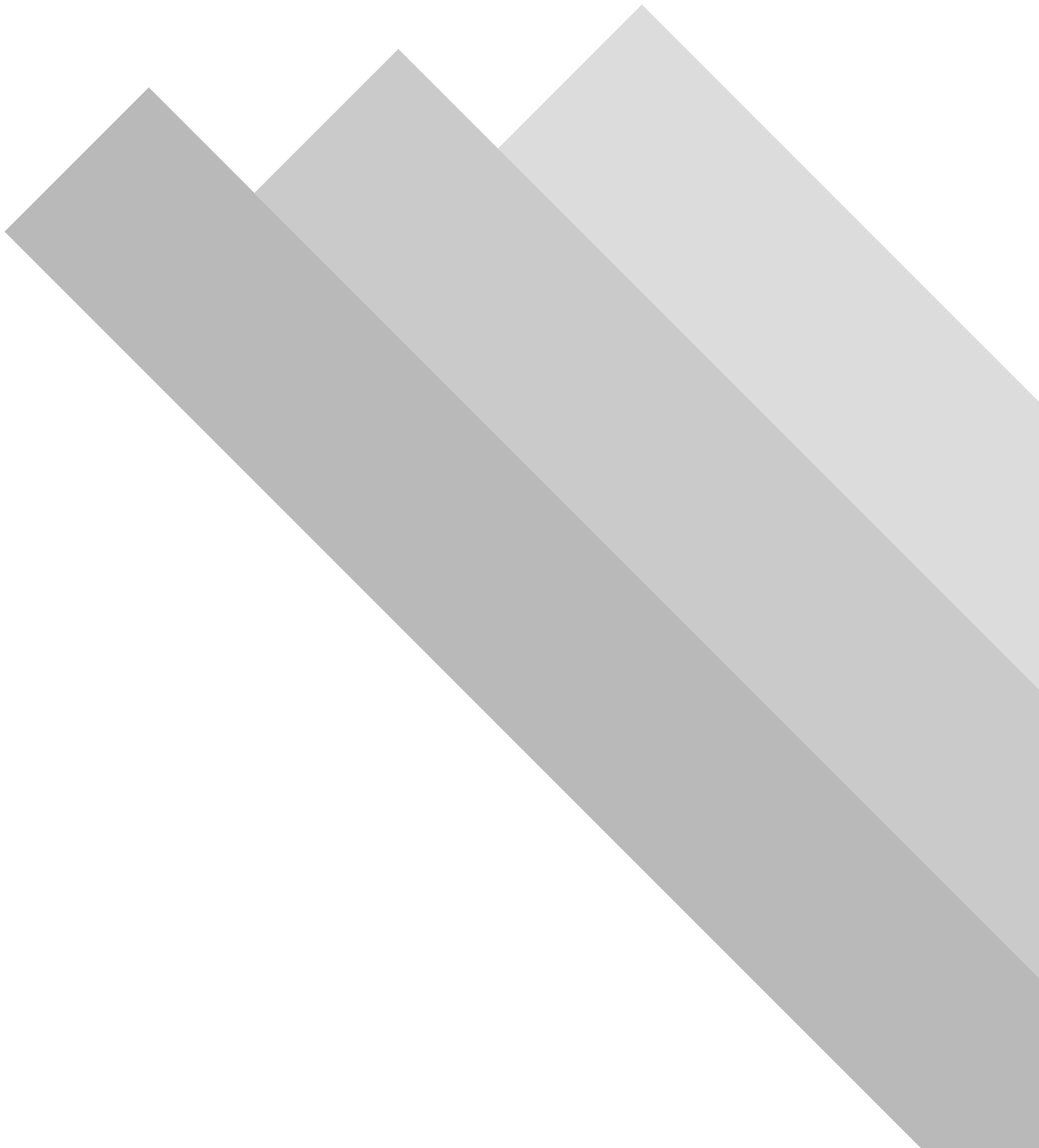
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Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico

2020 SPECIAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on the problems of organized crime and violence in Mexico, which have been of enormous concern to U.S. and Mexican authorities and the general public in both countries in recent decades. To better understand the ongoing challenges Mexico has experienced in recent years, this report examines the trends of violent criminal activities that are often associated with Mexican organized crime groups (OCGs). In particular, this report provides a detailed analysis of recent data on intentional homicides (*homicidio doloso*), intentional injuries (*lesiones*), extortion cases (*extorsión*), reported kidnapping (*secuestro*), and other violent crimes. The authors also compile various data and information about special victims of crimes in Mexico, including government officials, police, military personnel, and media workers. Along these lines, because of growing concerns about systemic violence against women in Mexico, this report also gives special attention to categories of crime specifically targeting women, including femicide (*feminicidio*) and sexual violence (*violencia sexual*).

This report builds on 10 years of previous studies generated by Justice in Mexico, a series that was previously titled *Drug Violence in Mexico*. In 2019, the title and scope of these reports was modified in an effort to gauge the broader impacts of organized crime and violence in Mexico. Accordingly, this report on *Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico* compiles the latest available information and relevant research on these topics, with an emphasis on data made available by Mexican authorities. Because the production of this report was delayed by interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the content focuses primarily on developments through 2019. However, where applicable, the authors discuss trends playing out as this report went to publication in mid-2020.

ORGANIZED CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN MEXICO

The problem of organized crime and violence has been a prevailing public concern in Mexico for decades. In particular, the problem of violence perpetrated by Mexican drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs), or drug cartels, has been evident since the 1990s and grew to become a serious concern in the early 2000s. This violence was fueled by

increased competition among such organizations for control of production zones, transit areas, and “*plazas*” that facilitated access to the U.S. illicit consumer market. Several scholars have noted that increased competition was attributable in part to the opening of the Mexican political system in the late-20th century.¹ In particular, the introduction of new, opposition governments at the municipal and state level disrupted long-standing bargains between corrupt government officials in key *plazas*, contributing to newfound competition and violence among Mexican OCGs vying for access to state protection and market share.

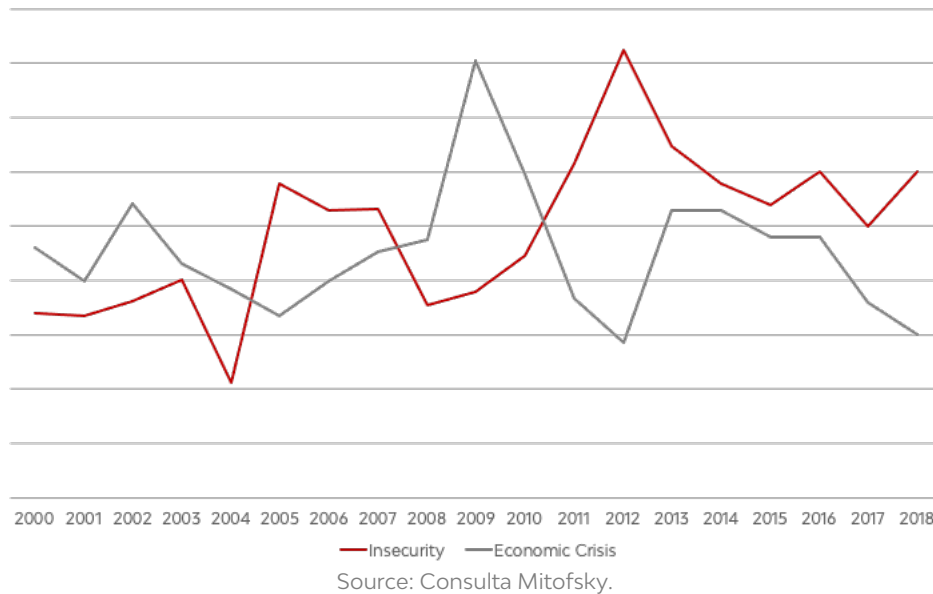
Crimes committed by Mexico’s major OCGs did not typically target ordinary citizens. However, the 1990s also brought a significant increase in the number of violent, predatory crimes both by individuals and low-level OCGs, partly as a result of the economic crisis that followed the 1994-peso devaluation. This proliferation of predatory crimes—including armed robberies and “express” kidnappings—contributed to growing concerns about Mexico’s crisis of “public insecurity.”² The escalation of crime during this period revealed a glaring lack of capacity and integrity in Mexican law enforcement and the criminal justice system in general. This enabled widespread criminal impunity due to an inability to effectively investigate, prosecute, and punish unlawful behavior. Mexican law enforcement and judicial sector institutions suffer from insufficient resources, low levels of professionalization, and rampant corruption, contributing to widespread criminal impunity and low levels of public confidence in the criminal justice system.

In fact, in national polling, the proportion of respondents in public opinion surveys who perceived insecurity as their top concern surged from 2004-2007, even as Mexico’s homicide rates dipped to their lowest recorded levels in 2007 (See Figure 1). The turning point appeared to come in 2008, as the number of homicides in Mexico increased dramatically during the term of Mexican President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), then a member of the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN) who ramped up public security efforts and deployed the military to combat major drug-trafficking operations. By 2010, insecurity became the country’s top public concern in opinion polls for several years running, tracking fairly closely with national crime rates. Following trends in homicide, public concerns about security issues peaked in 2011, declined from 2012-2014, and began rising again beginning in 2015 out of frustration with the resurgence of violence under Calderón’s successor, Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI) President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018).

¹ See, for example, Luis Astorga Almanza and David A. Shirk, “Drugs, Crime, and Violence,” in Peter H. Smith and Andrew Selee, eds., *Mexico and the United States: The Politics of Partnership* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013); Guillermo Trejo and Sandra Ley, “Federalism, Drugs, and Violence: Why Intergovernmental Partisan Conflict Stimulated Inter-Cartel Violence In Mexico” *Política y gobierno* XXIII (1), 2016, pp. 9-52; Angélica Durán-Martínez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops, and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*. New York: Oxford, 2018.

² John Bailey and Jorge Chabat, eds., *Transnational Crime and Public Security: Challenges for Mexico and the United States*. (La Jolla, CA: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California-San Diego, 2002).

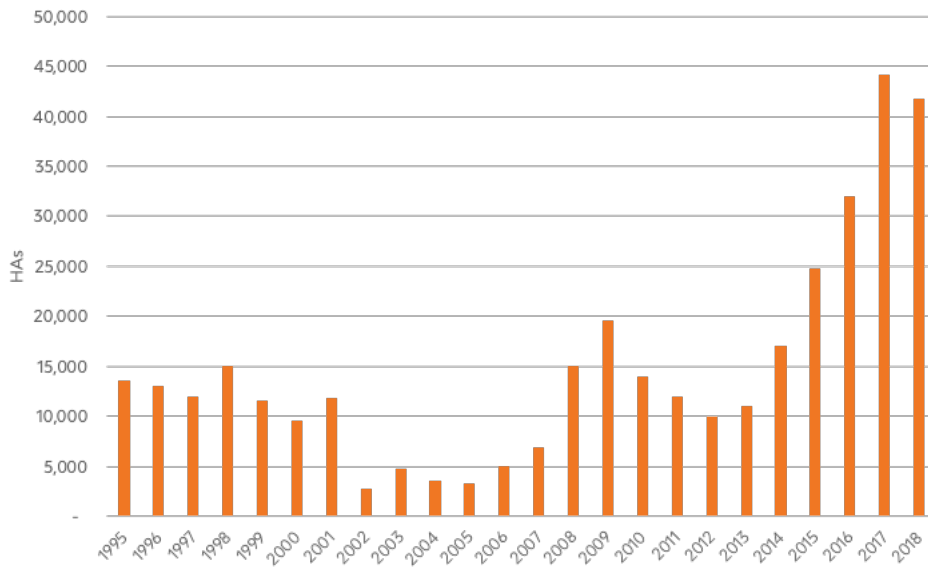
Figure 1: Top Concerns: Economic Crisis vs. Insecurity (by %) 2000-2018



With Peña Nieto’s administration viewed as ineffective on security and also deeply corrupt, the country elected current President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-2024) in 2018 in the hopes of ending the country’s security and rule of law problems. Backed by the National Regeneration Movement (*Movimiento Regeneración Nacional*, MORENA) party that he founded a few years earlier, López Obrador has used this mandate to restructure the country’s security apparatus, including the creation and deployment of a new National Guard (*Guardia Nacional*). Still, as we discuss in this report, over the last year, López Obrador has left many Mexicans disappointed with his handling of the public security situation, as public opinion polls show an average approval of around 50%, and trending downwards since he took office in December 2018.³ President López Obrador’s failure to control illicit drug trafficking, specifically, comes at a time when the resurgence of opioid production in Mexico has contributed to a major public health epidemic related to opioid addiction and overdoses in the United States, as illustrated by the increases in opium cultivation and U.S. overdose deaths in recent years (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).

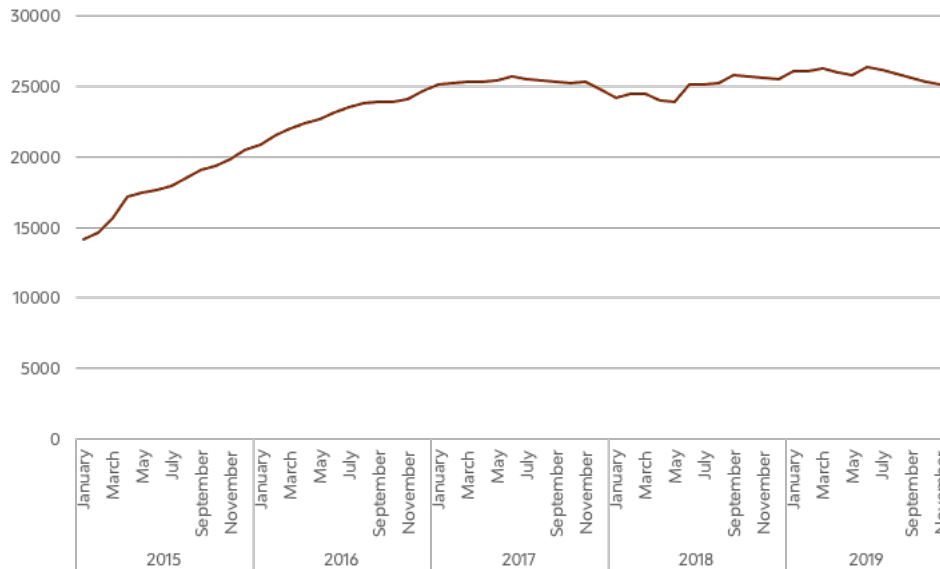
³“López Obrador, aprobación promedio en mayo 2020,” Mitofsky, April 5, 2020, <http://www.consulta.mx/index.php/encuestas-e-investigaciones/evaluacion-de-gobierno/item/1350-lopez-obrador-aprobacion-promedio-abril-2020>.

Figure 2: Estimated Opium Cultivation



Source: U.S. State Department.

Figure 3: U.S. Opioid Overdose Deaths, 2015-2019



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Part of the challenge that Mexican authorities face today is that the country’s public security challenges have evolved significantly over time due to the diversification and proliferation of organized crime. On the one hand, while drug trafficking remains a highly lucrative source of income for criminal organizations operating in Mexico, many such groups have significantly diversified their revenue streams to include other illicit forms of income. For example, the group known as the Zetas (*Los Zetas*) were among the first drug trafficking organizations known to have entered into human trafficking, fuel

theft, and exotic animal trafficking as major sources of revenue.⁴ Because of this, some of Mexico's most powerful OCGs are now widely characterized not only as "DTOs" but as "TCOs," or trans-national criminal organizations.

On the other hand, counter-drug efforts and conflicts with rival organizations have disrupted the leadership structures of some major Mexican OCGs. This has contributed to the splintering of OCGs into smaller, more regionally-focused operations. Because of their more localized scale, such organizations tend to have less capability to develop trans-national criminal enterprises, like international drug trafficking operations. As a result, in addition to small-scale drug dealing, they are also more inclined to engage in predatory crimes, such as kidnapping, extortion, robbery, and similar crimes, which involve illicitly extracting revenue from individuals or businesses. Compared to major drug trafficking operations, many of these crimes have relatively low "barriers to entry" and often require less state protection. However, because of their predatory nature, the fragmentation of organized crime has contributed to more widespread victimization and public outrage.

The result of the above-noted trends is a complex landscape of organized crime and violence in Mexico that requires careful and detailed analysis. While OCGs do not account for all violent crime in Mexico, there are clear indications that such groups have played a major role in overall crime trends in recent years. Sharp increases in violent crime tend to be linked to competition among criminal organizations involved in drug trafficking, which has been the major focus of this series of reports over the last decade. However, because of the diversification of organized criminal activities in Mexico in recent years, this report offers a broader analysis of available data and public source information summarizing violent crime trends across several categories primarily linked to organized crime.

To analyze these trends, this report examines data drawn from various sources to provide an overview of the problem of organized crime and violence in Mexico. In particular, the authors draw heavily on data from the Executive Secretariat for the National Public Security System (*Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública*), referred to here as SNSP, and to a lesser extent on data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, INEGI).⁵ The authors also draw from other studies and media reports in an effort to provide insight into current trends affecting Mexico's public security situation.

In the sections below, we present available data on the major categories of violent crime reported in Mexico: homicide, intentional injury, robbery, kidnapping, extortion, and gender-related violence. Most of these categories involve organized crime to a varying

⁴ Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera, *Los Zetas Inc.: Criminal Corporations, Energy, and Civil War in Mexico* (University of Texas Press, 2017; Spanish version: Planeta, 2018).

⁵ Homicide data reported by INEGI rely on a classification system and medical codes established by the World Health Organization (WHO). As explained in the attached Appendix, these data are much more detailed than those available from SNSP, but INEGI data are released much later than SNSP data, which are updated on a monthly basis.

degree. The notable outlier is gender-related crimes, which has been of growing concern in recent years. Since there has been little analysis to see how such crimes relate to or differ from patterns of organized criminal violence, this report offers some preliminary observations on this topic.

The contributors are keenly aware of the epistemological and methodological challenges and limitations of trying to study organized crime and violence, both generally and in Mexico. These concepts are often intensely debated social and legal constructs laden with subjective and cultural interpretations that greatly complicate the task of properly defining and analyzing the phenomena they describe. There are also enormous limitations to what can be observed and documented with regard to the behaviors and actions of clandestine actors engaged in illicit deeds. This means that any attempt to gauge organized crime and violence is necessarily hindered by a lack of adequate information and often imprecise data. To the best of our ability, we attempt to identify and acknowledge these challenges throughout the report and in the attached Appendix.

VIOLENT CRIME IN MEXICO

OVERVIEW

Mexico has experienced elevated levels of violent crime, especially homicide, for more than a decade, and has been experiencing a sustained public security crisis since the 1990s. This crisis is partly due to increased criminal activity and violence, but it is also a result of the inability of public authorities to reduce crime victimization and criminal impunity. In short, the rule of law in Mexico suffers not only because of the widespread perpetration of crimes, but also as a result of the lack of effective law enforcement. In this section, we present data on recent trends across various categories of violent crime that are commonly associated with organized crime, as well as violent crimes targeting special victims, such as police, military personnel, public officials, and media workers. This analysis will help to illustrate the various forms of criminal activity and violence of prevailing concern in Mexico.

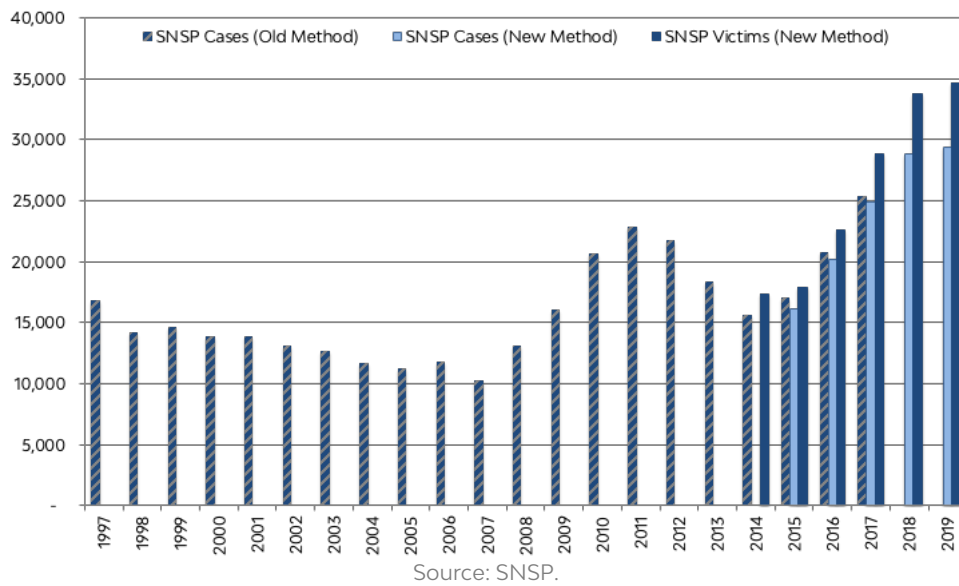
HOMICIDE

Homicide is commonly classified as either intentional (*homicidio doloso*) or unintentional (*homicidio culposo*), with the former category subject to more severe penalties because of deliberate malice. In Mexico, intentional homicide is classified as a crime under Article 315 and Article 350 of the Federal Criminal Code originating in 1931 and last updated January 24, 2020. This legal statute establishes that intentional homicide is a premeditated crime that leads to the death of the victim, and may be considered aggravated (qualified as having higher penalties) when committed “with advantage,

with treachery or treason.”⁶ This legal definition establishes the basis for statistical information on the number of intentional homicide cases and individual victims gathered by state and federal law enforcement agencies and reported by SNSP since 1997. SNSP altered its methodology for reporting intentional homicides in 2014 when it began reporting on victims and introduced a new methodology for reporting cases in 2015. The agency phased out its old methodology in 2018.⁷

SNSP’s intentional homicide data help to inform our understanding of violent crime in Mexico from 1997 to 2019. As illustrated below, Mexico experienced a slow but steady decline in the number of intentional homicides reported starting in the 1990s until early 2000s. This was followed by two step surges from 2008 to 2011 and from 2015 to the present (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

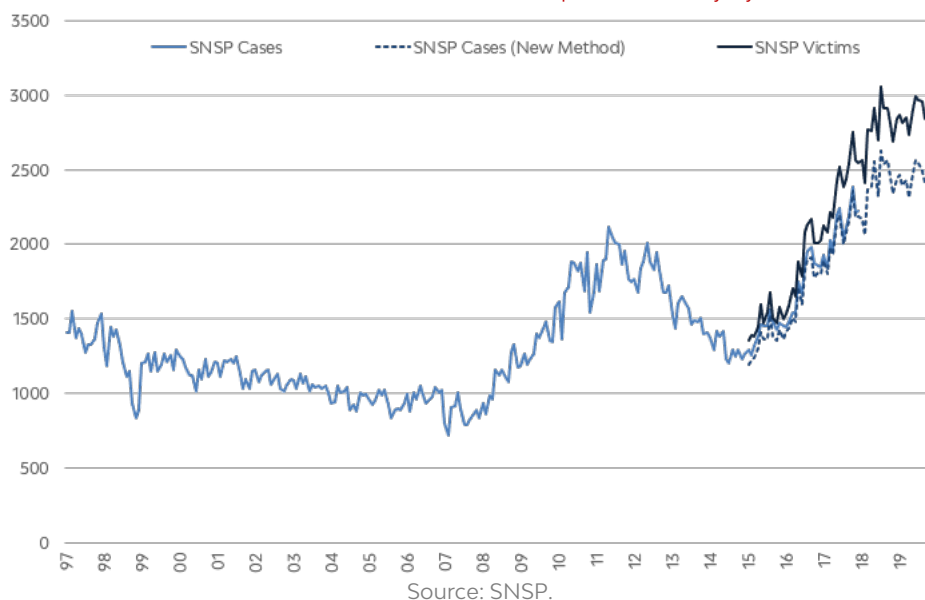
Figure 4: Number of Intentional Homicide Cases and Victims Reported Annually by Law Enforcement, 1997-2019



⁶ Cámara de Diputados, Código Penal Federal, January 24, 2020.

⁷ Compared to the new methodology, the number of homicide cases reported monthly under the old methodology was about 3.4% higher, on average, from 2015 to 2017. This suggests that under the old methodology, some homicide victims were recorded under separate cases.

