

**ORGANIZED
CRIME
AND VIOLENCE
IN MEXICO**

**SPECIAL
REPORT**

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Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico: 2021 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. The Justice in Mexico program is 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.

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. The authors are indebted several colleagues for their thoughtful suggestions, including June Beittel, Marcelo Bergman, Janice Deaton, Angelica Durán Martínez, Matthew Ingram, Gema Kloppe-Santamaría, Sandra Ley, Eric Olson, Javier Osorio, Juan Salgado, Patrick Signoret, Aileen Teague, and Amb. Earl Wayne. .

Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico

2021 SPECIAL REPORT

Justice in Mexico
Department of Political Science &
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Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico

INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on trends in organized crime and violence in Mexico, which have been enormous concerns to U.S. and Mexican authorities and the general public in both countries the past few decades. For ten years (2009-2018), this report was entitled *Drug Violence in Mexico*, because of the dramatic increase in violence associated with Mexican drug trafficking organizations. However, in 2019, the authors modified the title and scope of the report in an effort to more accurately reflect the significant changes that have occurred in the dynamics Mexico's public security situation, as the nature of organized crime and violence in Mexico has evolved and become more complex. Accordingly, this report on *Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico* – the second edition under this title – compiles the latest available information and relevant research on these topics with an emphasis on data made available by Mexican authorities.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the significant public security challenges Mexico has faced in recent years. The authors draw on data from Mexico's national public security system to examine the observable trends across a wide range of violent crimes, especially those that are often associated with Mexican organized crime groups (OCGs). In particular, this report provides a detailed analysis of data on intentional homicides (*homicidio doloso*), intentional injuries (*lesiones*), reported kidnapping (*secuestro*), extortion (*extorsión*), robbery, and violence targeting special victims of crime in Mexico, including government officials, police, military personnel, and members of the media. Also, because of its growing prevalence and recent public concerns, this report gives special attention to categories of crime specifically targeting women (e.g., femicide, sexual violence), which have increased alongside other forms of violent crime.

ORGANIZED CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN MEXICO

The problem of organized crime and violence has been a prevailing concern in Mexico in recent years. A Mitofsky poll taken in advance of the country's June 2, 2021 national, state, and local elections found that the largest proportion of respondents (36.5%) identified crime (*delincuencia*) as their top concern, followed by corruption (22.2%) and well ahead of the corona virus (14.9%).¹ In particular, organized crime, and especially drug trafficking, is a major source of crime and insecurity in Mexico. The 2021

¹ Consulta Mitofsky, "Estudio de opinion en todo el país (México)," May 14-15, 2021. (Accessed July 19, 2021). <http://www.consulta.mx/index.php/encuestas-e-investigaciones/item/1453-panorama-mx>

International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) notes that today Mexico is “a significant source and transit country for heroin, marijuana, methamphetamine, and illicit synthetic opioids destined for the United States,” as well as other countries.² While cannabis cultivation has been prominent in Mexico since the 19th century and opium cultivation began in the 1910s and 1920s, it was not until the 1970s that Mexican criminal organizations developed major drug trafficking operations.³

The evolution of the Mexican drug trade has been influenced by law enforcement efforts elsewhere. In the 1970s, following the disruption of Turkish-Italian-French supply networks to the United States, Mexico became a major exporter of heroin, supplying as much as 80% of the U.S. market.⁴ Beginning in the 1980s, due to increased counter-drug efforts in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, Mexico also became a major transit point for cocaine trafficking. While precise indicators of illicit production and flows are not available, seizure data provide a useful proxy measure. From the earliest available data in 1988 to the late 1990s, the Mexican government seized an average of 33 metric tons of cocaine annually. However, in the 2000s, as Colombian counter-drug efforts restricted the cocaine supply, such seizures declined to an average of 23 metric tons annually from 2000-2010, and to just 8 tons annually from 2011-2020, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Cocaine Seizures by Mexican Government (in metric tons), 1988-2020

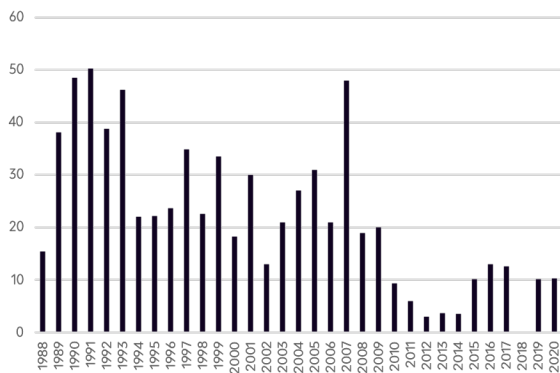
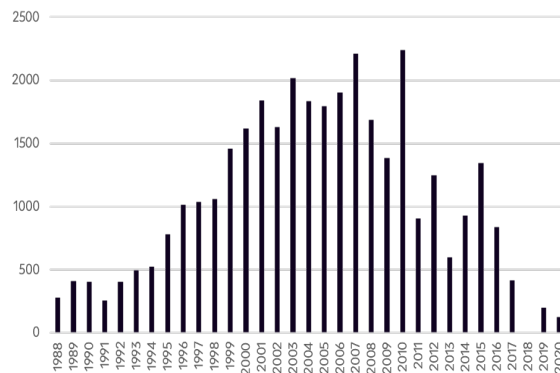


Figure 2: Marijuana Seizures by Mexican Government (in metric tons), 1988-2020



² Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Volume 1*, United States Department of State, March 2021, pp. 180-183. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/International-Narcotics-Control-Strategy-Report-Volume-I-FINAL-1.pdf>

³ Cannabis cultivation dates to at least the 1700s. Campos provides useful references to early cannabis cultivation and prohibition in Mexico. Campbell discusses some of Mexico’s early opium trafficking, while Enciso provides an excellent discussion of emergence of Mexican producers in the early opium trade. Campos, Isaac. *Home Grown: Marijuana and the Origins of Mexico's War on Drugs*, University of North Carolina Press, 2012. Enciso, Froylan, *Nuestra historia narcótica: pasajes para (re)legalizar las drogas en México*, (Mexico: Debate, 2015).

⁴ Celia Toro.

Figure 3: Opium Seizures by Mexican Government (in kilograms), 1988-2020

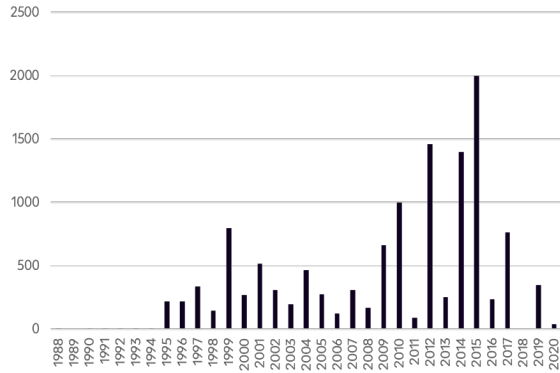
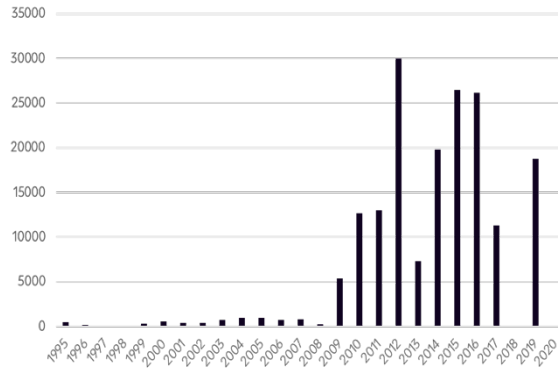


Figure 4: Methamphetamine Seizures by Mexican Government (in kilograms), 1995-2020



Meanwhile, Mexican traffickers diversified into producing and distributing other illicit drugs, as illustrated by increased Mexican government seizures of cannabis, opium, and synthetic drugs. While annual cannabis seizures reported by the Mexican government averaged just over 700 metric tons during the 1990s, these figures more than doubled to an average of over 1,800 metric tons from 2000-2010 (Figure 2). At the same time, average annual opium seizures increased from over 170 kilos in the 1990s to more than 300 kilos in the 2000s and over 750 kilos over the last decade (Figure 3). Likewise, Methamphetamine seizures increased from an average of half a metric tons from the 1990s through the 2000s to more than 17 metric tons from 2010-2020 (Figure 4).⁵ Meanwhile, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reports that its seizures of fentanyl have risen from just 175 pounds in 2015 to 4,776 in 2020, with most of these flows coming from Mexico.⁶ These increased flows of synthetic drugs have contributed to an epidemic of U.S. drug abuse and overdoses (especially in cases involving the synthetic opioid fentanyl).⁷

The structure of Mexico’s illicit drug trade has also changed over time in ways that have increased the level of violent crime throughout the country. Once characterized by quiet collusion among a few monopolistic illicit firms, Mexico’s drug trade has become highly competitive. Whereas there were only two major drug trafficking organizations in Mexico during the 1980s – namely, the Gulf Cartel and the Guadalajara Cartel – the number grew to four in the 1990s, as the Guadalajara Cartel splintered into the Tijuana, Juárez, and Sinaloa Cartels. Over the 2000s and 2010s, further splintering led to the emergence of at least a dozen significant regional criminal groups. Lacking the capacity

⁵ Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2011. p. 86.

⁶ These data represent all CBP seizures and come from the *National Drug Threat Assessment* produced by the U.S. Department of Justice over various years. These reports do not provide disaggregated data on seizures for the Southwest border only.

⁷ Holly Hedegaard, M.D., Arialdi M. Miniño, M.P.H., and Margaret Warner, Ph.D., “Drug Overdose Deaths in the United States, 1999-2017,” Center for Disease Control, *National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief* No. 329, November 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db329.htm>.

for large-scale international drug trafficking, many regional criminal organizations have sought to remain profitable by diversifying into various forms of violent crime, including extortion, kidnapping, human smuggling, and various forms of theft.

Several factors have contributed to this unvirtuous cycle of competition and violence. In particular, leadership disruptions – especially due to the targeting of drug “kingpins” by Mexican and U.S. law enforcement – has contributed to the above-noted pattern of internal schisms and encroachment by rival organizations that has fueled violence. As an illustration, in the 1980s, the torture and murder of U.S. DEA agent Enrique “Kiki” Camarena led to revelations of massive drug cultivation operations and high-level governmental corruption, resulting in enormous U.S. pressure to intensify counter-drug efforts in Mexico.⁸ This was followed by a series of high levels arrests that resulted the splintering of the Guadalajara Cartel and subsequent competition between the Sinaloa, Tijuana, and Gulf cartels in the 1990s. At the same time, the continued escalation and militarization of counter-drug efforts contributed to the escalation of conflict between such groups – and with the Mexican government – in the 1990s and 2000s. Moreover, the frequent corruption of counter-drug efforts at high levels further exacerbated competition among criminal organizations, as government officials have secretly protected one cartel while pursuing its rivals.

Other factors also played an important role in the evolution of the Mexican drug trade, including changing market dynamics. Responding to shifts in supply and demand, Mexican drug trafficking organizations have periodically moved into new product areas, which can result in newfound competition that destabilizes the power dynamics among criminal groups. This is part of what has made the New Generation Cartel of Jalisco (*Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG*) – which pioneered the trafficking of synthetic drugs like methamphetamine – such a powerful disruptive force in the Mexican drug trade.⁹ The rise of synthetic drugs – now including fentanyl – has led to a dramatic shift away from the trafficking of marijuana and cocaine – resulting in a large decrease in seizures of these substances by U.S. and Mexican authorities – and a significant disruption of illicit drug cultivation activities in rural Mexico.¹⁰ Production shortages and supply chain interruptions can also contribute to increased competition among Mexican traffickers, as was the case when counter-drug efforts in Colombia

⁸ Elaine Shannon, *Desperados: Latin Druglords, U.S. Lawmen, and the War America Can't Win*, Viking Publishers, 1988; James Kuykendall, *¿O Plata O Plomo?: "Silver Or Lead" The Story Of The Kidnapping And Murder Of DEA Agent Kiki Camarena*, Self-published, 2018.

⁹ 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

¹⁰ Romain Le Cour Grandmaison, Nathaniel Morris, and Benjamin T. Smith, “The U.S. Fentanyl Boom and the Mexican Opium Crisis: Finding Opportunities Amidst Violence?,” *Briefing Paper Series on Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Justice in Mexico, February 2019. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/the_u.s._fentanyl_boom_and_the_mexican_opium_crisis.pdf

impacted the cocaine supply in the mid-2000s.¹¹ As we discuss later in this report, similar supply chain interruptions created challenges for CJNG and other organizations trafficking in synthetic drugs like methamphetamine and fentanyl.

The opening of the Mexican political system in the late-20th century also contributed to increased competition among criminal organizations, as political alternation destabilized corrupt protection networks.¹² Previously, Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) sustained cartel-like arrangements to control production and wholesale distribution of illicit drugs. Single party rule and the centralization of power enabled corrupt, high-level officials to provide protection and discourage competition among such groups. With greater political alternation, this arrangement began to fall apart and splintering and competition among organized crime groups increased.¹³

Today, Mexico's security situation is vastly different than it was in the 1980s and 1990s past, when a handful of large, well-protected drug trafficking organizations operated in relative harmony and had little impact on the lives of average citizens. Since the early 2000s, competing criminal organizations have been engaged in open violent combat with one another and with the Mexican government, millions of Mexicans live in communities severely impacted by crime and violence, and public opinion polls place the country's security situation at the top of a long list of frustrations. In the sections below, we provide a more detailed examination of these trends, drawing on the most recent data available on crime and violence in Mexico.

VIOLENT CRIME IN MEXICO

Violent crime is a long-standing problem in Mexico that presents a real threat to individuals, communities, business, and governability. While violent crime has been

¹¹ Juan Camilo Castillo, Daniel Mejía, Pascual Restrepo, "[Scarcity Without Leviathan: The Violent Effects of Cocaine Supply Shortages in the Mexican Drug War](#)," *Review of Economics & Statistics*, Volume 2, 2014.

¹² 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 organized crime groups vying for access to state protection and market share. 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); Angélica Durán-Martínez. *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops, and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*. New York: Oxford, 2018; Guillermo Trejo and Sandra Ley, *Votes, Drugs, and Violence: The Political Logic of Criminal Wars in Mexico*, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

¹³ Astorga, Luis and David A. Shirk. "Drugs, Crime, and Violence." In *Mexico and the United States: The Politics of Partnership*, edited by Peter H. Smith and Andrew Selee, 161-190. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2013); Shirk, David A. and Joel Wallman. "Understanding Mexico's Drug Violence." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 8 (2015): 1348-1376; Trejo, Guillermo and Sandra Ley. 2021. "High-Profile Criminal Violence: Why Drug Cartels Murder Government Officials and Party Candidates in Mexico." *British Journal of Political Science* 51(1): 203-229; Trejo, Guillermo and Sandra Ley. 2020. *Votes, Drugs, and Violence. The Political Logic of Criminal Wars in Mexico*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

closely associated with drug trafficking for several years, increasingly such crimes are associated with a diverse array of other organized criminal activities. Some of this violence targets special populations, such as government officials, political candidates, and journalists. Meanwhile, other forms of violent behavior – notably, domestic violence and sexual and gender-related violence – have also tended to increase alongside organized criminal violence. This report draws on the most recent available data from both official and non-governmental sources to provide a summary of recent trends across several major categories of violent crime: homicide, intentional injuries, kidnapping, extortion, robbery, murders of special victims (politicians, police, military, and journalists), and femicides and other gender-related crimes.

It is important to note that – across all categories of crime – there is a serious problem of impunity in Mexico, which underscores the urgent need for reforms and increased resources to strengthen the country’s criminal justice sector. Indeed, the vast majority of crimes in Mexico go unreported, uninvestigated, and unpunished, primarily because of a lack of confidence in the integrity and effectiveness of governmental authorities. Moreover, many criminal cases drag on for years due to inefficiencies in the administration of justice. In 2019, the latest year for which INEGI has reported data, over half of all criminal cases in Mexico were still being processed under the “traditional” inquisitorial criminal justice system.¹⁴ Even high impact crimes like homicide typically result in a suspect in only a fraction of investigations. The large number of unreported crimes – known as the “black statistic” (*cifra negra*) – makes it difficult to analyze criminal violence in Mexico, especially in cases where victims are highly reluctant to report them to authorities (e.g., kidnapping and sex crimes). Thus, where possible, the authors draw on both official data on reported crimes, as well as data from national crime victimization surveys that provide a more complete picture.

¹⁴ INEGI, *Censo Nacional de Impartición de Justicia Federal 2021*, July 1, 2021, <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/cnijf/2021/>.

HOMICIDE

Both the number and rate of intentional homicides in Mexico have been characterized by dramatic surges over the past two decades, placing it among the most violent countries in the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, according to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) data available through 2018 (see Figures 5 and 6), Mexico has experienced a larger number of intentional homicides than any Latin American country except for Brazil (which has twice Mexico's population).¹⁵

Especially in recent years, homicidal violence in Mexico has reached record levels, with more than four times greater the number of murders in 2007. However, the number of homicides appeared to level off in 2020, with SNSP reporting 34,515 intentional homicide victims and INEGI reporting 35,247 victims.¹⁶ In fact, the overall trend in homicides appeared to decline slightly late that year and into the first half of 2021.

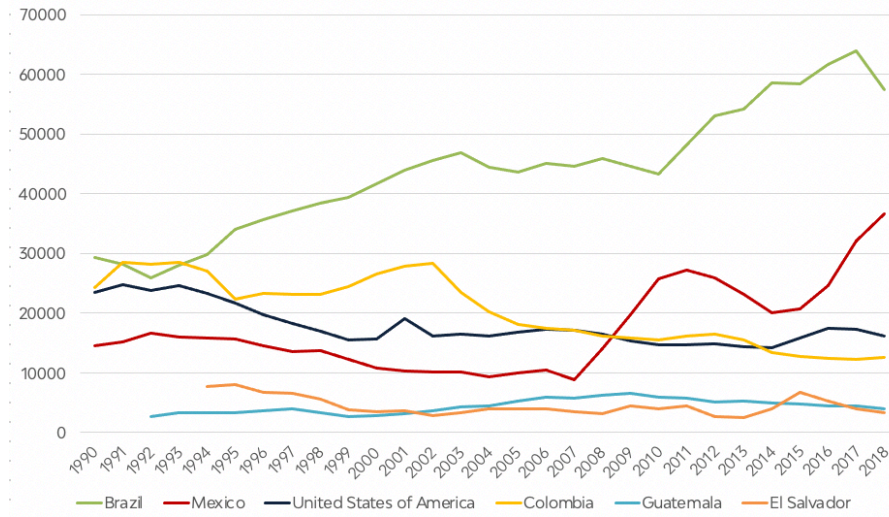
Homicide is often classified as either intentional (*doloso*) or unintentional (*culposo*), with the former category subject to more severe penalties because of deliberate malice. In Mexico, intentional homicide (*homicidio doloso*) is classified as a crime under Article 315 and Article 350 of the 1931 Federal Criminal Code, which was last updated January 24, 2020. This statute establishes that intentional homicide is a premeditated crime leading to the death of the victim. This crime may be considered "aggravated" (qualifying for higher penalties) when committed "with advantage, with treachery or treason."

This legal definition establishes the basis for statistical information on the number of intentional homicide cases and (since 2015) individual victims gathered by state and federal law enforcement agencies and reported through the National Public Security System (SNSP). Homicides are also documented by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI), using World Health Organization (WHO) classifications.

¹⁵ Mexico does have a lower per capita rate than some other countries in the region, including El Salvador. However, Mexico's growing number and rate of homicides in recent years underscores the importance and urgency of its public security situation.

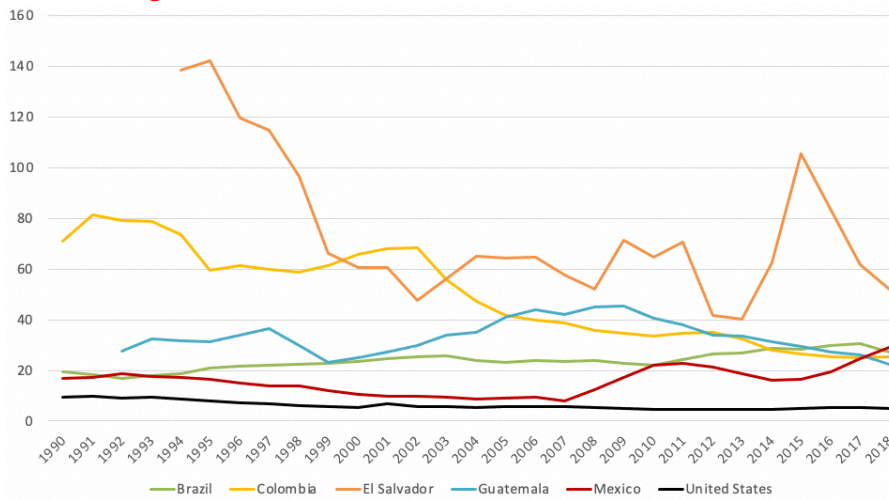
¹⁶ INEGI classifies deaths based on the 10th edition of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) from the World Health Organization (WHO). ICD-10 establishes criteria and procedures for collecting, processing, classifying, and presenting mortality data on death certificates. Under ICD-10, homicides fall under the category of "External causes of morbidity and mortality (V01-Y98)," including accidents, intentional self-harm (suicide), assault, events of undetermined intent, war and legal interventions, complications from medical intervention, and late-term impacts (sequelae) of external causes. 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, and physical trauma (e.g., gunshots, use of blunt objects, bodily force, sexual assault, strangulation, fire, explosions, drowning, etc.), but does not include cases of legitimate use of force by law enforcement authorities or agents of war. A new edition of the ICD (ICD-11) was released in June 2018, and will be utilized by WHO member states beginning in 2022.

Figure 5: Number of Homicides in the Americas, 1990-2018



Source: UNODC.

Figure 6: Homicide Rates in the Americas, 1990-2018

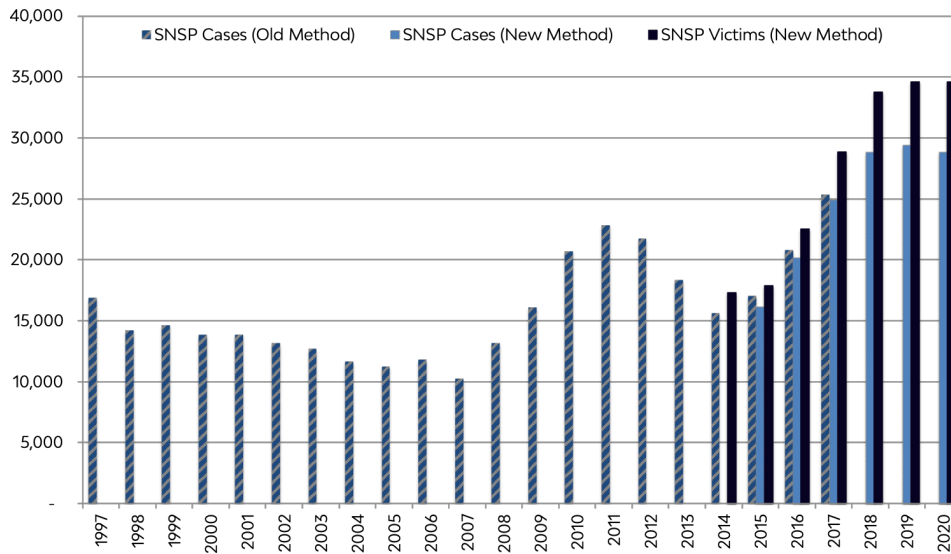


Source: UNODC.

As illustrated with SNSP data presented in Figure 7, there have been two large surges in the number of intentional homicides in Mexico in recent decades.¹⁷ The first surge began with a steep increase in 2008, peaked in 2011, and was followed by a relatively sharp decrease over the next few years. The second surge began in 2015, when SNSP first began reporting the number of individual murder victims alongside the number of homicide case investigations. Both the number of cases and victims reached record highs in 2018 and 2019. In 2020 and into 2021, Mexico’s murder rate has remained at historically high levels, even amid the significant social and economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹⁷ In this report, preference is given to SNSP data because they have been formally classified as homicides through an official law enforcement investigation, which is not the case for INEGI figures.

Figure 7: Number of Intentional Homicide Cases and Victims Reported Annually by Law Enforcement, 1997-2020



Source: SNSP.

There is perhaps some relief in sight. The number of intentional homicides appears to have begun to level off and perhaps even declined slightly over the course of 2020. Indeed, the 34,515 intentional homicide victims documented SNSP in 2020 was 0.3% lower (93 fewer victims) than the total that SNSP reported in 2019 (34,608 victims).¹⁸ However, the number of intentional homicides in 2020 remained almost double the number in 2015, when SNSP documented 17,866 victims, and triple the number of SNSP homicide investigations reported in 2007.¹⁹ Moreover, the numbers for 2018-2020 are so close that it technically impossible to say which year had the greatest number of homicides, given the large number of unreported cases that will likely be discovered in future years.²⁰ Even then, the high rate of disappearances in recent years – with over

¹⁸ Considering that there was an average of around 95 victims per day over these two years, the decrease from 2019 to 2020 was negligible: 2020 had roughly the equivalent of one day fewer murders compared to 2019. Also, it is worth noting that these figures have been updated from Justice in Mexico’s 2020 report based on more recent figures from SNSP.

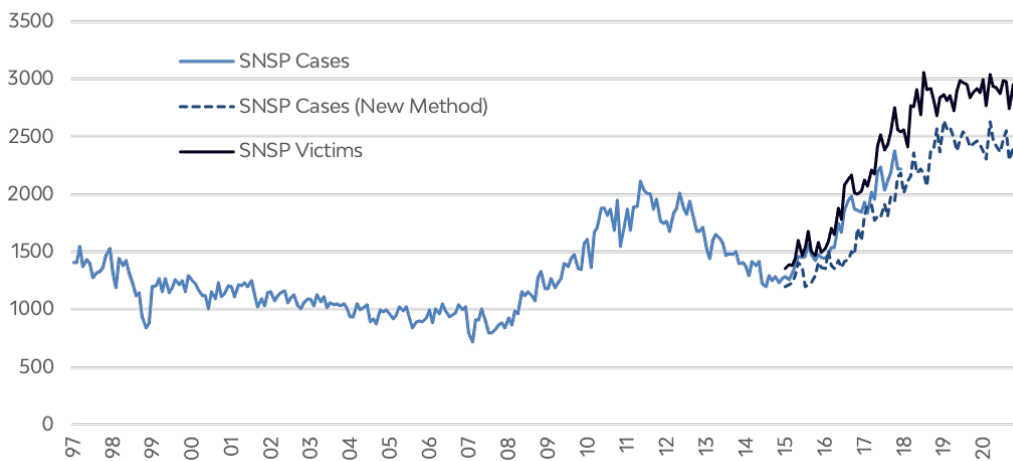
¹⁹ Here a subtle but important distinction is made between homicide victims and homicide investigations. SNSP only began reporting the number of homicide victims in 2015. Prior to that, SNSP reported only homicide cases (including multiple homicides).

²⁰ Indeed, many murders are not discovered or recorded until well after the year in which they occur. Thus, for a given year, INEGI figures distinguish between the number of fatalities (*defunciones*) registered (*registradas*) and the number that occurred (*ocurridas*) that same year. This means that the number of “registered” fatalities is not an accurate reflection of the number of deaths in any given category for a given year. For example, 2019 was widely reported as the year with the most homicides recorded in recent decades. Yet, according to INEGI mortality data, there were 36,662 intentional homicides registered in 2019. Of these, 35,506 occurred in 2019, while 834 occurred in 2018 and the rest occurred in earlier years dating as far back as 1982. Since INEGI’s initial reports for 2018 listed 35,520 homicides occurring in that year, the additional 834 murders later reported for 2018 brings the total number of known homicides reported by INEGI for that year to 36,354, which is the largest number on record for

93,000 people missing according to Mexico’s National Search Commission (*Comisión Nacional de Búsqueda, CNB*) – means that we may never know how many people have died in the course of Mexico’s decades-long public insecurity crisis.²¹ Moreover, it should be noted that neither SNSP nor INEGI’s figures on intentional homicide account for extrajudicial killings by Mexican authorities that are committed with or without cause, leaving the number of state-led killings in Mexico an unanswered question.

What is clear is that the number of murders in Mexico remains at extraordinarily high levels. As illustrated by Figure 8, the average number of intentional homicide victims was around 1,492 per month in 2015, but this number climbed to more than 2,800 per month since 2018. The average number of intentional homicide victims was 2,876 in 2020 per month and declined slightly (1.7%) to 2,826 per month in the first eight months of 2021.²² At the current rate, it is plausible that the total number of intentional homicide victims in 2021 be around 31,000, a modest (10%) improvement from one of the worst years on record.

Figure 8: Number of Intentional Homicide Cases and Victims Reported Monthly by Law Enforcement, January 1997-August 2021



Source: SNSP.

any year. Even so, new cases pertaining to 2019 will continue to be discovered and registered over the coming years, making it impossible to determine at this time which year actually had more homicides.

²¹ CNB administers the National Registry of Disappeared and Missing Persons (*Registro Nacional de Personas Desaparecidas y No Localizadas, RNPEDNO*), which replaced the National Registry of Lost and Missing Persons (*Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas, RNPED*) in 2018. In total, RNPEDNO reports that more than 230,000 people have gone missing in Mexico from March 15, 1964 to October 20, 2021. Of these, 136,799 people (59.4%) have been located, including 127,715 that have been found alive and 9,084 that have been found dead. Of the people who remain missing, 84,106 are listed as “disappeared” and 9,225 are listed as “not located.” *Comisión Nacional de Búsqueda*, <https://versionpublicarnpdno.segob.gob.mx/Dashboard/ContextoGeneral>.

²² By comparison, in the first eight months of 2020 the number of homicides averaged 2,940 per month.

At the same time, it is worth noting that, since 2015, there has been a modest increase (7.6%) in the number of victims relative to the number of homicide cases, from approximately 1.11 victims per case in 2015 to 1.19 in 2020. This suggests that, in recent years, the national increase in homicides has been driven at least partly by a greater number of multiple homicides and mass casualty events involving organized crime.²³

In this context, it also bears mention that a large majority of homicides – roughly 70% of SNSP homicides in 2020 – in Mexico involve firearms. Moreover, in many areas with high rates of organized criminal violence (such as Colima, Guanajuato, and Michoacán) the proportion reached 80% or more in 2020. According to the one estimate, more than 250,000 firearms – including many high caliber, rapid-fire military-grade weapons – are smuggled into Mexico from the United States each year.²⁴ This fact caused the Mexican government to file a lawsuit against U.S. firearms manufacturers in August 2021.²⁵ The Mexican government points out that U.S. manufacturers supply precisely the kind of high-powered weapons frequently employed by organized crime groups, the key perpetrators of Mexico’s recent violence.

Indeed, various tallies suggest that the number of intentional homicides attributable to Mexican organized crime groups is substantial, and a new index released in 2021 indicates that Mexico’s organized crime problem is one of the worst in the world.²⁶ As illustrated by Figure 9, at least a third – and perhaps as many as two thirds – of all intentional homicides in Mexico in recent years bore characteristics of violence employed by Mexican organized crime groups. While there are major methodological challenges, various organizations (including the Mexican government) have attempted to monitor such killings, which often involve multiple assailants and/or victims, use of high-powered weapons, indications of torture, and messages or markings associated with specific criminal organizations.²⁷ By any estimate, organized crime groups appear

²³ The biggest increase in the ratio of victims per homicide case came in 2017, when this figure jumped by 3.5%. The victim/case ratio has ticked upwards each year since at a rate of about 0.5-1.3%. All of this suggests that there was a significant increase in multiple casualty events that began in late 2015, with the uptick in competition and violent conflicts among organized crime groups in Mexico.

²⁴ Kate Linthicum, “Mexicans Are Killing Each Other at Record Rates. The U.S. Provides the Guns,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 2019; Topher McDougal, David A. Shirk, Robert Muggah and John H. Patterson, *The Way of the Gun: Estimating Firearms Traffic Across the U.S.-Mexico Border*, USD Trans-Border Institute and Igarapé Institute, March 2013,

https://catcher.sandiego.edu/items/peacestudies/way_of_the_gun.pdf

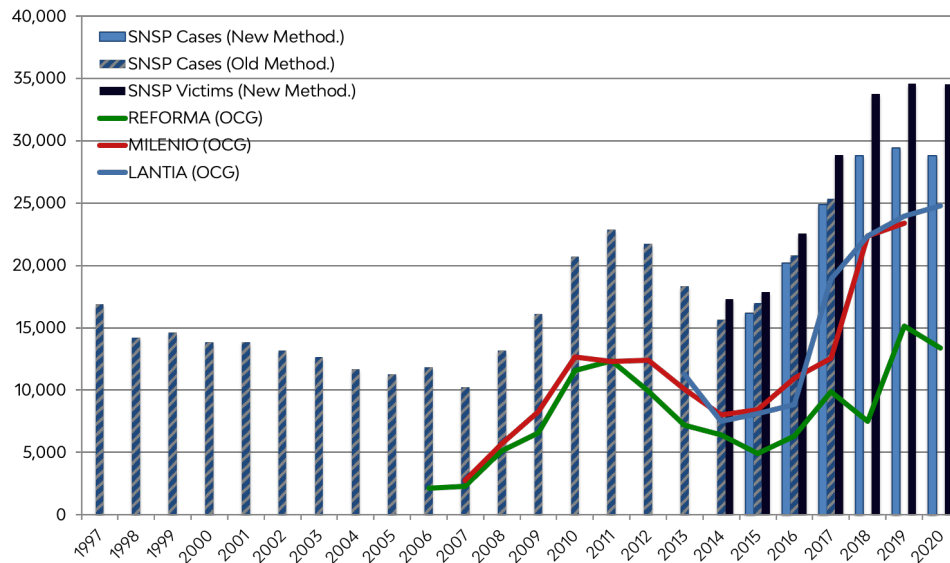
²⁵ Natalie Kitroeff and Oscar Lopez, “Mexico Sues Gun Companies in U.S., Accusing Them of Fueling Violence,” *The New York Times*, August 4, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/by/oscar-lopez>

²⁶ *The Global Organized Crime Index 2021*, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/ocindex-2021/>

²⁷ Of the 34,515 intentional homicide victims reported by SNSP in 2020, the Mexican newspaper *Reforma* was able to identify 13,365 organized crime-style killings, or about 38% of all reported intentional homicides. Another tally by the consulting firm Lantia indicates that as many as 24,807 intentional homicides, or about 72%, bore characteristics of organized crime involvement in 2020. *Reforma’s* methodology is detailed in Viridiana Rios and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2010*, San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, February 2011.

to account for a major share – if not the majority – of the recent increases in violence that Mexico has experienced.

Figure 9: Comparison Between Intentional Homicides and Organized-Crime-Related Homicides



Meanwhile, past reports and numerous studies have shown that violent crime tends to be highly concentrated in specific regions that are important zones of illicit activity, including the production and transit of illegal drugs and other contraband. As illustrated in Figure 10 and Figure 11, the number and rate of intentional homicide cases is highly concentrated in the northwest, northern border, and central regions of Mexico, while the number and rate of homicides is comparatively lower in the south and southeastern portions of the country.²⁸ The concentration of homicidal violence in 2020 was markedly less than it had been during the period from 2010-2012, when more than a third of all homicides were found in the top five municipalities, and over 40% were found in the top ten. However, the concentration of homicides has steadily increased since the lull in violence in 2013, suggesting that greater attention is needed to some of the country’s main hotspots.

²⁸ Here the term “homicide cases” is used deliberately, since Mexico’s National Public Security (SNSP) reports municipal level homicide data by the number of cases investigated, not by the number of individual victims.

Figure 10: Map of the Number of Intentional Homicide Cases by State and Municipality in 2020²⁹

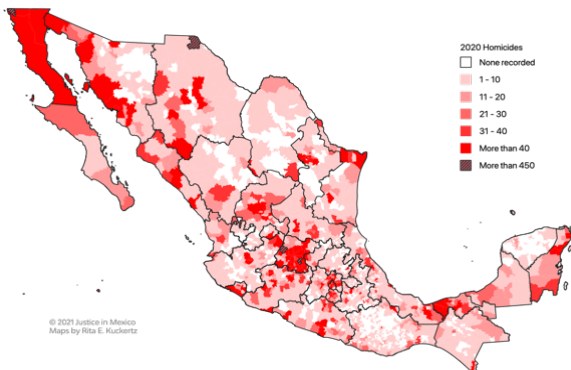
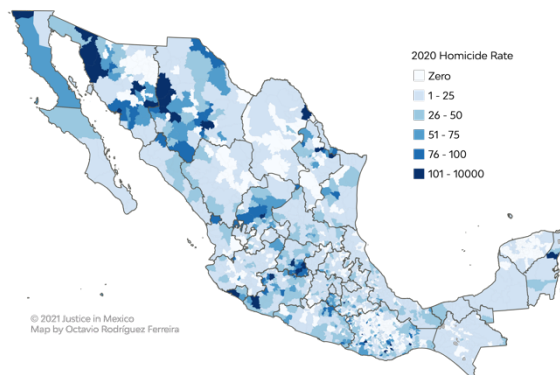


Figure 11: Map of Intentional Homicide Cases (Rate Per 100K) by State and Municipality



Source: SNSP.

For over a decade, the majority of intentional homicide cases has been highly concentrated in a minority of the country's roughly 2,450 municipalities. In fact, as illustrated in Table 1, nearly a quarter (4,916) of all intentional homicides in 2020 were concentrated in just five municipalities, while nearly a third (6,767) were concentrated in the top ten most violent municipalities. This is a stark contrast from 2007, Mexico's historic low point in homicides, when the top five municipalities accounted for less than ten percent (934) of the country's 10,253 cases, and the top ten accounted for around 16% of all cases (1,598). In 2020, the top two municipalities accounted for nearly ten percent of Mexico's 34,608 homicide cases, with around 5% in Tijuana (1,846) and 4% in Ciudad Juárez (1,533).

While Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez have consistently ranked among the municipalities the greatest number of homicide cases for more than a decade, the "top ten" list has shifted considerably over time. As homicidal violence subsided in the country's two largest border cities, during what O'Rourke and Byrd (2011) called the "Pax Sinaloa," Acapulco rose to the top slot from 2012 to 2016.³⁰ However, thereafter, Acapulco experienced substantial decreases and, in 2020, saw a nearly 40% drop in homicides. Similarly, Monterrey, which ranked among the top five municipalities with the most homicides in 2011 and 2012, saw a dramatic reduction in its levels of homicidal violence thereafter. Meanwhile, other municipalities have seen sudden, sharp surges in the number and rate of homicide cases. In the central industrial-agricultural state of Guanajuato, for example, violence among regional organized crime groups in 2020

²⁹ 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 (ten?) municipalities with the greatest number of homicides and assigned them a separate, patterned color.

³⁰ O'Rourke and Byrd use the term "Pax Sinaloa" refer to the period of dominance by the Sinaloa Cartel. See Beto O'Rourke and Susie Byrd, *Dealing Death With Drugs: The Big Business of Dope in the U.S. and Mexico*, El Paso, Texas: Cinco Puntos Press, 2011, p. 27.

pushed the municipalities of León and Celaya to the third and fourth ranked municipalities, respectively.

Table 1: Number and Rate (per 100K) of Homicide Cases Reported by Law Enforcement, by Municipality, 2007-2020

#	Municipality	2007	Rate	#	Municipality	2008	Rate	#	Municipality	2009	Rate	#	Municipality	2010	Rate
1	Tijuana	207	14	1	Juárez	1,620	117	1	Juarez	2,399	170	1	Juarez	3,746	262
2	Juarez	200	15	2	Tijuana	782	51	2	Tijuana	1,094	69	2	Tijuana	1,250	76
3	Acapulco	186	26	3	Chihuahua	424	53	3	Culiacán	620	76	3	Chihuahua	1,106	134
4	Iztapalapa	186	10	4	Culiacán	401	49	4	Chihuahua	528	65	4	Culiacán	798	97
5	Ecatepec	155	9	5	Acapulco	216	30	5	Acapulco	418	59	5	Acapulco	489	70
6	G. A. Madero	151	13	6	Ecatepec	213	12	6	Ecatepec	316	18	6	Ecatepec	424	24
7	Monterrey	139	12	7	Guadalajara	174	11	7	Gomez Palacio	278	84	7	Mazatlán	418	97
8	Nezahualcóyotl	135	12	8	Iztapalapa	172	9	8	Durango	230	42	8	Monterrey	359	32
9	Culiacán	121	15	9	Durango	160	29	9	Mexicali	216	23	9	Tepec	309	85
10	Guadalajara	118	7	10	G. A. Madero	151	13	10	Iztapalapa	206	11	10	Torreón	287	47
Top 10 total/share		1,598	7.7%	Top 10 total/share		4,313	20.7%	Top 10 total/share		6,305	30.3%	Top 10 total/share		9,186	44.2%
Top 5 total/share		934	4.5%	Top 5 total/share		3,443	16.6%	Top 5 total/share		5,059	24.3%	Top 5 total/share		7,389	35.5%

#	Municipality	2011	Rate	#	Municipality	2012	Rate	#	Municipality	2013	Rate	#	Municipality	2014	Rate
1	Juárez	1,460	100	1	Acapulco	1,271	184	1	Acapulco	883	129	1	Acapulco	590	70
2	Acapulco	1,008	145	2	Juarez	850	58	2	Tijuana	492	27	2	Tijuana	462	27
3	Monterrey	700	62	3	Monterrey	685	61	3	Culiacán	479	58	3	Culiacán	399	43
4	Culiacán	649	79	4	Culiacán	471	57	4	Juarez	453	30	4	Juarez	389	28
5	Chihuahua	554	66	5	Torreón	792	126	5	Ecatepec	312	18	5	Ecatepec	349	20
6	Torreón	455	72	6	Chihuahua	587	69	6	Monterrey	266	24	6	Chihuahua	184	20
7	Tijuana	418	25	7	Tijuana	320	18	7	Chihuahua	251	29	7	Morelia	182	24
8	Ecatepec	325	19	8	Nuevo Laredo	544	132	8	Torreón	238	38	8	León	166	11
9	Mazatlán	307	71	9	Cuernavaca	270	73	9	Zapopan	217	16	9	Chilpancingo	166	64
10	Guadalupe	254	36	10	Ecatepec	533	30	10	Morelia	209	27	10	Iztapalapa	160	9
Top 10 total/share		6,130	29.5%	Top 10 total/share		6,323	30.4%	Top 10 total/share		3,800	18.3%	Top 10 total/share		3,047	14.7%
Top 5 total/share		4,371	21.0%	Top 5 total/share		4,069	19.6%	Top 5 total/share		2,619	12.6%	Top 5 total/share		2,189	10.5%

#	Municipality	2015	Rate	#	Name	2016	Rate	#	Name	2017	Rate	#	Name	2018	Rate
1	Acapulco	902	107	1	Acapulco	918	139	1	Tijuana	1,618	83	1	Tijuana	2,246	115
2	Tijuana	612	36	2	Tijuana	871	44	2	Acapulco	834	126	2	Juárez	1,004	64
3	Culiacán	441	47	3	Juárez	470	32	3	Juarez	642	41	3	Acapulco	839	127
4	Ecatepec	355	20	4	Culiacán	439	46	4	Culiacán	607	73	4	Benito Juárez (Cancún)	537	61
5	Juárez	269	19	5	Ecatepec	298	17	5	Chihuahua	363	41	5	Culiacán	500	60
6	Chilpancingo	212	81	6	Chihuahua	275	31	6	León	335	21	6	Guadalajara	480	33
7	Guadalajara	193	13	7	Chilpancingo	234	99	7	Ecatepec	318	18	7	Irapuato	374	75
8	Iztapalapa	181	10	8	Mazatlán	224	48	8	Los Cabos	317	111	8	León	350	22
9	Zapopan	176	13	9	Iztapalapa	222	11	9	Guadalajara	266	18	9	Tlaquepaque	329	45
10	Nezahualcóyotl	172	15	10	Victoria, Tam.	216	60	10	Chilpancingo	260	110	10	Ecatepec	317	18
Top 10 total/share		3,513	16.9%	Top 10 total/share		4,167	20.0%	Top 10 total/share		5,560	26.7%	Top 10 total/share		6,976	33.6%
Top 5 total/share		2,579	12.4%	Top 5 total/share		2,996	14.4%	Top 5 total/share		4,064	19.5%	Top 5 total/share		5,126	24.7%

#	Name	2019	Rate	#	Name	2020	Rate
1	Tijuana	2,000	94	1	Tijuana	1,846	85
2	Juárez	1,381	85	2	Juárez	1,533	94
3	Acapulco de Juárez	592	92	3	León	633	37
4	León	455	27	4	Celaya	493	109
5	Culiacán	455	54	5	Cajeme	411	108
6	Benito Juárez	393	41	6	Culiacán	407	48
7	Guadalajara	367	26	7	Zamora	371	206
8	Irapuato	359	71	8	Guadalajara	362	26
9	Iztapalapa	329	18	9	Acapulco de Juárez	357	56
10	Cajeme	327	86	10	Benito Juárez	354	36
Top 10 total/share		6,658	32.0%	Top 10 total/share		6,767	32.6%
Top 5 total/share		4,883	23.5%	Top 5 total/share		4,916	23.6%

Source: SNSP. Note that data prior to 2015 reflect the total number and rate of homicide cases, while data from 2015 onward reflect the total number and rate of homicide victims.