Figure 5: Number of Intentional Homicide Cases and Victims Reported Monthly by Law Enforcement, 1997-2019



While the number of intentional homicide cases occurring monthly gradually declined after 2011, this number began to climb again in late-2014. By that point, SNSP had begun to tally both the number of homicide cases and victims, both of which showed sharp increases until 2018. By 2019, SNSP reported a nationwide total of 29,406 murder cases (including cases with multiple homicides), resulting in 34,588 individual victims (an average of 2,884 victims per month). This represented a new record high in the number of intentional homicides recorded in Mexico, exceeding the 28,816 murder cases and 33,742 individual victims (an average of 2,778 per month) reported in 2018, which had set the previous record.⁸

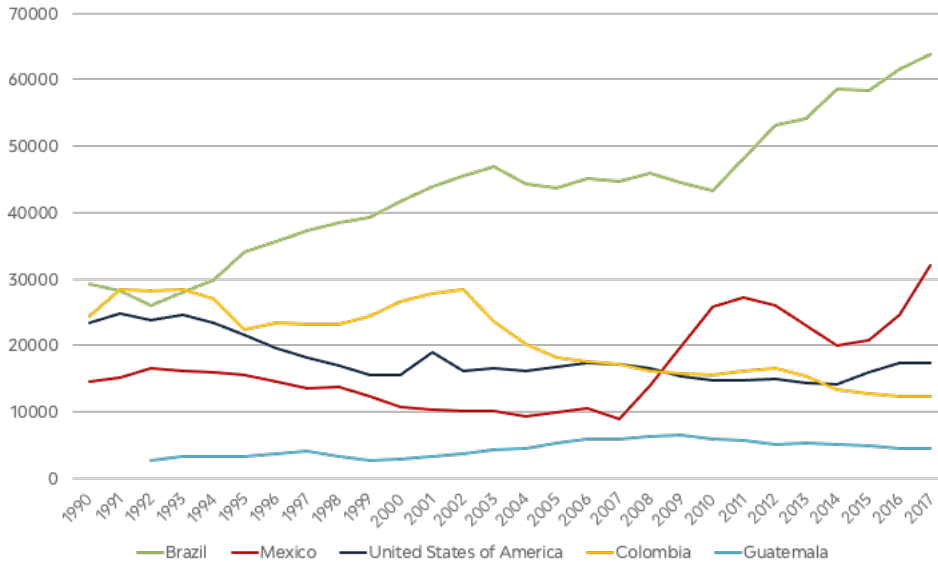
It is worth noting that the rate of increase in the number of homicides has slowed considerably, especially compared to 2016 and 2017 when the number of intentional homicide cases and victims increased by more than 20% annually. The increase in the number of homicides from 2018 to 2019 translated to a much smaller percentage year-over-year increase (<2.5%). Given current trends at the time of this report, Mexico remains on track to see another record year for homicides in 2020, with another small increase (~1.5%) compared to 2019. Available data from SNSP for January through May 2020 indicated that the number of homicides has averaged around 2,926 per month, even amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Cross-national comparison helps to illustrate the relative impact of homicides in Mexico. According to the latest-available comparative data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Mexico's rising number of homicides places it among the most violent countries in the Western Hemisphere. As illustrated in Figure 6, although it has the third largest population in the Americas, Mexico has the second

⁸ From 2018 to 2019, there was a 2% increase in homicide cases and a 2.5% increase in the number of homicide victims. Previously, 2017 was the year with the highest number of homicides, surpassing the record set in 2011.

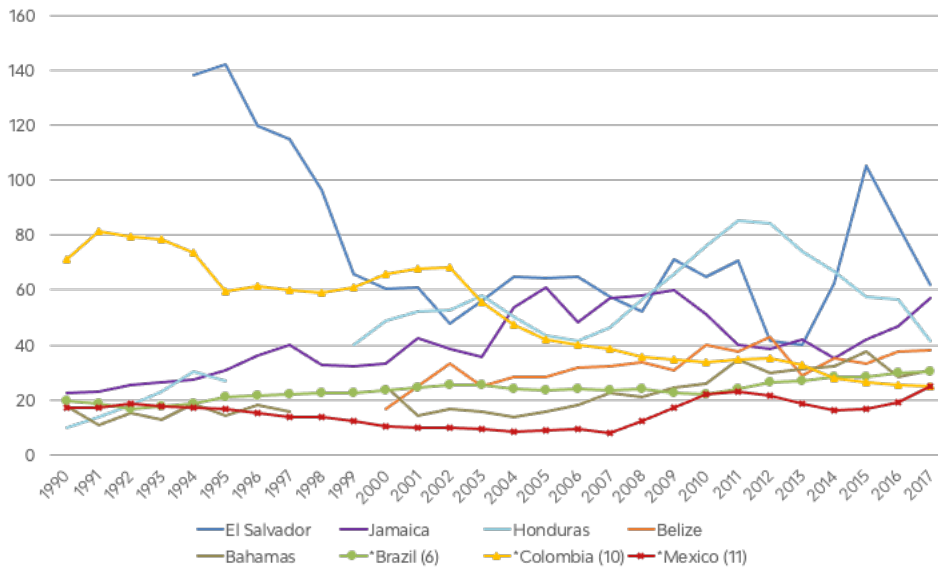
highest number of homicides in the hemisphere (after Brazil, which has more than twice Mexico’s population). Also, while Mexico’s homicide rate still ranks below those of several other countries in the region, its large population means that even small increases in the number of murders per 100,000 inhabitants amount to hundreds or even thousands of lives lost nationally (see Figure 7).

Figure 6: Number of Homicides in the Americas, 1990-2017



Source: UNODC.

Figure 7: Homicide Rates in the Americas, 1990-2017



Source: UNODC.

A major question surrounding intentional homicide trends is the extent to which recent increases have been fueled by violent activities perpetrated by drug traffickers and other OCGs. Unfortunately, at present, SNSP does not publicly release official data on homicides involving organized crime. The agency attempted to track and report the

number of organized crime-related homicides from 2007 to 2010, but it stopped doing so thereafter, citing methodological challenges.⁹ Still, SNSP's intentional homicide statistics offer some useful indicators of the role that OCGs play in Mexico's violence.

For example, one consistent finding among studies of violence in Mexico is that there is a high geographic concentration of intentional homicides in states and municipalities that suffer from problems of organized crime.¹⁰ In particular, geographic areas that are strategically important for the production, transportation, and distribution of illicit psychotropic substances are often highly-contested by OCGs. As noted earlier, in recent decades, competition among OCGs has contributed to large and frequent spikes in the number of violent crimes, and particularly homicides, clustered in these geographic areas. Also, because of the sporadic nature of clashes and infighting among such organizations, the distribution of intentional homicides can shift dramatically across different years. Figure 8 and Figure 9 illustrate the national-level distribution of the number and rate (per 100,000 inhabitants) of intentional homicides reported by SNSP in 2019.

Figure 8: Number of Reported Homicide Cases by State and Municipality¹¹

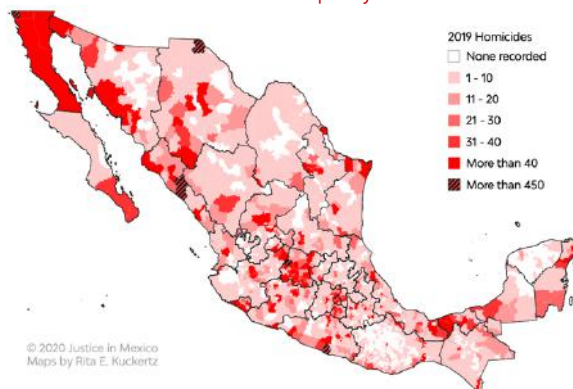
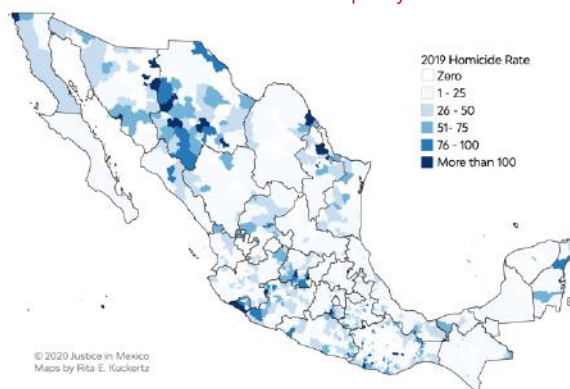


Figure 9: Reported Homicide Cases (Rate Per 100K) by State and Municipality



Source: SNSP.

⁹ These are characterized here as “organized crime-related” homicides because SNSP data included information solicited from regional offices of the Federal Attorney General (*Procuraduría General de la República, PGR*) on the number of intentional homicide cases that were linked to official law enforcement investigations on organized crime. Thus, authorities officially identified an alleged connection to organized crime. We describe other non-governmental tallies as referring to “organized-crime-style homicides” because they rely on circumstantial indicators that organized crime may have been involved.

¹⁰ Studies examining the concentration and clustering of violence in Mexico include Justice in Mexico's crime and violence reports as well as the following individual works published by contributors of this report: Kimberly Heinle, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, “Analysing Drug Violence in Mexico,” in *Routledge Handbook of Security Studies*, Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Thierry Balzacq, eds., (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 313-326; Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, “Violent Mexico: Participatory and Multipolar Violence Associated with Organised Crime,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 10, no. 1 (2016); Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, “De Casus Belli,” *La criminalidad transnacional organizada en los conflictos armados contemporáneos* (Madrid: Tecnos, 2015); David A. Shirk, and Joel Wallman, “Understanding Mexico's Drug Violence,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 8 (2015): 1348-1376.

¹¹ The data illustrated in Figure 8 and Figure 9 reflect a distribution of municipal-level homicide cases, along with various outlier cases. In order to accurately depict those municipalities that recorded a number of homicides significantly beyond the distribution's mean, we have selected the top 10 municipalities with the greatest number of homicides and assigned them a separate, patterned color.

As illustrated above, there are particularly high concentrations of intentional homicides in at least five specific zones and municipalities in which the number of homicides is greater than 450 and the homicide rate exceeds 100 per 100,000 inhabitants. These high concentration areas or “hot spots” include the following: 1) Tijuana, 2) Ciudad Juárez, 3) Culiacán, 4) Acapulco de Juárez, and 5) León. Each of these areas has experienced elevated levels of organized criminal activity in recent years. In terms of homicide rate, the hot spots include three major clusters of violence: 1) the North-East border region with Texas (including some municipalities of Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas), 2) the Jalisco- Colima- Michoacán pacific coastal region, and 3) the Golden Triangle area (Chihuahua-Durango-Sinaloa, spilling into some municipalities of Sonora).¹² Most of these areas have been long-time drug production or drug trafficking hot spots, though the particulars of these clusters are discussed in more detail later in this report.¹³

Further indications of the role of OCGs in fomenting violence in Mexico can be found in unofficial tallies of homicides generated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including media organizations, private consulting firms, and academic initiatives. Such efforts have attempted to monitor and report the number of “organized-crime-style” homicides occurring in Mexico by identifying publicly reported murders that have characteristics or circumstances commonly associated with organized crime. While such tallies face numerous methodological difficulties, they provide a rough estimate of the number and proportion of intentional homicides that can be attributed to OCGs. Regardless of the actual involvement of organized crime, such efforts also provide an indication of the number of high impact murders – e.g., those involving multiple assailants, high powered weaponry, narco-messages, etc. – taking place in Mexico, especially since these tend to be widely reported by the media.

The two Mexican media organizations that have most regularly reported on the number of organized-crime-style homicides are the nationally-distributed newspapers *Reforma* and *Milenio*.¹⁴ Both *Reforma* and *Milenio* track and report national-level data on organized-crime-style homicides, though unfortunately neither has consistently reported this information for the state or municipal level.¹⁵ Also, because the two organizations use different methodologies, there are significant differences between the two, as can be seen in Figure 10. In 2019, *Milenio* reported that there were 23,393 organized-crime-style homicides, while *Reforma* reported 15,108. Both figures represented the highest number of organized-crime-style homicides ever reported by either media organization, paralleling the rise to record official homicide figures. In

¹² There might be other areas with high concentrations of homicides in terms of homicide rate. However, some of these areas' homicide rates are affected by smaller population sizes rather than atypical homicide patterns.

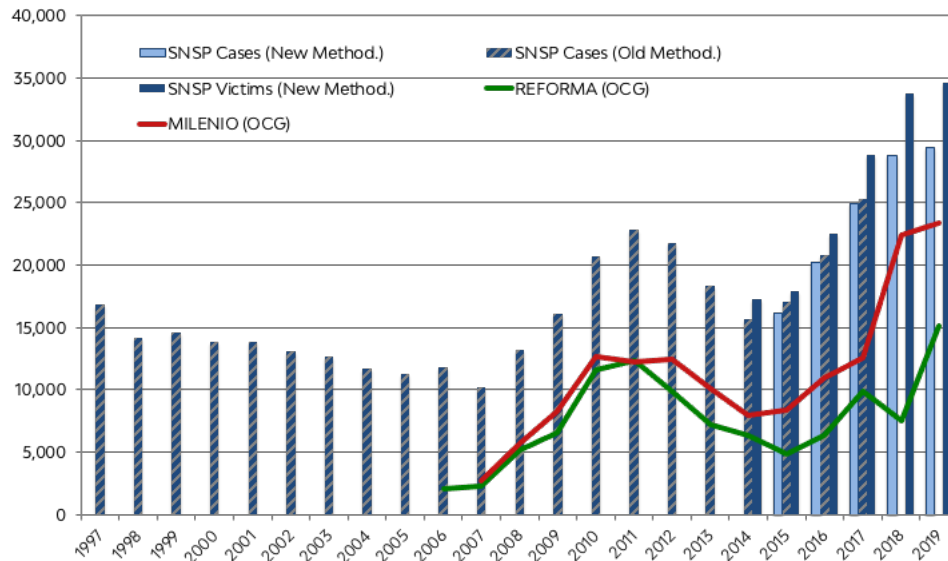
¹³ Another minor homicide rate cluster is in the Bajío region, mostly in the state of Guanajuato. Guanajuato is somewhat of an outlier, in that organized criminal violence appears to be particularly linked to the problem of fuel theft.

¹⁴ In past reports, the authors have also referenced tallies for organized-crime-style homicides from other organizations, including SNSP, the National Human Rights Commission (*Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, CNDH*), and the consulting firm *Lantia*. However, these tallies are no longer publicly-available.

¹⁵ After a significant lapse, *Reforma* began reporting state figures again in early 2019.

recent years, *Milenio's* tallies have more closely corresponded with official figures than *Reforma's*.¹⁶

Figure 10: Comparison Between Intentional Homicides and Organized-Crime-Related Homicides



Sources: SNSP, Reforma, Milenio.

Comparing *Reforma's* relatively conservative estimate and *Milenio's* much larger estimate to the total number of homicides reported by SNSP, this suggests that somewhere between 44% to 80% of all officially reported intentional homicides bore characteristics that suggested the involvement of OCGs. It is unclear whether those organized-crime-style murders were perpetrated by large, powerful crime syndicates, local gangs, or small groups of individuals. However, the available data do suggest that a substantial proportion – and perhaps a sizeable majority – of Mexico's recent violence is attributable to OCGs, rather than other causes such as sexual crimes, interpersonal disputes, or interfamilial violence.

Of course, not all forms of death provoke an equal sense of alarm, and it is necessary to keep Mexico's homicides in perspective. There is little doubt that Mexican homicides – especially organized-crime-style homicides – have provoked far greater attention than other troubling problems.¹⁷ At last count by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2016, nearly two thirds of deaths worldwide were attributable to non-contagious diseases, like coronary disease or diabetes, and roughly 13% of deaths were attributable to infectious diseases that are largely preventable (namely, lower respiratory infections,

¹⁶ This was particularly apparent in 2015 and 2018 when national homicide rates went up, but *Reforma* reported declines in the number of organized-crime-style homicides.

¹⁷ For example, the current murder rate in Mexico (around 29 per 100,000) is lower than the rate of suicide in Russia (31.9 per 100,000) or Lithuania (31 per 100,000) in recent years, yet this problem does not draw a similar level of worldwide attention and alarm. The most recent comparative data on suicide available from the WHO refers to 2016. Both Russia and Lithuania had much higher rates of suicide (exceeding 50 per 100,000) at the start of the century, and have seen gradual reductions. See "Suicide Rate Estimates, Crude Estimate by Country," World Health Organization, April 5, 2018, <https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.MHSUICIDE>.

intestinal disease, and tuberculosis).¹⁸ These trends largely hold constant for Mexico, where the WHO reported that 24% of all deaths are due to cardiovascular disease; 14% are due to diabetes; 12% are due to cancers; 11% are due to communicable, maternal, perinatal and nutritional diseases; 6% are due to respiratory disease; and 21% are due to other noncommunicable diseases. Only 12% of deaths were attributable to injuries (including homicide).¹⁹ Amid the COVID-19 outbreak, especially, it is worth bearing in mind that there are other urgent threats to human security.

Yet, part of the reason why homicide is of such enormous concern is that it has risen to become the leading cause of premature death in Mexico.²⁰ Indeed, it is *the* leading cause of death among youth aged 15-19 and young adults aged 20-39, according to data from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), a branch of the WHO.²¹ This is especially true because of the high death rate by homicide in Mexico among male youths and adults in these age groups, although homicide has also proven to be a leading cause of death for women at peak periods of violence.²² There is also evidence that the vast majority of victims of violence are of limited socioeconomic means, and facing significant educational deficits and inadequate employment opportunities.²³ In other words, **the young Mexican men and women who are least able make a decent living are most likely to die a violent death.** This has disastrous human, social, and economic consequences in Mexico, since lost lives devastate families, tear apart communities, and permanently destroy productive capacity.²⁴

¹⁸ "10 Facts on Noncommunicable Diseases," World Health Organization, http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/noncommunicable_diseases/facts/en.

¹⁹ World Health Organization, "Mexico" (Diabetes Country Profiles), 2016, https://www.who.int/diabetes/country-profiles/mex_en.pdf?ua=1.

²⁰ According to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, interpersonal violence jumped from the eleventh leading cause of death in Mexico in 2007 to the fourth leading cause of death in 2017, behind heart disease, kidney disease, and diabetes. Intrapersonal violence also caused the most premature deaths in Mexico in 2017, a jump from its eighth-place ranking in 2007. See "Mexico," Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, <http://www.healthdata.org/mexico> (accessed April 24, 2020).

²¹ Meanwhile, the leading cause of death for middle-aged men aged 40-44 is cirrhosis and other liver disease, while for men aged 45-79 it is diabetes. See "Principales causas de muerte," Pan American Health Organization, <https://www.paho.org/data/index.php/es/mnu-mortalidad/principales-causas-de-muerte.html> (accessed April 24, 2020).

²² According to data from PAHO (Plataforma de Información en Salud para las Américas), during the height of the wave of violence from 2008-2012, homicide was the leading cause of death for women aged 15-34. See "Principales causas de muerte," Pan American Health Organization, <https://www.paho.org/data/index.php/es/mnu-mortalidad/principales-causas-de-muerte.html> (accessed July 7, 2020).

²³ Matthew C. Ingram, "The Local Educational and Regional Economic Foundations of Violence: A Subnational, Spatial Analysis of Homicide Rates across Mexico's Municipalities" (Working Paper), Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2014, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/mex_hom_analysis_ingram.pdf.

²⁴ The Institute for Economy and Peace (IEP) documents the economic toll that it has had in its annual "Mexico Peace Index: 2019." IEP found that the level of peace nationwide in Mexico decreased in 2018 by 4.9% compared to 2017, which led to a 10% increase in the toll it took on Mexico's economy. This brought the cost of violence to 5.16 billion pesos, which is almost one quarter the national gross domestic product (GDP). "The cost of lost opportunity is high," the report states. "Reducing violence throughout Mexico to the level of its five most peaceful states would generate a peace dividend of 2.5 billion pesos a year, or 10 billion pesos over a period of four years." See "Mexico Peace Index 2019," Institute for Economy and Peace, April 2019, <http://economicsandpeace.org/reports/>.

INTENTIONAL INJURIES

SNSP reports on crimes that result in intentional injuries (*lesiones*), a category that roughly correlates to the legal category of “assault and battery” in U.S. criminal law. Under Article 288 of the Mexican Federal Criminal Code, intentional injuries are considered to be premeditated actions that result in physical damage to an individual, including gunshot wounds, lacerations, blunt trauma, and other externally caused health effects that leave “a material mark” (*huella material*) on the body.²⁵ The number and rate of intentional injuries does not necessarily follow the exact same pattern as other violent crimes, such as homicide, though there are some similar trends.

In 2019, the number of cases of intentional injury in Mexico increased for the fourth year in a row, according to data from SNSP. The number of intentional injuries initially declined from 139,783 cases in 2015 to 137,151 in 2016, but then began to move in an upward trajectory. In 2017, 152,273 cases of intentional injury were registered, followed by 157,416 in 2018 and eventually increasing to 164,143 in 2019. According to INEGI’s 2019 National Survey on Victimization and Public Security Perception (*Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública, ENVIPE*), the projected rate of intentional injuries in 2018 was nearly 60% higher for men (1,474 per 100,000 inhabitants) than for women (922 per 100,000 inhabitants).²⁶ ENVIPE data also show that intentional injuries were more commonly associated with urban areas (1,266 per 100,000 inhabitants) than rural areas (866 per 100,000 inhabitants). With a “*cifra negra*” of about 87% unreported, intentional injuries were more likely to be reported to authorities than other violent crimes.²⁷

At the municipal level, SNSP data show that 1,856 of Mexico’s 2,326 municipalities reported at least one intentional injury in 2019. Thirty-five municipalities reported more than 1,000 cases in 2019, of which 11 municipalities had more than 2,000 cases, just three had more than 3,000 cases, and only one had more than 5,000 cases. The top five municipalities with the highest number of cases of intentional injury in 2019 were Ecatepec de Morelos, Estado de México (5,392 cases); Toluca, Estado de México (3,935); León, Guanajuato (3,078); Querétaro, Querétaro (2,923); and Mexicali, Baja California (2,842). Estado de México alone accounted for nearly 30% of all intentional injuries in Mexico in 2019 with 49,094 of the 164,143 cases nationwide. Guanajuato ranked second, accounting for 8.8% of all cases with 14,500 registered intentional injuries. This was followed by Jalisco with 5.4% of all cases, Baja California with 4.2%, and Chiapas with 3.9% to round out the top five states with the most intentional injuries in 2019. Meanwhile, nine states each accounted for less than 1% of all cases in Mexico.

²⁵ “Delitos contra la vida y la integridad corporal.” See Código Penal Federal, Libro II, Capítulo I “Lesiones,” Article 288.

²⁶ These rates were calculated based on a sample size of 325,708 total household members for whom crime victimization data was collected.

²⁷ INEGI, Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (ENVIPE): Principales Resultados, September 24, 2019, pp. 13, 14, 16, 32. https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/envipe/2019/doc/envipe2019_presentacion_nacional.pdf (accessed July 4, 2020).

Campeche had the fewest cases nationwide with just 109 intentional injuries recorded in 2019, or .07% of Mexico’s 164,143 cases (See Figure 11 and Figure 12).

Figure 11: Number of Reported Intentional Injury Cases by State and Municipality

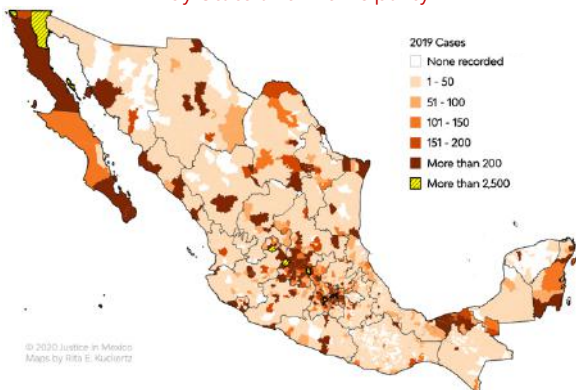
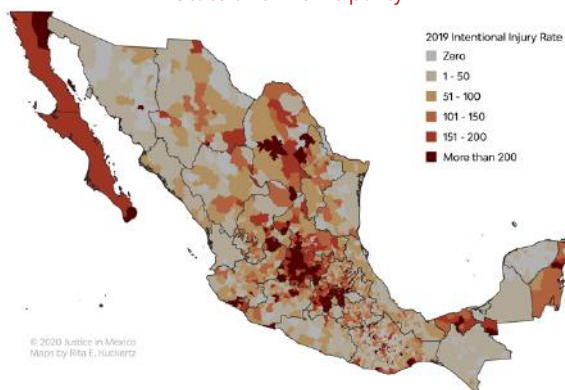


Figure 12: Reported Intentional Injury Rate by 100K by State and Municipality



Source: SNSP.

This past year was also the first time in at least five years that Tijuana, Baja California was not one of the top five municipalities with the highest number of intentional injury cases. The border city had the country’s largest tally in 2015 (5,907 cases), 2016 (4,699), and 2017 (4,483). In 2018, it dropped to third highest with 3,391 cases, and then fell to seventh on the list in 2019 with 2,774. It is noticeable that the number of intentional injuries in Tijuana has decreased, even as the number of intentional homicides has increased. This may suggest that physical confrontations have simply become more lethal.²⁸ The neighboring municipality – Mexicali, Baja California – has also been among those with the highest number of intentional injuries cases in recent years, though the number has been on the decline. In 2015, Mexicali had the second highest number of intentional injury cases for a municipality (3,671 cases). However, it fell to third place in 2016 (3,349) and 2017 (3,315), to fourth in 2018 (3,233 cases), and to fifth in 2019 (2,842).

KIDNAPPING

Kidnapping (*secuestro*) is a criminal offense in the Federal Criminal Code and specifically defined under the 2010 General Law to Prevent and Punish Crimes in the Matter of Kidnappings (*Ley General Para Prevenir y Sancionar Los Delitos en Materia de Secuestro*). Under Chapter II, Article 9 of the 2010 General Law, kidnapping is a punishable offense of 40-80 years in prison when it involves an effort to detain a person as a hostage under threat of life or harm as a means of extortion, obtain a ransom, or cause harm. Additional penalties apply when “aggravated” by the involvement of two or more perpetrators; when occurring in specific locations (e.g., public road); when

²⁸ Jaime Arredondo Sánchez Lira et al., “The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana,” Justice in Mexico Policy Brief, February 5, 2018, https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/180205_TJViolence.pdf.

involving a minor, woman or elderly person; or when the perpetrators break into a property to commit the act.²⁹

SNSP compiles and reports data on the number of kidnappings on a monthly basis for all states and municipalities. According to available SNSP data, the number of officially reported kidnappings in Mexico had slowly and steadily risen over the years, but leveled off in 2018 and 2019. That is, the number reported kidnapping cases increased gradually from 2015 to 2017: with 1,061 in 2015, 1,128 in 2016, and 1,149 in 2017. Thereafter, there was a roughly 15% increase in the number of officially reported kidnappings each, with 1,329 (2018) and 1,323 (2019).