Throughout the country, the vast majority of murders go unsolved. In 2019, the most recent year for which there are official data on state-level criminal court proceedings, INEGI reported that Mexican authorities levied criminal charges (*causas penales*) in a

total of 10,134 homicide cases.³¹ That was equivalent to about a third of the 29,406 homicide investigations reported by SNSP that year, which involved 34,608 homicide victims. However, since many investigations and criminal charges pertain to previous years, the total number of homicides prosecuted – let alone “resolved” through court proceedings – in any given year is very small. Indeed, an *Animal Político* research project sponsored by the Open Society Foundation claims that 95% of all homicides in Mexico go unsolved, often due to botched criminal investigations.³² The same study cites a variety of obstacles to effective homicide investigations, including a failure to properly preserve crime scenes, a lack of qualified forensic experts, mismanagement of the processing and chain of custody of evidence, poor coordination between criminal investigators, and corruption among criminal justice operators.

Other research suggests that the very nature of many homicides in Mexico itself presents important barriers to homicide investigations. Generally speaking, the motive and culpability of an assailant can be more easily established in some types of homicides than others. For example, homicides targeting certain populations (such as intimate partners and children) or involving specific modalities of violence (e.g., stabbings or blunt trauma) are often easier to solve than ones involving assailants that were unknown to their victims or using firearms. This makes solving homicides particularly challenging in Mexico, where most murders involve firearms and a large proportion involve assailants that are unknown to the victim, leaving few telltale indicators of the motive or the identity of the assailant.³³ For poorly resourced Mexican criminal investigators overwhelmed by enormous caseloads, solving murders thus presents significant challenges and victims’ families rarely see the perpetrators brought to justice.³⁴

In short, all indicators on intentional homicide indicate that Mexico’s public security situation remains very dire, and that impunity reigns. Following the steep increases in intentional homicides that began in 2015, Mexico has faced unprecedentedly high levels of homicide for three years running, and projections for 2021 remain high, despite the possibility of a 10% decrease compared to the previous year. Clearly, there are some areas of the country that face particularly significant challenges, and others that have

³¹ “Tabulados básicos,” Fig. 9, Censo Nacional de Impartición de Justicia Estatal 2020.

³² *Animal Político*, “Solving A Murder In Mexico Is the Exception, Not the Rule,”

<https://www.animalpolitico.com/kill-murder-mexico/homicides-unpunished-mexico.php>

³³ Rodrigo Meneses Reyes and Miguel Quintana Navarrete, “Homicidios e investigación criminal en México,” *Perfiles Latinoamericanos*, 24(48) 2016, pp. 297-318.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305218017_Homicidios_e_investigacion_criminal_en_Mexico/fulltext/57850b0308ae3949cf5381ba/Homicidios-e-investigacion-criminal-en-Mexico.pdf

³⁴ In 2020, the *New York Times* reported on the extraordinary lengths that a shopkeeper named Miriam Rodriguez went to over a three-year period in order to track down and help prosecute 10 individuals responsible for the abduction and murder of her daughter in 2014. In 2017, Ms. Rodriguez was shot and killed in front of her home, presumably in retaliation for her efforts. Azam Ahmed, “She Stalked Her Daughter’s Killers Across Mexico, One by One,” *The New York Times*, December 13, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/13/world/americas/miriam-rodriguez-san-fernando.html>

made progress in reducing homicidal violence. However, reducing homicidal violence arguably remains the most urgent and important public security problem Mexico faces, even amid the COVID-19 crisis.

INTENTIONAL INJURIES

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. Cases of intentional injuries in Mexico decreased in 2020 for the first time since 2016. In the four years prior, cases of intentional injuries declined from 139,783 cases in 2015 to 137,151 in 2016, but then began its upward trajectory. In 2017, 152,273 cases of intentional injuries were registered, followed by 157,416 in 2018 and 164,143 in 2019. That dropped to 144,280 cases in 2020, a nearly 20,000-case decline.

Intentional Injuries: 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. 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.

INEGI data are also available on injuries using the same edition of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10). However, while this system catalogues intentional self-harm, it does not report on the intentionality of other injuries.

For at least the second consecutive year, the states of Mexico, Guanajuato, and Jalisco had the highest number of assaults, respectively. The State of Mexico alone accounted for 30% of all assaults in Mexico in 2020, registering 43,503 cases. Guanajuato ranked second, with 7.7% of all cases (11,127 cases). This was followed by Jalisco with 5.2%, and Veracruz and Michoacán each with 4.6%. Eight states independently accounted for less than 1% of all cases in Mexico, the highest being Baja California Sur with 1,415 cases and descending down through Colima, Morelos, Chiapas, Tlaxcala, Yucatán, Nayarit, and ultimately Campeche with just 71. Campeche also had the lowest number of intentional injuries nationwide in 2019, registering 109.

Figure 12: Number of Reported Intentional Injury Cases by State and Municipality

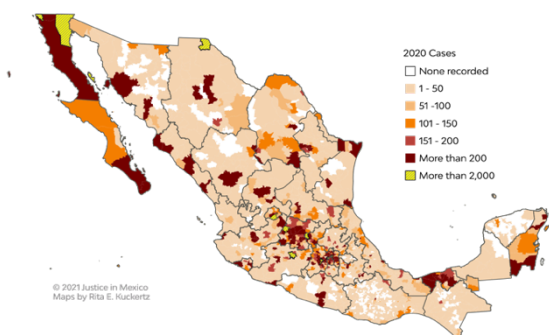
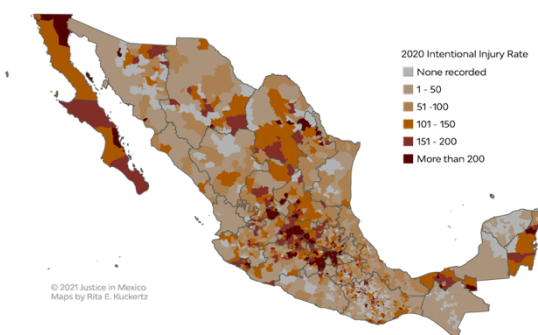


Figure 13: Reported Intentional Injury Rate by 100K by State and Municipality



Source: SNSP.

Figure 12 and Figure 13 illustrate the distribution of intentional injuries throughout the country at the municipal level. At the municipal level, 1,975 of Mexico's 2,471 municipalities reported at least one case of intentional injury in 2020; 979 reported ten or more; 268 reported 100 or more; and just 26 reported 1,000 or more. The top five highest cases of intentional injuries per municipality in 2020 were recorded in Ecatepec de Morelos, Mexico with 5,231 cases; Toluca, México (3,573); León, Guanajuato (2,805); Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes (2,805); and Querétaro, Querétaro (2,438). These municipalities account for 11.4% of all cases of intentional injuries nationwide in 2020.

Aguascalientes, the capital of the state of Aguascalientes, was the only municipality in 2020's top five that was not in 2019's top five. It replaced Mexicali, Baja California, which dropped from having the fifth highest number of cases in 2019 with 2,842 cases to eighth highest in 2020 with 2,225. Its neighboring municipality – Tijuana – also continued its three-year decline in cases of intentional injuries. After having topped the list in 2015 (5,907 cases), 2016 (4,699), and 2017 (4,483), it then dropped to third in 2018 (3,391), seventh in 2019 (2,774), and ultimately to ninth in 2020 (2,184). This is welcomed news in what is otherwise the country's deadliest municipality. It is also important to note that the State of Mexico had four of the ten municipalities with the highest number of intentional injuries (Ecatepec de Morelos, Toluca, Nezahualcóyotl, and Naucalpan de Juárez), and Baja California had two (Mexicali and Tijuana). Thus 60% of the top ten highest counts for intentional injuries in 2020 took place in just two states, demonstrating the geographic concentration of the crime.

KIDNAPPING

Kidnappings are notoriously under-reported in Mexico, since many are dealt with privately due to low levels of trust in law enforcement authorities. Still, official figures provide a glimpse of the general trends. For example, there was a marked increase in the number of kidnappings alongside the rise in other violent crimes after 2008, as illustrated in Figure 14.

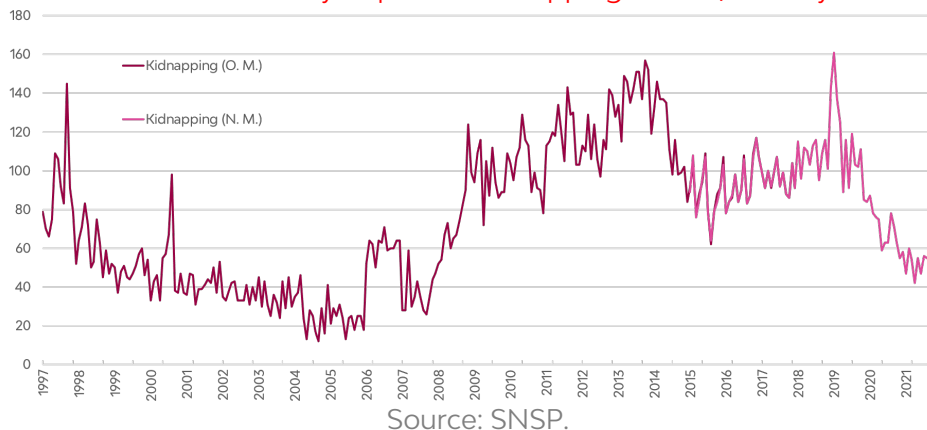
Unlike homicides, which declined from 2012-2014, the number of officially reported kidnappings continued to increase during that period. Then, the number of monthly kidnappings declined dramatically in 2014 as homicidal violence ramped up again. Although kidnappings appeared to increase gradually from 2015 through 2019, the number of kidnappings dropped significantly again in 2020, as illustrated in Figure 14.

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

Figure 14: Total Number of Officially Reported Kidnappings Cases, January 1997-August 2021³⁵



The 826 total official cases reported in 2020 represented a 38% drop from the number reported in 2019 (1,331). The number reported has remained relatively low in 2021, with a monthly average of around 52 cases and a projected annual total of around 625 cases. The dramatic decrease in 2020 and continued low levels could be related to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, though it is not certain.

³⁵ The abbreviation “O.M.” stands for “Old Methodology” and “N.M.” for “New Methodology.”

At the subnational level, the State of México saw the greatest number of kidnappings in 2020 (155 cases, or 19% of all reported kidnappings). This was followed by Veracruz (122), Mexico City (65), Morelos (57), and Michoacán (48). Conversely, there were no SNSP reports of kidnapping in Yucatán, and Durango and Campeche each reported one and two cases, respectively. Nayarit and Sonora each reported just three cases. Results at the state level were very similar to 2019 in terms of rankings, suggesting some level of geographic consistency in cases of kidnapping in recent years.

Figure 15: Number of Reported Kidnappings Cases by State and Municipality

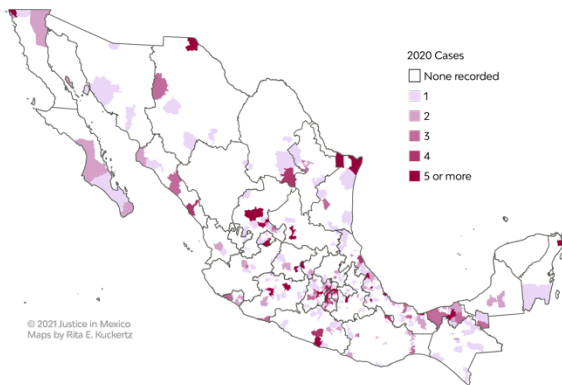


Figure 16: Reported Kidnappings Rate Per 100K by State and Municipality



Source: SNSP.

The municipality with the greatest number of kidnappings in 2020, according to SNSP, was Uruapan, Michoacán (18 total cases). Iztapalapa in Ciudad de México was second (14 cases), followed by Juárez, Chihuahua (13 cases), Ecatepec de Morelos, State of Mexico (13 cases), San Luis Potosí, San Luis Potosí (12 cases), and Córdoba, Veracruz (12 cases). 2020 results at the municipal level demonstrated a greater degree of geographic variability compared to 2019 figures, when the top three municipalities with the greatest number of kidnappings were located in Mexico City, and the following three were located in Veracruz. However, similar to findings from previous years, cases of kidnapping have remained geographically concentrated; 30% of all 2020 kidnappings reported by SNSP occurred in just 30 municipalities.

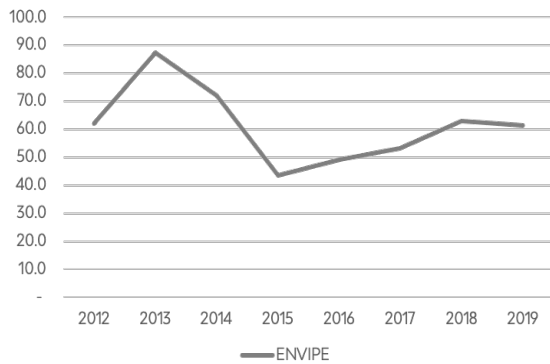
As previously noted, official data on kidnappings is heavily affected by the *cifra negra*, the unknown number of crimes due to a lack of reporting. Thus, surveys on crime victimization find a much higher incidence of kidnapping in Mexico. According to Mexico's latest National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Safety (*Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción de Seguridad Pública, ENVIPE*), released in December 2020, 94% of kidnappings went unreported in 2019.³⁶ Based on the national

³⁶ The previous year's victimization survey reported a lower rate of reporting for kidnapping crimes (91%). INEGI, Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (ENVIPE) 2020: Principales Resultados, December 2020, pp. 40,

under-reporting rate, there were an estimated 81,766 kidnappings in that year. Using ENVIPE results to estimate the number of kidnappings at the state level, the largest share appears to be concentrated in the State of Mexico (see Table 2).³⁷

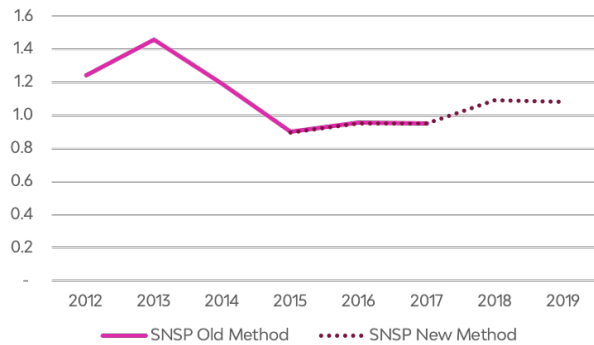
Despite the discrepancy between SNSP reports of kidnapping and crime victimization reports, it is worth noting that from 2012 to 2019 the number of kidnappings reported by SNSP and ENVIPE each year follows the same roughly trend. That is, in years when SNSP reports increased numbers of kidnappings, there is a corresponding increase – and a strong, statistically significant positive correlation ($r=0.97$, $p<0.005$) – in the number of victims reporting kidnappings on the ENVIPE survey (See Figure 17 and Figure 18).³⁸ This strong relationship suggests that SNSP data, while underreported, is a reliable indicator of the direction of kidnapping trends over time, which (as discussed in the next section) is not the case for extortion.

Figure 17 ENVIPE Estimated Kidnapping Rates (Per 100,000 Inhabitants)



Sources: CONAPO, ENVIPE.

Figure 18 SNSP Reported Kidnapping Rates (Per 100,000 Inhabitants)



Sources: CONAPO, SNSP.

https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/envipe/2020/doc/envipe2020_presentacion_nacional.pdf (accessed March 18, 2021).

³⁷ The projected figure for 2019 kidnappings was calculated by dividing the number of cases of kidnapping reported by respondents in INEGI victimization surveys by the number of survey respondents, then multiplying by the population for each state (as estimated by CONAPO).

³⁸ In 2014, SNSP began reporting crime data based on a new methodology, though it continued to report data using the previous methodology until 2017. As reflected above, this new methodology did not significantly alter the overall rate of kidnapping.

Table 2: Comparison of Officially Reported Kidnapping Cases and Estimate of Kidnappings Based on ENVIPE Crime Victimization Survey Reports (2019)

State	Estimate of Kidnappings Based on ENVIPE Survey Reports	Number of Kidnapping Cases Reported by SNSP
Aguascalientes	1,084	12
Baja California	2,926	10
Baja California Sur	372	5
Campeche	246	3
Chiapas	819	21
Chihuahua	3,354	16
Mexico City	6,509	180
Coahuila	2,163	10
Colima	655	18
Durango	904	1
Estado de México	15,914	206
Guanajuato	10,359	10
Guerrero	2,875	44
Hidalgo	824	30
Jalisco	2,543	20
Michoacán	2,167	47
Morelos	3,238	72
Nayarit	1,092	3
Nuevo León	4,215	26
Oaxaca	413	23
Puebla	2,898	70
Querétaro	674	8
Quintana Roo	1,219	24
San Luis Potosí	438	24
Sinaloa	1,011	6
Sonora	521	12
Tabasco	1,834	40
Tamaulipas	4,893	31
Tlaxcala	153	14
Veracruz	3,725	298
Yucatán	424	0
Zacatecas	1,304	47
Grand Total	81,766	1,331

Sources: ENVIPE, SNSP, CONAPO.

According to SNSP data, it appears that the total number of cases of kidnappings decreased from 2019 to 2020. While it is not fully known why kidnappings decreased during this time, it likely has something to do with the events of 2020. Specifically, reporting mechanisms may have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in changes to the institutional resources or personnel needed to carry out effective reporting. It is also possible that quarantine measures decreased the likelihood of a

kidnapping taking place by decreasing the number of instances in which both potential victims and perpetrators left their homes. In time, a more in-depth assessment will be needed to determine how the events of 2020 and 2021 affected both the incidence of kidnapping and the manner in which it was reported.

EXTORTION

The number of reported extortion cases has increased substantially since in 1997. Whereas this figure remained below 400 cases per month until 2007, the rate of reporting shot well above this mark to reach 600 cases a month in 2008, and spiked dramatically in subsequent years. While the number of reported extortion cases appears to decline somewhat during periods of heightened homicidal violence, there has been a general tendency toward greater numbers of reports over the last decades. Official data on the number of extortion cases reported monthly since 1997 are illustrated in Figure 19.

Indeed, from 2015 to 2019, there was a steady increase in the number of cases of extortion reported by SNSP (from 5,072 cases in 2015 to 8,500 in 2019), including both cases of direct extortion (*extorsión directa*) and indirect extortion (*extorsión indirecta*). Following this four-year surge, cases of extortion appeared to fall by around 6% in 2020, with a total of 7,960 cases.

Extortion is a punishable offense under Title 22, Chapter III, Article 390 of Mexico's Federal Criminal Code, 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.