Figure 13: Number of Reported Kidnappings Cases by State and Municipality

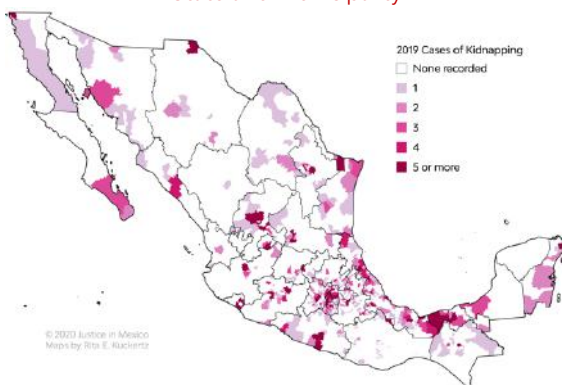


Figure 14: Reported Kidnappings Rate Per 100K by State and Municipality



SOURCE: SNSP.

First, at the state level, Veracruz had the highest number of officially reported kidnappings (298) in 2019, followed by Estado de México (206), Mexico City (175), Morelos (72), and Puebla (70). Yucatán was the only state to register no cases of kidnapping. Durango had just 1, Nayarit and Campeche both had 3, and Baja California Sur had 5 cases to round out the bottom five entities with the fewest cases in 2019 (See Figure 13 and Figure 14).

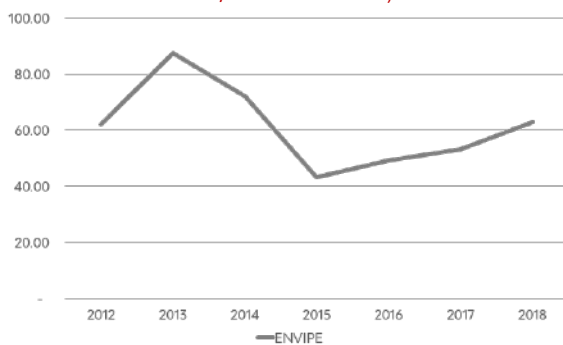
Second, at the municipal level, the top three municipalities with the most cases of kidnapping were in Mexico City: Gustavo A. Madero (25 cases), Iztapalapa (25), and Cuauhtémoc (24). The next three were all in Veracruz: Xalapa (22 cases), Veracruz (19), and Martínez de la Torre (17). Thirty percent of all kidnappings occurred in 2019 in just 28 municipalities, highlighting the concentration of the cases. In 2018, six of the top 10 municipalities with the most kidnappings were located in Mexico City – municipalities in which 14% of all kidnappings nationwide occurred. The spike in kidnappings reported in Mexico City is relatively new, however, as Tamaulipas, Tabasco, and Estado de México, among several other states, tended to rank in the top 10 municipalities.

²⁹ Ley General Para Prevenir y Sancionar Los Delitos En Materia De Secuestro, Reglamentaria de la Fracción XXI del Artículo 73 de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, November 30, 2010 (revised January 19, 2018), http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LGPSDMS_190118.pdf.

While official data are useful in identifying trends in known kidnapping cases, they are widely regarded as a poor indicator of the actual incidence of this crime. Kidnappings tend to be significantly under-reported because of the nature of ransom negotiations, low levels of confidence in law enforcement, and past evidence of direct police involvement in and support for kidnappings. Indeed, according to Mexico’s latest national crime victimization survey, ENVIPE, released in September 2019, around 91.2% of kidnappings went unreported or uninvestigated by authorities in 2018. That year, there were an estimated 81,966 kidnappings of some member of a household, far more than the above-noted official statistic for 2018 (1,329).³⁰ This illustrates the under-reporting of crime, but it does not provide a clear indication of how representative (or unrepresentative) officially reported kidnappings are compared to the overall incidence of kidnapping.

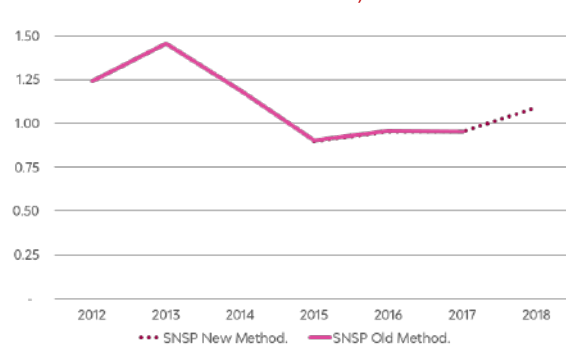
To determine the relationship between officially reported kidnappings and reporting of kidnapping in crime victimization surveys, it is useful to compare SNSP and ENVIPE data over time. Figure 16 below shows that from 2012 to 2018, the number of kidnappings reported by SNSP followed the same pattern as the number reported in ENVIPE crime victimization surveys (Figure 15). Indeed, there was a strong positive correlation (0.95) in the rate of officially reported kidnappings and the rate calculated from crime victimization survey data. That is, the fewer kidnappings reported by SNSP in a given year, the fewer were also reported by ENVIPE survey respondents (See Figure 15 and Figure 16).³¹ This illustrates that while official data on kidnappings may not reflect the true volume of cases, they may be useful in predicting trends from year to year.

Figure 15: ENVIPE Estimated Kidnapping Rates (Per 100,000 Inhabitants)



Sources: CONAPO, ENVIPE.

Figure 16: SNSP Kidnapping Rates (Per 100,000 Inhabitants)



Sources: CONAPO, SNSP.

³⁰ The estimated figure for 2018 kidnappings reported by INEGI was slightly higher than the total number of reported kidnappings, divided by the number of respondents, multiplied by CONAPO’s 2018 national population estimate (See calculated estimated in Table 1), See INEGI, Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (ENVIPE): Principales Resultados, September 24, 2019, https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/envipe/2019/doc/envipe2019_presentacion_nacional.pdf (accessed July 4, 2020).

³¹ Starting in 2014, SNSP began reporting figures based on a new methodology, while continuing to report data using the former methodology through 2017. Data points for both methodologies have been included in Figure 16 for 2015 through 2017 in order to account for any significant statistical changes from year to year. As illustrated, the methodology change did not significantly alter the rate of extortion.

Table 1: Comparison of Officially Reported Kidnapping Cases and Estimate of Kidnappings Based on ENVIPE Crime Victimization Survey Reports (2018)

State	Estimate of Kidnappings Based on ENVIPE Survey Reports	Number of Kidnapping Cases Reported by SNSP
Aguascalientes	0	10
Baja California	746	15
Baja California Sur	382	0
Campeche	457	8
Chiapas	1,115	24
Chihuahua	3,948	10
Mexico City	12,217	280
Coahuila	1,012	11
Colima	374	16
Durango	1,183	6
Guanajuato	4,572	4
Guerrero	3,175	57
Hidalgo	913	21
Jalisco	4,096	16
Estado de México	10,513	174
Michoacán	3,540	34
Morelos	618	46
Nayarit	1,033	9
Nuevo León	2,792	28
Oaxaca	2,379	27
Puebla	2,752	46
Querétaro	1,275	12
Quintana Roo	583	14
San Luis Potosí	421	20
Sinaloa	697	8
Sonora	512	2
Tabasco	1,522	103
Tamaulipas	6,560	109
Tlaxcala	848	3
Veracruz	5,339	175
Yucatán	194	0
Zacatecas	3,061	41
Grand Total	78,828	1,329

Sources: ENVIPE, SNSP, CONAPO.

It is also useful to see how well official data represent the geographic distribution of kidnappings by state, based on information gathered from ENVIPE respondents (See Table 1). For example, in 2018, SNSP reported that the five states with the most kidnappings were Mexico City (280), Veracruz (175), Estado de México (174), Tamaulipas (109), and Tabasco (103), with all other states having fewer than 60 reported kidnappings. According to calculations conducted using ENVIPE respondent data, the five states with the largest estimated number of kidnappings reported by survey respondents in 2018 were Mexico City (12,217), Estado de México (12,217), Tamaulipas

(6,560), Veracruz (5,339), and Guanajuato (4,572). Thus, four of the five states with the greatest number of officially reported kidnapping cases also saw the highest rates of kidnapping on the ENVIPE crime victimization survey. This once again suggests that while official data on the number of kidnapping cases in Mexico may not capture a majority of the crimes committed, it may still be useful for examining geographic trends.

EXTORTION

Title 22, Chapter III, Article 390 of Mexico's Federal Criminal Code defines extortion as a punishable offense with up to 2-8 years in prison when one individual forces another to "give, do, stop doing, or tolerate something for the purpose of personal enrichment or to another person financial harm." As such, extortion falls into one of several major categories under which SNSP groups types of violent crime, along with homicide, crimes against personal liberty, sex crimes, crimes against property (*patrimonio*), crimes against the family, and crimes against society. Specifically, extortion is listed under the category of "crimes against property," which also includes cases of robbery, fraud, breach of confidence, property damage, looting, and others.

Over the years, there has been a steady rise in officially reported cases of extortion from 5,072 cases in 2015 to nearly 8,500 cases in 2019, according to SNSP data. These data include both direct extortion (*extorsión directa*) and indirect extortion (*extorsión indirecta*).³² According to Mexico's Federal Police (*Policía Federal, PF*), direct extortion is when the individual or group committing the crime asserts their physical presence at the establishment or the residency to threaten the owner, employee, or inhabitant. In cases of direct extortion, the criminal typically identifies themselves as a member of a specific OCG and makes a demand of payment for the protection of the victim to avoid further harm or violence, whether to the victim, their family, or the establishment. Often, payment of a fee or quota is demanded on a periodic basis, ensuring that the victim stays loyal to the group demanding the payment.³³

³² Policía Federal, "Conoce los tipos de extorsión," Gobierno de México, <https://www.gob.mx/policiafederal/articulos/conoce-los-tipos-de-extorsion> (accessed March 29, 2020).

³³ Indirect extortion is committed in six different ways, all of which are done through telephone calls to the victim. This includes: a) Premiums (victim receives false notification that they have won a prize like a trip or vehicle, but it requires a premium deposit into the criminal's bank account); b) Virtual kidnapping of a family member (the criminal demands a monetary sum in exchange for releasing their kidnapped loved one, who was never actually detained); c) Family member detained abroad (criminal pretends to a member of the family who was traveling and detained by authorities, requiring a payment from the victim to be released); d) Threat of violent crime (the criminal threatens the victim that if they do not pay, their loved one will be kidnapped or murdered, oftentimes using real names and personal information of the victim's family or friends obtained by the victim through prior research); e) Threat from alleged federal agents (the criminal pretends to be a federal authority who has one of their loved ones in custody, whom they will release in exchange for a payment from the victim or they will threaten to turn him or her over to appropriate authorities for processing); and f) Contracted debt (the criminal pretends to be a member of the banking or finance industry, threatening the victim that they will be forced to pay more on the sum owed if they do not cover the smaller amount demanded at the time). See Policía Federal, "Conoce los tipos de extorsión," Gobierno de México, <https://www.gob.mx/policiafederal/articulos/conoce-los-tipos-de-extorsion> (accessed March 29, 2020).

Figure 17: Number of Reported Extortion Cases by State and Municipality

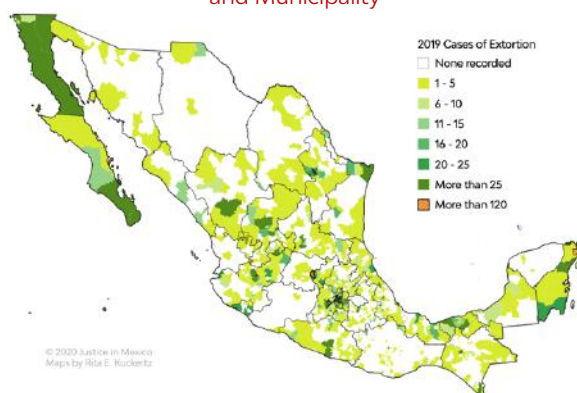
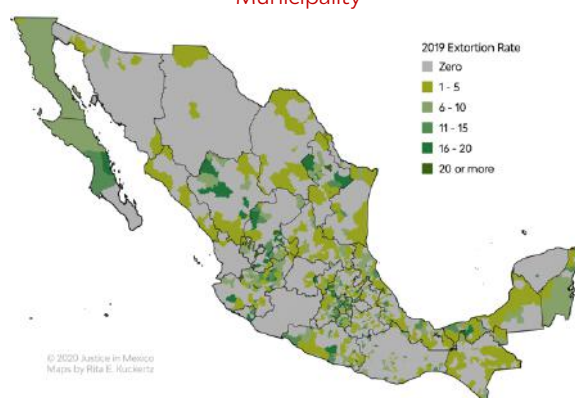


Figure 18: Reported Extortion Rate Per 100K by State and Municipality



Source: SNSP.

At the municipal level, the number of officially reported extortion cases has been relatively concentrated among a handful of highly-affected municipalities year after year (See Figure 17 and Figure 18). In 2019, the two municipalities with the most cases of extortion were both in Estado de México: Ecatepec de Morelos with 296 and Toluca with 275. Guadalajara, in the state of Jalisco, registered 186 cases of extortion, followed by Monterrey in Nuevo León with 181 and Querétaro in the state of Querétaro with 176. Most of these municipalities also ranked in the top five or six cities with the most kidnappings in 2018 and 2017.

Estado de México had the highest number of extortion cases in 2019 with 2,487 cases, or 29% of all 8,500 registered nationwide. Mexico City had the second highest with 856 cases, followed by Jalisco (742), Veracruz (560), and Nuevo León (509) to round out the top five. Tlaxcala and Michoacán had the fewest cases with just 2 each registered in 2019. Nayarit had only 4, Yucatán with 7, and Sonora with 16 cases.

Similar to official statistics on kidnapping in Mexico, these data help to identify observable trends in known cases of extortion, but they may not illustrate the true incidence of this type of crime. This is in part due to the overall lack of reporting on this crime. Indeed, for crimes committed in 2018, the estimated *cifra negra*, or percentage of unreported offenses, was 97.0% for extortion—the highest of all crimes that INEGI examined, including kidnapping (91.2%), intentional injuries (86.9%), and robbery (38.1%-94.8%).³⁴ However, official statistics also fall short in capturing the full scope of citizen reports of extortion to authorities. For instance, SNSP data may not include complaints of extortion made to all state attorneys' general offices, those submitted to

³⁴ There are four separate *cifra negra* figures for robbery as a result of INEGI's classification system: partial robbery of a vehicle saw a *cifra negra* of 94.8%, while "robbery on public roads or transportation" was reported at 94.7%. Similarly, INEGI reported a rate of 93.3% for "other robberies" and 38.1% for full robbery of a vehicle. See INEGI, Encuesta Nacional de Victimization y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (ENVIPE): Principales Resultados, September 24, 2019, pp. 32, https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/envipe/2019/doc/envipe2019_presentacion_nacional.pdf (accessed July 20, 2020).

local law enforcement offices, those not referred to a prosecutor's office, or those reported telephonically.³⁵

Results from the ENVIPE survey of victims in Mexico echo this reality. In 2018, respondents reported 5,837 instances of extortion, reflecting a rate of approximately 1,792 cases per 100,000 inhabitants (N = 325,708).³⁶ Meanwhile, SNSP reported 6,721 total cases in 2018, reflecting an incidence of 5.51 per 100,000 – more than 300 times less than ENVIPE data suggest. At the state level, SNSP reported that Estado de México saw the greatest number of cases of extortion in 2018, with 1,629 cases. However, ENVIPE survey data suggest that the figure is likely closer to 262,834 (See Table 2). In fact, estimates based on the incidence of extortion calculated using ENVIPE reports indicate that in certain states, the actual number of cases may be over 1,000 times more than SNSP case counts (Chihuahua, Coahuila, Guanajuato, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit, Sonora, Tlaxcala, and Yucatán).

Nonetheless, SNSP data may still be useful in revealing geographic trends as they relate to the incidence of kidnappings. For example, four of the five states that SNSP reported as having the greatest number of kidnappings in 2018 also ranked in the top five states based on calculations using ENVIPE crime victimization survey data. This included Estado de México, Jalisco, Veracruz, and Mexico City (See Table 2).

³⁵ Vania Pérez Morales, et al., "Evolución de la extorsión en México: un análisis estadístico regional (2012-2013), *Revista Mexicana de Opinión Pública*, no. 18 (2014): 113-135.

³⁶ INEGI, Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (ENVIPE) 2019, September 2019, <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/envipe/2019/> (accessed July 17, 2020).

Table 2: Comparison of Officially Reported Extortions and National Estimate of Extortions Based on ENVIPE Crime Victimization Survey Reports (2018)

State	Estimate of Extortions Based on ENVIPE Survey Reports	Number of Extortion Cases Reported by SNSP
Aguascalientes	17,364	138
Baja California	16,411	135
Baja California Sur	10,878	198
Campeche	9,021	18
Chiapas	39,014	184
Chihuahua	54,611	8
Mexico City	157,839	536
Coahuila	34,397	32
Colima	19,084	55
Durango	21,627	74
Guanajuato	127,363	13
Guerrero	184,546	202
Hidalgo	51,137	142
Jalisco	174,502	778
Estado de México	262,834	1,629
Michoacán	72,225	3
Morelos	74,172	24
Nayarit	22,097	4
Nuevo León	43,004	536
Oaxaca	60,675	130
Puebla	107,336	168
Querétaro	38,041	104
Quintana Roo	16,714	126
San Luis Potosí	66,158	122
Sinaloa	56,684	64
Sonora	63,488	10
Tabasco	28,043	331
Tamaulipas	67,391	138
Tlaxcala	41,412	1
Veracruz	163,499	578
Yucatán	19,754	5
Zacatecas	49,677	235
Grand Total	2,186,938	6,721

Sources: ENVIPE, SNSP, CONAPO

However, temporal trends observed using ENVIPE and SNSP data do not coincide. Between 2012 and 2018, an inverse correlation was observed between SNSP and ENVIPE extortion data (-0.51). As illustrated in Figure 19 and Figure 20, as SNSP cases increased over time, ENVIPE reports of extortion tended to decrease, and vice versa.³⁷

³⁷ Starting in 2014, SNSP began reporting figures based on a new methodology, while continuing to report data using the former methodology through 2017. Data points for both methodologies have been included in Figure 21 for 2015 through 2017 in order to account for any significant statistical changes from year to year. As illustrated, the methodology change did not significantly alter the rate of extortion.

Unlike the above analysis of kidnapping data, these findings suggest that official data may not be a reliable indicator of extortion trends observed from year to year. Thus, further research is necessary to examine why official data from 2012 to 2018 may track with anonymous survey data for certain crimes, such as kidnapping, but not for others, such as extortion

Figure 19: ENVIPE Estimated Extortion Rates (Per 100,000 Inhabitants)

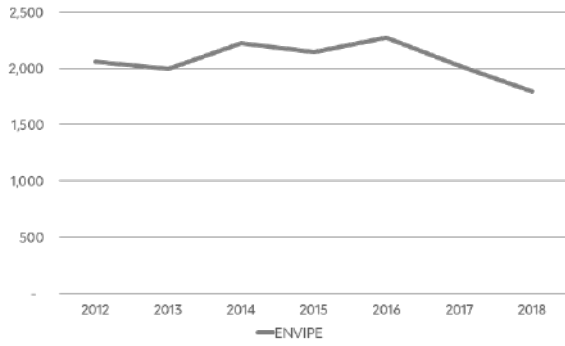
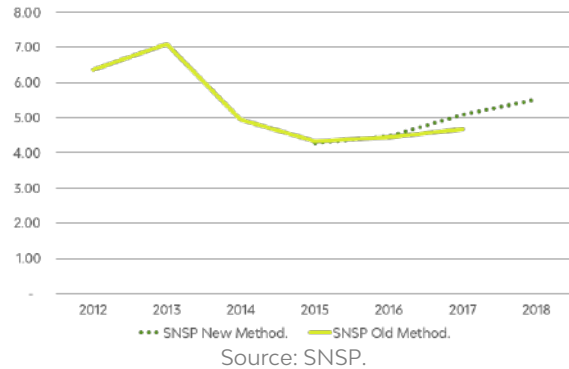


Figure 20: SNSP Extortion Rates (Per 100,000 Inhabitants)



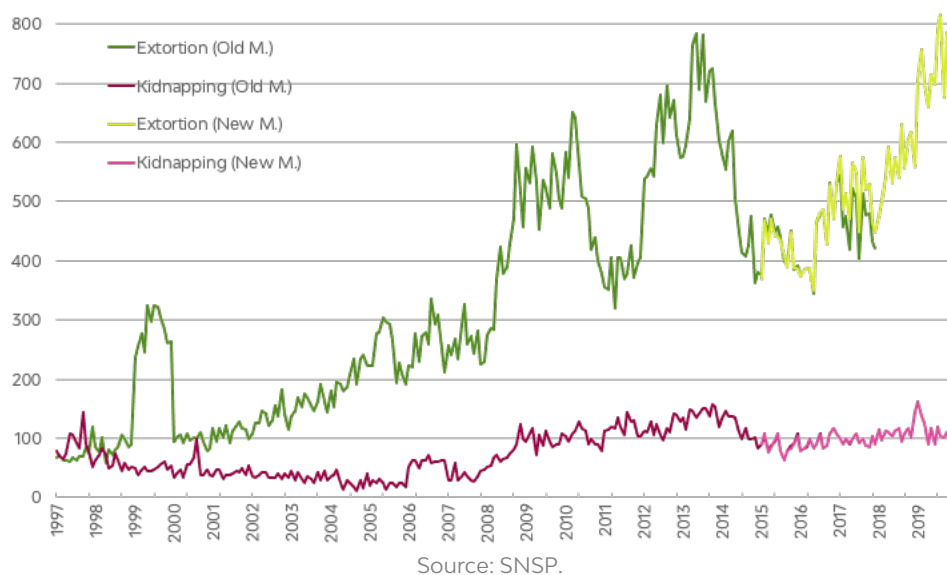
Anonymous victim data cast further doubt on official extortion data, with 111,000 reports of extortion made to an official anonymous tip line (0-89) between January 2019 and February 2020. These findings suggest that extortion is the second most common crime committed at the local level, after robbery on public roads or transportation.³⁸ In fact, according to estimates from the National Information Center (*Centro Nacional de Información, CNI*), one of every five crimes committed in 2018 represented a case of extortion, with a total estimate of 5.7 million cases (more than double the total calculated using ENVIPE data in Table 2).³⁹ Thus, while official figures examined in this report help to illustrate the nature of documented cases, they fall short in capturing the true incidence of extortion and other crimes, such as kidnapping (see above).

As previously mentioned, Figure 21 below, illustrates, the cases of kidnapping and extortion reported by SNSP before and after the methodology change.

³⁸ According to SNSP classifications, this type of robbery (“robbery on public roads or transportation”) could be disaggregated into several different types of robberies, which could arguably affect the total number of cases reported.

³⁹ Jorge Monroy, “Extorsión, segundo delito más recurrente en México,” *El Economista*, April 16, 2020, <https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/politica/Extorsion-segundo-delito-mas-recurrente-en-Mexico-20200416-0118.html> (accessed July 20, 2020).

Figure 21: Monthly Extortions and Kidnapping (Old and New Method)



GENDER VIOLENCE

In 2019, Mexico recorded its most violent year on record for women, according to data from SNSP.⁴⁰ This fact is perhaps unsurprising, since 2019 was a record year for violence in Mexico (including both men and women). It also did little to change the fact that men are more than 11 times more likely to be murdered than women in Mexico, compared to a rate of roughly four times as likely worldwide.⁴¹ Still, violence against women has distinct modalities and raises special concerns. In part for this reason, 2019 was a year of unprecedented protest over violence against women.

Public outrage, demonstrations, and activism against violence targeting women was spurred by several high-profile, brutal “femicides” (murders of women). In August of 2019, a number of high-profile cases catalyzed what was dubbed the “glitter revolution.”⁴² The first case involved a 17-year-old girl who reported that four policemen raped her in a patrol car in Azcapotzalco, Mexico City. The second case involved another incident of police misconduct, in which a 16-year-old girl came

⁴⁰ Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, “Incidencia delictiva del Fuero Común,” Gobierno de México, March 20, 2020, <https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/acciones-y-programas/incidencia-delictiva-del-fuero-comun-nueva-metodologia?state=published>.

⁴¹ As discussed below, according to SNSP data, there were 2,800 female homicide victims in Mexico in 2019, compared to roughly 31,000 men (in fact, approximately 11 times greater). According to the UNODC, approximately 87,000 women were victims of intentional homicides in 2017, with 58% killed by intimate partners or other family members. The number of women killed that year represented about 18.9% of the 464,000 homicides in 2017. Thus worldwide, men were about four times as likely as women to be murdered. See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Global Study on Homicide: Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls, Vienna, 2019, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet_5.pdf

⁴² Tom Phillips, “Mexico’s ‘Glitter Revolution’ Targets Violence against Women,” *The Guardian*, August 26, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/26/desperation-and-rage-mexican-women-take-to-streets-to-protest-unabated-sexual-violence-glitter-revolution>.

forward and reported that a policeman raped her in a museum.⁴³ In September, just one month later, Mexican saxophonist Maria Elena Rios suffered an acid attack that is believed to have been coordinated by her ex-boyfriend, Juan Vera Carrizal, a former Oaxaca lawmaker.⁴⁴

In addition, within the first few months of 2020, Mexico experienced three high-profile femicide cases that led to protests and major demonstrations condemning violence against women. The first involved Isabel Cabanillas, a 26-year-old artist and feminist activist who was murdered in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua on January 18, 2020 while riding her bike.⁴⁵ Weeks later, 25-year-old Ingrid Escamilla was murdered by her male partner in northern Mexico City.⁴⁶ The third case involved the murder of 7-year-old Fatima Cecelia Aldrighett Anton, who went missing on February 11, 2020 in Santiago Tulyehualco, Xochimilco (Mexico City) while waiting for her mother to pick her up from school.⁴⁷

While such cases provided a catalyst for protest in 2019 and into 2020, Mexico has long grappled with the problem of targeted killings of women. Nearly half (45%) of all women in Mexico reported being victims of violence at the hands of their partner, according to a 2018 survey by INEGI. Another 18% specified that they were victims of physical abuse.⁴⁸

The number of women who were victims of violent crimes in 2019 was slightly higher (2.5%) than the figures observed in 2018.⁴⁹ This included cases of intentional injury, extortion, intentional homicide, corruption of minors, femicide, kidnapping, and human trafficking (including that of minors). The number of female victims of such crimes

⁴³ David Fuentes, Kevin Ruiz, and Eduardo Hernández, "Over 500 women protest after two minors were raped in Mexico City," *El Universal*, August 13, 2019, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/english/over-500-women-protest-after-two-minors-were-raped-mexico-city>; "Mexicans March to Vent Anger at Police over Rape Cases," *BBC News*, August 13, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-49327568>.