SNSP data on reported extortion cases make a distinction between direct extortion (*extorsión directa*) and indirect extortion (*extorsión indirecta*), with the former involving cases of people who are extorted directly by another person and the latter involving cases in which the perpetrator communicates by telephone or some other indirect mode of communication.

Figure 19: Number of Extortion Cases Reported Monthly, January 1997-August 2021



Source: SNSP

However, while SNSP data help to identify general trends in the incidence of extortion in Mexico, recent research and crime victimization surveys suggest that they do not capture the full volume of extortion cases.³⁹ Indeed, according to the latest edition of Mexico's National Crime Victimization Survey (ENVIPE 2020), the estimated *cifra negra*, or percentage of unreported offenses, for extortion in 2019 was 97.9% – the highest of all types of crime in Mexico.⁴⁰

In 2019, a sample of 314,566 ENVIPE respondents reported 4,429 incidents of victimization by extortion, a rate of approximately 1.4% or 1,408 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. National projections of these findings suggest that there may have been close to two million cases of extortion that year (See Figure 20).⁴¹ Meanwhile, SNSP reported just 8,734 cases of extortion nationwide in 2019. The contrast between ENVIPE estimates and SNSP figures was particularly stark in the case of Michoacán, Tlaxcala, and Guanajuato. In each of these states, ENVIPE estimates suggest that the actual number of extortions exceeded the number of extortions reported to SNSP by more than 8,000 times over (and up to 28,000 times over).⁴² This suggests that extortions are significantly under reported, and somewhat better reported in some places than others.

³⁹ In addition to a general absence in reporting, SNSP data also fail to capture all official reports made, particularly those brought to the attention of state attorneys' general offices and local law enforcement offices, as well as those reported telephonically. 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.

⁴⁰ In addition, the estimated *cifra negra* for extortion increased slightly from 2018 to 2019 (97.1% to 97.9%). Data for 2020 has yet to be released. See INEGI, Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (ENVIPE) 2020: Principales Resultados, December 2020, pp. 40, https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/envipe/2020/doc/envipe2020_presentacion_nacion_al.pdf (accessed March 18, 2021).

⁴¹ The estimated figure for 2019 extortions, according to INEGI victimization data, was calculated by dividing the number of cases of extortion by the number of survey respondents, then multiplying by population (as estimated by CONAPO).

⁴² ENVIPE estimates of extortion in Michoacán were more than 28,000 times more than reported SNSP cases in 2019 (with only 2 recorded reports). Similarly, ENVIPE estimates suggest that there were over 22,000 cases of extortion in Tlaxcala in 2019, though SNSP also reported just 2 cases.

Figure 20: Comparison of Officially Reported Extortion Cases and Estimate of Extortions Based on ENVIPE Crime Victimization Survey Reports (2019)

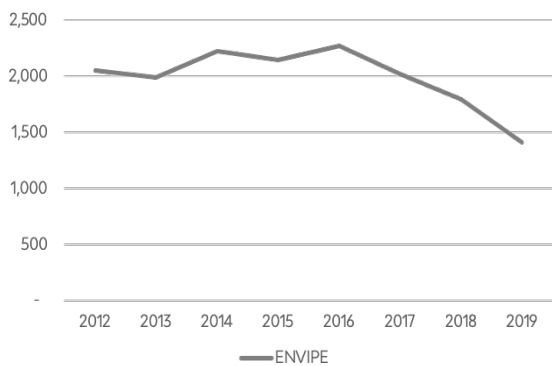
State	Estimate of Extortions Based on ENVIPE Survey Reports	Number of Extortion Cases Reported by SNSP
Aguascalientes	31,232	116
Baja California	41,388	218
Baja California Sur	5,389	185
Campeche	5,668	25
Chiapas	27,841	138
Chihuahua	37,901	18
Mexico City	168,738	856
Coahuila	27,404	37
Colima	12,039	74
Durango	21,519	114
Estado de México	246,883	2,487
Guanajuato	149,474	18
Guerrero	111,210	259
Hidalgo	37,502	210
Jalisco	122,893	742
Michoacán	57,417	2
Morelos	53,316	184
Nayarit	10,487	4
Nuevo León	80,679	509
Oaxaca	62,767	131
Puebla	85,011	192
Querétaro	37,315	259
Quintana Roo	19,909	276
San Luis Potosí	31,120	121
Sinaloa	48,263	46
Sonora	34,917	16
Tabasco	34,848	232
Tamaulipas	56,698	123
Tlaxcala	22,759	2
Veracruz	92,387	794
Yucatán	22,684	7
Zacatecas	27,642	339
Grand Total	1,825,300	8,734

Sources: ENVIPE, SNSP, CONAPO.

As we saw with kidnappings, official data are sometimes useful in identifying broader temporal and geographic trends. However, this appears to be less the case with official data on extortion. Indeed, between 2015 and 2019, there appears to be a strong, statistically significant *negative* correlation between SNSP's reports of extortion and ENVIPE's estimates of extortion. Thus, as SNSP cases increased on an annual basis, the

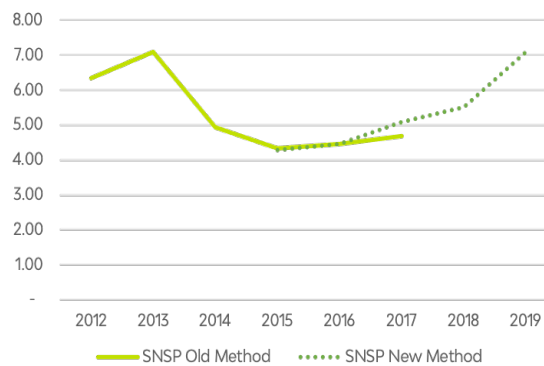
estimated number of extortions based on ENVIPE victimization reports decreased, and vice versa (See Figure 21 and Figure 22).⁴³ Since SNSP and ENVIPE figures are positively correlated for kidnappings and negatively correlated for extortion, this suggests that the reliability of official data vary greatly depending on the type of crime and its associated reporting mechanisms. Additional research is needed to assess what factors determine higher levels of reliability when it comes to official crime data.

Figure 21: ENVIPE Estimated Extortion Rates (Per 100,000 Inhabitants)



Sources: CONAPO, ENVIPE.

Figure 22: SNSP Extortion Rates (Per 100,000 Inhabitants)



Sources: CONAPO, SNSP.

In analyzing recent trends in extortion, there are several unique factors about 2020 that must be considered. First, it is not clear how the COVID-19 pandemic affected crime reporting mechanisms in Mexico. It is possible that difficulties related to the global health crisis resulted in a decrease in overall reporting. Second, it is possible that cases of extortion actually decreased as a result of stay-at-home orders and reduced economic activity, providing fewer opportunities extortion. While the underlying factors driving these trends have not been thoroughly studied, further analysis may reveal how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the incidence of extortion and its reporting.

Meanwhile, there were also a number of geographic disparities in 2020, as illustrated in Figure 23 and Figure 24. At the state level, the State of Mexico saw the greatest number of official extortion cases in 2020 with 2,995 cases, representing 38% of all cases nationwide reported by SNSP. This proportion is up from 2019, when SNSP reported 29% of all incidents of extortion occurring in the state (2,487 cases in 2019). This suggests that the crime of extortion has become even more geographically concentrated – a trend observed in the 2020 *Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico* report. After the State of Mexico, Jalisco saw the second most cases (730 total, or 9.2%), followed by Veracruz (714 cases, or 9.0%), Nuevo León (389 cases, 4.9%), and Zacatecas (362 cases, 4.5%). Notably, Mexico City fell from the state with the second most cases of

⁴³ In 2014, SNSP began reporting crime data based on a new methodology, though it continued to report data using the previous methodology until 2017. As reflected above, this new methodology did not significantly alter the overall rate of extortion.

extortion in 2019 (with 2,487 cases) to number six in 2020, with 344 total cases, representing an 86% decrease.⁴⁴

Figure 23: Number of Reported Extortion Cases by State and Municipality

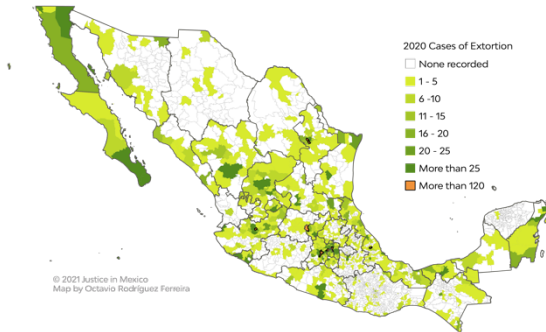
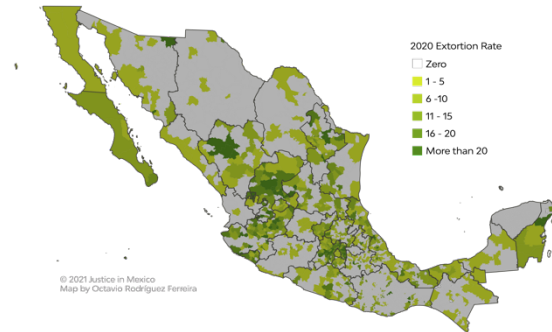


Figure 24: Rate of Reported Extortion Cases by State and Municipality



Source: SNSP.

Geographic concentration of cases of extortion was also observed at the municipal level. Specifically, according to SNSP data, five of the top ten municipalities with the greatest number of extortion cases were located in the State of México. Ecatepec de Morelos (State of Mexico) saw the most cases of extortion for the second year in a row, with 331 total (4.2% of all cases). This was followed by Toluca (Estado de México) with 287 total (3.6%), Nezahualcóyotl (State of Mexico) with 209 cases (2.6%), Guadalajara (Jalisco) with 166 cases (2.1%), and finally Naucalpan de Juárez (State of Mexico) with 163 cases (2.0%).

⁴⁴ Nonetheless, SNSP reported that several states saw very few cases of extortion, including Yucatán (1 case), Tlaxcala (2 cases), and Nayarit (8 cases). Despite SNSP's optimistic figures for these states, victimization data suggest that the actual number of cases is much higher (see below).

ROBBERY

There are multiple categories of robbery, some of which can be considered a form of violent crime and others which are non-violent. For the purposes of this report, we provide an overview of all types of robbery crimes, both violent and non-violent, to gain an understanding of the types and relative impact of robbery. Unlike other forms of crime presented in this report, the official data made available in this section are limited to the years 2015 to 2021, because we rely on SNSP's new methodology for cataloguing such crimes.

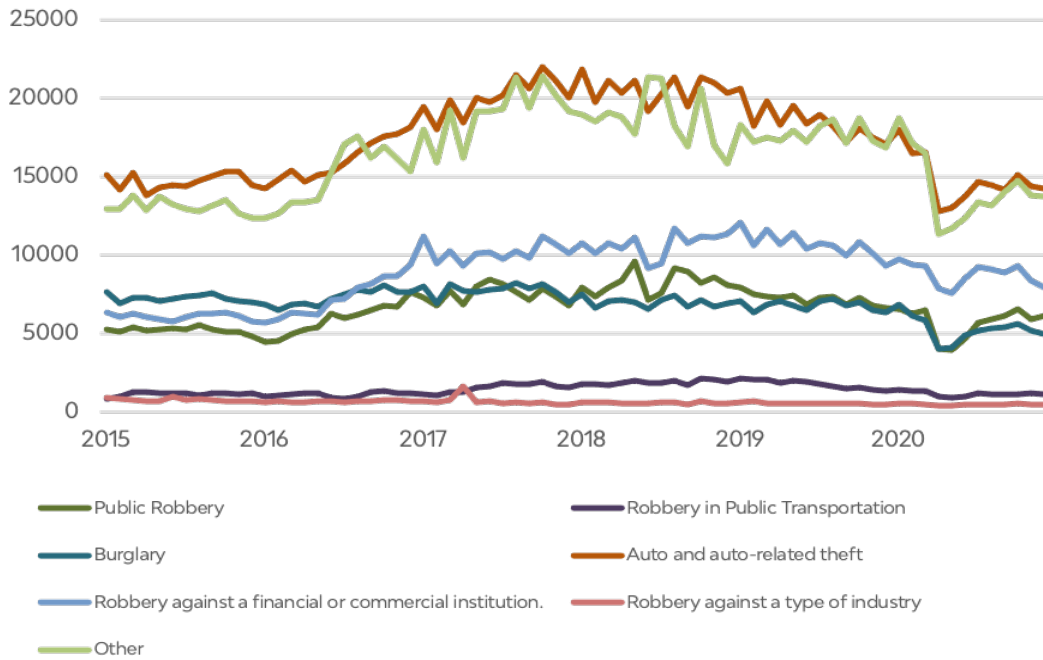
One thing that is immediately clear from official data is that robbery is one the most commonly reported crimes in Mexico. In 2020 alone, there were 604,265 cases of robbery reported in Mexico in 2020, an average of over 50,000 cases per month. There was a year after year increase in the number of reported robberies from 2015 through 2018, rising from 578,401 cases up to 810,602 cases, respectively.

Still, the number of robberies reported declined modestly to 758,032 cases in 2019 (a decrease of more than 50,000 cases, or 6.1%), followed by an even more substantial decrease in 2020 when the number dropped to just over 600,000 cases (a 20% decrease). This is the lowest number of robberies nationwide in five years, falling just below 2016's total of 638,648 cases. This large decrease appears to be entirely a result of the COVID19 pandemic, since fewer public interactions and more people staying at home likely reduced opportunities for theft and burglary. However, the economic destitution and stresses experienced by individuals during the pandemic may have also increased the incentives for various types of theft, so the recent decrease may be followed by a substantial resurgence in such crimes in the coming years.

Robbery is a broad category of crime that involves seven different types and 17 subcategories of offenses involving the unlawful taking of money, property, or other items of value. SNSP makes data publicly available for 14 of the 17 types of robbery in Mexico, which, for the purposes of this analysis, are clustered into thematic subtypes as follows:

Type I: Public Robbery	Subtype i: Robbery on public spaces Subtype ii: Robbery on public roads
Type II: Robbery in Public Transportation	Subtype iii: Robbery on collective public transportation Subtype iv: Robbery on individual public transportation
Type III: Burglary	Subtype v: Burglary
Type IV: Auto and Auto-Related Theft	Subtype vi: Auto theft Subtype vii: Theft of auto parts Subtype viii: Theft on personal vehicle
Type V: Robbery Against a Financial or Commercial Institution	Subtype ix: Bank robbery Subtype x: Business robbery Subtype xi: Carrier robbery
Type VI: Robbery Against a Type of Industry	Subtype xii: Cattle theft Subtype xiii: Theft of machinery
Type VII: Other	Subtype xiv: Other robberies

Figure 25: Assorted Types of Robbery in Mexico by Month (January 2015-August 2021)

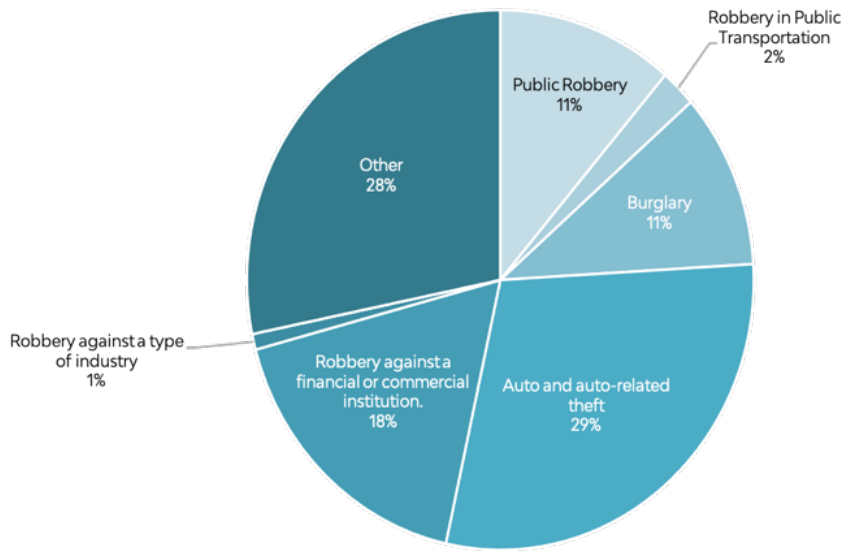


Source: SNSP.

In 2020, as in previous years, two categories accounted for more than half of all robberies in Mexico. The most common type of robbery was “auto and auto-related theft” with 177,607 cases, or 29.4% of all robberies, followed closely by “other” robberies with 170,504 cases, or 28.2%. Robberies targeting financial or commercial institution had the third highest total, following the same pattern as previous years and making up 17.4% of cases in 2020. “Public robbery” accounted for 11.3% of cases, followed by “burglary” with 10.5%. Only 2.3% of all reported cases fell under the category of “robberies on public transportation,” and less than 1% were classified as “robbery against a type of industry.” Looking at most specific subtypes, the three categories with the most recorded cases in 2020 were “other” (170,504 cases or 28.2% of all robberies), “auto theft” (145,602 cases, 24.1%), and “business robbery” (95,285 cases, 15.8%). This follows the trend seen over the past few years, in which robberies classified as “other,” “auto theft,” and “business robbery” were the most common subtypes.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ In 2015 and 2016, “burglary” had the third highest, pushing “business robbery” to fourth out of the 14 subtypes.

Figure 26: General Distribution of Robbery Crimes (2020)



Source: SNSP.

At the municipal level, when taking into consideration all types of robberies, Ecatepec de Morelos in the State of Mexico had the most cases registered in 2020, with 21,291 or 3.5% of all robberies nationwide, with a rate of roughly 15 robberies per 1,000 inhabitants. This was followed closely by Guadalajara, Jalisco (20,993 cases), which had a rate of 20 robberies per 1,000 inhabitants. Other municipalities with large numbers of included Querétaro, Querétaro (14,745 cases), with a rate of 17 per 1,000 inhabitants; Tijuana, Baja California (12,860 cases), with a rate of 960 per 100,000 inhabitants; and Iztapalapa, Mexico City (12,374 cases), with a rate of 1,209 robberies per 100,000 inhabitants. Of Mexico's 2,471 municipalities, 1,226 registered ten or less cases of robbery of all kinds in 2020, of which 440 recorded zero.

Figure 27: Number of Reported Robbery Cases by State and Municipality (2020)

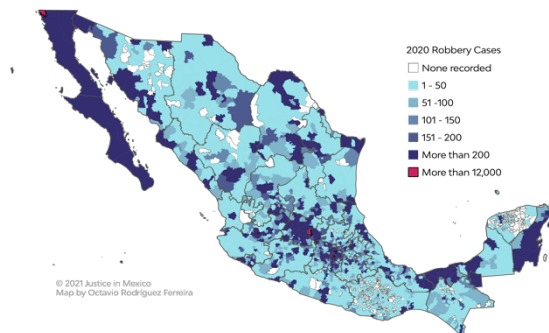
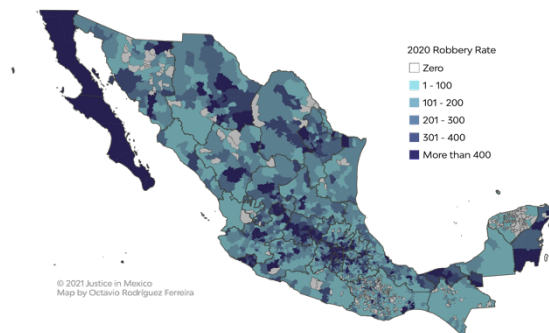


Figure 28: Reported Robbery Cases Rate Per 100K by State and Municipality (2020)



Source: SNSP.

The geographic distribution of cases of robbery appears to be more widespread than several types of violent crime, particularly those involving organized crime. That is,

unlike crimes like homicide, kidnapping, and extortion – which tend to be very geographically concentrated in geographic areas where organized groups are most active, rates of robbery tend to be more geographically dispersed throughout the country. However, unlike rape and sex crimes (which we discuss below), reporting of robbery crimes does not appear to be as geographically concentrated in urban areas, suggesting that robbery crimes may be more likely to be reported and/or receive greater attention from law enforcement in rural areas than rape and sex crimes. The distinct geographic distribution of different types of crime arguably merits further research and analysis.

Overall, rising rates of robbery in Mexico in recent years coincide with the theory proposed by Bergman (2018) that the growing number of property crimes in Latin America are driven by a burgeoning market for stolen and illicit goods due to the limits of upward economic mobility, on the one hand, and the low capacity and integrity of law enforcement agencies, on the other.⁴⁶ Thus, unless there are deep and sustained efforts to improve Mexico's economic situation the recent decline in reported robberies caused by the disruptions of the COVID pandemic may quickly reverse itself.

POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS

The murder of elected authorities threatens the democratic process and undermines the rule of law. Unfortunately, assassinations of current, former, elected or alternate candidates to government office have been a serious concern in Mexico for the last several years. Many experts and academics have tried to provide explanations for the waves of violence affecting mayors and other locally elected authorities in Mexico.⁴⁷ In 2020, scholars Guillermo Trejo and Sandra Ley published the theoretical and statistical results of several years of research on the relationship between violence and elections in Mexico.⁴⁸ Trejo and Ley argue that while not all state agents are colluded with organized crime, those agents who are, determine the dynamics of crime at the local

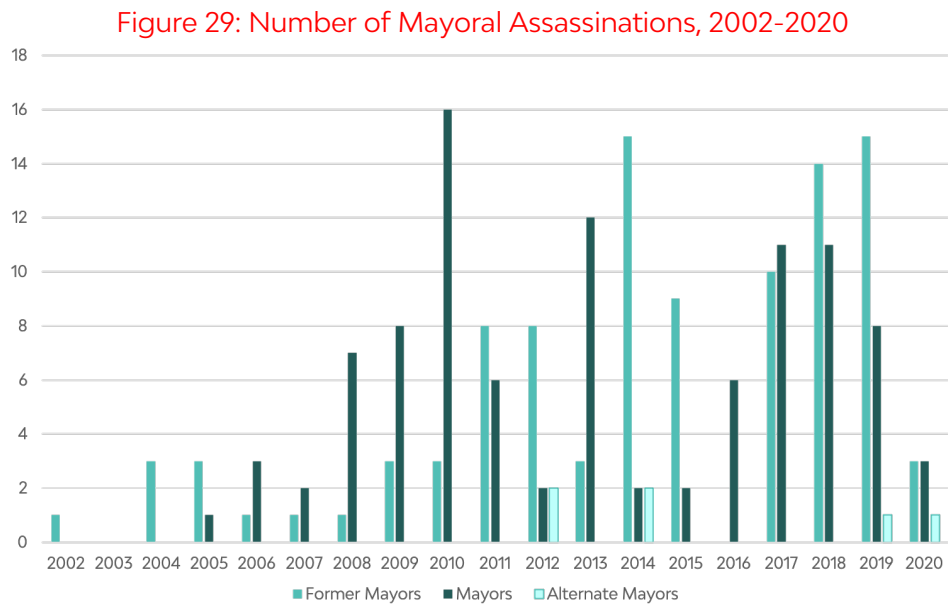
⁴⁶ Marcelo Bergman, *More Money, More Crime: Prosperity and Rising Crime in Latin America*, (Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁴⁷ See: Viridiana Ríos, "Tendencias y Explicaciones al Asesinato de Periodistas y Alcaldes en México," *Las Bases Sociales y Políticas del Crimen Organizado*, SSP, Mexico City, 2012; Viridiana Ríos, "Why Did Mexico Become so Violent? A Self-reinforcing Violent Equilibrium Caused by Competition and Enforcement," *Trends in Organized Crime*, Vol. 16, No. 2, June, 2013; Guillermo Trejo and Sandra Ley, "High-Profile Criminal Violence: Why Drug Cartels Murder Government Officials and Party Candidates in Mexico," *British Journal of Political Science*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000637>, 2019. Laura Calderón, "An Analysis of Mayoral Assassinations in Mexico, 2000-17," *Justice in Mexico*, January, 2018, <https://justiceinmexico.org/publications/working-papers/>

⁴⁸ They argue that violence against elected officials depends heavily on the dynamics between state power and organized crime groups, "any major change in the sphere of state power or state policy that upsets the terms of engagement between the state and organized crime groups can destabilize the gray zone [of criminality], introducing uncertainty and generating incentives or large-scale criminal violence." Guillermo Trejo and Sandra Ley, p 10

level, ultimately affecting local decision-makers who are seen as threats to the survival and protection of a given organized crime group.

According to Enrique Vargas del Villar, President at the National Association of Mayors (*Asociación Nacional de Alcaldes, ANAC*), at least 250 mayors and local politicians have been murdered from 2006 to November 2020.⁴⁹ Justice in Mexico tracks such killings through its *Memoria* dataset, which focuses especially on mayoral assassinations. This dataset includes 238 mayors, mayoral candidates, and former mayors killed from 2002 through 2020.⁵⁰ According to Justice in Mexico’s research, there were at least ten sitting mayors and ten former mayors (and several mayoral candidates and alternates) killed each year from 2017 to 2019. However, in 2020, the number of assassinations decreased to three sitting mayors and three former mayors in 2020, with no candidates and only one alternate mayor killed in that year. (See Figure 29).



SOURCE: Justice in Mexico, Memoria dataset.

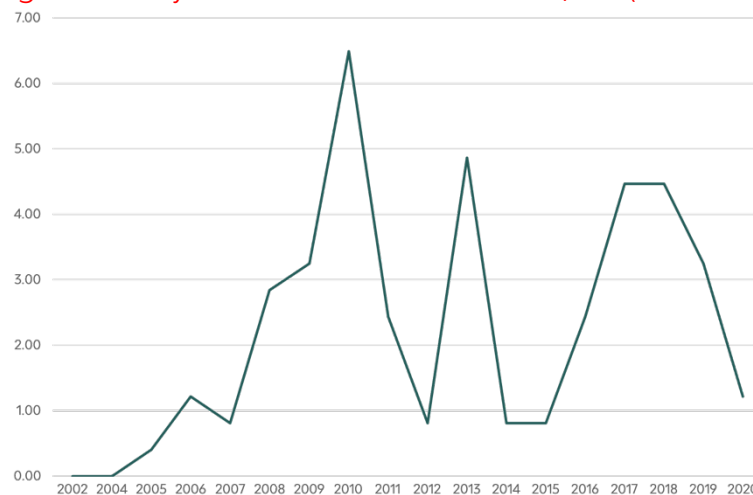
The authors estimate that in 2020 current, former, and aspiring mayors in Mexico were over four times more likely to be murdered than the general population. Using

⁴⁹ Vargas identified 2019 and 2020 as the most violent years for local authorities, when at least 16 mayors and 18 former mayors were killed. Juan Pablo Reyes, “Dejan a alcaldes a merced del crimen.” *El Sol de México*. November 30, 2020. <https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/mexico/sociedad/dejan-a-alcaldes-a-merced-del-crimen-seguridad-segob-protocolos-proteccion-violencia-crimen-organizado-presidentes-municipales-6076583.html>

⁵⁰ *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/>

comparable data from 2020, the homicide rate for mayors was 1.22 per 1,000, compared to the homicide rate for the general population of approximately .28 per 1,000 (or 28 per 100,000) that year (See Figure 30).⁵¹ By comparison, 2020 was a considerably better year than 2019, when the homicide rate for current, former, and aspiring mayors (3.25 per 1,000 mayors) was over 13 times greater than for the average citizen.⁵² These findings raise serious concerns about the dangers facing Mexican local politicians.

Figure 30: Mayoral Assassinations Rate Per 1,000 (2002-2020)



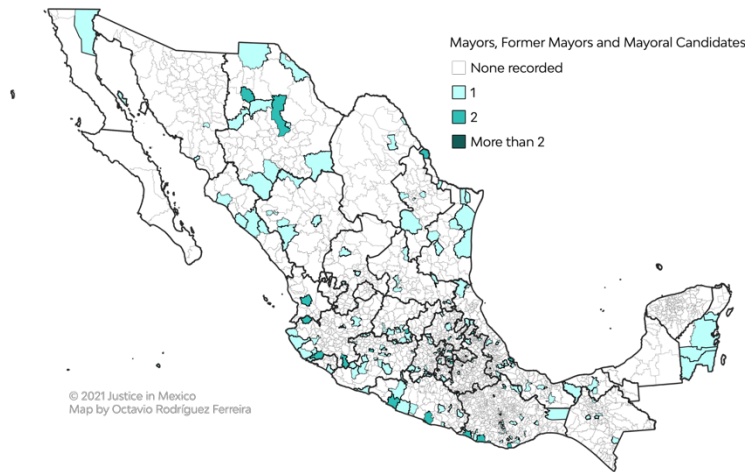
SOURCE: Justice in Mexico, Memoria dataset.

In 2020, the current, former, and aspiring mayors whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico included: Jorge Alberto Baruch Custodio (PAN); Erik Juárez Blanquet (PRD); Obed Durón Gómez (no party information); Carlos Ignacio Beltrán Bencomo (PRD); Florisel Ríos Delfín (PRD-PAN), and César Chávez Garibay (PRI). Only one of these was female (See Figure 29). The age of the victims ranged between 40 and 57 years old, with an average of 46 years old. Meanwhile, as noted, the party affiliation of the victims was diverse, including individuals ties with the PRD (2), PRD-PAN (1), PAN (1), and PRI (1). In six of the seven cases, the cause of death was gunshot. Unlike previous years, MORENA mayors suffered no assassinations in 2020. In terms of geographical distribution (See Figure 31), the victims included two individuals from Michoacán and two from Veracruz, while Chihuahua and Quintana Roo had one victim each.

⁵¹ 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 CONAPO and homicide victims figures from SNSP.

⁵² The year 2010 still holds the record high in mayoral killings, with a homicide rate of 6.49 per 1,000 mayors.

Figure 31: Map of Mayors, Former Mayors and Mayoral Candidates Killed in Mexico by Municipality (2002-2020)



SOURCE: Justice in Mexico, Memoria dataset.

In addition to mayoral assassinations, Justice in Mexico identified nine other local officials murdered in 2020. There were four assassinations of city council members in the states of Mexico (2), Sinaloa (1), and Veracruz (1), all of which involved the use of firearms. In addition, there were several other former officials and local politicians killed, including four former legislators, one alternate legislator, one former city council member, one state coordinator for the PRD, and one local coordinator for the National Electoral Institute (*Instituto Nacional Electoral*, INE). Among these victims were: Luis Alfredo Flores Manzanilla (State Coordinator of the PRD in Quintana Roo), Saúl Héctor Velázquez (city council member, PRI), Fernando Palma Gómez (Former diputado, PAN), Román Guzmán González (former diputado, PVEM), J. Jesús Maquir Enríquez Rodríguez (former legislator, PRI), Guillermo Esquivel Esquivel (city council member, MORENA), Ramón Rodrigo Martínez (city council member, PRD), Gustavo Rey Velo (local coordinator for the INE in Nayarit), Miguel Enrique Medina Hernández (former city council member, PAN), Juan Jaramillo Frikas (former legislator, PRI), Alejandro Toledo Morales (alternate legislator, MORENA), and José Carlos Trujillo García (city council member, PT-MORENA).

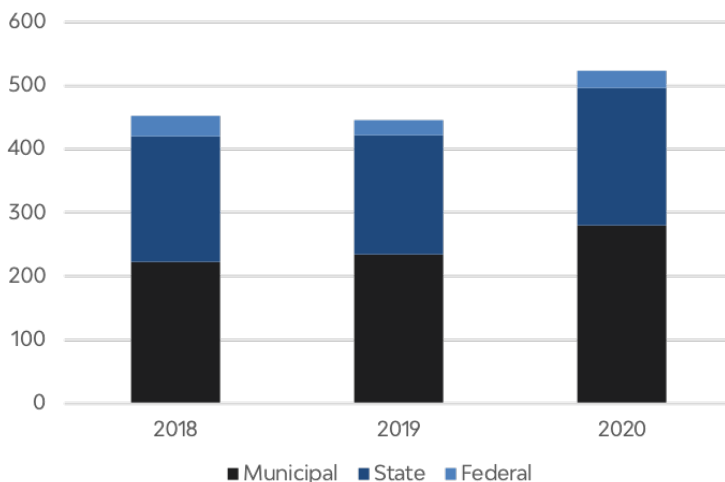
POLICE AND MILITARY

Mexican police officers have experienced high levels of violence during the last few years. According to the non-profit organization *Causa en Común*,⁵³ 524 police officers

⁵³ *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->

were killed in Mexico in 2020, for an average of 1.24 daily, making police officers more than five times more likely to be murdered in 2020 than the regular citizen.⁵⁴ This represented a 17.5% increase from the 446 police officers killed in 2019. According to *Causa en Común*'s dataset, most victims belonged to municipal police, with 280 victims or 53.4% of the recorded cases, from which 12 officers belonged to the traffic police (See Figure 32). Members of state police were the next most likely to be killed, with 217 victims or 41.4% of the cases (including 58 investigative police, eight traffic police, and seven penitentiary officers). Lastly, federal police accounted 27 victims, including 11 federal guards, three investigative police, and one federal penitentiary officer. Adjusting these figures in terms of homicide rates for each group, municipal police officers were killed in 2021 at a rate of 2.7 per 1,000 officers, state police at a rate of 1.2 per 1,000 officers, and federal police at a rate of .74 per 1,000 officers.⁵⁵

Figure 32: Homicide distribution per police institution in Mexico, 2018-2020



Source: Causa en Común.

2019/#:~:text=Durante%202019%20asesinaron%2C%20al%20menos%2C%20a%20446%20polic%C3%ADAs.&text=En%20promedio%2C%201.16%20polic%C3%ADAs%20fueron%20asesinados%20cada%20d%C3%ADa.&text=En%202019%2C%20los%20estados%20con,) %20y%20Guerrero%20(26).

⁵⁴ David Saúl Vela, "Cifra de policías asesinados creció 17.4% de 2019 a 2020." *El Financiero*. January 28, 2021, <https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/nacional/cifra-de-policias-asesinados-crecio-17-4-de-2019-a-2020>

⁵⁵ Homicide rates are estimates calculated by Justice in Mexico using data from *Causa en Común* 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%20Policiales_SESNSP.pdf.

In terms of geographic distribution, Guanajuato continues having the most cases, amassing 84 victims or around 16%. The next states with the highest number of cases were Estado de México and Veracruz with 39 victims or around 7.4%, followed by Guerrero with 37 victims or around 7%. It is worth noting that while in 2019 there were four states with no police killings on record, Campeche was the only state in 2020 that reported zero police homicides.

Despite being the second most trusted institution in Mexico,⁵⁶ the military has also seen its officials affected by violence involving organized crime groups. According to the National Secretariat for Defense (*Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional*, SEDENA), 290 members of the military have been killed and 1,717 wounded, while 4,995 aggressions have been recorded from 2007 to 2020.⁵⁷ In 2020, SEDENA registered 56 military officers wounded, six homicides, and 260 assaults (*agresiones*).⁵⁸ The number of military aggressions increased by 7.44% while homicides decreased by 45.45% with respect to the cases reported by SEDENA in 2019. The number of wounded officers also showed a significant decrease, with 33.3% less cases in 2020 than in 2019.⁵⁹

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 2020 was no different. The various organizations tallying homicides targeting reporters in Mexico use different criteria for tallying and classifying this violence. 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 professional activities. From 1992 through 2020, CPJ reported that there were 57 confirmed cases of journalists killed, 68 unconfirmed cases, and four cases of media-support workers killed in Mexico. Nearly 80% of confirmed cases involved reporters working the crime beat, 46% involved reporters working on political issues, and approximately 37% involved reporters working on issues related to corruption.⁶⁰ In 2020, nine journalists were killed in Mexico, making it the country with the greatest number of cases for that year.

⁵⁶ 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>.

⁵⁷ 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>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "49 Journalists Killed," Committee to Protect Journalists, https://cpj.org/data/killed/2020/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&motiveUnconfirmed%5B%5D=Unconfirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&start_year=2020&end_year=2020&group_by=location (accessed March 17, 2021).

CPJ also considered Mexico the sixth deadliest country worldwide (after Somalia, Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, and Afghanistan) on its Global Impunity Index for 2020, up from seventh place in 2019.⁶¹ It is worth noting that Mexico has appeared in the ranking, which considers only the 12 worst countries for journalists in the world, for the past 13 years running. CPJ considers Mexico's prosecuting of cases involving murdered journalists to have slightly improved since 2019, achieving convictions for some perpetrators in the infamous murders of Miroslava Breach Velducea and Javier Valdez Cárdenas. However, the organization notes a concerning decline in the number of new cases taken by the federal special prosecutor's office, which may signal a lack of political will on the part of the current Mexican government.

In 2020, CPJ reported that there were 49 reporters murdered in the world according to its criteria, with five confirmed cases and four cases with unconfirmed motives in Mexico.⁶² The nine CPJ-confirmed and unconfirmed cases include:

CPJ Confirmed Cases:

1. **Israel Vázquez Rangel:** internet reporter for "El Salmantino" in Salamanca, Guanajuato. He was shot and killed on November 9, 2020, while preparing to do a Facebook Live report from a crime scene in Salamanca where human remains were left in a plastic bag.⁶³
2. **Jorge Miguel Armenta Ávalos:** founder and owner of *Última Palabra* and *El Tiempo de Medios Obson*, based in Ciudad Obregón, Sonora. Armenta and his two police bodyguards were killed while they were leaving a restaurant in Cajeme, Sonora on May 16, 2020.⁶⁴
3. **Julio Valdivia:** reporter for *El Mundo* newspaper in Córdoba, Veracruz. His body was found beheaded on September 9, 2020 in Tezonapa, Veracruz.⁶⁵
4. **María Elena Ferral Hernández:** correspondent for *El Diario de Xalapa* and co-founder of "El Quinto Poder" news website. She was shot by unidentified men on March 20, 2020 in Papantla, Veracruz while leaving the office of a local notary.⁶⁶

⁶¹ The only country that improved from its 2019 ranking was Philippines, moving from the sixth to the seventh place. "Getting Away with Murder," Committee to Protect Journalists, October 2020, <https://cpj.org/reports/2020/10/global-impunity-index-journalist-murders/#index> (accessed March 17, 2021).

⁶² "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).

⁶³ "Israel Vázquez Rangel," Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/israel-vazquez-rangel/> (accessed March 18, 2021).

⁶⁴ "Jose Miguel Armenta Ávalos," Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/jorge-miguel-armenta-avalos/> (accessed March 18, 2021).

⁶⁵ "Julio Valdivia," Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/julio-valdivia/> (accessed March 18, 2021).

⁶⁶ "María Elena Ferral Hernández," Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/maria-elena-ferral-hernandez/> (accessed March 18, 2021).

5. **Pablo Morrugares Parraguirre:** founder and editor of “PM Noticias.” He was shot and killed on August 2, 2020 inside a restaurant in Iguala, Guerrero. The heavily armed men fired at Morrugares at least 50 times, killing him instantly.⁶⁷

CPJ Unconfirmed Cases:

1. **Arturo Alba:** host of the daily television news show “Telediario,” murdered in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, on October 29, 2020. He was shot at least ten times.⁶⁸
2. **Fidel Ávila Gómez:** manager and anchor for the radio broadcaster “La Ke Buena” in Huétamo, Michoacán. His body was found on January 7, 2020 in San Lucas, Michoacán with several gunshots.⁶⁹
3. **Jesús Alfonso Piñuelas:** founder of *Zarathustra Press* and reporter at “El Shock de la Noticia.” He was shot and killed by unidentified individuals while driving his motorcycle on November 2, 2020 in Cajeme, Sonora.⁷⁰
4. **Jaime Castaño Zacarías:** independent reporter at his site “Prensa Libre MX.” He was shot and killed by unidentified men while driving his motorcycle in Jerez, Zacatecas on December 9, 2020.⁷¹

Meanwhile, the Mexico office of Article 19, which also tracks violence against journalists, documented six cases where journalists were murdered in 2020 in relation to their professional work. Five of these included the cases previously confirmed by CPJ, and the sixth – Jaime Castaño – is a case still under investigation by CPJ. Article 19 notes that assassinations of journalists and members of the media under President López Obrador reached to a total of 17 in 2020, almost double the cases under President Peña Nieto during the first two years of his administration.⁷² Including non-fatal attacks, Article 19 also reports a 45% increase in violence against the press compared to 2019, and notes that Mexico has a 99.1% rate of impunity on cases of crimes against journalists and media workers.⁷³

⁶⁷ “Pablo Morrugares Parraguirre,” Committee to Protect Journalists,

<https://cpj.org/data/people/pablo-morrugares-parraguirre/> (accessed March 18, 2021).

⁶⁸ “Arturo Alba,” Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/arturo-alba/> (accessed March 17, 2021).

⁶⁹ “Fidel Ávila Gómez,” Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/fidel-avila-gomez/> (accessed March 17, 2021).

⁷⁰ “Jesús Alfonso Piñuelas,” Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/jesus-alfonso-pinuelas/> accessed March 18, 2021).

⁷¹ “Jaime Castaño Zacarías,” Committee to Protect Journalists, <https://cpj.org/data/people/jaime-castano-zacarias/> accessed March 18, 2021).

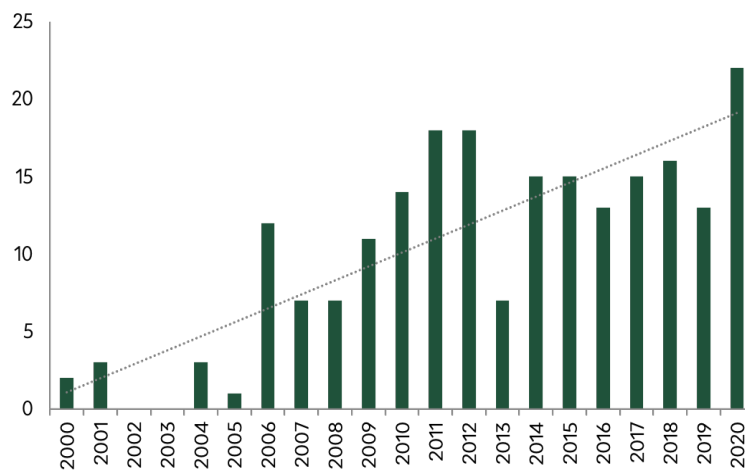
⁷² “Periodistas asesinados en México, en relación con su labor informativa,” Article 19, <https://articulo19.org/periodistasasesinados/> (accessed March 19, 2021)

⁷³ The rate of impunity considers cases 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). “Mexico: Attacks against the press grew exponentially in the first al of 2020,” Article 19, September 25, 2020, <https://www.article19.org/resources/mexico-attacks-against-the-press/> (accessed March 19, 2021). “Informe Anual 2018: ante el silencio, ni borrar ni cuenta nueva,” Article 19, April 17, 2019, <https://www.article19.org/resources/mexico-report-shows-silencing-of-journalists-and-media-freedom/> (accessed March 19, 2020).