⁴⁴ Óscar Rodríguez, "Detienen a hombre que arrojó ácido a saxofonista en Oaxaca," *Milenio*, December 23, 2019, <https://www.milenio.com/estados/oaxaca-detienen-atacante-acido-mariela-elena-rios>.

⁴⁵ "El asesinato de la activista Isabel Cabanillas genera indignación en Chihuahua," *Expansión Política*, January 20, 2020, <https://politica.expansion.mx/estados/2020/01/20/el-asesinato-de-la-activista-isabel-cabanillas-genera-indignacion-en-chihuahua>; Suzanne Gamboa et al., "Shooting death of young woman activist returns spotlight to 'femicides' in Juarez and Mexico," *NBC News*, January 24, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/shooting-death-young-woman-activist-returns-spotlight-femicides-juarez-mexico-n1120811>.

⁴⁶ Al Jazeera News, "Ingrid Escamilla Murder: Mexican social media users express shock," *Al Jazeera*, February 13, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/ingrid-escamilla-murder-mexican-social-media-users-express-shock-200213062641392.html>.

⁴⁷ "Identifican a Fátima, la niña de 7 años asesinada y torturada en Tláhuac," *El Universal*, February 17, 2020, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/metropoli/cdmx/identifican-fatima-la-nina-de-7-anos-asesinada-y-torturada-en-tlahuac>.

⁴⁸ Oscar Lopez, "Mexico City mayor promises to eradicate violence against women," *Reuters*, July 9, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-women-violence/mexico-city-mayor-promises-to-eradicate-violence-against-women-idUSKCN1U42MM>.

⁴⁹ Alexis Ortiz, "2019, el año con más mujeres víctimas en México," *El Universal*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/2019-el-ano-con-mas-mujeres-victimas-en-mexico>.

reported has risen steadily each year from 62,567 in 2015 to 74,632 victims in 2019,⁵⁰ representing a 19.3% increase over the past five years.⁵¹

SNSP released new data in early 2020 specifically tracking violence against women from 2015 to the present. In their report, they show a spike in trafficking of female children nationwide. Beginning in 2015, the number of victims of such crimes jumps from 44 to 115 in 2016, followed by 99 in 2017, 16 in 2018, and 12 in 2019. On the other hand, the number of female victims of extortion nationwide has slowly climbed. In 2015, 1,792 women were victims of extortion, followed by a slight dip in 2016 to 1,774. From 2017 to 2019, the numbers rose to 2,179, then to 2,244, and finally to 3,112 in 2019. Lastly, data from the number of 9-1-1 phone calls received relating to violence against women also steadily increased from 2016 to the present.⁵² In 2016, 92,604 calls were received, followed by 106,765 in 2017, 172,210 in 2018, and 197,693 in 2019.⁵³

Women are also murdered at an astounding rate in Mexico, with 10 women killed each day, which “[makes] it one of the most dangerous countries in the world for females.”⁵⁴ According to SNSP, more women were victims of homicide in 2019 than ever before. Of the approximately 34,588 victims of intentional homicide nationwide, around 2,800 were female (8%).⁵⁵

In addition to murders of women, in 2019 there were 945 cases of femicide (*feminicidio*), a statistic that has steadily risen over the years. In 2015, 411 cases were registered, which increased to 604 in 2016, 741 in 2017, and 892 in 2018. Veracruz had the most cases of femicide in 2019 (157 cases), followed by Estado de México (123), Mexico City (71), Nuevo León (67), and Jalisco (58). Baja California Sur had the fewest cases, registering only two in 2019. Tlaxcala and Yucatán each had 3 cases, and Aguascalientes and Nayarit rounded out the bottom five with 5 cases each.⁵⁶

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹ “Ingrid Escamilla: Outraged Mexicans post ‘beautiful images’ for murdered woman,” *BBC News*, February 13, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-51488124>.

⁵² SNSP refers to violence against women as “any violent act that can result in a woman’s pain or physical, sexual, or psychological suffering, including the threats of such act,” drawing from the National Catalogue of Emergency Incidents. See Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, “Catálogo Nacional de Incidentes de Emergencia,” Gobierno de México, October 2017, <https://www.gob.mx/911/documentos/catalogo-nacional-de-incidentes-de-emergencia-88726>.

⁵³ Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, “Información sobre violencia contra las mujeres. Incidencia delictiva y llamadas de emergencia 9-1-1,” Centro Nacional de Información, February 29, 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eJvQGfWG3Fe9Xls53DpfCArCt5ARd-FbN/view>.

⁵⁴ Amy Guthrie, “Mexican women protest murders of activists, target monuments,” *The Associated Press*, January 25, 2020, <https://apnews.com/97fb23c7552cc493e6cd61605c4ea804>; Amy Guthrie and Alicia Hernandez, “Mexican women Paint, march to protest gender violence,” *The Associated Press*, March 8, 2019, <https://apnews.com/865a9f5cb3a11ee25b47eb17e262dedd>.

⁵⁵ Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, “Incidencia delictiva del Fuero Común,” Gobierno de México, March 20, 2020, <https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/acciones-y-programas/incidencia-delictiva-del-fuero-comun-nueva-metodologia?state=published>.

⁵⁶ Ibid, SNSP.

*Femicide*⁵⁷

Femicide, a crime that deprives a woman of life as a result of their gender, remains a long-standing and protracted problem in Mexico. With the López Obrador administration declaring an “end to the war” against drug cartels and trafficking, the question remains whether this proclamation will lead to more adequate responses regarding gender violence – responses in which answers and accountability stand at the forefront of the government’s plan of action.⁵⁸

SNSP reports that between 2015 and 2019, cases classified as femicides grew from 411 to 945, representing an increase of approximately 130%. Likewise, 473 cases were officially reported as femicide from January to June 2020. However, the aforementioned figures may be much higher when one accounts for shortcomings and biases in the collection and conceptualization of femicide data. For example, Mexico’s elevated levels of impunity further compound this issue. According to INEGI, “93% of crimes were either not reported or not investigated in 2018.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, attorney general’s offices in Mexico remain underfunded, and preventive actions, such as intelligence gathering and criminal investigation, remain stifled and ineffective.⁶⁰ Thus, the perpetrators of violence could be further motivated by the unlikelihood of conviction. Compounded by stark gender inequalities and the pervasiveness of *machismo* culture in Mexico, investigations of gender-based homicides appear to remain of reduced priority.

Moreover, when observing the legal context of femicide, penal codes on femicide can vary by state, resulting in “a lack of comparable data and agreed definitions” that make prosecuting cases more difficult.⁶¹ Frequently, for both genders, victims of violence are battered and further discriminated against when trying to access the justice system. For women, the motivation to seek legal recourse or assistance diminishes significantly, seeing that “77% of Mexican women report not feeling safe,” according to the 2019 National Survey on Urban Public Security (*Encuesta Nacional de Seguridad Pública Urbana*, ENSU).⁶²

In November 2019, Mexican officials had vowed a “zero tolerance” approach to the problem, as they observed the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against

⁵⁷ Extracted from: Teagan McGinnis, “Exploring the Legal Context of Femicide in Mexico,” *Justice in Mexico*, June 12, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/legal-context-femicide-mexico/>.

⁵⁸ Ryan C. Berg and Alejandro Poiré, “In Mexico, AMLO’s Presidency Turned One,” *Foreign Policy*, December 16, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/16/amlo-security-relationship-trump-back-track/>.

⁵⁹ INEGI, “Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (ENVIPE 2019),” Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, September 24, 2019, https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/envipe/2019/doc/envipe2019_presentacion_nacional.pdf.

⁶⁰ “Global Impunity Index 2017 (GII-2017),” Fundación Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, August 2017, https://www.udlap.mx/cesij/files/IGI-2017_eng.pdf.

⁶¹ Ari Medina, “The growing epidemic of femicide and impunity,” *Global Citizen*, November 5, 2015, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/growing-epidemic-of-femicide-and-impunity/>.

⁶² INEGI, “Encuesta Nacional de Seguridad Pública Urbana (ENSU 2019),” Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, April 2019, https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/ensu/doc/ensu2019_marzo_presentacion_ejecutiva.pdf.

Women, in partnership with the United Nations.⁶³ The government has also made a point of emphasizing the existing measures in place, such as gender sensitivity training for armed forces.⁶⁴ Additionally, President López Obrador denounced the behavior of the media in leaking the explicit photos of femicides and praised activists' efforts in passing a bill that would increase prison sentences for those who commit femicide.⁶⁵

However, although lauded as a socially-progressive leader, López Obrador's response to the issue of femicide – and gender-violence more generally – has been regarded as “tepid at best.”⁶⁶ Critics and activists note that the president appears indifferent to the reality of crime's gendered context, calling himself a “humanist” rather than a feminist, and accusing political opponents for the situation of unrest.⁶⁷

Furthermore, his administration faced an adverse reaction when the Attorney General suggested removing femicide from Mexico's criminal code, even though President López Obrador later explained that he did not support the change.⁶⁸ Claiming that the media manipulates the issues surrounding gender-based violence, he has denounced the current crisis as tied to his predecessors' neoliberal economic policies and has advocated for the country's “moral regeneration.”⁶⁹

As the surfacing of data and high-profile cases sheds a greater light on this national epidemic and mobilizes the public to place considerable pressure on Mexican officials, it remains critically important to understand the legal context of femicide in Mexico – particularly how its process of prosecution could affect femicide data, media reporting, rate of occurrence, and other related factors.

Prior to 1992, the term “femicide” had been used by the media and greater society in a colloquial manner to indicate the death of a woman. According to the Organization of American States (OAS) Inter-American Commission of Women, that same year, Diana Russell and her colleague Jill Radford redefined femicide as “the murder of women, committed by men, for the simple reason of their being women.”⁷⁰ In elucidating the

⁶³ World Economic Forum and Thomson Reuters Foundation, “Mexico commits to 'zero tolerance' of violence against women amid rise in killings,” World Economic Forum, November 27, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/11/mexico-commits-to-zero-tolerance-of-violence-against-women-amid-rise-in-killings/>.

⁶⁴ Amelia Cheatham, “Mexico's Women Push Back on Gender-Based Violence,” Council on Foreign Relations, March 12, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/mexicos-women-push-back-gender-based-violence>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Linnea Sandin, “Femicides in Mexico: Impunity and Protests,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, March 19, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/femicides-mexico-impunity-and-protests>.

⁶⁷ Joy Diaz, “Outraged By Femicides, Mexican Women Demand Change During Nationwide Walkout,” *KUT: 90.5* (Austin's NPR Station), March 9, 2020, <https://www.kut.org/post/outraged-femicides-mexican-women-demand-change-during-nationwide-walkout>.

⁶⁸ Amelia Cheatham, “Mexico's Women Push Back on Gender-Based Violence,” Council on Foreign Relations, March 12, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/mexicos-women-push-back-gender-based-violence>.

⁶⁹ David Diaz, “The message he's sending is I don't care: Mexico's president criticized for response to killings of women,” *The Guardian*, February 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/21/mexico-femicide-crisis-amlo-response#maincontent>.

⁷⁰ Organization of American States Inter-American Commission of Women, “Declaration of Femicide,” Organization of American States (OAS), August 15, 2008, <http://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/docs/DeclaracionFemicidio-EN.pdf>.

gendered motives of men in killing women, which include “attempts to control their lives, their bodies and/or their sexuality, to the point of punishing through death those women that do not accept that submission,” Russell and Radford provided both legal and social contexts to the concept of femicide.⁷¹

The concept garnered significant notoriety in Mexico when Marcela Lagarde took the aforementioned notion of femicide advanced by Russell and Radford and further developed it as “*feminicidio*,” rather than “*femicidio*” (which constitutes the literal translation).⁷² The OAS *Declaration on Femicide* reports that “Lagarde’s position was that femicide could be understood as the death of women without specifying the cause, whereas feminicide better encapsulated the gender-based reasons and the social construction behind these deaths, as well as the impunity that surrounds them.”⁷³ She subsequently used the term feminicide (*feminicidio*) to analyze a wave of gender-motivated murders in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, which started around 1993, and continued to substantiate its importance in her professional research.⁷⁴

Before the classification of femicide as a social construct and category of crime, many of these homicides were wrongly labeled as ‘crimes of passion’: “crimes committed as a result of strong emotional feelings, especially in connection with a sexual relationship.”⁷⁵ The same term has also frequently been used to describe violent crimes committed against persons identifying as LGBTQ+. However, once the term “femicide” was coined and the phenomenon was further explained and adopted by the media and public, the gender-based implications of this type of violence against women became more widely understood.

Nevertheless, bias and sexism still permeate media reporting of violent crimes against women. For example, after the femicide of Ingrid Escamilla by her partner in early 2020, “a newspaper titled the article ‘It was cupid’s fault’ and printed a photograph of her skinned and dismembered body on its cover.”⁷⁶ While femicides often occur between romantic partners, it can hardly be concluded that these types of disputes are the defining aspect of this phenomenon. As previously made clear by anthropologist Marcela Lagarde, “the explanation of femicide lies in gender dominance: characterized by both the male supremacy and the oppression, discrimination, exploitation and, above all, social exclusion of girls and women.”⁷⁷

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Gretel Morales, “What is femicide?,” *El Universal*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/english/what-femicide>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, “¿A qué llamamos feminicidio?” (1er Informe Sustantivo de actividades 14 de abril 2004 al 14 abril 2005, Comisión Especial para Conocer y dar seguimiento a las Investigaciones Relacionadas con los Femicidios en la República Mexicana y a la Procuración de Justicia Vinculada), LIX Legislatura Cámara de Diputados H. Congreso de la Unión, https://xenero.webs.uvigo.es/profesorado/marcela_lagarde/feminicidio.pdf.

Mexico began counting and including femicide data in its official crime statistics in 2012.⁷⁸ The General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence (*Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a Una Vida Libre de Violencia*) proposed by the Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD) in 2007 was one of the legislative measures that predated and influenced the current Federal Penal Code (*Código Penal Federal*).⁷⁹

To date, most Mexican states adhere to the federal legislation on femicide, though its legal classification is not the same in all laws, and each state defines different characteristics for the crime. The lack of uniformity in the states' criminal codes makes it especially difficult for third-party groups to ensure effective, nation-wide implementation. For example, there is still no general agreement on whether the act of femicide is a separate category of crime or an aggravated form of homicide.

Not considering femicide as a category of crime could constitute a "setback" because of "the specificity of the content, implications, and meaning of this crime, [because] it makes invisible the essential component of hatred against women, as well as through it seeks to perpetuate the cultural patterns of subordination, inferiority, and oppression of women," [own translation] as has been objected by the National Human Rights Commission (*Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos*, CNDH).⁸⁰

In sum, there are several possible reasons for the increase in violence against women. For one, women may be more apt to report cases of sexual violence in the midst of the global #MeToo movement. As victims are encouraged and empowered to find their voice, greater numbers of cases may be being reported. Accordingly, it is possible that authorities are paying greater attention to gender-related crimes in recent years, and rising numbers may therefore reflect the reprioritization of law enforcement efforts. Whatever the reason for the increase, with increased numbers in 2019 spilling over into 2020, critics are turning their ire towards the López Obrador administration to seek answers, action, and accountability.

Sex Crimes

With regard to sex crimes (*delitos que atentan contra la libertad y la seguridad sexual*), there were almost 10,000 more cases in 2019 (51,662) than in 2018 (42,873), and almost 20,000 more cases in 2019 than in 2015 (31,171).⁸¹ SNSP breaks these down into seven categories, all but one of which (incest) has steadily increased over at least the past five

⁷⁸ Linnea Sandin, "Femicides in Mexico: Impunity and Protests," Center for Strategic & International Studies, March 19, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/femicides-mexico-impunity-and-protests>.

⁷⁹ Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia, Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, February 1, 2007, <https://www.gob.mx/conavim/documentos/ley-general-de-acceso-de-las-mujeres-a-una-vida-libre-de-violencia-pdf>.

⁸⁰ "La nueva tipificación de feminicidio implica un retroceso: CNDH," *La Jornada*, February 13, 2020, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/politica/2020/02/13/retroceso-con-nueva-tipificacion-de-feminicidio-cndh-946.html>.

⁸¹ Figure 22 and Figure 23 illustrate the concentration of cases and rate of sex crimes by municipality.

years. These categories include sexual abuse (*abuso sexual*), which had 23,191 cases in 2019; generic sexual harassment (*acoso sexual*) with 4,206 cases; sexual harassment involving a hierarchy and subordinate relationship (*hostigamiento sexual*) with 1,634 cases; rape (*violación simple*) with 13,428 cases; equated rape (*violación equiparada*), which involves a victim that is unable to consent due to unconsciousness, illness or any impossibility by the victim to resist, or is under the age of 15, with 3,673 cases; incest (*incesto*) with 13 cases; and other sex crimes (*otros delitos que atentan contra la libertad y la seguridad sexual*) with 5,517 cases.⁸² An illustration of how sex crimes occur geographically illustrates a relatively even distribution throughout the country (See Figure 22 and Figure 23).

Figure 22: Number of Reported Sex Crimes Cases by State and Municipality

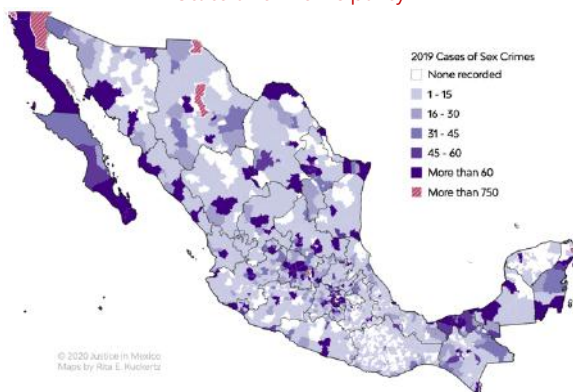
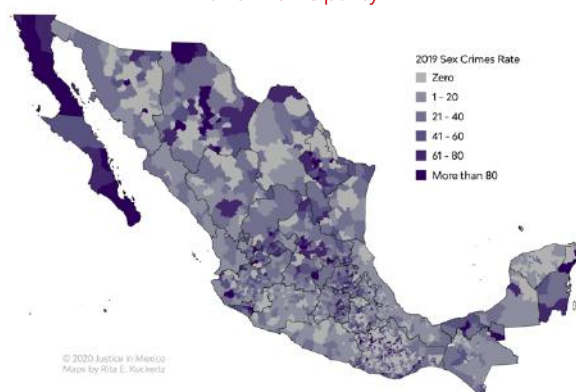


Figure 23: Reported Sex Crimes Rate Per 100K by State and Municipality



Source: SNSP.

In 2019, Mexico City had the greatest number of registered sex crimes with 6,507 cases – almost 13% of all 51,662 cases nationwide. Estado de México saw the second highest volume of registered sex crimes (5,678 cases), followed by Jalisco (3,428), Nuevo León (3,053), and Chihuahua (2,934). Baja California ranks sixth on the list, with 2,772 cases. Tlaxcala had the fewest registered cases with just 48 over the five-year span from 2015 to 2019, followed by Nayarit (238 cases), Yucatán (252), Campeche (347), and Colima (419).⁸³ Additionally, it is worth noting that the number of cases involving the corruption of minors and human trafficking rose in 2019 – crimes that also involve unique gender dynamics. There were 2,162 cases of corruption of minors in 2019, up 314 from 2018. There were 538 recorded cases of human trafficking, an increase of 151 cases from the prior year.

⁸² Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, “Incidencia delictiva del Fuero Común,” Gobierno de México, March 20, 2020, <https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/acciones-y-programas/incidencia-delictiva-del-fuero-comun-nueva-metodologia?state=published>.

⁸³ Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, “Incidencia delictiva del Fuero Común,” Gobierno de México, April 20, 2020, <https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/acciones-y-programas/incidencia-delictiva-del-fuero-comun-nueva-metodologia?state=published>.

POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS

Assassinations of current, former, elected, or alternate candidates to the mayoral position in Mexico continues to be a serious concern. The murder of elected authorities threatens the democratic process and undermines the rule of law. The National Association of Mayors (*Asociación Nacional de Alcaldes*, ANAC), reported 158 murdered mayors from 2006 to 2019. In their 2019 summary, ANAC identified 85% of mayoral killings occurred in states with less than 50,000 inhabitants and 70% happened in states with budgets of 200 million Mexican pesos (about \$9 million USD) or less.⁸⁴

Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* dataset includes 264 mayors, mayoral candidates, and former mayors killed from 2002 through 2019 (See Figure 24, Figure 25, and Figure 26).⁸⁵ After 2018 marked a record high for public official killings, 2019 showed a 26% decrease in the number of cases with 25 assassinations. However, 2019 was the deadliest year for former mayors, totaling 15 cases out of the 25 recorded. With the increase of the total number of homicides in Mexico since 2015 through 2019, there have been a total of 98 current, former, and aspiring mayors killed, with 14 victims in 2015, 6 in 2016, 23 in 2017, 30 in 2018, and 25 in 2019.

Of the 25 cases identified for 2019, Justice in Mexico identified 8 mayors, 15 former mayors, 1 mayoral candidate, and 1 alternate mayor (See Figure 24). According to Justice in Mexico's data, the party affiliation of the victims in 2019 was diverse, including ties with the PRI (10), PRD (4), MORENA (3), *Usos y Costumbres* (2), PRD and Ecological Green Party of Mexico (*Partido Verde Ecologista de México*, PVEM) (1), and PAN (1). Out of the 2,061 municipalities that had a formal municipal government, 38% had coalition governments, most of them led by the PRI or PAN.⁸⁶ As for single-party-governed municipalities, 19% belonged to the PRI, 11% PAN, 6% PRD, 6% local parties, 5% PVEM, 4% MORENA, 4% New Alliance (*Partido Nueva Alianza*, PANAL), 2% Citizen Movement (*Movimiento Ciudadano*), 1% Work Party (*Partido del Trabajo*, PT), 1% *Usos y Costumbres*, and 1% Independent.

In 2019, most murders of mayors, former mayors, mayoral candidates, and alternate mayors took place in Oaxaca (6), Veracruz (3), and Estado de México (3). In 20% of all the cases, there were visible signs of torture on the victims' bodies, while in 84% of the cases the cause of death was gunshot. The deadliest month for public officials was

⁸⁴ Alberto Duarte, "Infografía de la Violencia contra Ediles en México," Asociación Nacional de Alcaldes, December 2, 2019, [https://anac.mx/tag/alcaldes-muertos-en-mexico/\(accessed_March_18_2020\)](https://anac.mx/tag/alcaldes-muertos-en-mexico/(accessed_March_18_2020)).

⁸⁵ *Memoria* is a project that belongs to the Justice in Mexico program at the University of San Diego. The project collects data on organized-crime-style homicides, such as location, name of the victim, cause of death, among other relevant factors in order to identify, report, and geolocate crimes, as well as memorialize victims of violence and organized crime. *Memoria* also encompasses data on assassinations of special victims such as elected officials, police officers, military officials, and media workers. Learn more: Memoria, Justice in Mexico, <https://justiceinmexico.org/memoria/>

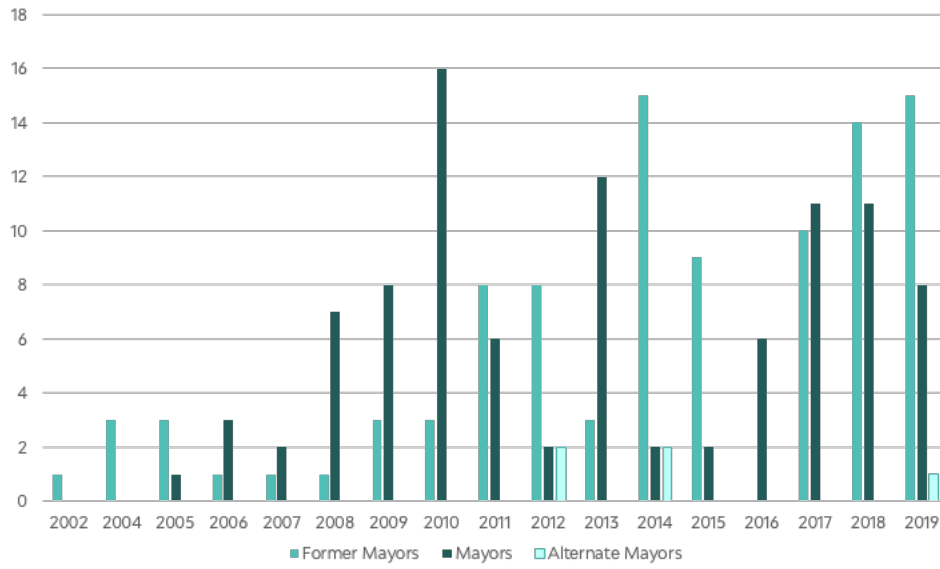
⁸⁶ Some municipalities, especially in Oaxaca, were in the process of choosing their local leaders at the time of data collection for this report. Data on municipal political parties was collected through the National Institute for Federalism and Municipal Development (*Instituto Nacional para el Federalismo y el Desarrollo Municipal*).

August, accounting for 20% of the total cases, followed closely by April and December, with 16% of the cases each. The age of the victims ranged between 31 and 77 years old with an average of 49 years old.

In 2019, the mayors, former mayors, mayoral candidates, and alternate mayors whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico include: Alejandro Aparicio Santiago (MORENA), Joel Hernández González (PRI), Alejandro Barranco Flores (PRI), Rosendo Galván Medina (PRI), Maricela Vallejo Orea (MORENA), David Eduardo Otlica Avilés (PRD/PVEM), Juan Manuel Carbajal Hernández (PRI), Ignacio Pérez Girón (*Usos y Costumbres*), Omar Justo Vargas (PRD), Ovilio Mauricio Vazquez (PRI), Rogelio Ayala Palomino (PRI), Carmela Parral Santos (PRD), Juan Cuellar Bravo (PRI), David Maciel Sosa (unspecified party), Mario Álvarez López (PRI), Beatriz García Licona (unspecified party), Francisco Tenorio Contreras (MORENA), Juan Gabriel Rodríguez Salinas (PRI), Hugo Estefania Monroy (PRD), Arturo García Velásquez (unspecified party), Pedro Mendoza Cortés (PAN), Lorenzo Barajas Heredia (PRD), Luciano Moreno López (PRI), and Braulio Márquez García (*Usos y Costumbres*).

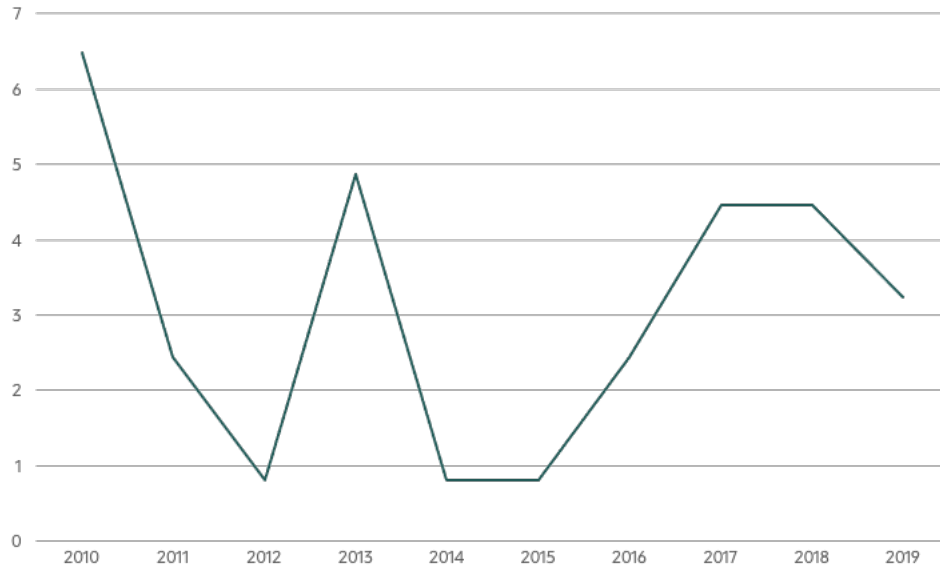
In addition to mayoral assassinations, starting in 2018, Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* project started to track homicides of other local political figures, such as city council members (*regidores*), former candidates to state and national legislature, and municipal trustees (*síndicos*). These victims amounted to 13 cases in 2019. There were seven cases of assassinations against city council members in the states of Jalisco (2 cases), Guanajuato (2), Oaxaca (1), Estado de México (1), and Mexico City (1), all of which involved the use of guns. In addition, two *síndicos* and one former party leader were murdered in Oaxaca. Among these victims were: Perfecto Hernández Gutiérrez (*Síndico*, MORENA), Jorge Ramos Parra (former city council member, *Nueva Alianza*), Cutberto Porcayo Sánchez (former party leader, MORENA), Rodrigo Segura Guerrero (city council member, *Partido Encuentro Social*, PES), Pablo Antonio Aguirre Covarrubias (city council member, PVEM), Zenón Cocula Fierros (city council member, MORENA), Arturo Figueroa Mendoza (former city council member, PRI), Francisco García Ramírez (city council member, MORENA), Javier Terrero (*Síndico*, N/D), Rafael Pacheco Molina (city council member, PRD), and Fidel Fernández Figueroa (city council member, PRI/PANAL/PVEM).

Figure 24: Number of Mayoral Assassinations



Source: Justice in Mexico, Memoria dataset

Figure 25: Mayoral Assassinations Rate Per 1,000

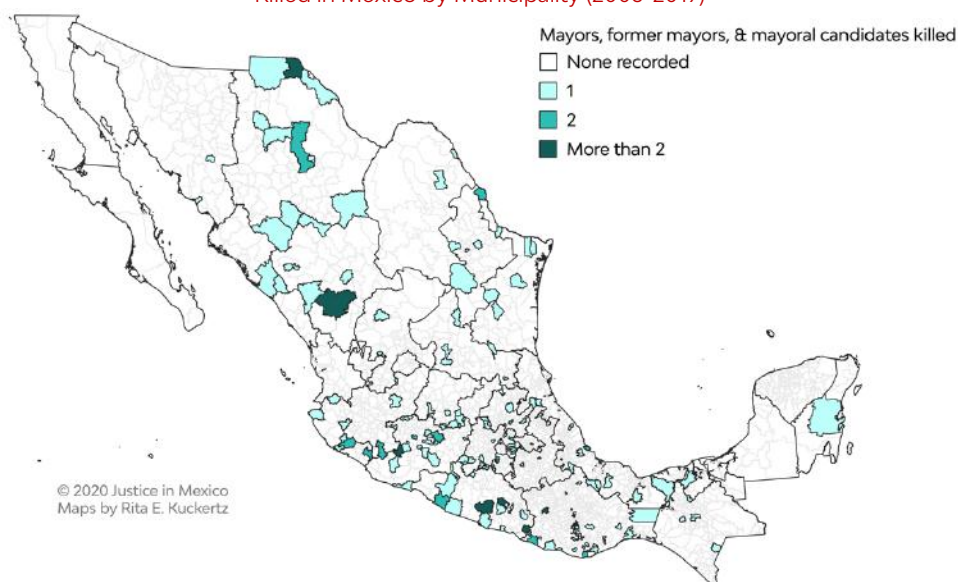


Source: Justice in Mexico, Memoria dataset

Ultimately, while it is clear violence is a significant threat for elected officials, until recently, it has been difficult to assess how severely mayors are threatened compared to other specific groups or the general population. However, based on the tally of mayoral deaths in the *Memoria* dataset, the authors estimate that Mexican mayors were actually **more than 13 times more likely to be murdered** in this past year than the general population. Using comparable data from 2019, the homicide rate for mayors was 3.25 per 1,000, compared to the homicide rate for the general population of approximately

.24 per 1,000 (or 24 per 100,000) that year (See Figure 25).⁸⁷ In 2010, the worst year for mayoral killings, the rate was as high as 6.49 per 1,000. Future studies on the killings of special populations in Mexico should examine such rate comparisons in more detail to consider other groups, such as police and military personnel. However, these findings raise serious concerns about the dangers facing Mexican local politicians, particularly in election years.

Figure 26: Map of Mayors, Former Mayors and Mayoral Candidates Killed in Mexico by Municipality (2006-2019)



Source: Justice in Mexico, Memoria dataset.

POLICE AND MILITARY

Mexican police officers have also experienced high levels of violence during the last few years, and 2019 was not the exception. According to the non-profit organization *Causa en Común*, in 2019, 446 police officers were killed in Mexico, an average of 1.16 daily.⁸⁸ This represented a 1.3% decrease from the 452 police killed in 2018. The lack of coordination between state and municipal police forces, as well as between local forces and the National Guard; the limited capabilities that police officers possess to confront

⁸⁷ The homicide rate for mayors in 2019 was calculated using estimates from INEGI using an updated number of municipalities. The homicide rate for the general population in 2019 was calculated using estimates from Mexico's National Population Council (*Consejo Nacional de Población*, CONAPO) and homicide victims figures from SNSP.

⁸⁸ *Causa en Común* is a non-profit organization dedicated to study victims and institutions in Mexico, especially focusing on public security. It is also one of the few organizations devoted to studying the conditions of the police in Mexico through surveys and data collection. See "Registro de policías asesinados 2019," *Causa en Común*, [https://causaencomun.org.mx/beta/registro-de-policias-asesinados-2019/#:~:text=Durante%202019%20asesinaron%2C%20al%20menos%2C%20a%20446%20polic%3%ADas.&text=En%20promedio%2C%201.16%20polic%3%ADas%20fueron%20asesinados%20cada%20d%C3%ADa.&text=En%202019%2C%20los%20estados%20con,%20y%20Guerrero%20\(26\)](https://causaencomun.org.mx/beta/registro-de-policias-asesinados-2019/#:~:text=Durante%202019%20asesinaron%2C%20al%20menos%2C%20a%20446%20polic%3%ADas.&text=En%20promedio%2C%201.16%20polic%3%ADas%20fueron%20asesinados%20cada%20d%C3%ADa.&text=En%202019%2C%20los%20estados%20con,%20y%20Guerrero%20(26).).

OCG members; and the re-structuring of OCGs to develop a wider array of crimes are some of the factors that made police officers more vulnerable to OCG violence in 2019.⁸⁹

Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* dataset also documents cases of police assassinations that are publicly available. For 2019, the dataset recorded 414 members of police institutions killed. Most victims belonged to municipal police, with 250 victims or 60.4% of the recorded cases. Members of state police followed them with 104 victims or 25.1% of the cases. Investigative police (*policía ministerial*) had 47 victims recorded or 11.4%. The rest of the police institutions had significantly fewer victims: federal police had nine (2.2%) and federal investigative police (*policía ministerial federal*) had four (1%). When analyzing the homicide rates for each group, adjusting to each specific group of the population, municipal police officers were once again the most affected, with a homicide rate of 185 per 100,000. The rate for municipal police officers was followed by federal investigative police with a rate of 115 per 100,000, local investigative police with 90 per 100,000, state police with 57 per 100,000, and lastly federal police with 25 per 100,000.⁹⁰

From the cases analyzed, 373 victims or 90% of the sample were killed with a firearm, 9.4% of which were high-caliber weapons. In 11 cases, or 2.7%, there was indication of torture or severe beating, while 2.4% of cases (10) involved victims who were found dismembered. The age of victims ranged from 20 to 57 years old, with an average of 36 years old. In addition, 91.3% of the victims were male while 3.6% were female. The remaining 5.1% was either unidentifiable or the information was not publicly-available.

In terms of geographic distribution, Guanajuato had the most cases, amassing 71 victims or 17.1%. The next state with the highest number of cases was Michoacán with 41 victims or 9.9%, followed by Chihuahua with 28 or 6.8%. It is worth noting that cases were only registered in 28 out of the 31 states and Mexico City. Aguascalientes, Baja California Sur, Campeche, and Yucatán reported no police victims.

It is also important to note that in the case of police homicides, there are more cases where an OCG claimed authorship for the crime compared to other populations. In this case, 5.1% of all recorded victims had a narco-message while in 10.4% of cases (43) it was possible to identify the OCG of assailants: the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (*Cártel de Jalisco Nueva Generación*, CJNG) (27), the Northeastern Cartel (*Cartel del Noreste*) (6), *La Familia Michoacana* (5), the Sinaloa Cartel (2), *La Línea* (2), and *Los Rojos* (2).

⁸⁹ EFE, "México registra record de policías asesinados por el crimen en 2019," *El Sol de México*, December 20, 2019, <https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/mexico/justicia/mexico-registra-record-de-policias-asesinados-por-el-crimen-en-2019-4610219.html>.

⁹⁰ Homicide rates are estimates calculated by Justice in Mexico using data from SNSP and INEGI. The latest data available for state and municipal police was from 2017, while for the rest of the police groups was 2015. These figures are merely illustrative. See "Primera Encuesta Nacional de Estándares y Capacitación Profesional Policial (ENECAP)," INEGI, November 12, 2018, <https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/saladeprensa/boletines/2018/EstSegPub/ENECAP2017.pdf>; "Resultados del diagnóstico de salarios y prestaciones de policías estatales y municipales del país," Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, http://secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/docs/pdfs/transparencia/Resultados_diagnostico_sueldos_prestaciones%20Policial.es_SESNSP.pdf.

Despite being the second most trusted institution in Mexico,⁹¹ the military has also seen its officials affected by OCG violence. According to the Secretary of National Defense (*Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional*, SEDENA), 284 members of the military have been killed and 1,661 wounded, while 4,735 aggressions have been recorded from 2007 to 2019.⁹² In 2019, SEDENA registered 84 military officers wounded, 11 homicides, and 242 aggressions.⁹³ The number of military aggressions decreased by 10.03% while homicides increased by 10% with respect to the cases reported by SEDENA in 2018. The number of wounded officers remained almost steady, showing a 3.4% decrease.⁹⁴

However, Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* dataset recorded 21 military officers and six members of the National Guard killed, including 18 victims affiliated to the Mexican Army and one to the Mexican Air Force. From the identified military victims, 22.2% were first-level soldiers (6); another 22.2% were corporals (6); 14.8% were National Guard officers (4); another 14.8% were lieutenants (4); just one was a captain (3.7%); one was a sergeant (3.7%); one was a colonel lieutenant (3.7%); and one was a colonel (3.7%). The remaining cases did not publicly specify the rank of the military victims.

The states that registered cases of military officers' assassinations were: Tamaulipas with 38.1% cases (8); Guerrero with 19% of cases (4%); Sinaloa with 14.3% of cases (3); Michoacán with 9.5% (2); and Chiapas, Mexico City, Durango, and Tabasco with one case each (4.8% each, 19.2% together). In terms of National Guard officers, only three states registered homicides: Guanajuato with four (66.7%); and Nuevo León and Sinaloa with one each (16.7% each, 33.4% together).

In 74.1% of the cases, the victims died from gunshot. Only one National Guard officer was reported with evident signs of torture (3.7%). In 48.1% of the cases the victim was identified as male while in 51.9% of them, the gender of the victim was not publicly available.

The criminal affiliation of the assailant or assailants was only identified in eight of the total cases (29.6%). Most of the cases (4) were tied to the Northeastern Cartel, while two cases were attributed to the Sinaloa Cartel and one case each was linked to the groups *Guerreros Unidos* and *Los Viagras*.

Lastly, 33.3% of the homicides were committed at night, while 18.5% of the cases were committed in the afternoon. No cases were recorded to have happened in the morning and the remainder of the cases did not have the information publicly available.

⁹¹ The military ranked second, only behind universities, in the study implemented by Consulta Mitofsky on levels of trust in Mexican Institutions for 2019. See "México: Confianza en instituciones 2019," Consulta Mitofsky, January 4, 2020, <http://www.consulta.mx/index.php/encuestas-e-investigaciones/item/1309-mexico-confianza-en-instituciones-2019>.

⁹² Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, "Agresiones contra el personal militar," Gobierno de México, March 5, 2020, <https://www.gob.mx/sedena/acciones-y-programas/agresiones-contra-el-personal-militar>.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Mexico is one of the world's most dangerous places for journalists. Dozens of reporters and media workers have been killed or disappeared in Mexico over the years, and 2019 was no different. The various organizations tallying homicides involving reporters in Mexico use different criteria for tallying and classifying this violence, since motives are often difficult to confirm. For example, one of the most respected sources, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), focuses primarily on cases where a murder was confirmed to have been committed in relation to the journalist's profession. From 1992 through 2019, CPJ reported that there were 49 confirmed cases of journalists killed, 64 unconfirmed cases, and four cases of media-support workers killed in Mexico. Nearly 80% of confirmed cases involved reporters working the crime beat, approximately 39% involved reporters working on issues related to corruption, and 45% involved reporters working on political issues.⁹⁵ In 2019, five journalists were killed in Mexico, only outnumbered by Syria, with seven cases.⁹⁶

CPJ also considers Mexico the seventh deadliest country worldwide on its Global Impunity Index, an index on which Mexico has placed for 12 years and counting. The Global Impunity Index writes, "[CPJ] spotlights countries where journalists are slain and their killers go free." CPJ considers Mexico's prosecuting of cases involving murdered journalists to have "worsened" since 2018. Of the other six countries that were ranked higher than Mexico, Syria, South Sudan, and the Philippines also "worsened" this past year, whereas Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan all "improved."⁹⁷

In 2019, CPJ reported that there were 26 reporters murdered in the world according to their criteria (described below), with five confirmed cases and six cases with unconfirmed motives in Mexico.⁹⁸ The five CPJ-confirmed cases include:

⁹⁵ "1337 Journalists Killed," Committee to Protect Journalists, https://cpj.org/data/killed/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&start_year=1992&end_year=2019&group_by=year (accessed March 18, 2020).

⁹⁶ Syria, Mexico deadliest countries for journalists in 2019," Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/2019/12/syria-mexico-deadliest-countries-for-journalists-i.php> (accessed March 18, 2020).

⁹⁷ "Getting Away with Murder," Committee to Protect Journalists, October 2019, <https://cpj.org/reports/2019/10/getting-away-with-murder-killed-justice.php> (accessed March 18, 2020).

⁹⁸ "4 Journalists Killed in Mexico," Committee to Protect Journalists, https://cpj.org/data/killed/americas/mexico/murder/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&cc_fips%5B%5D=MX&start_year=2018&end_year=2018&group_by=year (accessed March 24, 2019).

1. Francisco Romero Díaz: A print and internet reporter who covered crime and politics, Romero was shot and killed on May 16, 2019 in Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo.⁹⁹
2. Jorge Celestino Ruiz Vázquez: A print reporter for *El Gráfico* who covered crime and politics, Ruiz was shot and killed on August 2, 2019 in Actopan, Veracruz.¹⁰⁰
3. Nevith Condés Jaramillo: An internet reporter and camera operator for *El Observatorio del Sur* who covered crime and politics, Condes was stabbed on August 24, 2019 in Tejupilco, Estado de México.¹⁰¹
4. Norma Sarabia Garduza: A print and internet reporter for *Tabasco Hoy* and *Diario Presente* who covered crime and politics, Sarabia was shot dead on June 11, 2019 in Huimanguillo, Tabasco.¹⁰²
5. Rafael Murúa Manríquez: Publisher and owner of *Radiokoshana FM* who covered business, corruption, crime, politics and sports, Murúa was found dead on January 20, 2019 in Mulegé, Baja California Sur.¹⁰³

CPJ's criteria for identifying the murders of reporters and media workers are fairly conservative, since they focus only on cases where there is a confirmed motive associated with the journalist's profession. The organization known as Article 19, meanwhile, documented the murder of 10 media workers in 2019, double the number tallied by CPJ. So far, these 10 cases bring assassinations under President López Obrador to a total of 11 after one year in office – more than double the cases under former president Peña Nieto during his first year.¹⁰⁴ Article 19 also reports that "Mexico has a 99.1% rate of impunity on cases of crimes against journalists and media workers which are under investigation by the Special Prosecutor for Attention for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression (*Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos cometidos contra la Libertad de Expresión*, FEADLE)."¹⁰⁵

According to Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Barometer, Mexico had three times more journalists killed (9) in 2019 than any other country worldwide.¹⁰⁶ Afghanistan and Somalia trail with three journalists each killed in 2019, followed by Pakistan with two, and 10 other countries with one each, including the United States.

⁹⁹ "Francisco Romero Díaz," Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/francisco-romero-diaz/index.php> (accessed March 18, 2020).

¹⁰⁰ "Jorge Celestino Ruiz Vazquez," Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/jorge-celestino-ruiz-vazquez/index.php> (accessed March 18, 2020).

¹⁰¹ "Nevith Condes Jaramillo," Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/nevith-condes-jaramillo/index.php> (accessed March 18, 2020).

¹⁰² "Norma Sarabia Garduza," Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/norma-sarabia-garduza/index.php> (accessed March 18, 2020).

¹⁰³ "Rafael Murua Manriquez," Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/rafael-murua-manriquez/index.php> (accessed March 18, 2020).

¹⁰⁴ "Periodistas asesinados en Mexico, en relación con su labor informativa," Article 19, November 20, 2018, <https://articulo19.org/periodistasasesinados/> (accessed March 18, 2020).

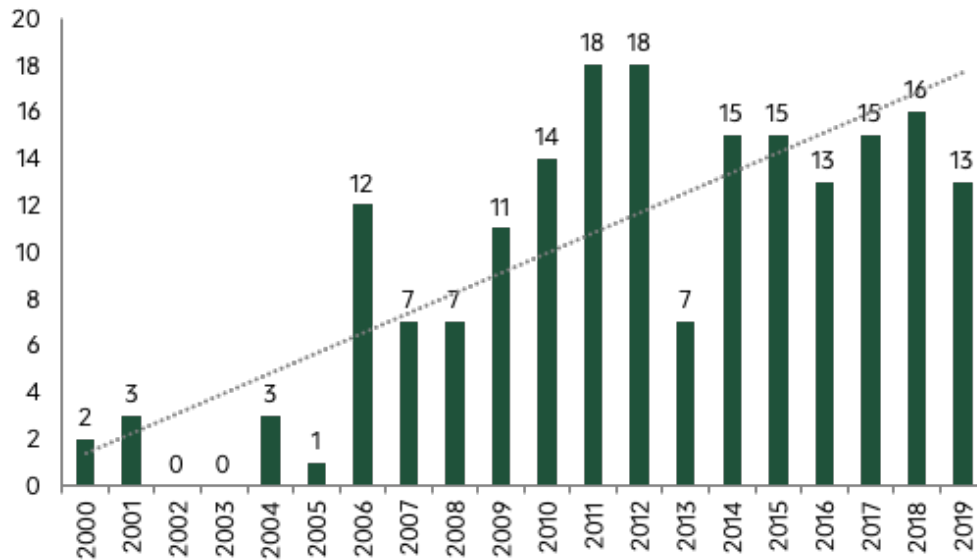
¹⁰⁵ "Informe Anual 2018: ante el silencio, ni borrón ni cuenta nueva," Article 19, April 17, 2019, <https://www.articulo19.org/resources/mexico-report-shows-silencing-of-journalists-and-media-freedom/> (accessed March 19, 2020).

¹⁰⁶ "Violations of press freedom barometer," Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/barometer> (accessed March 19, 2020).

These numbers reflect homicides that were connected to the victims' line of work. Compounding these issues – or perhaps as a result of them – Mexico ranks as the 144th country on the 2019 World Press Freedom Index, improving slightly from its 2017 and 2018 ranking (147th).¹⁰⁷

However, the fact that members of the press are more prone to violence than the average person – whether or not this can be directly linked to reporting – is the point of interest for this analysis. Hence, the Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset adopts a less conservative measure than CJP, considering cases of both media workers and journalists who may have been victims of intentional homicide for a variety of motives not limited to their reporting. From 2000 to 2019, Justice in Mexico has identified at least 191 journalists and media-support workers who were murdered, with the vast majority of these deaths (176) occurring from 2006 onwards. This tally includes journalists and media-support workers employed with recognized news organizations at the time of their deaths, as well as independent, free-lance, and former journalists and media-support workers (See Figure 27 and Figure 28).

Figure 27: Number of Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico (January 2000-December 2019)



Source: Justice in Mexico Memoria dataset.

¹⁰⁷ "Mexico," Reporters Without Borders, <https://rfsf.org/en/mexico> (accessed March 19, 2020).

Figure 28: Map of Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico (January 2000-December 2019)



Source: Justice in Mexico Memoria dataset.

The Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset includes 13 journalists and media workers killed in 2019, whereas 17 were documented in 2018. From the total number of victims, 12 were male, and one was female. All of the victims were Mexican, and the average age of victims recorded by Justice in Mexico was 41 years old.¹⁰⁸ In 77% of the cases, the cause of death was gunshot, while one victim was stabbed and one other beaten. According to Justice in Mexico's findings, the assassinations took place in the states of Guerrero (2), Morelos (2), Sonora (2), Tabasco (2), Estado de México (1), Oaxaca (1), Quintana Roo (1), Sinaloa (1), and Veracruz (1). It is worth mentioning that according to Justice in Mexico's data, only six out of the 32 states in Mexico have not had recorded cases of journalists murdered since 2000: Aguascalientes, Campeche, Hidalgo, Querétaro, Tlaxcala, and Yucatán.

The media workers killed included journalists, reporters, photojournalists, correspondents, photographers, station directors, and activists. In all of the cases, the media workers were the only victims, and in one case there was a narco-message left at the scene.

In 2019, the reporters and media workers whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico include: Samir Flores (Founder, *Amiltzinko*), Jesús Eugenio Ramos Rodríguez (Reporter and radio host, *Nuestra Región Hoy*), Reynaldo López (Radio host, local radio station), Omar Iván Camacho Mascareno (Sports reporter, *EvoraSport*), Santiago Barroso Alfaro (Reporter and radio host, *San Luis Hoy*), Francisco Romero Díaz (Founder and Director, *Ocurrió Aquí*), Telésforo Santiago Enríquez (Director, *Estereo Cafetal*), Norma Sarabia Garduza (Correspondent, *Tabasco Hoy*), Rogelio Barragán Pérez (Director,

¹⁰⁸ Age was only publicly available for 125 of the 191 cases on file.