Meanwhile, a third organization – Reporters Without Borders – ranks Mexico as 143rd (out of 180 countries) on the 2020 World Press Freedom Index, improving slightly from its 2019 ranking (144th).⁷⁴ The Press Freedom Barometer, also managed by Reporters Without Borders, found that Mexico had eight journalists killed in relation to their journalistic work. According to their tally, there were journalists killed in 18 counties in 2020. The Barometer reported six countries (Afghanistan, India, Iraq, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Syria) with four journalist murders, one with three (Honduras), and nine other countries with one or two each.⁷⁵

In tracking murders of media workers, Justice in Mexico relies on broader criteria than CJP, Article 19, and Reporters without Borders. Justice in Mexico gathers data on homicide victims working in a variety of different categories of media and cases where the motives were not necessarily related to their reporting. From 2000 to 2020, Justice in Mexico has identified at least 213 journalists and media-support workers who were murdered, with the vast majority of these deaths (202) 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 33 and Figure 34).

Figure 33: Number of Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico (January 2000-December 2020)



SOURCE: Justice in Mexico Memoria dataset.

⁷⁴ “Mexico,” Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/mexico> (accessed March 19, 2020).

⁷⁵ It is worth noting that the United States was not in the list for 2020, improving from 2019 when it had one journalist murdered. “Violations of press freedom barometer,” Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/barometer> (accessed March 19, 2021).

Figure 34: Map of Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico (January 2000-December 2020)



SOURCE: Justice in Mexico Memoria dataset.

According to the *Memoria* dataset, 2020 was the deadliest year for journalists and media workers, totaling 22 cases in 12 different states, a 169% increase from the 13 cases registered in nine states in 2019. Before 2020, the year with the most cases registered was 2011, with 18 cases. It was also the first year since 2012 where one single municipality (Cajeme, Sonora) amassed more than three cases in one year, with four homicides against journalists.⁷⁶

Of the total number of victims for 2020, 19 were male and three were female. All of the victims were Mexican, and the average age of victims recorded by Justice in Mexico ranged from 29 to 67 years old, with an average age of 46 years old.⁷⁷ In 68% of the cases, the cause of death was gunshot, while two victims were stabbed and one was beaten. For the remaining four cases, the cause of death was not publicly available, or the bodies were in such precarious condition that it was not possible to determine the cause of death at the time of reporting. The media workers killed included journalists, reporters, photojournalists, correspondents, photographers, station directors, editors, and activists. In most of the cases (18), the journalists were the only victims, while in three cases there was a second victim, and in one case – involving an attack by the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) – a total of six victims were killed.

According to Justice in Mexico’s findings, these murders took place in the states of Sonora (4), Guerrero (3), Michoacán (3), Veracruz (3), Chihuahua (2), Baja California (1), Chiapas (1), Coahuila (1), Mexico City (1), Guanajuato (1), Quintana Roo (1), and

⁷⁶ The record high before 2020 belonged to Boca del Río, Veracruz in 2012, also with four registered cases. The murders in Cajeme, Sonora in 2020, also led Sonora to enter the top 10 most violent states for journalists with 8 cases total. From which, 4 were registered in Cajeme in 2020 alone.

⁷⁷ Age was only publicly available for 13 of the 22 cases on file.

Zacatecas (1). It is worth noting 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.

In 2020, the reporters and media workers whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico included the following:

1. **Alma Angélica Aguilar Domínguez** (editor and reporter, *El Diario Yaqui*)
2. **Luis Eduardo Aguilar Ochoa** (independent reporter and professor)
3. Teresa Aracely Alcocer, a.k.a "Bárbara Greco" (radio host, *La Poderosa*)
4. **Víctor Fernando Álvarez Chávez** (founder and director, *Punto por punto*)
5. **Jorge Miguel Armenta Avalos** (director/owner, *Grupo Editorial Medios Obson*)
6. **Rosendo Arroyo Delgado** (former director and radio host, XE-KF)
7. **José Guadalupe Castillo Alemán** (founder and reporter, *Prioridad Máxima*)
8. **Alvaro Armando Cuoh Cupul** (reporter, *Sport Quintana Roo*)
9. **María Elena Ferral Hernández** (correspondent, *Diario de Xalapa* and *Organización Editorial Mexicana [OEM]*)
10. **Fidel Avila Gómez** (Manager and radio host, *La Ke Buena*)
11. **Juan Guillermo López García** (editor and coordinator, *Proceso*)
12. **Juan Espinoza Menera** (founder and reporter, *Valedor Tv*)⁷⁸
13. **Pablo Morrugares Parraguirre** (director, *P.M. Noticias Guerrero*)
14. **Francisco Navarrete Serna** (founder, *El Sol de Tierra Blanca*)
15. **Gilter Oseguera Barrera** (radio host and producer, *La Zeta* and *La Tremenda*)
16. **Alvaro Ruiz** (Manager, radio host, and editor, *Radio Pichucalco*)
17. **Julio Valdivia Rodríguez** (reporter, *El Mundo de Córdoba*)
18. **Arturo Alba Medina** (newscast anchor, *Multimedios Televisión*)
19. **Israel Vázquez Rangel** (correspondent, *El Salmantino*)
20. **Jesús Alfonso Piñuelas Montes** (reporter, *Zarathustra Prensa*)
21. **Mariano Farael Soto Cortez** (founder and reporter, *Tijuana Sin Censura*)
22. **Jaime Castaño Zacarías** (director, *Prensa Libre MX*)

At least two of the murdered media workers identified by Justice in Mexico in 2020 had been admitted to the government's Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Activists and Journalists (*Mecanismo de Protección para Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas*). For individuals hoping for government protection, failure to protect journalists enrolled in this program inspires little confidence. Indeed, the program fell to a record low level of participation in 2019, with just 27 journalists registered (down from 89 in 2018 and 122 in 2017). While the mechanism has been in

⁷⁸ Espinoza Menera was victim of an alleged extra-judicial killing, since he died under the supervision of state police forces who detained him in a security checkpoint. The severity of his injuries, believed to be caused by police officers, led him to respiratory failure. His body had several torture marks and the investigation is now being led by the National Commission of Human Rights (*Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, CNDH*).

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 its inability to respond quickly enough to protect someone in imminent risk.⁷⁹ According to a United Nations report, there were 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.⁸⁰ However, if 36 government employees cannot protect the 27 people enrolled in the program, this is a serious problem.

GENDER VIOLENCE

According to SNSP data, the number of female victims of violent crimes in 2020 was notably lower (-11.26%) than the figures observed in 2019, falling from 74,632 to 66,229 victims.⁸¹ The aforementioned figures include cases of intentional injury, extortion, intentional homicide, corruption of minors, femicide, kidnapping, and human trafficking (including that of minors).

The SNSP report on violence against women from January 2020 through December 2020 also tracks and compares data from 2015 to the present, permitting the evaluation of observable trends. In this report, they show a sharp decline in the kidnapping of women nationwide from 2019 to 2020.⁸² From 2015 to 2019, the number of female kidnapping victims increased by approximately 20%, while from just 2019 to 2020, there was a stark decrease of about 46%. These figures mirrored nationwide trends for kidnapping, irrespective of gender. Activists argue that this recent decrease in incidence reflects the inability of officials to effectively recognize, classify, and prosecute kidnapping as the crime evolves, especially with methods of recruitment taking place predominantly online during the coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, and as previously noted, more individuals stayed home in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19, deterring and complicating possible kidnapping operations.⁸³

⁷⁹ 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).

⁸⁰ 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).

⁸¹ All data is pulled from SNSP, specifically this report:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GMOd1xhgo0511_hMNEP-IVdpOdSkY-aH/view and updated information from this webpage on SNSP <https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/articulos/informacion-sobre-violencia-contra-las-mujeres-incidencia-delictiva-y-llamadas-de-emergencia-9-1-1-febrero-2019>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Infobae, "Secuestros disminuyeron 18% en abril ante contingencia por coronavirus en México," *Infobae*, May 19, 2020, <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2020/05/19/secuestros-disminuyen-18-en-abril-ante-contingencia-por-coronavirus-en-mexico/>.

Similarly, the number of female victims of extortion nationwide lessened in 2020, representing a decrease of approximately 10%. In addition, though data shows a decrease for nearly all of the aforementioned crimes against women, the number of 9-1-1 phone calls received relating to violence against women from 2019 to 2020 experienced a pronounced increase. In 2016, 92,604 calls were received, followed by 106,765 in 2017, 172,210 in 2018, and 197,693 in 2019. In 2020, 260,067 calls relating to violence against women were registered, constituting about a 32% increase from 2019 to 2020, as opposed to the 14% increase observed for 2018 to 2019.⁸⁴ The rise in 9-1-1 phone calls reflects the implications and dark realities of COVID-19 lockdown measures for women, seeing that in many cases, they are stuck in close quarters with their aggressors.⁸⁵

Furthermore, women continue to be murdered at a staggering rate in Mexico. Combining the number of femicide (*feminicidio*) victims with the number of female victims of intentional homicide, in 2020, approximately 10.3 women were killed each day, keeping pace with the 2019 average of 10.5 women. As shown by official data, fewer women were victims of intentional homicide in 2020 than in 2019, resulting in a roughly 3% decrease. However, of the approximately 34,531 victims of intentional homicide nationwide, 12% (2,783) were female, representing a 4% increase from 2019 (8%) to 2020.

In addition to evaluating female victims of intentional homicide, in 2020 there were 940 cases of femicide (*feminicidio*), a statistic that has steadily increased over the last five years. In 2015, 411 cases were registered, increasing to 605 in 2016, 742 in 2017, 893 in 2018, and 942 in 2019. The State of Mexico had the most cases of femicide in 2020 (150 cases), followed by Veracruz (84), Nuevo León (67), Jalisco (66), and Mexico City (64). Aguascalientes had the fewest cases, registering only two femicides in 2020, with Campeche (3) and Baja California (4) trailing closely.

*Femicide*⁸⁶

SNSP reports that between 2015 and 2020, cases classified as femicides grew from 411 to 940, representing an increase of approximately 129%. Although from 2019 to 2020, femicide cases only decreased by two (from 942 to 940 respectively), the staggering numbers persist and warrant further analysis. Moreover, it remains critically important to acknowledge the limitations and biases in the collection and conceptualization of

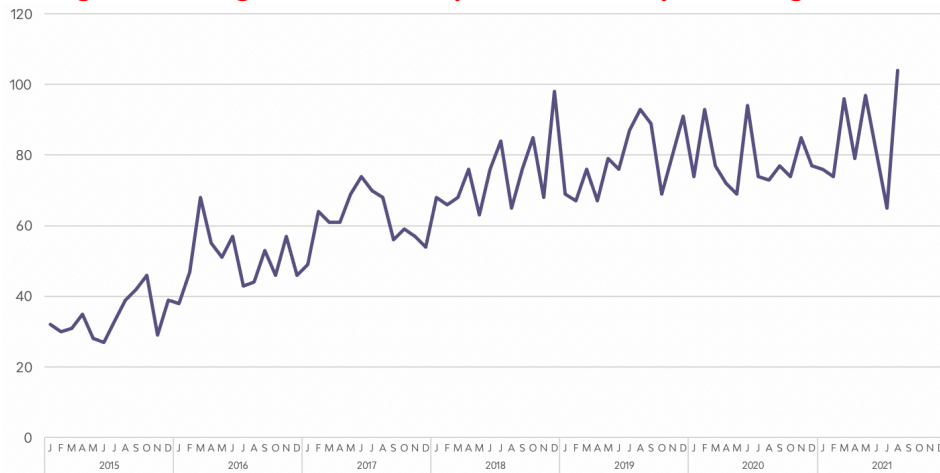
⁸⁴ All SNSP, specifically from <https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/articulos/informacion-sobre-violencia-contra-las-mujeres-incidencia-delictiva-y-llamadas-de-emergencia-9-1-1-febrero-2019>

⁸⁵ Christine Murray, "Emergency calls on violence against women spiked in Mexico in 2020," *Reuters*, January 25, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-women-violence-trfn/emergency-calls-on-violence-against-women-spiked-in-mexico-in-2020-idUSKBN29U2FH>.

⁸⁶ 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/>.

available femicide data. For instance, according to ENVIPE, in 2018, 15,609,239 out of 16,667,291 (93.7%) crimes against women were not formally investigated because either the authorities did not initiate an investigation file or victims did not denounce the crime, elucidating an astonishing level of impunity for perpetrators.

Figure 35: Alleged Femicides, by Month, January 2015-August 2021



Source: SNSP.

Figure 36: Number of Reported Femicide Cases by State and Municipality (2020)

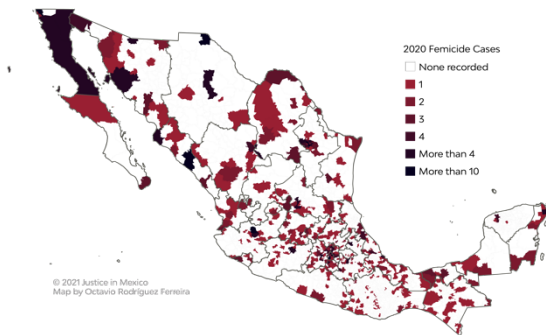
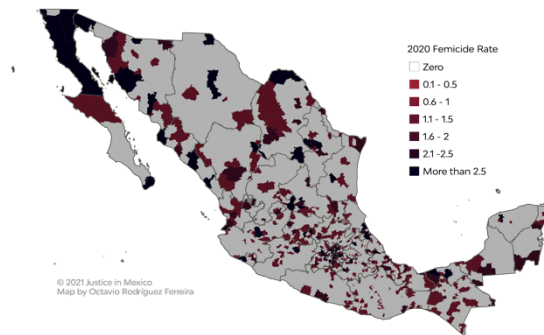


Figure 37: Reported Femicide Cases Rate Per 100K by State and Municipality (2020)



Source: SNSP.

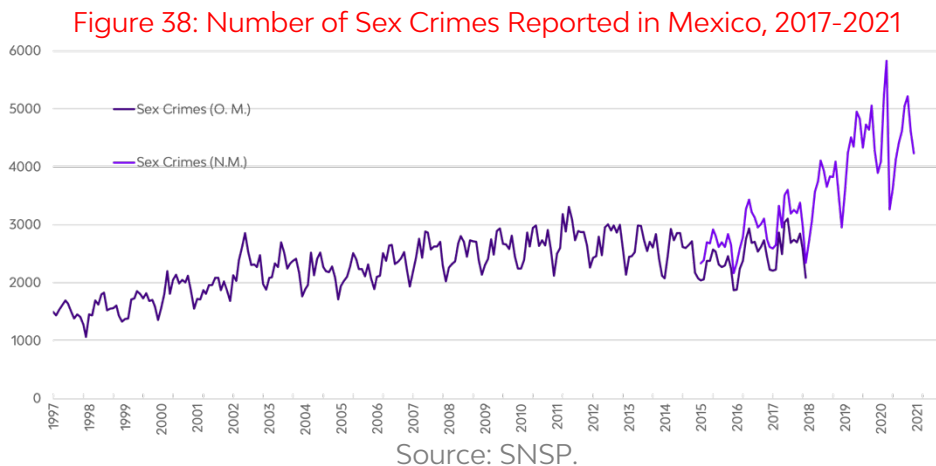
Evaluating broader femicide trends, while the number of femicides in any given year is highly correlated ($R^2 = .75$) at a high degree of statistical significance ($*p < .05$) to the number of homicides nationally, changes in the number of homicides have no statistically significant correlation to the number of femicides.⁸⁷ This means that the increasing number of femicides in Mexico is likely not simply a function of rising violence, something that has long been assumed by the media, politicians, and analysts.

⁸⁷ A high degree of statistical significance suggests that the results generated by the data did not occur randomly. Rather, one can attribute the results to a specific independent/explanatory variable.

Moreover, there is enormous subnational (state-level) variation in the number and proportion of femicides, with some states reporting disproportionately high or low numbers of femicides, relative to the number of homicides. Thus, it remains critically important to more thoroughly analyze this subnational variation to understand the factors that influence the femicide rate in different parts of Mexico, such as public pressure, prosecutorial capacity, and other factors that help to shine a spotlight on violence against women.

Sex Crimes

Sex crimes is a composite category used here to refer to an array of different offenses reported by SNSP and previous agencies since 1997. With the new methodology adopted in 2015, SNSP has seen a slight increase in crimes committed under the categories of “simple” rape (*violación simple*); statutory, incapacitated, and/or object rape (*violación equiparada*); sexual abuse (*abuso sexual*); sexual bullying (*acoso sexual*); sexual harassment involving a hierarchical relationship (*hostigamiento sexual*); and “other crimes that threaten sexual freedom and security” (*otros delitos que atentan contra la libertad y la seguridad sexual*).⁸⁸ While increase in sex crimes reported since 2015 and illustrated in Figure 38 is likely partly attributable to SNSP’s new methodology, it is worth noting that it also coincides with the dramatic uptick in homicidal violence during that same period.



For 2020, there were 54,342 reported sex crimes (*delitos que atentan contra la libertad y la seguridad sexual*), an increase of roughly 5% (2,000 cases) in comparison to 2019, which had 51,662 reported sex crimes. There was an overall increase (73%) in reported sex crimes from 2015 to 2020, with especially large increases in 2018 (16%) and 2019 (20%).

⁸⁸ For the sake of clarity, the Mexican legal term for “*violación equiparada*” refers to three separate types of possible sexual violations: 1) sexual relations with a minor, 2) sexual relations with an individual that is physically or mentally incapacitated, and/or 3) forceable sexual penetration with an object (referred to in some U.S. state criminal codes as “object rape”).

In 2020, there were 22,379 cases of sexual abuse (*abuso sexual*) ; 5,597 cases of general sexual harassment (*acoso sexual*); 1,753 cases of sexual harassment (*hostigamiento sexual*); 12,320 cases of rape (*violación simple*); 4,225 cases of statutory, incapacitated, and/or object rape (*violación equiparada*); 42 cases of incest (*incesto*); and 8,032 cases of other sex crimes (*otros delitos que atentan contra la libertad y la seguridad sexual*).⁸⁹ Although sex crimes affect all people across the gender spectrum, sex crimes disproportionately affect women.

While every sex crime category except incest saw increases in 2019, the 2020 numbers were more varied. There were increases in reports of sexual harassment (33%), incapacitated rape (15%), incest (200%), and other sex crimes increased in 2020, while there was a decrease in reports of sexual abuse (down 5%), sexual harassment involving a hierarchical/subordinate relationship (down 6%), and rape decreased (down 10%) compared to the previous year.

The list of states with the highest number of reported sex crimes has not changed much from 2019. From 2018 through 2020, Mexico City has continued to report the highest number of total sex crimes, with 6,464 reported cases in 2020, or 12% of all reported sex crimes nationwide. The State of Mexico trailed closely behind with 6,153 reported cases, or 11% of all reported sex crimes nationwide. Nuevo León, Jalisco, Chihuahua followed with 3,654, 3,164, and 2,872 total reported sex crimes, respectively. Each of these five large entities has consistently topped the list in total number of sex crimes since 2015.

Figure 39: Number of Reported Sex Crimes Cases by State and Municipality

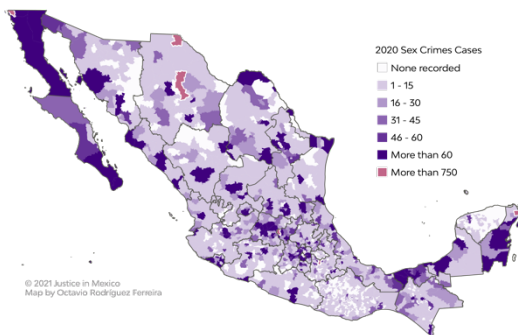
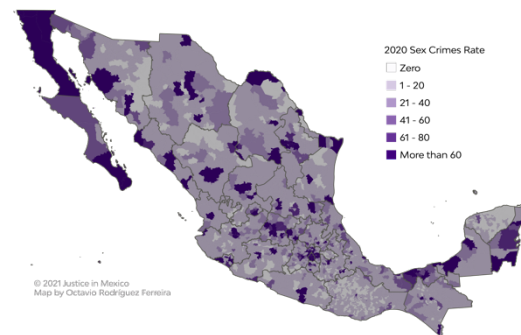


Figure 40: Reported Sex Crimes Rate Per 100K by State and Municipality



Source: SNSP.

Sex crimes in general are notoriously underreported for many reasons, including lack of ample support systems for survivors, shame, and the risk of being ostracized by their

⁸⁹ In the Mexican criminal code, incest is a crime involving sexual activity between family members aged 18 or older, and not considered to be a violent crime. In theory, incest is considered to be consensual, or it would be classified as rape. Penalties for incest vary depending on the relationship between family members. Although it is non-violent and consensual, we include incest here because it stands out among the increased number of sex crimes in 2020.

community. One study by the Sexual Violence Research Initiative estimated that in Latin America and the Caribbean only 5% adult victims of sexual violence report the incident to the police.⁹⁰ Moreover, México Evalúa found in their National Urban Public Security Survey (*Encuesta Nacional de Seguridad Pública Urbana, ENSU*) that in the second half of 2020, over 98.6% cases of sexual violence in Mexico went unreported.⁹¹ The report also estimates that almost 5,000,000 women were victims of sex crimes during the same time period, far more than the 1,452 sexual crimes officially reported by the SNSP. Importantly, there are grave concerns that domestic violence increased during pandemic, as many victims were quarantined their aggressors and faced greater household tensions and financial stress.

Meanwhile, despite the under-reporting of sex crimes, there are a number of useful observations that can be made about the problem of sexual violence and sex-related crimes in Mexico. Importantly, scholarly research suggests that patterns of gendered violence are related to larger security trends in Mexico. For example, Laura H. Atuesta and Estefanía Vela Barba (2021) demonstrate the intersection of the “war on drugs” and the “war on women,” due to the militarization of public safety and the effect it has had on the murders of women.⁹² In this sense, understanding organized crime and violence in Mexico requires considerably more attention to these intersections between criminality, gender, and conflict.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

As demonstrated in this report, Mexico sustained extraordinarily high numbers of homicides in 2020, although various other forms of violent crime declined somewhat. Reflecting on these findings, it is important to underscore the role of organized crime in Mexico, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violent crime, and public concerns about the lack of effective governmental policy responses, especially regarding gender violence. Each of these three themes is addressed in turn below.

⁹⁰ Contreras J et al. *Sexual violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Desk Review*. Pretoria, Sexual Violence Research Initiative, March 2010.

<https://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2016-04-13/SexualViolenceLACaribbean.pdf> (accessed March 16, 2021).

⁹¹ México Evalúa, “En 2020, el 98.6% de los casos de violencia sexual no se denunciaron,” México Evalúa, March 5, 2020. <https://www.mexicoevalua.org/en-2020-el-98-6-de-los-casos-de-violencia-sexual-no-se-denunciaron/> (accessed March 16, 2020).

⁹² Laura H. Atuesta and Estefanía Vela Barba, *Las Dos Guerras: El Impacto de los Enfrentamientos de las Fuerzas Armadas en los Asesinatos de Mujeres en México (2007-2018)*, Mexico City, Intersecta/Fondo Semillas, September 2020. <https://www.intersecta.org/lasdosguerras/>

TRENDS IN MEXICAN ORGANIZED CRIME

As we have noted here and in previous reports, a major portion of violent crime in Mexico over the last several years is attributable to competition between organized crime groups, particularly those battling for control of the drug trade. Understanding the dynamics of Mexican organized crime is therefore of critical importance to any discussion about the violent crime trends.

Mexico's drug trafficking organizations became especially powerful in Mexico in the 1970s and 1980s, thanks to protection from corrupt, high-level government officials and law enforcement agencies. However, the 1980s and 1990s brought newly invigorated U.S. and Mexican counter-drug efforts, as well as Mexico's gradual democratization over the 1980s and 1990s. This contributed to the disruption of long-standing trafficking and networks, and also produced conflicting protection rackets at different levels of government. Whereas Mexico's drug trade was long characterized by monopolistic or "cartel-like" drug trafficking organizations, increased competition contributed to the splintering and proliferation of organized criminal groups in the 2000s and 2010s.

Along with this restructuring of Mexican organized crime, there were dramatic increases in violence related to clashes between criminal organizations and, to a lesser extent, clashes between criminals and the government. In the 1990s, notably, conflicts among organized crime groups became more visible to the public, even as overall levels of homicide trended slightly downwards during the administration of President Vicente Fox Quesada (2000-2006). However, monthly homicide levels began to rise significantly roughly a year into Felipe Calderón Hinojosa's presidency (2006-2012), after he launched a massive counter-drug campaign that deployed tens of thousands of federal police and military troops throughout the country. Indeed, many of Calderón's critics have blamed his militarized response as a contributor to the increased conflict among major drug trafficking organizations.

During Calderón's last two years in office, though, homicides began trending downwards, as the Sinaloa Cartel consolidated power and its rivals suffered significant setbacks, including the arrest of high-level drug traffickers like Zeta Cartel leader Heriberto Lazcano in October 2012. There is widespread speculation that this "pax Sinaloa" was made possible by high level corruption in the Calderón administration, including Public Security Secretary Genaro García, who is currently facing charges in the United States.⁹³ In 2020, U.S. charges were also filed against a retired Mexican army

⁹³ In July 2020, U.S. officials charged former-Public Security chief Genaro García Luna with accepting millions of dollars in bribes from the Sinaloa Cartel from 2001 to 2012 "in exchange for providing protection for its drug trafficking activities." U.S. Department of Justice, "Former Mexican Secretary of Public Security Genaro Garcia Luna Charged with Engaging in a Continuing Criminal Enterprise," Press Release: U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York. July 30, 2020. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/former-mexican-secretary-public-security-genaro-garcia-luna-charged-engaging-continuing>

general, Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda, for his alleged support of the “H-2” cartel, an organized crime group that emerged from the remnants of the Beltran Leyva Organization.

After Calderón left office in late 2012, the downward trend in the number of intentional homicides continued during the administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018). During his term, violence remained at relatively low levels even after the arrest and later escape of famed drug trafficker Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán of the Sinaloa Cartel, perhaps because he retained control of his organization even from behind bars. Guzmán escaped from prison in mid-2015 and remained a large for six months before he was rearrested and later extradited to the United States in 2018. Around the time of his escape, a new schism emerged in his own organization, as internal schisms and rival criminal organizations began to vie for power, resulting in a measurable increase in violence.

In this context, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (*Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación*, CJNG), a Sinaloa Cartel splinter group, gained prominence, especially in areas once dominated by its former-parent organization.⁹⁴ According to a recent DEA assessment, its rapid growth and influence has been propelled by the organization’s willingness to participate in violent clashes with the government, law enforcement agencies, and rival cartels. The most conservative estimates by government agencies indicate the CJNG is present in at least 23 out of 32 Mexican states, while others indicate it could be in as many as 29.⁹⁵ This represents at least a 44% increase in CJNG’s geographic reach since late 2015, when it was reported to be present in 16.⁹⁶ Most of CJNG’s growth seems to be focused in the central states of Mexico, including Mexico City, and along strategic drug corridors in the northern border, such as Tijuana (Baja California), Juárez (Chihuahua), and Nuevo Laredo (Tamaulipas).⁹⁷

While the CJNG was initially led by Erick Valencia Salazar, since his arrest in 2012 the group has been led by Ruben Oseguera Cervantes, a Mexican born trafficker who was arrested on minor drug charges in the United States in the 1990s and later deported to Mexico. Under his leadership, CJNG has teamed up with former rivals of Guzmán’s Sinaloa Cartel (such as the remnants of the Arellano Felix Organization, the Beltrán

⁹⁴ CJNG emerged from an earlier criminal organization known as the Milenio Cartel, which was originally based in Michoacán but later relocated to Jalisco and began to operate as a subsidiary of the Sinaloa Cartel in the 2000s. In 2010, the group experienced an internal schism and re-emerged as a separate criminal organization under its current name. 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

⁹⁵ United States, Congress, U.S. Department of Justice. *National Drug Threat...*, Lemus, J. Jesús. “El CJNG Se Posiciona Como La Primera Organización Criminal De México.” *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 21 July 2020.

⁹⁶ Aguilar Valenzuela, Rubén. “La Presencia Del CJNG.” *Animal Político*, 2 Oct. 2020, www.animalpolitico.com/lo-que-quiso-decir/la-presencia-del-cjng/.

⁹⁷ Monroy, Jorge. “CJNG, Con Presencia En 23 Estados Del país.” *El Economista*, 2 Mar. 2021.

Leyva Organization, and the Juárez Cartel). This has enabled the organization 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 and conflict with the Santa Rosa Lima Cartel– that has contributed significantly to Mexico’s increased violence over the past six years.

El Chapo’s removal and the subsequent rise of the CJNG has also fueled violence in Baja California, particularly in the border city of Tijuana. When the CJNG entered the Baja scene around 2016, the rather depleted Arellano Felix Organization’s remaining cells began to align with the CJNG in an effort bolster their position vis-à-vis the Sinaloa Cartel. This alliance gave rise to a regional branch of the CJNG known as the Tijuana New Generation Cartel (Cártel de Tijuana Nueva Generación, CTNG), which was charged with seizing control of the Tijuana trafficking corridor away from the Sinaloa Cartel. However, media reports have consistently pointed to the existence of a group of AFO holdouts, led in part by Pablo “El Flaquito” Huerta Nuño, who have actively resisted any alliance with the CJNG and have remained committed to preserving the AFO as a separate, independent organization. This has resulted in a three-way conflict in Tijuana between the Sinaloa Cartel, CJNG-CTNG, and independent AFO remnants that is currently fueling elevated levels of violence in the city.

The above noted schism also played out in 2020 and 2021, for example, in the mountainous zones of western Chihuahua. In that region, the Sinaloa Cartel and the Juárez Cartel have been competing for control over the region’s broad array of lucrative criminal enterprises. This underscores the fact that Mexico’s recent violence is no longer solely – or perhaps even primarily – linked to drug trafficking. In Chihuahua, the battles for control beyond the cultivation of opium poppy and other illicit drugs now include illegal logging, illegal mining, and timber trafficking, resulting in acts of robbery, theft, and extortion against trade workers.

Meanwhile, its presence in Mexico City has helped the CJNG to develop ties to local gangs for drug dealing and money laundering, but most importantly, it has gained access to the Mexico City International Airport (*Aeropuerto Internacional de la Ciudad de México*, AICM). In 2018, Federal Police agents uncovered 120 kilos of drugs hidden in computer equipment air-bound for Australia.⁹⁸ According to Arturo Angel from *Animal Político*, although this was a major setback for the organization, it also highlighted the organization’s extensive network in the city. In addition to the Mexico City airport, the CJNG also controls the ports of Veracruz (Veracruz), Manzanillo (Colima), and Lázaro Cárdenas (Michoacán). This widespread control of major airports, seaports, and border crossings have made CJNG a major powerhouse in the global control of the drug

⁹⁸ Angel, Arturo. “Cártel De Jalisco En CDMX: Su Crecimiento, Alianzas y Un Atentado Inédito.” *Animal Político*, 27 June 2020.

trade.⁹⁹ According to Rubén Aguilar, also writing for *Animal Político*, the organization's current strategy is to consolidate its presence in Mexico City and gain full control of the northern border, including Chihuahua, Sonora, and Baja California.¹⁰⁰

Much of the CJNG's growth has been characterized by the organization's willingness to participate in violent, bloody confrontations with its rivals, including the government. Historically, drug violence tends to align with organized crime disputes and the CJNG is no different. For example, according to the Mexican Secretary of Defense, the CJNG is currently disputing the remnants of the Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel for control of southern Guanajuato.¹⁰¹ In the State of Mexico, CJNG is fighting against remnants of La Familia Michoacana, the Knights Templar Cartel, and the Guerreros Unidos.¹⁰² Both Guanajuato and the State of Mexico have some of the highest homicide rates in the country. In contrast, in Mexico City, where the CJNG has no major cartel rivals and has aligned itself with the Fuerza Anti-Unión Tepito, violence has remained relatively low.¹⁰³

In recent years, attacks by the CJNG against high profile government officials, law enforcement agents, and journalists have become more noticeable. Some of these attacks include: 14 state police officers killed in an ambush in Aguililla, Michoacán on October, 2019; the homicide of federal judge, Uriel Villegas and his wife in Colima, Colima on June 2020; and the attempted homicide of the head of the public security in Mexico City, Omar García Harfuch on June 2020.¹⁰⁴ In addition, although it has not yet been confirmed, the CJNG has been linked to the recent homicide of the ex-governor of Jalisco, Jorge Aristóteles Sandoval Díaz on December 2020.¹⁰⁵ Its willingness to engage in violent altercations with the government and its rivals has greatly increased the CJNG's profile and present a stark contrast to the current government's message of "Hugs, Not Bullets." Indeed, arrests against CJNG members increased by 200% in the second half of 2019 and the first half of 2020.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Beittel, June S., *Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations*, U.S. Congressional Research Service, 28 July 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Rubén Aguilar, "La presencia del CJNG," October 2, 2020. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/lo-que-quiso-decir/la-presencia-del-cjng/>

¹⁰¹ While the CJNG-Santa Rosa de Lima conflict has dominated press coverage, it is important to note that local criminal organizations in Guanajuato have also resisted encroachment from the CJNG. For example, in León, the Cartel Union Leon and Cartel Los Durango have put aside their differences to work together (along with the Cartel Nueva Plaza, a splinter CJNG group) to fight against CJNG. The Sinaloa Cartel has also attempted to counter CJNG in Guanajuato. Correspondence with Marco Alcocer, Ph.D. Candidate, UCSD Department of Political Science, on October 16, 2021.

¹⁰² Aguilar Valenzuela, Rubén. "La Presencia..."

¹⁰³ "La Unión Tepito," *Insight Crime*, November 12, 2020. <https://insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/la-union-tepito-profile/>

¹⁰⁴ Angel, Arturo. "Cártel De Jalisco En CDMX: Su Crecimiento, Alianzas y Un Atentado Inédito." *Animal Político*, 27 June 2020.

¹⁰⁵ "Investigan a Célula Del CJNG En Vallarta Por Homicidio." *El Universal*, 20 Dec. 2020.

¹⁰⁶ Anarte, Enrique. "Un Hospital Privado Para Demostrar El Poder De 'El Mencho' En México." *DW*, Deutsche Welle, 29 July 2020.

What remains to be seen is whether its rapid ascent as a major criminal organization can facilitate a “New Generation Peace” (*Pax Novo Generatio*). On the one hand, the CJNG has begun to achieve dominance in several parts of the country, and this may help to reduce violent competition in these areas. Also, the dramatic shift to renewed single party dominance and increased federal centralization of power may make it easier for the CJNG to obtain protection from corrupt, high level government officials, allowing for a further reduction in competition and violence. On the other hand, the CJNG’s dominance in many of areas of the country remains contested. Also, unlike the Sinaloa Cartel in the 2000s and 2010s, there does not appear to be a concerted government effort targeting the CJNG’s rival criminal organizations, as was the case for the Arellano Felix, the Beltran Leyva Organization, the Zetas, and other Sinaloa-rivals. Moreover, the CJNG has a more confrontational approach toward the Mexican government than the Sinaloa Cartel did and also faces a much more fragmented criminal landscape, which may make it much more difficult to broker a lasting peace.

Indeed, the splintering and reshuffling of Mexico’s major organized crime groups has been accompanied by proliferation and diversification criminal groups into other forms of illicit activities, many of which involve predation on the general population. As noted in this report, rates of kidnapping, extortion, and various forms of robbery in Mexico have risen over the years. Predatory criminal activities require no supply chains and have very low barriers to entry and are therefore often an ideal point for nascent criminal organizations and splinter groups. Still, some organized crime groups have incorporated some of these activities into their criminal enterprises more than others, often as a means to obtain illicit revenue after splintering from major drug trafficking organizations.

During the 2000s and 2010s, these included the Knights Templar Organization (*Los Caballeros Templarios*), Michoacán Family (*La Familia Michoacana*), the Gulf Cartel (*Cartel del Golfo*), and the Zetas. More recently, groups relying on predatory criminal activities have included the *Cartel del Noreste* (CDN), the *Cartel Nueva Plaza* (CNP), the *La Linea* Organization (LLO), *Los Pelones* Organization (LPO), the Reds (*Rojos*), Sombra Group (Grupo Sombra), the Los Salazar Organization (LSO), Los Talibanes Organization (LTO), Unión Tepito, and Los Viagras Organization (LVO).¹⁰⁷

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON VIOLENT CRIME

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in early 2020 has affected lifestyles, travel, government policies, and virtually every aspect of private and public life worldwide. Organized crime operations were not the exception, with supply-chain disruptions,

¹⁰⁷ Victoria Dittmar, Paige Bowman, and Santiago Previde, “The Next Generation of Criminal Groups Driving Violence in Mexico,” *Insight Crime*, August 12, 2021, <https://insightcrime.org/news/next-generation-criminal-groups-violence-mexico/>

fluctuating drug prices, closed borders, ports restrictions, and an overall change in illicit activities dynamics. According to Nils Gilman of the Berggruen Institute, the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, are likely to lead to long-term reconfiguration of illicit industries – including drug trafficking – and may result in the elimination of small cartels and the ultimate survival of “supersized” cartels.¹⁰⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have benefitted some organized crime groups and criminal activities more than others. These trends especially impacted the Jalisco New Generation Cartel’s operations which is a key supplier of synthetic drugs like methamphetamine and fentanyl. The DEA reports that there were initially supply chain interruptions that made it especially difficult for CJNG to obtain precursor chemicals from locations in China – notably, including Wuhan – that used to produce these drugs.¹⁰⁹ In addition, special protocols established at shipping ports to reduce COVID-19 infections also rankled international supply chains for both licit and illicit goods, and the U.S. government’s decision to allow permit entry of only “essential” travelers at landbound ports of entry dramatically reduced pedestrian and vehicular crossings along the U.S.-Mexico border and likely created complications for smuggling through U.S. ports of entry. Such factors led CJNG to raise its prices in response to higher production and transit costs. However, even with the resumption of precursor chemical production and shipments and the gradual increase in cross-border traffic at U.S. landbound ports of entry, CJNG reportedly deliberately withheld illicit drug shipments in order to artificially inflate the wholesale pricing of methamphetamines in order to increase profits and make up for lost revenues.

Moreover, the CJNG took advantage of the void left by the federal government and stepped in to help communities negatively affected by the pandemic. In the community of El Alcihuatl, Jalisco, CJNG leader Ruben Oseguera commissioned the building of a private hospital for him, his security team, and the local inhabitants.¹¹⁰ CJNG members also handed out care packages with pantry items to communities in San Luis Potosí that read: “On behalf of your friends from the CJNG, COVID-19 contingency support.”¹¹¹ Such actions contrast the capabilities of the CJNG with those of the Mexican state. In this sense, the CJNG has managed to surpass the Sinaloa Cartel in terms of geographic presence and influence in recent years, making it the most rapidly growing criminal organization in Mexico.

While the emergence of the pandemic appeared to catch criminal groups in Mexico unprepared, many adapted quickly, deciding to tackle COVID-19 themselves to re-establish their operations. Several news sources reported on major Mexican organized

¹⁰⁸ Nils Gilman, “Foreword: Pandemics and Conflict,” *COVID-19, Gangs, and Conflict*, A Small Wars Journal – El Centro Reader, September, 2020, pg. xxxi

¹⁰⁹ United States, Congress, U.S. Department of Justice. *National Drug Threat...*

¹¹⁰ Espino, Manuel. “‘El Mencho’ Construyó Su Propio Hospital En Jalisco.” *El Universal*, 27 July 2020.

¹¹¹ Dittmar, Victoria. “Mexico Cartels Hand Out Food Amid Coronavirus Pandemic.” *InSight Crime*, 28 Apr. 2020.

crime groups providing aid boxes in various parts of the country as a strategy to gain sympathy and support from local residents. In the northern state of Tamaulipas, the Gulf Cartel distributed hundreds of labeled aid boxes containing basic foods in Ciudad Victoria and Matamoros. Another major group seen providing COVID-19 aid kits was the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, who approached the most impoverished areas of San Luis Potosi, including Salinas de Hidalgo, Villa de Arriaga, Villa de Reyes, Santa Maria del Rio, Tierra Nueva, Rioverde, Villa de Zaragoza, and Soledad de Graciano Sanchez. CJNG also provided aid to the municipality of Cuautitlán, Jalisco. As for the eastern part of Mexico, Los Zetas were providing aid boxes in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, a major port city in the state.¹¹²

Meanwhile, the Sinaloa Cartel also worked to provide COVID-19 relief in local communities. On the one hand, Alejandrina Guzmán, daughter of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera, coordinated the distribution of “Chapo Provisions” in Guadalajara, Jalisco. These provisions included toilet paper, water, basic foods, and hygiene products. On the other hand, the Sinaloan sub-group called Los Chapitos, started enforcing quarantine curfews, punishing those who violated them with reprimands that included literal public spankings with paddles that were recorded and made available on the Sinaloa Cartel’s social media outlets. In addition, *Los Granados*, a remnant group of the Beltran Leyva Organization, took a similar approach, disciplining people for ignoring the local curfews in Teloloapan, Guerrero. They also made the videos public and used similar punishments to those employed by the Sinaloa Cartel.

Smaller groups allied to the major players and some remnants also played a role in humanitarian assistance. “El Comando de la M,” a remnant group from La Familia Michoacana, provided aid kits to low income and elderly residents in Guerrero, including the municipalities of San Lucas, Villa Guerrero, El Santiago, and Arcelia. In Michoacan, the Los Viagras Organization (LVO) was distributing food for residents of Apatzingan, Santiago Acahuato, and neighboring small towns. Los Viagras are believed to be funding their humanitarian activities through street taxes (*pago de renta*) demanded of local businesses to support the rest of the communities. Finally, Gente Nueva, a close ally of the CDS with presence in Chihuahua, distributed provisions in Santa Barbara.

It is worth emphasizing that all assistance kits distributed by organized crime groups in Mexico were labeled with logos of the responsible organization and “signed” by their leaders. The Sinaloa Cartel, for example, used images of El Chapo that are also used by Alejandrina Guzmán’s clothing line. CJNG’s aid boxes were “signed” with Nemesio Oseguera’s pseudonym “El Señor de los Gallos” and a stamp with the state shapes of

¹¹² Robert J., Bunker and John P., Sullivan, “Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 29: An Overview of Cartel Activities Related to COVID-19 Humanitarian Response,” COVID-19, Gangs, and Conflict, A Small Wars Journal -El Centro Reader, September 9, 2020, p. 23-47.

Jalisco and San Luis Potosí. Other groups also used stickers and stamps referring to their leaders' nicknames.