Guerrero al Instante), Nevith Condés Jaramillo (Director, *El Observatorio del Sur*), Edgar Alberto Nava López (Editor, *La Verdad de Zihuatanejo*), Jorge Celestino Ruiz Vázquez (Reporter, *Gráfico de Xalapa*), and Erick Castillo Sánchez (Photography Director, *Discovery Channel*).

At least three of the murdered journalists in 2019 had requested or were already part of the government's Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Activists and Journalists (*Mecanismo de Protección para Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas*), which reached a record low level of participation with 27 journalists registered, down from 89 in 2018, and 122 in 2017. While the mechanism has been in place since 2014 at both the state and federal level, journalists and media workers remain skeptical of its effectiveness due to understaffing, insufficient funding, and inability to respond quickly enough to protect someone in imminent risk.¹⁰⁹ According to a United Nations report, there are only 36 representatives working directly for the protection mechanism, leading to excessive workloads and a heightened backlog, especially after increased demand in 2017. In addition, the report highlights the lack of coordination between authorities to provide integral protection strategies to all journalists and human rights activists.¹¹⁰

ROBBERY

Robbery is one of the most common crimes in Mexico. In 2019 alone, there were over three-quarters of a million robberies reported nationwide. It proves challenging to analyze robberies, however, because the crime itself is broken down into 17 different legal subcategories that are notably different from one another. Some robberies are more likely than others to involve organized crime or violence. It is important, therefore, to consider the different subtypes of robbery reported by Mexican authorities. SNSP makes data publicly available of 14 types of robbery in Mexico,¹¹¹ which for the purposes of this analysis, we clustered into thematic types and subtypes (See Table 3).

¹⁰⁹ Jan Albert Hootsen, "When it comes to protecting journalists, Mexico's safety mechanism comes up short," Committee to Protect Journalists, December 17, 2019, <https://cpj.org/blog/2019/12/mexico-journalist-safety-protection-fail-killed-attacked.php> (accessed March 19, 2020).

¹¹⁰ Oficina en México del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los derechos Humanos, "Diagnóstico sobre el Funcionamiento del Mecanismo," Naciones Unidas Derechos Humanos, http://hchr.org.mx/images/doc_pub/190820-Diagnostico_Brief.pdf (accessed March 23, 2020).

¹¹¹ The Technical Norm for the National Classification of Crimes for Statistical Purposes (Norma Técnica para la Clasificación Nacional de Delitos para Fines Estadísticos) lists 17 types of robbery. Of those included in the technical norm SNSP does not provide information on simple robbery (robo simple), robbery in a private place (robo a persona en un lugar privado) and energy theft (robo de energía eléctrica). It is not clear whether these crimes are bundled with other crimes or simply not reported.

Table 3: Justice in Mexico Analytical Classification of Robberies

Robbery Type (classification by Justice in Mexico)	Robbery Subtype (corresponding to types of robbery reported by SNSP)
1. Type I: Public Robbery	a. Subtype i: Robbery on public spaces b. Subtype ii: Robbery on public roads
2. Type II: Robbery in Public Transportation	a. Subtype iii: Robbery on collective public transportation b. Subtype iv: Robbery on individual public transportation
3. Type III: Burglary	c. Subtype v: Burglary
4. Type IV: Auto and Auto-Related Theft	d. Subtype vi: Auto theft e. Subtype vii: Theft of auto parts f. Subtype viii: Theft on personal vehicle
5. Type V: Robbery Against a Financial or Commercial Institution	g. Subtype ix: Bank robbery h. Subtype x: Business robbery i. Subtype xi: Carrier robbery
6. Type VI: Robbery Against a Type of Industry	j. Subtype xii: Cattle theft k. Subtype xiii: Theft of machinery
7. Type VII: Other	a. Subtype xiv: Other robberies

Sources: SNSP and Justice in Mexico.

There were 758,032 cases of robbery reported in Mexico in 2019 – an average of just over 63,000 cases per month. This was the first decline in cases of robbery over the past five years, as Mexico had seen an increase each year since at least 2015. Cases climbed steadily from 578,401 cases in 2015 up to 810,602 cases in 2018, but then declined by over 50,000 cases in 2019.

Two categories accounted for more than half of all robberies in Mexico in 2019. The most common type of robbery was “auto and auto-related theft” with 221,807 cases, or 29.3% of all robberies, followed closely by “other” robberies with 212,358 cases, or 28.0%. Robberies categorized as “robbery against a financial or commercial institution” had the third highest total, making up 16.9% of cases. “Public robbery” accounted for 11.4% of cases, followed by “burglary” with 10.7%. Only 2.8% of all robberies were “robbery in public transportation,” and less than 1% were “robbery against a type of industry.”

Looking at the data from the subtype level – SNSP’s 14 most specific robberies – the three subtypes with the most recorded cases in 2019 were “other” (212,358 cases or 28.0% of all robberies), “auto theft” (185,730 cases, 24.5%), and “business robbery” (116,205 cases, 15.3%). This follows the trend seen over the past few years with robberies classified as “other,” “auto theft,” and “business robbery” having the highest number of robberies by subtype in 2017, 2018, and 2019. In 2015 and 2016, “burglary” had the third highest, pushing “business robbery” to fourth out of the 14 subtypes.

At the municipal level, when taking into consideration all types of robberies, Guadalajara, Jalisco had the most registered cases in 2019 with 30,230 or nearly 4% of all robberies nationwide. This was followed by Ecatepec de Morelos, Estado de México (25,168 cases); Iztapalapa, Mexico City (17,630); Tijuana, Baja California (16,934); and Querétaro, Querétaro (16,499) to round out the top five. Nearly 1,200 municipalities (1,185) registered 10 or fewer cases of robbery of all kinds in 2019, of which 362 recorded zero (See Figure 29 and Figure 30).

Figure 29: Number of Reported Robbery Cases by State and Municipality

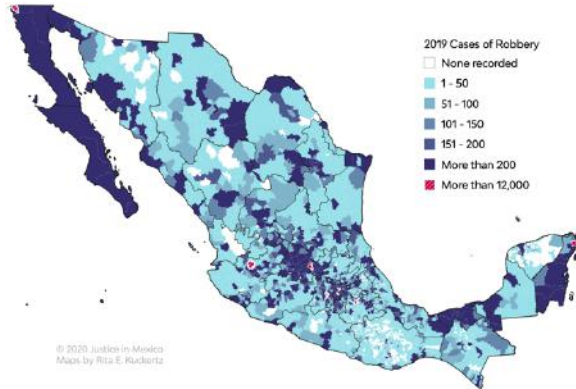
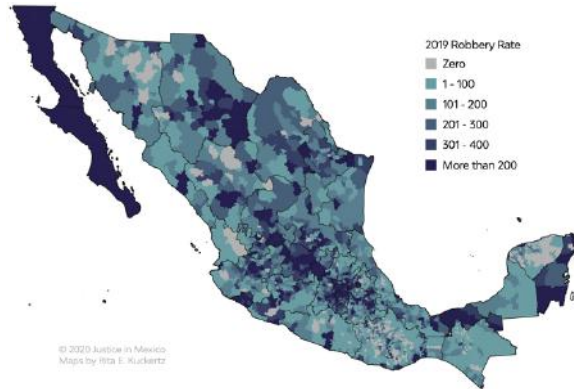


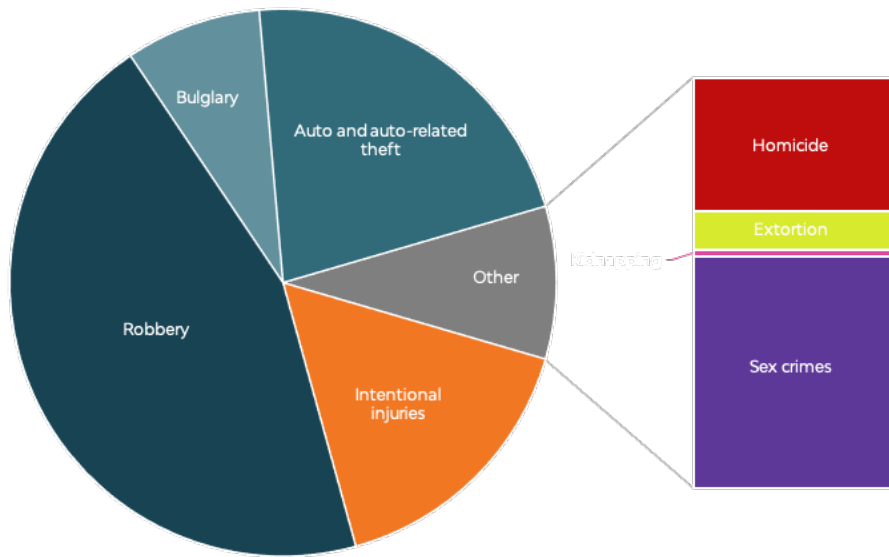
Figure 30: Reported Robbery Cases Rate Per 100K by State and Municipality



Source: SNSP.

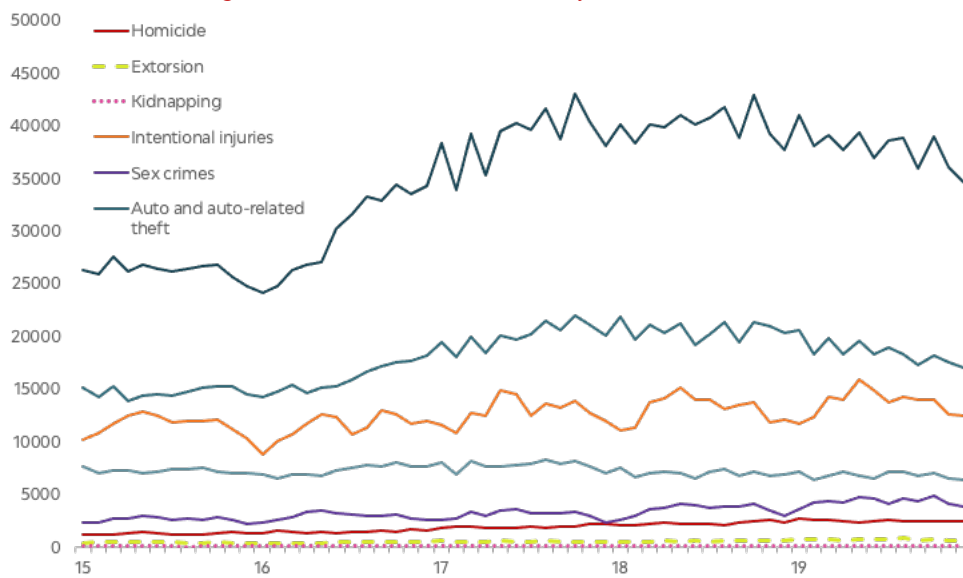
Summarizing the general phenomenon of violent crime, as depicted by Figure 31, robbery accounted for the largest percentage of violent crimes in 2019. As previously stated, there were 758,032 cases of robbery reported in Mexico in 2019, an average of just over 63,000 cases per month. Auto theft constituted the second most common crime in the general distribution of violent crimes for 2019. Furthermore, the number of cases of intentional injury in Mexico increased for the fourth straight year in a row. With respect to general trends for violent crimes from 2015-2019, as exhibited by Figure 32, the number of intentional injuries spiked in 2019, while homicides appear to have leveled off, suggesting that Mexico is at least making some progress in “flattening the curve” on intentional homicides. Sex crimes appear to have increased annually during the summer months, with the exception of spikes in October and November.

Figure 31: General Distribution of Crimes (2019)



Source: SNSP.

Figure 32: Violent Crime in Mexico by Month (2015-2019)



Source: SNSP.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

GENERAL TRENDS

As indicated in the data presented throughout this report, Mexico has reached unprecedented levels of violent crime in recent years, with 2019 marking a new record. As this report went to press, available data suggest that 2020 is on track to meet or

exceed these extraordinarily high levels of violence. As we have noted in previous reports, a major portion of the increase in violence in Mexico over the last several years is attributable to competition between OCGs, particularly those battling for control of the drug trade. Mexico's drug trafficking organizations became especially powerful in the 1970s and 1980s, thanks to protection from corrupt, high-level government officials and law enforcement agencies.

However, with Mexico's gradual democratization over the 1980s and 1990s, the introduction of political alternation at the local, state, and eventually the national level disrupted long-standing corruption networks and led to conflicting protection rackets at different levels of government, contributing to increased competition among major drug trafficking organizations. Also, beginning in the late-1980s and early 1990s, U.S. and Mexican counter-drug efforts targeting major drug trafficking organizations – including efforts to eradicate production, interdict illicit goods in transit, and disrupt organized crime leadership structures – contributed to fragmentation and further infighting among criminal organizations. In particular, the use of leadership disruption, or “kingpin” removal has greatly increased the internal fragmentation and competition among criminal organizations, and accordingly has been seen as a major contributor to Mexico's violence.

Indeed, as made evident by the rise in the number of homicides following the 2015 recapture and 2018 extradition of Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, leadership disruption can have very undesirable consequences. The removal of top cartel operatives contributes to internal schisms, encroachment from rival organizations, and escalating use of violence. With the fall of Guzmán, for example, a new violent criminal organization known as the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) emerged as an offshoot of the Sinaloa Cartel.¹¹² Teaming up with former rivals of Guzmán's Sinaloa Cartel (such as the remnants of the Arellano Felix Organization, the Beltran Leyva Organization, and the Juárez Cartel), the CJNG has been able to challenge Sinaloa, other competitors, and the Mexican government through a series of violent clashes for control of key territories and illicit activities. Although the CJNG has emerged as a dominant player in many parts of the country, it has also continued to engage in turf wars with its rivals and has reportedly suffered internal schisms of its own – notably its rupture with the Santa Rosa Lima cartel, as discussed below – significantly contributing to Mexico's increased violence over the past five years.¹¹³

That said, it is certainly true that Mexico's recent violence is no longer solely – or perhaps even primarily – linked to drug trafficking. The splintering of Mexico's major OCGs and the proliferation of smaller, regional criminal organizations has been accompanied by diversification into other forms of illicit activities, many of which

¹¹² Lucy La Rosa and David A. Shirk, “The New Generation: Mexico's Emerging Organized Crime Threat,” Justice in Mexico Policy Brief, February 5, 2018, https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/180319-Policy_Brief-CJNG.pdf.

¹¹³ “Dónde nace el cartel Santa Rosa de Lima,” *El Economista*, February 7, 2019, <https://www.economista.com.mx/politica/Donde-nace-el-cartel-Santa-Rosa-de-Lima-20190207-0008.html>.

involve predation on the general population. Indeed, as noted in this report, rates of kidnapping, extortion, and various forms of robbery in Mexico have risen over the years along with the growing competition and splintering among OCGs. Some OCGs have incorporated extortion into their criminal activities more than others, often as a means to obtain illicit revenue after splintering from major drug trafficking organizations. These include the Knights Templar Organization (*Los Caballeros Templarios*), *La Familia Michoacana*, the Gulf Cartel (*Cartel del Golfo*), and the *Zetas*, among others. Predatory criminal activities require no supply chains and have very low barriers to entry, and are therefore often an ideal entry point for nascent criminal organizations and splinter groups.

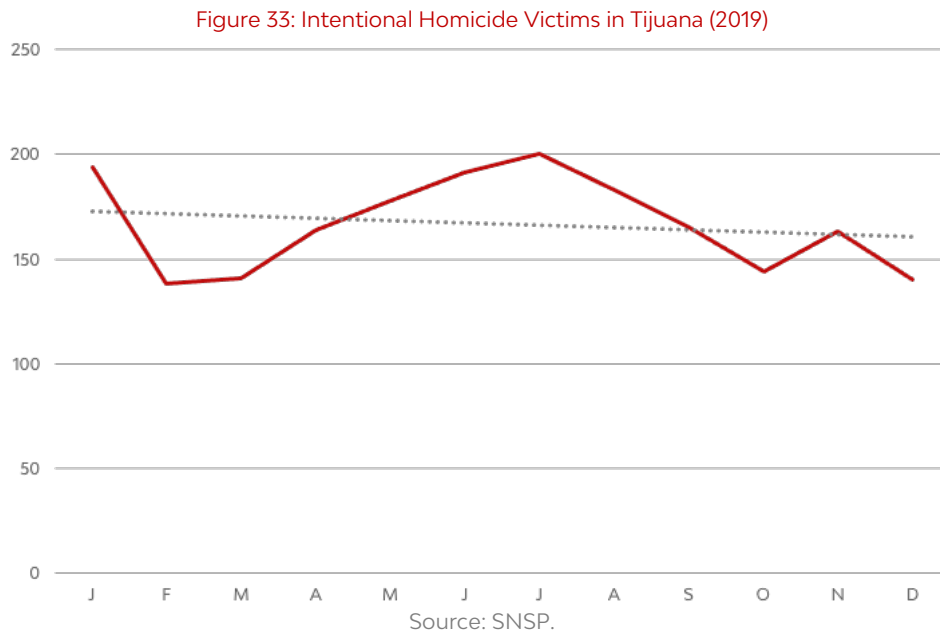
If Mexico's previous wave of violence from 2008 to 2012 serves as a precedent, it is certainly possible that the country could begin to reduce the trend in the coming years. As noted above, after the annual and monthly rate of homicides leveled off in 2011, there was a gradual but significant decline in subsequent years. In large part, this appears to have been attributable to the fact that the Sinaloa Cartel established dominance over most of its rivals, with the new underworld order bringing lower-level criminal organizations to heel in many parts of the country. Available data for the first quarter of 2020 showed that the number of intentional homicides remained nearly on par with 2019. In this sense, the leveling off of homicides at this high-water mark seems to suggest that Mexico is at least making some progress on addressing intentional homicides and other violent crimes. If and when hostilities among major criminal organizations are reduced – perhaps through the consolidation of power by a single cartel, a *pax mafiosa*, or some other intervention – this could help bring about a newfound reduction in violence. However, it remains to be seen whether past trends are predictive and whether Mexican authorities will be able to reduce the number of intentional homicides and “reverse the curve” in the near future.

SPECIAL CASES

Tijuana, the Most Violent City in Mexico

As noted in this report, there has been a very large number and a relatively high rate of intentional homicides in the municipality of Tijuana. Indeed, Tijuana has ranked among the top 10 Mexican cities with the most homicides over the past two decades, and since 2017 it has had the highest number in the country. In 2019, the municipality of Tijuana reported 2,001 victims of intentional homicide, resulting in a 113 per 100,000 inhabitants homicide rate (See Figure 33). There was an average of more than 150 murders per month, with a peak of 200 victims registered in July. In 2019, the number and rate of homicides in Tijuana far surpassed Ciudad Juárez, Mexico's second most violent city that year (with a total of 1,281 murders and a rate of 88 per 100,000 inhabitants). While

some have claimed that Tijuana is also the most violent city in the world, this claim is debatable given important gaps in the available data for other highly violent cities.¹¹⁴



Tijuana’s violence reflects the fact that it is a key *plaza* or control point for illicit drug trafficking into the United States and has been a major battleground among OCGs competing for access, notably the Sinaloa Cartel and the CJNG (which appears to be allied to the Arellano Félix Organization that once dominated the *plaza*). The Sinaloa Cartel had controlled the *plaza* since the mid-2000s, when they disputed and won the territory from the Arellano Félix Organization.¹¹⁵ The CJNG’s presence in Tijuana dates back to 2015, when they made their first appearances aiming to fight the Sinaloa Cartel out of the major transit *plaza*. Boosted by Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán’s arrest in early 2016 and his organization’s inner disputes over leadership, the CJNG adopted a more aggressive strategy to control Tijuana, with public displays of dead bodies, beheadings, sending signed messages using narco-messages, etc., resulting in a weakened Sinaloa presence in the area and officially making Tijuana a “disputed *plaza*.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ A 2019 ranking titled “The 50 most violent cities in the world” by the *Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad y la Justicia Penal, A.C.*, a Mexican non-governmental organization, placed 15 Mexican cities among the world’s top 50 most violent cities, with five of the top six from Mexico. Specifically, Tijuana came in first with 138 homicides per 100,000 residents, Acapulco in second (111), Ciudad Victoria in fourth (86), Ciudad Juárez in fifth (86), and Irapuato in sixth (81). The ranking inaccurately referenced official data from INEGI and SNSP, fused the data for certain municipalities (e.g., Tijuana and Rosarito), and featured other methodological inconsistencies across various cases that make it problematic to compare Mexican municipalities to those in other countries. Importantly, the study also ignored many smaller municipalities in Mexico with much higher per capita homicide rates. See Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal A.C., “Las 50 ciudades más violentas del mundo 2018,” *Seguridad, Justicia y Paz*, March 12, 2019.

¹¹⁵ The Arellano Félix Organization (commonly known as CAF or AFO) controlled Baja California, particularly Tijuana, since the 1980s.

¹¹⁶ Disputed plazas are territories where no single OCG has dominance. That is, two or more organizations are fighting over control of the territory.

According to Arredondo et al., “[the] CJNG has formed an illicit methamphetamine trafficking corridor along the West coast of the United States, and Tijuana has been key in the distribution.”¹¹⁷ In order to secure their operations in the area and disrupt Sinaloa’s, the CJNG formed an alliance with the remaining elements of the AFO and formed an allied group often called the Tijuana New Generation Cartel (*Cártel de Tijuana Nueva Generación*, CTNG).

In 2019, the CTNG seemed to start having problems asserting their dominance. On the one hand, there is a group of former AFO members who do not recognize the alliance with Jalisco. On the other hand, CTNG was facing internal conflicts with their leader, Héctor Manuel Morales Guzmán “El Gallero,” that led to the emergence of two splinter groups called The Powerful New Line (*La Poderosa Nueva Línea*) under the supervision of Gustavo Germán Ayala “El Patachín;” and *Los Cabos*, under the direction of David López Jiménez “El Cabo 20,” who was arrested in February 2019.¹¹⁸ Although Sinaloa is still fighting to re-establish control in Tijuana, the CTNG internal strife has fueled the drastic increase of violence in this border municipality.

Federal and state governments worked in a special strategy carried out by the National Guard in Tijuana starting in February 2019. Initially, President López Obrador reported that the initiative had reduced homicides by 21%, in addition to other crimes.¹¹⁹ However, data by the SNSP showed a steady increase in homicides from February to July. By mid-year, a second fleet from the National Guard arrived to Tijuana, with over 300 more elements.

Guanajuato and Fuel Theft

One of the major “hot spots” for violence identified in 2019 was Guanajuato. Guanajuato had the highest number of organized crime related homicides in 2019 with 2,673 cases, according to *Reforma*. The state was also featured in *Milenio*’s top five states with the highest number of homicides every month in 2019, calculating 2,934 organized crime-related deaths. Furthermore, Guanajuato tied with Estado de México as the second most dangerous place for elected officials, according to Justice in Mexico’s *Memoria* dataset. According to Alberto Nájjar from *BBC News*, the increased violence in Guanajuato is a result of local disputes for territory between the *Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación* (CJNG) and the *Cartel de Santa Rosa de Lima* (Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel, CSRL).

¹¹⁷ Jaime Arredondo Sánchez Lira et al., “The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana” (Justice in Mexico Policy Brief), February 5, 2018, https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/180205_TJViolence.pdf.

¹¹⁸ “El CAF vs CJNG: ola de muertes en Tijuana,” *Zeta*, February 18, 2019, <https://zetatijuana.com/2019/02/el-caf-vs-cjng-ola-de-muertes-en-tijuana/>; Javier Villalba, “Internal Strife Within the CJNG in Baja California, Mexico,” *Insight Crime*, August 27, 2019, <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/internal-strife-cjng-baja-california-mexico/>.

¹¹⁹ “Bajan 21% los homicidios en Tijuana con esquema de GN,” *Excelsior*, March 27, 2019, <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/bajan-21-los-homicidios-en-tijuana-con-esquema-de-gn/1304108>

CSRL was born in Guanajuato as a criminal group that handled local drug dealing and fuel theft (*huachicoleo*). Emerging from Santa Rosa de Lima, a small town in the municipality of Villagrán, Guanajuato, the group managed to set a strong presence in the surrounding municipalities, creating the so-called *Triángulo de las Bermudas* (the Bermuda Triangle) between Apaseo El Grande, León, Irapuato, Celaya, and most importantly, Salamanca. CSRL gained national relevance in 2017 when José Antonio Yépez Ortiz, a.k.a “El Marro,” assumed leadership and decided to concentrate the region’s *huachicoleo* operations within the CSRL, declaring a sanguine war against CJNG’s leader, Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, a.k.a. “El Mencho”. Initially operating as a subsidiary of CJNG, Yépez Ortiz publicly defied Oseguera Cervantes through a video, asserting CSRL’s territorial control in Guanajuato.¹²⁰

The cartel rivalry has been largely responsible for the increased violence in Guanajuato over the last few years. For example, data gathered by *Reforma* on organized crime-related killings shows that Guanajuato had the highest number of murdered police officials in 2019 with 56 victims. One of the worst strings of violence against security forces happened in late 2019, when 13 police officers were murdered in just 11 days.¹²¹ CJNG claimed responsibility for these attacks, targeting the Villagrán Police Station, local officials in León, Celaya, and Irapuato, and state authorities working in Public Security and the Antinarcotics Unit. CJNG has also threatened judicial officials suspected to be collaborating with CSRL.

OCGs in Guanajuato also started to use improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to deter their rivals. Still unclear on which group was responsible for this intended attack, on November 2019, residents of Apaseo el Alto reported the presence of a vehicle with an IED. While the device did not explode, the state Attorney General’s office tied it to the violent competition between the CJNG and the CSRL. This strategy resembles the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia’s (*Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC) model of leaving IEDs with remote detonators inside vehicles in plain sight to induce fear.¹²²

In response to this violence, the federal government sent over 4,000 military officers to Guanajuato. However, State Governor Diego Sinhué Rodríguez Vallejo claims that these forces were mostly staying in their military bases, failing to carry out any operatives or surveillance in conflict zones. The state government launched a special operative known as Golpe de Timón or “abrupt turn” that at first, aimed to find and arrest “El Marro,” setting up highway checkpoints, deploying helicopters in strategic zones, inspecting incoming and outgoing traffic, and securing properties in Santa Rosa de

¹²⁰ Rubén Torres, “Dónde Nace el Cartel Santa Rosa de Lima,” *El Economista*, February 7, 2019. <https://www.economista.com.mx/politica/Donde-nace-el-cartel-Santa-Rosa-de-Lima-20190207-0008.html>

¹²¹ Kimberly Heinle, “Attacks against Police Highlight Violence in Guanajuato,” *Justice in Mexico*, December 25, 2019, <https://justiceinmexico.org/attacks-against-police-highlight-violence-in-guanajuato/>

¹²² Robert J. Bunker, David A. Kuhn, and John P. Sullivan, “Mexican Cartel Tactical Note #42: Car Bomb in Apaseo el Alto, Guanajuato with Remote Detonation IED (‘Papa Bomba’) Payload,” *Small Wars Journal*, January 7, 2020, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/mexican-cartel-tactical-note-42-car-bomb-apaseo-el-alto-guanajuato-remote-detonation-ied>.

Lima. After several attempts, none of these measures helped identify the CSRL leader's location. Nonetheless, and despite local resistance, it did lead to the arrest of 57 cartel affiliates.¹²³ According to Guanajuato's Security Commissioner Sophia Huett, the focus of this strategy was to address the lack of rule of law and stabilize Villagrán, rather than just capturing "El Marro."¹²⁴ In addition to Golpe de Timón, state government launched a social impulse strategy to recover social structures and foster a culture of peace in Villagrán. The strategy includes the rehabilitation of highways and streets, increased streetlights, improving schools' facilities, and creating a state-level police academy.¹²⁵

After the implementation of President López Obrador's security strategy to combat *huachicoleo* in Mexico, OCGs in Guanajuato also started targeting local businessmen and clergy for extortion through a practice known as "*pago de piso*" (renter's fee), which consists of paying OCGs for protection.

Sinaloa and the Failed Capture of El Chapo's son

An extraordinary show of force from the Sinaloa Cartel in an incident that occurred in October 2019 highlighted the government's ineffective security strategy. On October 17, security forces detained Ovidio Guzmán López, the son of jailed drug lord Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, in Culiacán, Sinaloa. Heavy fighting erupted in the streets of the capital immediately after, as the Sinaloa Cartel launched a large retaliation demanding Ovidio's release. As videos and pictures of dead bodies and families scrambling for shelter surfaced and subsequently flooded the media, the public watched as the death toll gradually rose in the days following the violence. At least 13 people were killed in the ensuing violence, and dozens more injured. In an unprecedented turn of events, authorities bowed to the cartel's reign of violence in the public space and released Ovidio that same day. International reaction to the catch and release was swift.

President López Obrador defended his administration's decision to release Ovidio. "We don't want bloodshed. We do not want that. From anyone," he said. "We are also hurting with respect to the loss of the life of an alleged criminal. We are not oblivious to the pain caused by the death of any person." Reiterating the position that his administration has taken from the outset, the president insisted that "you can't fight fire with fire." The majority of Sinaloans agreed. According to *Consulta Mitofsky* for *El Economista*, "[in] Sinaloa, 79% of the population and 53% nationally, considered that the federal government did the right thing by freeing Ovidio Guzmán López from the threat of the Sinaloa Cartel to attack the citizens" [own translation]. Because cartel

¹²³ In 2020, the arrests of cartel affiliates included Yépez Ortiz's family members. His mother, sister, and cousin were detained in June, 2020. See Kimberly Heinle, "Tension and Violence Rise in Guanajuato Following Arrests of Cartel Leader's Mother," *Justice in Mexico*, June 30, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/tension-and-violence-rise-in-guanajuato-following-arrests-of-cartel-leaders-mother/>.

¹²⁴ Carlos Olvera, "Golpe de Timón fue para recuperar estado de derecho," *Milenio*, April, 2019, <https://www.milenio.com/policia/golpe-de-timon-fue-para-recuperar-estado-de-derecho>.

¹²⁵ Comunicación Social de Gobierno, "Continúa Estrategia Impulso Social 2.0 en Santa Rosa de Lima," Gobierno del Estado de Guanajuato, September 2019, <https://noticias.guanajuato.gob.mx/2019/09/continua-estrategia-impulso-social-2-0-santa-rosa-lima/>.

members had allegedly threatened to kill hostage soldiers and their families, there was agreement among the majority of Sinaloans that the government's release of Ovidio was the right course of action.

Vladimir Ramirez, a political scientist in Culiacán, explained that although the gunmen did not intentionally target noncombatants initially, the menace posed by the cartel remained clear. The citizens of Sinaloa, who have been subject and well-exposed to cartel reign, recognized this. The usual elusive quality of cartel gunmen had, in this case, materialized; their visible and violent presence forced families to hide in small spaces. "It was a threat of terrorism," Ramirez said, adding, "The government acted with great responsibility." Additionally, during the operation, Aguaruto prison experienced a breakdown in security, resulting in the escape of approximately 50 prisoners, most of whom were imprisoned because of their ties with organized crime.

Critics charged that the Sinaloa Cartel's "victory" in securing Ovidio's release was a stunning humiliation for the Mexican government. They argued that this decision could set a dangerous precedent moving forward, encouraging other cartels to unleash public violence in order to further their interests. Even pushback from within the military emerged. On October 22, retired military General Carlos Gaytán gave a highly critical speech regarding the worrisome status of "today's Mexico" under the López Obrador administration. "...We cannot ignore that the head of the executive has been legally and legitimately empowered. However, it's also an undeniable truth that fragile counterweight mechanisms have permitted a strengthening of the executive, which has made strategic decisions that haven't convinced everyone, to put it mildly."¹²⁶ Though Gaytán never explicitly referred to the Culiacán operation, established sources within the military asserted that the speech served as a response to the mission on behalf of the armed forces.

Overall, President López Obrador has been widely critiqued for lacking an effective security strategy, despite his efforts to build a new National Guard to restore order. His administration has pursued a self-described strategy of "hugs, not gunshots" (*abrazos, no balazos*). However, the embarrassing result of the government's response in Culiacán highlighted the serious weakness of the administration's strategy.

Sonora, Chihuahua, and the LeBaron Family Massacre¹²⁷

In November 2019, a clash between two rival cartel factions left nine U.S.-Mexico dual citizens dead – an incident that drew international attention. It began on the morning of November 4 when 17 members of a local Mormon family, the LeBarón's, departed their

¹²⁶ Mexico News Daily, "Critical speech by retired general reveals growing rift between AMLO, military," *Mexico News Daily*, November 4, 2019, <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/critical-speech-reveals-growing-rift-between-amlo-military/>.

¹²⁷ Extracted from: Teagan McGinnis, "Nine Members of Local Mormon Family Killed in Cartel-Related Ambush in Mexico," *Justice in Mexico*, November 22, 2019, <https://justiceinmexico.org/nine-members-of-local-mormon-family-killed-in-cartel-related-ambush-in-mexico/>.

homes in the small village of La Mora in northeastern Sonora. About 70 miles from the Arizona border, the family left in three separate vehicles, two of which were headed to the neighboring state of Chihuahua and the third to Phoenix, Arizona. Of those traveling, three were mothers and 14 were their children.¹²⁸

While in transit, the vehicles were ambushed by cartel members in two separate incidences. Authorities confirmed the death of nine individuals total – all three mothers and six of their children, including a 7-month-old baby. The surviving children fled the attack, hiding in nearby bushes, then proceeding to walk the 14 miles back to La Mora to alert authorities.¹²⁹

Two rival criminal factions, *Los Salazar* (Sinaloa Cartel) and *La Línea* (Juárez Cartel), were believed to be responsible for the attack. Mexico's General Homero Mendoza Ruíz, the Chief of Staff for the National Defense, commented that the two groups had previously engaged in a shootout in the town of Agua Prieta along the U.S.-Mexico border. As tension between the groups escalated, *La Línea* dispatched gunmen to the region that straddles Sonora and Chihuahua where the attacks took place. This was thought to be in an effort to impede *Los Salazar's* access to potential drug trafficking routes through and into the neighboring states.¹³⁰

There is widespread speculation on the motives behind the attacks. Some believe it was a case of mistaken identity. Others postured that the LeBarón family was somehow more intimately entangled and actively engaged in the rivalry between *Los Salazar* and *La Línea*. Still others pointed to the community's "cordial" relationship with *Los Salazar*, which controls most of the activity in that region. Some speculate that the ambush served as a message to the Sinaloa Cartel that *La Línea*, and more broadly the Juárez Cartel, control the road and therefore the drug trafficking routes that lead into the state of Chihuahua.¹³¹

In general, accounts differ with regard to the relationship between the Mormon community and local cartels. Although various news stories portrayed the massacre as a violent attack against visiting U.S. citizens, the community of over 5,000 Mormons living in northern Mexico dates back to the early 20th century and consists of many dual nationals.¹³²

¹²⁸ Azam Ahmed, Elisabeth Malkin, and Daniel Victor, "9 Members of Mormon Family in Mexico Are Killed in Ambush," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/05/world/americas/mormons-mexico-attack.html>.

¹²⁹ José Antonio Belmont, "Familia LeBarón cree que ataque a mujeres y niños fue directo," *Milenio*, November 5, 2019, <https://www.milenio.com/policia/familia-lebaron-crea-ataque-mujeres-ninos-directo>.

¹³⁰ Kate Linthicum, "For Mexico ambush victims, there was no safety in numbers," *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-11-06/mexico-killing-survivors>.

¹³¹ Patricia Vélez Santiago, "Autoridades presumen que ataque a familia LeBarón en México se debió a lucha territorial entre dos grupos delictivos," *Univisión*, November 6, 2019, <https://www.univision.com/noticias/sucesos/autoridades-presumen-que-ataque-a-familia-lebaron-en-mexico-se-debio-a-lucha-territorial-entre-dos-grupos-delictivos>.

¹³² Jaweed Kaleem, "La massacre de ciudadanos estadounidenses apunta a la comunidad mormona con profundas raíces en México," *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/espanol/mexico/articulo/2019-11-06/mormones-mexico-lebaron-fundamentalistas-historia>.

While some press accounts focused on this aspect – including conspiracy theories attempting to link the victims’ families to the human trafficking ring known as NXIVM – others focused on the family’s activism in advocating for the rights of crime victims and local disputes over land tenure and water. A decade earlier, two members of the LeBarón family were kidnapped and murdered following their confrontation of the drug gangs that control the borderlands south of Arizona. That incident spurred family members to organize locally and nationally to pressure the government to act to improve citizen security and victim protections.¹³³

Because the attack included U.S.-Mexican dual citizens and was located relatively close to the border, U.S. politicians became increasingly vocal regarding President López Obrador’s security strategy. According to *The New York Times*, U.S. President Donald Trump responded by offering help in combating cartel violence. “This is the time for Mexico, with the help of the United States, to wage WAR on the drug cartels and wipe them off the face of the earth...the cartels have become so large and powerful that you sometimes need an army to defeat an army!” he tweeted. Given the historical legacy of U.S. interventionism in Mexico and apprehensions about armed U.S. agents operating in Mexico, López Obrador swiftly declined the offer.¹³⁴

Ironically, sources point out the underlying complicity of the United States in the violence targeting La Mora’s Mormon community. *The New York Times* reported that at a news conference two days after the attacks, Mexican government officials offered additional details regarding the incident. According to investigators, “the ammunition used in the attack were .223 caliber cartridges manufactured in the United States by Remington” and usually associated with AR-15 and M16 rifles.¹³⁵ Each year, approximately 200,000 American guns illegally cross the border into Mexico, many of which land in the hands of the criminal organizations that fight to control the multibillion drug trade to the United States.¹³⁶

With the dialogue between Presidents Trump and López Obrador, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation did agree to join the investigation at the alleged request of the Mexican government.¹³⁷ Ultimately, the government’s failure to protect its citizens was

¹³³ Jeremy Kryt, “A New Twist in the Horrific Massacre of American Moms and Kids in Mexico,” *The Daily Beast*, November 11, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/a-new-twist-in-the-horrific-massacre-of-american-mormon-moms-and-kids-in-mexico>.

¹³⁴ Azam Ahmed, Elisabeth Malkin, and Daniel Victor, “9 Members of Mormon Family in Mexico Are Killed in Ambush,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/05/world/americas/mormons-mexico-attack.html>.

¹³⁵ Kirk Semple, “Mormon Massacre in Mexico May Be Tied to Gang War, Officials Say,” *The New York Times*, November 6, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/06/world/americas/Lebaron-Family-killed-Mexico.html?module=inline>.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Bobby Allyn, “FBI Joins Investigation into Killing of 9 Members of Mormon Family in Mexico,” *National Public Radio*, November 11, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/11/11/778318135/fbi-joins-investigation-into-killing-of-9-members-of-mormon-family-in-mexico>.

another stain on the López Obrador administration's inefficient public safety and security strategy.¹³⁸

GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSES

Public Security and the National Guard

The first contingent of Mexico's National Guard was officially deployed to the streets in June 2019. Formed from the ranks of the Mexican military and police, the National Guard was created to combat the country's ongoing challenges with organized crime and violence. The 52,000-person deployment came seven months after President López Obrador took office in December 2018 and three months after Mexico's Congress approved the force in March 2019. The National Guard is projected to grow to be 140,000 members. López Obrador is not the first Mexican president to pursue a National Guard. Even his immediate predecessor, President Peña Nieto (2012-2018), tried to create a national militarized police force, which he referred to as a *gendarmería*. Peña Nieto's initial plans for a 40,000-person force were eventually scaled down to 5,000 officers.¹³⁹

Soon after the creation of the National Guard, 6,000 of its 52,000 agents initially deployed in the summer of 2019 were stationed at Mexico's southern border with Guatemala.¹⁴⁰ Their mandate was to assist with the increasing flow of migrants crossing into Mexico from Central America. As *The Associated Press* noted, the deployment came "as Mexico [put] into effect a deal on irregular immigration reached with Washington to head off stiff tariffs that President Donald Trump threatened to slap on all imports from Mexico."¹⁴¹

The National Guard was called on again to stop a 4,000-person caravan of Central American migrants from entering Mexico's southern border with Guatemala in early January 2020. The Mexican government's response to the crossing migrants was fueled by the ongoing debate between the Trump and López Obrador administrations of the U.S.- and Mexican-governments, respectively, over whose responsibility it is to quell

¹³⁸ Azam Ahmed, "After Mormon Family's Terror in Mexico, a Message Emerges: No One Is Safe," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/07/world/americas/mexico-mormon-massacre.html>.

¹³⁹ Kirk Semple, "Mexico's National Guard, a 'Work in Progress,' Deployed to Curb Migration," *The New York Times*, June 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/14/world/americas/mexico-migration-national-guard.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Jorge Monroy, "Para la Guardia Nacional, hasta 1,040 mdp en 2020," *El Economista*, December 8, 2019, <https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/politica/Para-la-Guardia-Nacional-hasta-1040-mdp-en-2020-20191208-0073.html>.

¹⁴¹ President López Obrador's decision to strengthen the country's southern border in response to the escalating tension with the United States led to a 5.2% drop in his approval rating from 66.0% to 60.8%, according to polling firm *Mitkofsky*. See María Verza, "Mexico says National Guard deployment is complete," *The Associated Press*, June 21, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/3103516b36b846b1add74e8de1d06412>; "One year from election, Mexicans give government poor marks on key issues: poll," *Reuters*, July 1, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-politics-poll/one-year-from-election-mexicans-give-government-poor-marks-on-key-issues-poll-idUSKCN1TW37A>.

migration.¹⁴² United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Henrietta Fore acknowledged that, at least pertaining to the flow of migrants to Mexico’s southern border, the National Guard is not the cure. “Unless the root causes of these migration flows are addressed, the situation is unlikely to change,” said Fore.¹⁴³

The National Guard also assisted in drug trafficking arrests, highway and street patrols, and crime prevention throughout Mexico during the second half of 2019.¹⁴⁴ This included securing oil pipelines and deterring organized crime from engaging in petroleum theft (*huachicoleo*).¹⁴⁵ At the time of this report, the National Guard has now been called upon to shift some of its focus to responding to the coronavirus pandemic. In late March 2020, President López Obrador sent the National Guard to several states and entities to deter looting and social unrest as community members braced for the arrival of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.¹⁴⁶

Mexico’s Federal Police (PF) has been at the center of the debate over the National Guard, as the former will be fully integrated into the latter before the end of 2020. The police have been very critical of the National Guard’s formation and the effect it will have on the police agents themselves. Their concerns include officers’ pay and benefits if they transfer, job stability and security, and the effect of deployment on their families back home, reports *The New York Times*.¹⁴⁷ One Federal Police officer, Engelbert Ruiz, commented that “[w]hat is really happening is that they are simply changing our uniforms [with] no explanations, clarity, no rights or guarantees.”¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the dissolution of the Federal Police force and the absorption of its officers into the National Guard’s ranks continues.

Human rights advocates have also criticized the National Guard, ever since President López Obrador began advocating its creation during his 2018 presidential campaign. For example, *Causa en Común*, a collective of more than 500 domestic civil society organizations and businesses, among others, delivered a petition to Congress in November 2018 urging their elected officials to reject López Obrador’s proposition. At the national level, Congresswoman Lucia Rojas argued that the National Guard would only deepen the military-focused strategy already in Mexico. “And it’s become clear in

¹⁴²James Fredrick, “Mexico National Guard Prevents Caravan Members From Crossing Border,” *National Public Radio*, January 21, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/21/798088834/mexico-national-guard-prevents-caravan-members-from-crossing-border>.

¹⁴³“One year from election, Mexicans give government poor marks on key issues: poll,” *Reuters*, July 1, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-politics-poll/one-year-from-election-mexicans-give-government-poor-marks-on-key-issues-poll-idUSKCN1TW37A>.

¹⁴⁴ Secretaría de Seguridad y Protección Ciudadana, “Prensa,” Gobierno de México, <https://www.gob.mx/guardianacional> (accessed April 11, 2020).

¹⁴⁵ Clare Ribando Seelke, “Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2020,” Congressional Research Service, February 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10578.pdf>.

¹⁴⁶ “AMLO enviará a la Guardia Nacional para apoyar a estados que sufren saqueos,” *La Verdad Noticias*, March 25, 2020, <https://laverdadnoticias.com/politica/AMLO-enviara-a-la-Guardia-Nacional-para-apoyar-a-estados-que-sufren-saqueos-20200325-0217.html>.

¹⁴⁷ Paulina Villegas and Elisabeth Malkin, “Mexico’s Federal Police Rebel Against New Security Plan,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/04/world/americas/mexico-police-protest.html>.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

the last 12 years,” she said, “that there’s absolutely no evidence that having the army on the streets helps to reduce the violence.”¹⁴⁹

At the international level, organizations like the United Nations, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch have expressed concern, too. Jan Jarab of the United Nation’s Office on Human Rights in Mexico sent a letter to Congress following the Chamber of Deputies’ sub-committee vote in the winter of 2019. Approval of the bill, he wrote, “would establish at the constitutional level this paradigm of military involvement in security issues, the same one that has contributed to the deterioration of human rights in Mexico.” Jarab continued, “[It] would threaten the possibility of having a capable civil body in the future that could exercise public security in strict accordance with international human rights standards.”¹⁵⁰

Indeed, military involvement in domestic affairs raises serious concerns, particularly with regards to the potential increase in human rights violations perpetrated by members of the military against civilians.¹⁵¹ As it was, just days after the National Guard took to the streets in Mexico in 2019, three agents were arrested for allegedly kidnapping a 14-year-old in Estado de México.¹⁵² They are thought to be a part of a larger kidnapping gang that authorities in Estado de México and Guerrero were tracking.

The likelihood of such incidences occurring pushed Congress to establish human rights protocols and protections as they debated the force’s approval in early 2019. The changes established the National Guard as a “civilian force under civilian direction, [although] the majority of the force’s funding and equipment comes from the armed forces,” described the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA).¹⁵³ Mandatory human rights training for National Guard members were also established, as well as the use of civil courts to try any members of the National Guard should the situation arise.

This is a welcomed step forward in protecting human rights. Mexico’s military courts where Guard members would have been tried had Mexico’s Congress not made the changes are notoriously partial and lack transparency.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, as the

¹⁴⁹ “Mexican president-elect’s party presents national guard plan,” *Reuters*, November 20, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-politics/mexican-president-elects-party-presents-national-guard-plan-idUSKCN1NP2MZ>.

¹⁵⁰ Citlal Giles Sánchez, “Preocupa a representante de la ONU en México creación de la Guardia Nacional,” *La Jornada Guerrero*, December 22, 2018, <https://www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/index.php/politica/item/5446-preocupa-a-representante-de-la-onu-en-mexico-creacion-de-la-guardia-nacional>

¹⁵¹ Catherine Daly, Kimberly Heinle, and David A. Shirk, “Armed with Impunity: Curbing Military Human Rights Abuses in Mexico,” *Justice in Mexico*, July 2012, <https://justiceinmexico.org/armed-with-impunity-curbing-military-human-rights-abuses-in-mexico/>.

¹⁵² “Cae banda de secuestradores que pertenecían a la Guardia Nacional,” *Forbes*, July 16, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com.mx/cae-banda-de-secuestradores-que-pertenecian-a-la-guardia-nacional/>.

¹⁵³ Maureen Meyer and Gina Hinojosa, “Mexico’s Human Rights Landscape During President López Obrador’s First Year in Office,” *The Washington Office on Latin America*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/mexico-human-rights-lopez-obrador/>.

¹⁵⁴ Catherine Daly, Kimberly Heinle, and David A. Shirk, “Armed with Impunity: Curbing Military Human Rights Abuses in Mexico,” *Justice in Mexico*, July 2012, <https://justiceinmexico.org/armed-with-impunity-curbing-military-human->

Congressional Research Service summed up in a February 2020 special report, “[i]nstead of bolstering the federal police, which had received significant U.S. equipment and training, López Obrador backed constitutional reforms to allow military involvement in public security for five more years. Those reforms contradict a 2018 Mexico Supreme Court ruling that prolonged military involvement in public security...”¹⁵⁵

Mexico’s use of a National Guard to address public security is part of a bigger wave occurring across Latin America. Other countries throughout the region are increasing the use of their armed forces in domestic, civilian affairs, writes Adam Isacson with WOLA. In turn, this politicizes the military and expands their internal roles. Isacson highlights several concerning trends with this swing back towards military control, which had been largely at bay during the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. Of those, the point that “elected civilian leaders are increasingly weak compared to the armed forces” rings true with Mexico’s use of the National Guard. Additionally, “these weak elected civilians,” writes Isacson, “are using the military to ‘defend’ against their own people, viewing them as national security threats.”¹⁵⁶

It is therefore critical that the López Obrador administration keep human rights protections at the forefront of its public security strategies, especially as the country continues to blur the line between military and civilian control, and national security versus public affairs.

Fiscalía General de la República

In January 2019, President López Obrador proposed Alejandro Gertz Manero as the country’s new Attorney General (*Fiscal General*), in a change approved five years earlier to replace the former *Procuraduría General de la República* (PGR) with the new *Fiscalía General de la República* (FGR). Because the Attorney General is appointed to a nine-year term and will be in place even after President López Obrador leaves office, he is expected to have a greater degree of prosecutorial independence from the executive branch than the PGR had in the past.¹⁵⁷ Gertz Manero had served as one of López Obrador’s top security advisors during and after the 2018 presidential campaign.

Gertz Manero was widely hailed as an “experienced lawman” and an expert on security, having served under both PRI and PAN administrations dating back to the

[rights-abuses-in-mexico/](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-politics/mexican-president-elect-party-presents-national-guard-plan-idUSKCN1NP2MZ): “Mexican president-elect’s party presents national guard plan,” *Reuters*, November 20, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-politics/mexican-president-elect-party-presents-national-guard-plan-idUSKCN1NP2MZ>.

¹⁵⁵ Clare Ribando Seelke, “Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2020,” Congressional Research Service, February 2020, <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/row/IF10578.pdf>.

¹⁵⁶ Adam Isacson, “What is Latin America’s Political Turmoil Doing to Civilian Control of the Military?” The Washington Office on Latin America, December 10, 2019, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/latin-america-political-turmoil-doing-to-civilian-control-of-the-military/>.

¹⁵⁷ Juan Arvizu Arriola, “Eligen a Gertz Manero como primer Fiscal General,” *El Universal*, January 18, 2019, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/politica/designan-gertz-manero-como-primero-fiscal-general>.

1970s. Within the first few months of his tenure, Gertz Manero pointed to serious organizational problems inherited from the PGR, including overpaid personnel, profligate spending, and an inequitable distribution of caseloads (with one individual charged with managing 1,000 cases). Moreover, he reported that his office had a backlog of over 300,000 investigations (*averiguaciones previas*) into irregularities that had not been resolved by the PGR, with over 63,000 of these cases lapsing beyond the statute of limitations.¹⁵⁸

Still, there was opposition to Gertz Manero's candidacy by the National Action Party (PAN) and criticism from the non-governmental organization community because of his close ties to the president. Critics also charged that the new Attorney General was not sufficiently autonomous and was unwilling to investigate top administration officials. In mid-January 2020, a leaked draft proposal for reforming the criminal justice system prepared by Gertz Manero and Julio Scherer, the president's chief legal adviser, brought strong pushback from experts who argued that it would fundamentally undermine the country's oral, adversarial model of criminal procedure and devalue human rights protections.

U.S.-MEXICO BI-NATIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION

U.S.-Mexico cooperation continues under the bilateral security cooperation agreement known as the Merida Initiative. Without question, the initiative has yielded tangible results and successful interventions. Since it went into effect in 2008, for example, more than 300,000 kilograms of drugs headed towards the U.S.-Mexico border have been seized by equipment and anti-narcotics tactics funded by the agreement.¹⁵⁹

Additionally, the Merida Initiative has resulted in unprecedented levels of bilateral cooperation between the United States and Mexico through its four-pillar strategy that focuses on institutional capacity and building.¹⁶⁰

Yet the Merida Initiative's primary goal was to reduce violence and to reign in the power and extent of drug trafficking organizations in Mexico. "It has failed to achieve that goal," argued Richard G. Miles, Senior Associate for the Center for Strategic and International Studies.¹⁶¹ During Congressional testimony in January 2020, he pointed to

¹⁵⁸ "Estas son las irregularidades que detectó Gertz Manero en la FGR a 100 días de iniciar su operación," *Economía Hoy*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.economiahoy.mx/nacional-eAm-mx/noticias/9861429/05/19/Este-es-el-balance-a-100-dias-de-operacion-de-la-FGR-segun-Gertz-Manero.html>; "Mexico: Justice System Proposals Violate Fundamental Rights," Human Rights Watch, January 30, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/30/mexico-justice-system-proposals-violate-fundamental-rights#>.

¹⁵⁹ Clare Ribando Seelke, "Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2020," Congressional Research Service, February 2020, <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/row/IF10578.pdf>.

¹⁶⁰ These four pillars focused on combating transnational criminal organizations; institutionalizing the rule of law while protecting human rights; creating a 21st-century U.S.-Mexican border; and building strong and resilient communities.

¹⁶¹ Miles testified on January 15, 2020 in front of the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade, which falls under the House of Representative's Committee on Foreign Affairs. The hearing, "Strengthening Security and the Rule of Law in Mexico," called three distinguished experts to speak on the matter: Dr. David Shirk, Director of Justice in Mexico; Maureen Meyer, Director for Mexico and Migrant Rights with the Washington Office on Latin America; and Richard G. Miles, Senior Associate for the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

the historic levels of violence suffered in 2019, as well as the failed kingpin strategy deployed by President López Obrador's predecessors to reign in cartels as evidence of the Merida Initiative's shortcomings.¹⁶² The Congressional Research Service also highlighted the rising number of deaths in the United States due to drug and opioid overdoses.¹⁶³

Still, the importance of the bilateral cooperation and channels created through the Merida Initiative cannot be overstated. As both countries continue to grapple with rising violence and drug usage, the Merida Initiative remains in effect, though with less financial support from the U.S. government. Congress boosted funds appropriated for the agreement from \$139 million in FY2019 to \$150 million in FY2020, but then approved a substantial decrease down to \$61.3 million for FY2021. The reduction in funds is likely a result of congressional concern over the Merida Initiative's effectiveness and efficacy, as noted above.¹⁶⁴

PROSPECTS FOR 2020

Due to quarantine measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, this report was released later in the year than previous versions. As a result, a significant amount of data and corresponding analysis has become available demonstrating trends in Mexico's violent crime during the first half of 2020. Available data from January through May 2020, reveal novel trends during a year marked by a global pandemic and international public protests demanding equal access to justice. Further examination will be necessary to consider these findings in the context of a full year of data, but this initial analysis may help to understand how violent crime trends in 2019 relate to early observations in 2020.

One thing that is apparent is that the COVID-19 pandemic has not slowed the rate of violence in Mexico, generally, though it is clearly having a range of effects on organized crime. Early in the pandemic, the lockdown of Wuhan, an important manufacturing area in China for the manufacture of fentanyl and its precursor chemicals, contributed to temporary supply chain interruptions and price increases.¹⁶⁵ Port of entry closures at the U.S.-Mexico border and lockdowns in both countries have also caused disruptions that appear to present challenges for illicit drug trafficking operations, money laundering, and other organized crime activities. For example, U.S. drug enforcement agencies reported a boom in seizures of product and bulk cash, thanks to a smaller

¹⁶² Richard Miles, Testimony for the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee on the Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, and Trade hearing on "Strengthening Security and the Rule of Law in Mexico," U.S. House of Representatives, January 15, 2020, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA07/20200115/110382/HHRG-116-FA07-Wstate-MilesR-20200115.pdf>.

¹⁶³ Clare Ribando Seelke, "Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2020," Congressional Research Service, February 2020, <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/row/IF10578.pdf>.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Kate Linthicum, "Coronavirus Chokes the Drug Trade — from Wuhan, Through Mexico and Onto U.S. streets," *Los Angeles Times*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-04-24/wuhan-china-coronavirus-fentanyl-global-drug-trade>.

“haystack” of cross-border flows and overall economic activity.¹⁶⁶ As Ioan Grillo points out, the pandemic has led to increased idleness, isolation, and anxiety, resulting in increased drug consumption and abuse in the United States and greater demand for drugs from Mexican suppliers.¹⁶⁷ It seems likely that the combined supply-chain disruptions, increased law enforcement scrutiny, and surges in the market have led to increased violent competition among traffickers vying to hold onto or expand their market share in uncertain times. Such organizations have also been making obvious attempts to gain public visibility and support, even showing up the government by distributing aid packages (*despensas*) of food and supplies to help poor families amid the pandemic.¹⁶⁸

At the same time, according to data obtained by Justice in Mexico from an omnibus survey conducted by *DATA Opinión Pública y Mercados* (DATA-OPM), the security situation remains a salient concern during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some areas of the country reporting very severe problems of violent crime.¹⁶⁹ While 14.9% of the respondents felt that security had improved in their neighborhoods, about 37.7% indicated that security had worsened as a result of COVID-19, and 46.3% indicated that it remained the same. Moreover, when asked to rank the level of insecurity in their cities from 1 (very little) to 10 (a lot), 83.1% described their city’s insecurity level at 5 or more, 24.2% of which ranked insecurity in their city at number 10. That is, most respondents believe that insecurity is high in their city, and about a quarter of respondents consider their city to be extremely unsafe. Again, this is likely an illustration of the high rates of geographic concentration of violence in Mexico, which has unfortunately persisted through the pandemic.¹⁷⁰

Homicides

From January through May 2020, SNSP recorded 12,184 intentional homicides (*homicidio doloso*) for an average of 2,436.8 per month or 80.7 per day.¹⁷¹ If this monthly rate

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Blankstein, Tom Winter, and Rich Schapiro, “COVID-19 is Costing Drug Cartels Millions of Dollars,” *NBC News*, May 24, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/crime-courts/covid-19-costing-drug-cartels-millions-dollars-n1213181>.

¹⁶⁷ Ioan Grillo, “How Mexico’s Drug Cartels Are Profiting From the Pandemic,” *The New York Times*, July 7, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/07/opinion/sunday/mexico-drug-cartels-coronavirus.html>.

¹⁶⁸ Deborah Bonello, “El Chapo’s Daughter Hands Out Aid in Mexico as Cartels Play ‘Robin Hood’ in Pandemic Crisis,” *The Telegraph*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/17/el-chapos-daughter-hands-aid-mexico-cartels-play-robin-hood/>; Robert J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan, “Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 29: An Overview of Cartel Activities Related to COVID-19 Humanitarian Response,” *Small Wars Journal*, May 8, 2020, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/mexican-cartel-strategic-note-no-29-overview-cartel-activities-related-covid-19>.

¹⁶⁹ The survey interviewed 1,023 subjects to gauge their perceptions on issues like security, criminal justice system, politics, and personal economics during the COVID-19 pandemic. Subjects were randomly selected, representing all 31 Mexican states and Mexico City.

¹⁷⁰ Interestingly, when asked about President López Obrador’s handling of the COVID-19 health crisis, 53.3% of the respondents approved of his strategies; with 18.6% considering his performance to be “very good” and 34.7% considering it “good,” 23.75% considering it “very bad,” and 16.2% “bad.” It remains to be seen how the public will respond as the crisis unfolds.

¹⁷¹ “Incidencia delictiva del Fuero Común, nueva metodología,” Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, July 3, 2020, <https://www.gob.mx/sesnspp/acciones-y-programas/incidencia-delictiva-del-fuero-comun-nueva-metodologia?state=published>.

continues, Mexico would expect to see an annual total of 29,565 intentional homicides in 2020, which is just barely higher than the 29,421 registered in 2019.¹⁷²

Three states saw more than 1,000 individuals murdered in the first five months of 2020: Guanajuato (1,405 homicides), Estado de México (1,059), and Baja California (1,042). Rounding out the top five states were Chihuahua and Michoacán with 972 and 854 homicides, respectively. The states with the fewest homicides were Yucatán (16 homicides), Baja California Sur (20), Campeche (30), Aguascalientes (35), and Tlaxcala (46).¹⁷³

The rise in homicides continues to reflect the volatile and precarious dynamics among OCGs. This has played out specifically in Guanajuato with the escalating violence between the CSRL and the CJNG. Fallout from the rift includes the killing of 13 Guanajuato police officers and the head of Acámbaro municipality's Public Security in December 2019.¹⁷⁴ More recently, violence has spiked in response to the arrest of the mother of CSRL leader José Antonio "El Marro" Yépez in June 2020.¹⁷⁵ Aside from that conflict, targeted homicides in 2020 have also included violence against women – or femicides – which has driven hundreds of thousands of women to the streets in mass to protest for their safety.¹⁷⁶ Environmentalists have been targeted, too, with at least six killed in direct response to their line of work in 2020.¹⁷⁷ Homicides of individuals have also captured the headlines, such as a federal judge who was murdered in Colima,¹⁷⁸ a U.S.-Mexican teenager shot dead in Oaxaca by police,¹⁷⁹ and the attempted murder of Mexico City's Secretary of Public Security,¹⁸⁰ all of which occurred in June 2020. Although homicides between cartels are driving up the number of intentional homicides, it is clear that targeted homicides against other populations and figures are also at play.

¹⁷² Ibid, SNSP, "Incidencia delictiva del Fuero Común."

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Kimberly Heinle, "Attacks Against Police Highlight Violence in Guanajuato," Justice in Mexico, December 25, 2019, <https://justiceinmexico.org/attacks-against-police-highlight-violence-in-guanajuato/>.

¹⁷⁵ Kimberly Heinle, "Tension and Violence Rise in Guanajuato Following Arrests of Cartel Leader's Mother," Justice in Mexico, June 30, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/tension-and-violence-rise-in-guanajuato-following-arrests-of-cartel-leaders-mother/>.

¹⁷⁶ Teagan McGinnis, "Exploring the Legal Context of Homicide in Mexico," Justice in Mexico, June 12, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/legal-context-femicide-mexico/>.

¹⁷⁷ Mauricio Villaseñor, "Environmental Activists Under Attack in Mexico," Justice in Mexico, May 26, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/environmental-activists-under-attack-in-mexico/>.

¹⁷⁸ Kimberly Heinle, "Federal judge murdered in Colima," Justice in Mexico, June 18, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/federal-judge-murdered-in-colima/>.

¹⁷⁹ Jonathan Hale, "American teen killed in Mexico in latest instance of police violence," Justice in Mexico, June 25, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/american-teen-killed-mexico-police/>.

¹⁸⁰ Rita E. Kuckertz, "Mexico City's Secretary of Public Security Attacked by Armed Assailants," Justice in Mexico, June 26, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/cdmx-secretary-public-security-attacked-assailants/>.

Intentional Injuries

From January through May 2020, SNSP recorded 58,897 cases of intentional injuries (*lesiones dolosas*) or an average of 11,779.4 per month or 390 per day.¹⁸¹ At this monthly rate, Mexico would expect to see 141,353 cases of intentional injury over a 12-month span, which would be more than 22,000 cases less than the total reported in 2019.

Almost one-third of all intentional injuries in the first five months of 2020 occurred in Estado de México, which registered 17,876 cases or 30% of all cases. This tracks evenly with the trend from 2019 when that state also accounted for 30% of all intentional injuries nationwide. The states of Guanajuato (4,716 cases), Michoacán (2,719), Veracruz (2,693), and Baja California (2,189) followed Estado de México with the most intentional injuries from January through May 2020. Meanwhile, Campeche saw the lowest number of such crime with 32 cases, followed by Nayarit (57), Tlaxcala (100), Yucatán (107), and Chiapas (283).¹⁸²

At least some of the cases of intentional injuries that occurred were a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Assaults, for example, targeted members of the medical profession because of the supposed risk of contagion they bring to their communities. Nurses burned with bleach, clinics set on fire, and medical professionals being verbally assaulted are all acts that have made healthcare workers afraid to wear their uniforms outside of the hospitals.¹⁸³ Targeted attacks against women also increased during the pandemic due to the “stay at home” order. María Noel Baeza is the regional director for the UN Women, the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.¹⁸⁴ “In a situation of confinement,” Baeza explained, “what is happening is that women are locked up with their own abusers in situations where they have very limited outlets.”¹⁸⁵ Mexico’s Secretary of the Interior (*Secretaría de Gobernación*, SEGOB) estimated that violence against women increased between 30% and 100% in just the first three weeks after the stay at home order was imposed.¹⁸⁶ As the pandemic plays out, it will be of note to monitor the relationship with the numbers of intentional injuries, specifically those targeted against healthcare workers and women.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, SNSP, “Incidencia delictiva del Fuero Común.”

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Laura Calderón, “COVID-19 and violence in Mexico,” Justice in Mexico, May 6, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/covid-19-and-violence-in-mexico/>.

¹⁸⁴ UN Women, “About UN Women,” United Nations, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women> (accessed July 5, 2020).

¹⁸⁵ Lucila Sigal et al., “Another pandemic: In Latin America, domestic abuse rises amid lockdown,” *Reuters*, April 27, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-latam-domesticviol/another-pandemic-in-latin-america-domestic-abuse-rises-amid-lockdown-idUSKCN2291JS>.

¹⁸⁶ Megan MacGregor, “Domestic Violence in Mexico During COVID-19,” Justice in Mexico, June 16, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/domestic-violence-mexico-covid/>; Alexis Ortíz, “Estiman aumento de hasta 100% en violencia de género por confinamiento ante coronavirus,” *El Universal*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/coronavirus-en-mexico-estiman-aumento-de-hasta-100-en-violencia-de-genero>.

Robberies

From January through May 2020, SNSP recorded 258,470 cases of robbery (*robos*) or an average of 51,694 per month or 1,711.7 per day.¹⁸⁷ At this monthly rate, Mexico would expect to see 620,328 cases in 2020, a significant decrease of almost 138,000 from 2019. If this trajectory holds, it will be the second year that robberies have gone down since the number peaked in 2018 with 810,602 cases.

The most robberies occurred during the first five months of 2020 in Estado de México, which registered 57,278, or 22% of all cases. Mexico City followed with 13% of all cases (33,597 cases), then Jalisco with 9% (22,638 cases), Guanajuato with 6% (15,204 cases), and Baja California with 5% (12,499 cases). The five states with fewest cases of robbery were Yucatán (325 cases), Nayarit (351), Campeche (401), Tlaxcala (935), and Chiapas (1,588), all of which each accounted for less than 1% of the total cases nationwide.¹⁸⁸

Kidnappings

From January through May 2020, SNSP recorded 365 kidnappings (*secuestros*) or an average of 73 per month or 2.4 per day.¹⁸⁹ The overwhelming majority of these cases (88%) were kidnappings for ransom (*secuestro extorsivo*). The numbers are on a downward trajectory, decreasing from 87 kidnappings nationwide in January to 74 in March to 53 in May for an average of 17 to 18 kidnappings per month. At a rate of 73 cases per month, Mexico would expect just over 200 cases of kidnapping in 2020, a dramatic decrease from the 1,323 cases recorded in 2019.

In the first five months of 2020, Estado de México and Veracruz had the highest number of cases with 69 and 66, respectively, followed by Morelos (32 cases), Mexico City (29 cases), and Tabasco and Zacatecas (16 cases each). Meanwhile, 14 states recorded five or fewer kidnappings, four of which reported none (Baja California Sur, Campeche, Durango, and Yucatán).¹⁹⁰

Extortions

From January through May 2020, SNSP recorded 3,347 cases of extortion (*extorsión*) or an average of 669.4 per month or 22.2 per day.¹⁹¹ At that monthly rate, Mexico would expect to see over 8,033 cases of extortion in 2020 or just under 500 cases fewer than the

¹⁸⁷ SNSP, "Incidencia delictiva del Fuero Común."

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

8,500 recorded in 2019. The number of cases peaked at 721 in February and steadily declined to 603 in May.

Of the 3,347 extortions during the first five months of 2020, Estado de México registered dramatically more cases than any other state with 33.8% of all cases (1,131 cases), a continuance of the rates reported in 2019. Veracruz had the second highest total cases (330), followed by Jalisco (304), Mexico City (182), and Nuevo León (165) to round out the top five, which also parallels trends from 2019. The states with the lowest cases of extortion from January through May 2020 were Yucatán (0), Nayarit and Tlaxcala (1 each), Michoacán (5), and Campeche, Chihuahua, and Guanajuato (7 each).¹⁹²

CONCLUSION

Since beginning this series of studies in 2009, Justice in Mexico has tried to emphasize that the problems of organized crime and violence in Mexico are highly consequential, complex, and interconnected. This report details the unprecedented levels of violence that Mexico is currently facing and appears likely to face into the foreseeable future. While only marginally more violent than 2018, in recent years, Mexico has had far more homicides and other violent incidences than the previous surge in violence from 2011 to 2012. Yet, even less so than in the past, the Mexican government appears to have no clear strategy in place to improve the country's public security situation.

Indeed, thus far, President López Obrador's efforts to address organized crime have been mixed, at best, and by most accounts have fallen far too short. During his campaign for the presidency, López Obrador made vague assertions about the possibility of legalizing drugs, pledging to hold a referendum on this issue in his third year in office (when a new U.S. presidential term begins). Still, there has been little movement on this front so far. Meanwhile, as noted in previous reports, President López Obrador appears to be convinced that strong efforts to address Mexico's underlying socioeconomic deficits are the key that will unlock the door to a brighter future. Thus, to the extent that he has made combatting organized crime a priority, López Obrador appears to be most concerned with gaining controls to the levers of the Mexican economy; hence, his efforts crack down on fuel theft rings and to root out corruption in Mexico's energy sector.

To be sure, the idea that economic factors are at the root of Mexico's violent crime epidemic is a compelling notion, but it oversimplifies the challenge at hand. Indeed, as this report underscores, while Mexico's socioeconomic deficits are an important underlying contributor to the "unrule" of law, recent surges in violence are a function of the complex interactions among criminal organizations, and the choices and strategies that past and current governments have employed to combat them. Just as

¹⁹² Ibid.

concerning, the ability of OCGs to thrive hinges critically on the acquiescence, protection, and even direct involvement of corrupt public officials, as well as corrupt private sector actors, who share in the benefits of illicit economic activities. This is part of the reason that targeting kingpins has been ineffective. An effective strategy to combat organized crime, therefore, necessarily relies on thwarting criminal actors at all levels: not just those at the top, and not just those on the street.

While the López Obrador administration has clearly shifted away from the kingpin strategy, it has not adequately invested in the necessary infrastructure to promote the effective administration of justice. Rather, López Obrador appears to be keen on creating a centralized, militarized public security apparatus, while dismantling past efforts to improve the Mexican criminal justice system. Yet, to combat organized crime and improve citizen security, more generally, the Mexican government needs to do more than address the country's socioeconomic deficits and tighten its grip on public security agencies. It also needs to reduce impunity by holding violent criminal actors to account, professionalizing civilian police agencies, aggressively prosecuting official corruption, and targeting illicit dealings in the business and financial sector (including money laundering, fraud, and other white-collar financial schemes that frequently involve organized crime). Impunity is the opposite of accountability and the solution to Mexico's rule of law problem, across the board, is to increase accountability. In the dangerous and uncertain times the country currently faces, recent developments and policies give little cause for optimism on Mexico's public security front.

APPENDIX

DATA ON HOMICIDES IN MEXICO

INEGI mortality data are made available through its State and Municipal Databases (*Sistema Estatal y Municipal de Bases de Datos, SIMBAD*) database.¹⁹³ INEGI classifies homicides and other mortality data according to standards utilized by the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) published by the WHO, which is a sophisticated classification system used to improve the comparability of mortality statistics. The ICD establishes specific criteria and procedures for collecting, processing, classifying, and presenting data on the cause of mortality on death certificates. Using specific medical codes and classification system established by the ICD, authorities attempt to identify and record a specific underlying cause of death, along with other contributing factors that may have accompanied and contributed to a person's death. The ICD classification system's codes are designed to differentiate among sometimes seemingly similar causes and circumstances (e.g., differentiating between homicides committed in violation of the law and killings committed by police officers in the line of duty).

INEGI currently uses the tenth edition of the ICD (ICD-10), which was introduced in 1990 and includes nearly twice as many categories as the previous edition (ICD-9). A new edition of the ICD (ICD-11) was released in June 2018, but will not be utilized by WHO member states until 2022. Under ICD-10, homicides are considered within the category of "External causes of morbidity and mortality (V01-Y98)," which includes accidents, intentional self-harm (suicide), assault, events of undetermined intent, war and legal interventions (e.g., killings by police in the line of duty), complications from medical intervention, and late-term impacts (sequelae) of external causes. Technically, homicides are included under the category of "assault" (X85-Y09), which registers "injuries inflicted by another person with intent to injure or kill, by any means." The "assault" category includes intentional use of poisons, gases, physical trauma (e.g., gunshots, use of blunt objects, bodily force, sexual assault, strangulation, fire, explosions, drowning, etc.). However, assault does not include cases of legitimate use of force by law enforcement authorities or agents of war.

¹⁹³ INEGI, "Sistema Estatal y Municipal de Base de Datos," Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, <https://sc.inegi.org.mx/cobdem/>.

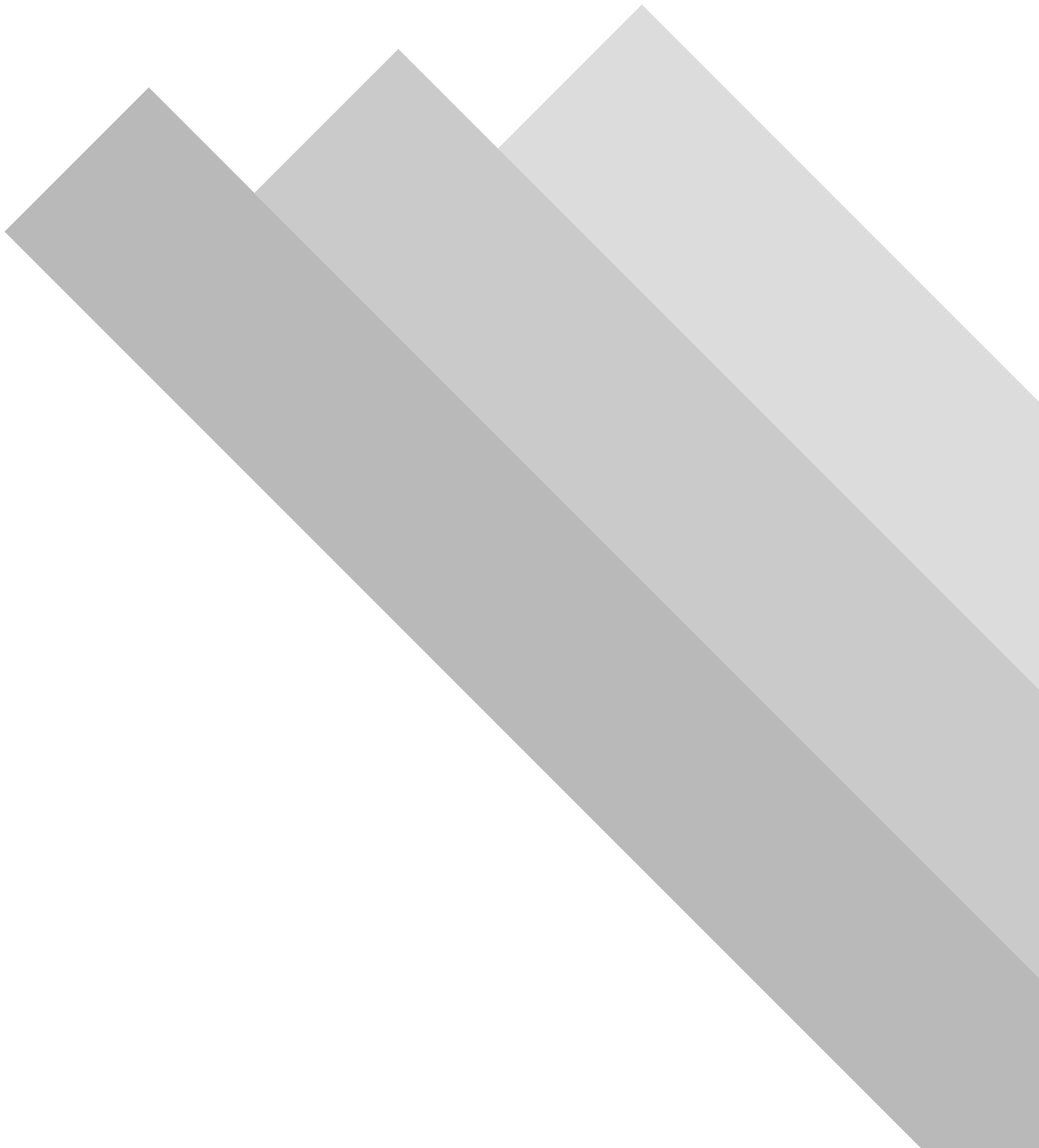
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