Humanitarian assistance is not new or exclusive to COVID-19. As Falko Ernst from International Crisis Group points out, Mexican organized crime groups are stepping into the vacuum created by the state's failure to provide basic security and assistance to marginalized populations, serving as self-styled public defenders while, simultaneously, serving as local prosecutors, charging rental fees, extorting locals, and intensively enforcing curfew measures.¹¹³ By providing COVID-19 kits and asserting their presence in local communities, organized crime groups in Mexico expected to gain local support in areas where they did not have a strong hold. In addition, organized crime groups are looking to expand their power and legitimacy at the expense of the state's legitimacy.

Meanwhile, as noted throughout this report, the impact of COVID-19 on other types of crime appears to be varied. On the one hand, the increase in the number of people who were required to stay at home or laid off contributed to documented increases in domestic violence. On the other hand, the large decreases in robbery crimes noted earlier suggest that the pandemic had the effect of inhibiting certain forms of criminal activity, or at least the reporting of those crimes. As Mexico's economy slowly gets back to full functioning, it will be important for authorities to brace themselves for a possible resurgence of such crimes.

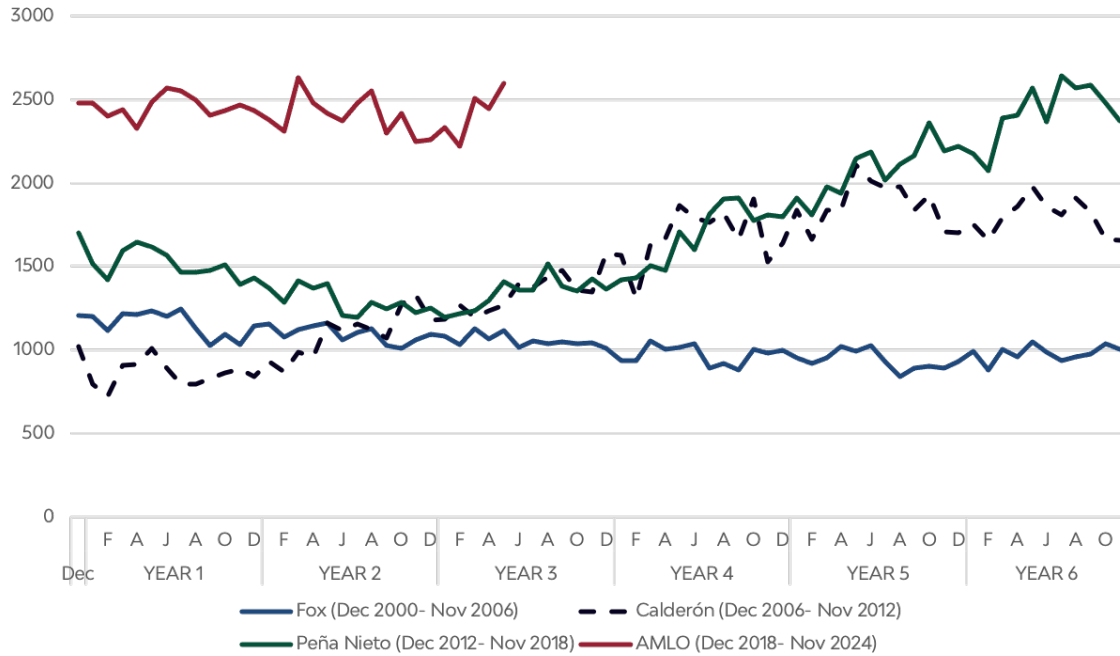
MEXICAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

For President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-2024), the continuation of elevated violence well into his third year in office sets his administration apart from the country's three previous presidents. López Obrador entered office with violence at a higher level than any previous administration, and the number of monthly homicides has essentially remained at or above 2,200 victims per month, with multiple peaks reaching over 2,500 per month well into the year 2021 (See Figure 41). All told, there were over 72,000 people killed during President López Obrador's first two and a half years in office.¹¹⁴ If current trends continue, there will almost surely be more than 200,000 murders in Mexico the end of López Obrador's term in office.

¹¹³ Falko, Ernst, "Mexican criminal groups see Covid-19 crisis as opportunity to gain power," The Guardian, April 20, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/20/mexico-criminal-groups-covid-19-crisis-opportunity-gain-power>. Accessed March 31, 2021.

¹¹⁴ None of the president's recent successors has been faced with such sustained high levels of violence: by comparison, there were 33,635 intentional homicide cases under President Fox, 30,572 murders under President Calderón, and 41,688 murders under President Peña Nieto within the same time frame.

Figure 41: Number of Intentional Homicide Investigations (Cases) by Reported by Month and Year of Presidential Administration, December 2000-June 2021



The Role of the National Guard

It is notable that Mexico’s violence persists at extraordinarily high levels despite some notable changes in the López Obrador administration’s approach to public security compared to past administrations. In 2019, López Obrador’s proposal to create a National Guard received near-unanimous approval in Mexico’s legislature. At its inception, the National Guard was intended to compensate for police forces that were perceived to be incompetent and corrupt, and a military with a reputation for heavy-handedness.¹¹⁵ During the National Guard’s first year in operation, the Mexican government faced pressure from the U.S. President Donald Trump to send additional personnel to Mexico’s northern and southern borders. While the Mexican public generally approved of the deployment of National Guard to enforce border crossings, some observers believed that the agency’s focus on migration was an attempt to distract from the government’s failure to combat organized crime and associated violence – the National Guard’s original mandate.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Hale, “AMLO’s National Guard Turns One,” Justice in Mexico, July 9, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/national-guard-turns-one/>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid; Kevin Sieff and Scott Clement, “Unauthorized Immigrants Face Public Backlash in Mexico, Survey Finds,” *The Washington Post*, July 17, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/unauthorized-immigrants-face-public-backlash-in-mexico-survey-finds/2019/07/16/f7fc5d12-a75e-11e9-a3a6-ab670962db05_story.html.

Indeed, as evidenced by official data, violent crime has continued to increase in the year following the National Guard's formation. Nonetheless, the López Obrador administration has doubled down on its strategy of public security militarization. On May 11, 2020, López Obrador issued an executive decree that expanded the military's involvement in internal affairs until March 2024, or until the National Guard can assume responsibility. This new order granted the military the ability to support investigations, detain suspects, secure crime scenes, and carry out arrest warrants. However, the order failed to implement corresponding oversight mechanisms for members of the military, who are not accountable to civilian institutions.¹¹⁷ Moreover, human rights advocates have cited the growing number of human rights complaints alleging serious misconduct by both military and National Guard members.¹¹⁸ In this sense, the expanded role of the National Guard continues a worrying trend toward the militarization of Mexican public security responses, given the tension in its dual command structures (having both military and civilian chains of command), its lack of training to deal with civilian law enforcement matters, and its inapt rules of engagement for dealing with civilians.

Indeed, in one incident that made international headlines, National Guard members were implicated in the death of a civilian in northern Chihuahua. In September 2020, a group of local farmers took control of the La Boquilla dam to protest the agricultural and economic impacts of a 1944 treaty with the United States that sent billions of gallons of water north each year. In a confrontation with local protestors, a National Guard unit was deployed to the Conchas River, where agents shot and killed 36-year-old pecan farmer Jessica Estrella Silva Zamarripa, also injuring her husband.¹¹⁹ In response, the National Guard allowed the Chihuahua State Prosecutor's Office to open an investigation into the actions of 17 of its members. President López Obrador stated publicly that if there was an abuse of authority, it would be punished. However, the president went on to praise the actions of the National Guard at La Boquilla, suggesting that the administration saw the members' use of force against civilians as an appropriate response.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ In response, members of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD) submitted an official complaint to the National Human Rights Commission (*Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos*, CNDH) regarding the administration's militarization of public security forces, arguing that the current strategy would only increase human rights violations and overall impunity. Kimberly Heinle, "AMLO's Decree Further Militarizes the Public Security Strategy," *Justice in Mexico*, June 12, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/amlos-decree-further-militarizes-the-public-security-strategy/>.

¹¹⁸ Jonathan Hale, "AMLO's National Guard Turns One," *Justice in Mexico*, July 9, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/national-guard-turns-one/>.

¹¹⁹ Pamela Constable, "Mexican Farmers Occupy Dam to Stop Water Payments to the United States," *The Washington Post*, September 14, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/us-mexico-water-dam-farm-protest/2020/09/13/dddb85e8-f3bb-11ea-999c-67ff7bf6a9d2_story.html.

¹²⁰ "No vamos a cubrir a nadie: AMLO sobre investigación a elementos de GN," *El Sol de México*, September 11, 2020, <https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/mexico/justicia/no-vamos-a-cubrir-a-nadie-amlo-sobre-investigacion-a-elementos-de-guardia-nacional-la-boquilla-presa-chihuahua-5745751.html>.

During the same month as the La Boquilla incident, a 2021 draft budget proposal was delivered to the Mexican Congress augmenting the annual budget for the National Guard. Specifically, the proposal sought to increase National Guard spending by 21.8% to a total of \$36 billion pesos (\$1.6 billion USD), while also allocating an additional \$500 million pesos for the construction of 76 new National Guard headquarters. At the same time, the proposal decreased funding for local police, for the National Intelligence Center (*Centro Nacional de Inteligencia, CNI*), and for the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims (*Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas, CEAV*).¹²¹ The new budget was approved in December 2020, enabling the continued activity of the National Guard as a public security force into 2021.¹²²

Responding to Public Protests Over Femicides and Violence Against Women

In response to multiple high-profile incidents of violence against, the Mexican public mobilized throughout 2020 to protest targeted abuse and violence against women. However, the current presidential administration has hardly been sympathetic to the cause. President López Obrador stated on various occasions that the issue of femicides had been “manipulated” by his political opponents, who he claims helped to instigate the protests.¹²³ He also claimed that 90% of 9-1-1 calls claiming violence against women were fake, and thus, that the problem of gender-based violence has been inflated by false reporting.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, other government actors have taken strides to confront the problem of violence against women. For example, Mexico City Mayor Claudia Steinbaum, also a member of López Obrador’s party, campaigned partly on a platform of curbing violence against women. In mid-2020, she underscored that she had approved seven laws to combat violence against women over the previous two years, including a recent law that established the Public Registry of Sex Offenders (*El Registro Público de Agresores*

Justice in Mexico, October 1, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/isecurity-spending-2021-militarization/>.

¹²¹ Elisabetta Marinoni, “Increased Security Spending in 2021: Between Opportunity and Further Militarization,”

¹²² Diario Oficial de la Federación de México, “Calendario de presupuesto autorizado a la Secretaría de Seguridad y Protección Ciudadana 2021,” December 17, 2020,

http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5608029&fecha=17/12/2020.

¹²³ Paulina Villegas, “In Mexico, Women Go on Strike Nationwide to Protest Violence,” *The New York Times*, March 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/09/world/americas/mexico-women-strike-protest.html>; “Ingrid Escamilla: Outraged Mexicans Post ‘Beautiful Images’ for Murdered Woman,” *BBC News*, February 13, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-51488124?utm_source=Today+in+Latin+America&utm_campaign=ab07d05d2d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_02_14_03_56&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_73d76ad46b-ab07d05d2d-15290975.

¹²⁴ “AMLO dice que el 90% de las llamadas sobre violencia contra las mujeres son falsas,” *Animal Político*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2020/05/llamadas-falsas-violencia-mujeres-amlo/>.

Sexuales) in Mexico City.¹²⁵ In addition, the Mexico City government announced the creation of a new forensic DNA Bank for those found guilty of sexual assault, kidnapping, or femicide – the first of its kind in Mexico.¹²⁶

At the national level, in October 2020, the National Electoral Institute (*Instituto Nacional Electoral*, INE) unanimously endorsed guidelines for political parties in order to prevent gender-based political violence. The new guidelines stipulated that beginning in 2021, aspiring candidates who have been convicted or accused of domestic violence, sexual misconduct, or defaulting on alimony payments will be ineligible to run in any election for public office.¹²⁷ This move came in response to the #3de3VsViolencia initiative implemented by female members of the Chamber of Deputies (from MORENA, the PAN, PRI, PRD, and MC) and activist Yndira Sandoval. Similar to the INE guidelines, the initiative put forth that no male with a record of violence against women would be permitted to occupy a position in the legislative, executive, or judicial branch of government. The INE guidelines faced pushback from male politicians who claimed that the new rules sought to unfairly persecute men; however, both INE representatives and Mexican legislators defended the move as essential to strengthening the accountability of Mexico's democratic institutions.¹²⁸ While these new policies represent a positive step toward the protection of women's rights, it remains to be seen whether an apathetic presidential administration will hamper future progress.

U.S.-Mexico Bi-National Security Cooperation

From 2009 to 2021, security cooperation between the United States and Mexico was structured under the bilateral agreement known as the "Merida Initiative." Under the agreement's four pillars, individual programs focused on combatting transnational criminal organizations, strengthening the judicial sector, bolstering border security measures, and promoting resilience in communities affected by violence.¹²⁹ Since the

¹²⁵ "En 2 años, van 7 leyes aprobadas contra violencia hacia mujeres en CdMx: Sheinbaum," *Milenio*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.milenio.com/politica/comunidad/violencia-mujer-cdmx-sheinbaum-7-leyes-aprobadas-2-anos>.

¹²⁶ Obed Ruiz, "Registro Público de Agresores Sexuales en CDMX: qué es y cómo funciona," *Debate*, February 26, 2021, <https://www.debate.com.mx/cdmx/Registro-Publico-de-Agresores-Sexuales-en-CDMX-que-es-y-como-funciona-20210226-0240.html>.

¹²⁷ Diario Oficial de la Federación de México, "Acuerdo del Consejo General del Instituto Nacional Electoral por el que se aprueban los Lineamientos para la integración, funcionamiento, actualización y conservación del Registro Nacional de Personas Sancionadas en Materia de Violencia Política contra las Mujeres en Razón de Género, en acatamiento a la sentencia dictada por la Sala Superior del Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación en el expediente SUP-REC-91/2020 y acumulado," September 22, 2020, https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5600948&fecha=22/09/2020.

¹²⁸ Veronica Rice, "The INE Takes Strides against Gender Based Violence," *Justice in Mexico*, November 12, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/ine-against-gender-violence/>.

¹²⁹ The Merida Initiative's four pillars include combatting transnational criminal organizations, institutionalizing the rule of law while protecting human rights, creating a 21st century U.S.-Mexico border, and building strong and resilient communities. Clare Ribando Seelke and Kristin Finklea, "U.S.-

initiative's inception in 2007, the U.S. Congress appropriated roughly \$3.3 billion to support these efforts, which have included efforts to improve intelligence-gathering and information sharing, training resources for law enforcement and judicial personnel, investments in Mexican customs and border infrastructure, and gang prevention programs.¹³⁰

Despite these efforts, tensions have occasionally threatened to derail the U.S.-Mexico security agenda after the Calderón administration left office in 2012. Initially, Peña Nieto administration (2012-2018) expressed skepticism about the agreement, but cooperation continued through careful coordination through the two federal governments.

However, under the López Obrador administration, there was a clear and consistent rejection of the Mérida Initiative framework from the outset of his term. López Obrador characterized the agreement as a vehicle for U.S. spying and intervention in Mexican affairs, and indicated that he would not accept any cooperation with the United States on domestic security matters.¹³¹ The agreement technically continued during his first years in office, even though López Obrador indicated his intention to renegotiate the terms of U.S.-Mexico security cooperation, stating in May 2019 that "We want the Merida Initiative to be completely reoriented, because that has not worked. We don't want there to be cooperation for the use of force, we want there to be cooperation for development, we don't want the so-called Merida Initiative."¹³²

Tensions over U.S.-Mexico security cooperation intensified in October 2020, U.S. authorities arrested former Mexican defense minister Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda at Los Angeles International Airport on various counts related to drug trafficking and money laundering.¹³³ Cienfuegos being the first high-ranking military official to face such charges in the United States, the response by Mexican officials was swift. In the month following the arrest, several formal notes of protest were submitted directly to U.S. Attorney General William Barr, after which the U.S. and Mexican Attorneys General offices released a joint statement announcing the dismissal of all charges

Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond," (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, June 29, 2017), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41349.pdf>.

¹³⁰ See Clare Ribando Seelke, "Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2021," Congressional Research Service, February 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10578.pdf>.

¹³¹ Shortly after taking office in December 2018, he indicated that "We do not accept the strategy that the Merida Initiative meant, which instead of development cooperation was military cooperation." Sebastián Barragán, "No aceptamos Iniciativa Mérida; se acabó el espionaje, 'ya no hay golondrinas en el alambre': López Obrador," *Aristegui Noticias*, December 18, 2018. <https://aristeguinoticias.com/1912/mexico/no-aceptamos-iniciativa-merida-se-acabo-el-espionaje-ya-no-hay-golondrinas-en-el-alambre-lopez-obrador/>

¹³² Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Press Conference, Mexico City, May 7, 2019. <https://www.gob.mx/presidencia/prensa/conferencia-de-prensa-del-presidente-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-del-7-de-mayo-de-2019>

¹³³ Rita Kuckertz, "Former Mexican Defense Minister Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda Arrested by U.S. Officials," *Justice in Mexico*, October 19, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/cienfuegos-arrested-us/>.

against Cienfuegos. Many security analysts believe that the decision was made in light of threats to limit the role of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in Mexico – a hypothesis that seemed to be confirmed by a sweeping policy change passed at the end of the year.¹³⁴ Also, in this context and after the U.S. presidential election results in November 2020 made it clear that Republican Donald Trump would be replaced by Democrat Joe Biden, the Mexican Foreign Minister announced the end of the Mérida Initiative.¹³⁵

In December 2020, the Mexican legislature approved the incorporation of several new provisions to the National Security Law (*Ley de Seguridad Nacional*), which cumulatively sought to curb the role of foreign officials operating within Mexico. These changes stripped foreign officials of diplomatic immunity, requiring that they obtain special permits to carry firearms and mandating that they share all intelligence obtained while operating in Mexico. In addition, the provisions restricted interactions between Mexican officials and their foreign counterparts, requiring that all meetings receive advance approval and that a member of the Mexican Foreign Ministry (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, SRE) be present. They also stated that local, state, and federal Mexican officials must report all communication with foreign agents within three days of any interaction.¹³⁶ In January 2021, these protocols were eased slightly, allowing Mexican officials at all three levels of government to engage with their foreign counterparts via electronic or telephonic means without prior approval. Nonetheless, all personnel were still required to report the date of interaction, the means of interaction, the nationality of the foreign agent, the agency to which they belong, and the purpose of the interaction to the SRE.¹³⁷

The potential negative impact of these new provisions is difficult to overstate. For years, U.S. and Mexican officials have exchanged information and intelligence through “on-the-ground, informal networks,” in order to circumvent the institutional bureaucracies of both countries. These organic networks have long aided law enforcement operations on both sides of the border, while also building trust between U.S. and Mexican personnel.¹³⁸ However, new requirements imposed by the National Security Law

¹³⁴ Rita Kuckertz, “United States Will Drop Charges against Former Mexican Defense Minister Cienfuegos,” Justice in Mexico, November 11, 2020, <https://justiceinmexico.org/us-will-drop-charges-cienfuegos/>.

¹³⁵ Ariadna García, “Se acabó la Iniciativa Mérida, señala la SRE,” El Universal, November 28, 2020.

¹³⁶ Teagan McGinnis, “Mexican Security Law Reforms May Impact Bilateral Initiatives on Organized Crime,” Justice in Mexico, January 11, 2021, <https://justiceinmexico.org/mexican-security-reforms-bilateral-initiatives-organized-crime/>.

¹³⁷ Jorge Monroy, “México suaviza control sobre agentes de seguridad extranjeros,” *El Economista*, January 14, 2021, <https://www.economista.com.mx/politica/Mexico-suaviza-control-sobre-agentes-de-seguridad-extranjeros-20210114-0041.html>.

¹³⁸ Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, “From the Institutional to the Informal: Security Cooperation Between the U.S. and Mexico,” in Tony Payan and Pamela Cruz, eds., *Binational Commons: Institutional Development and Governance on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020).

threaten to eradicate these types of organic relationships, decreasing the effectiveness of intelligence and security operations in both countries.

in the aftermath of the tensions over Cienfuegos' arrest and the subsequent Mexican security provisions, members of the U.S. Congress had sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken encouraging his office to be more assertive in addressing the worsening migration and security crises in Mexico.¹³⁹ In late September 2021, Blinken and other U.S. government officials met with their Mexican counterparts in a high-level security dialogue that resulted in a new framework for cooperation to replace the Mérida Initiative.¹⁴⁰ The new agreement is known as the “U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health and Safe Communities,” or the Bicentennial Framework.¹⁴¹ While details remain to be hammered out over time, the new framework agreement lays out a shared binational agenda with three broad goals:

- 1) **Goal 1: Protect Our People** by promoting public health approaches to substance abuse, addressing the root causes of violence, and “building sustainable, healthy, and secure communities” (improving homicide investigations, professionalize the criminal justice system, and combat gender-based violence in Mexico);
- 2) **Goal 2: Prevent Transborder Crime** by improving detection and interdiction of illicit smuggling of synthetic drugs and precursor chemicals, firearms, people, and wildlife;
- 3) **Goal 3: Pursue Criminal Networks** by disrupting illegal financial networks, strengthening investigations and prosecutions of organized crime, and increasing bilateral cooperation on international extraditions.¹⁴²

The goals of expressed by the two countries are certainly laudable. Many analysts have advocated for years to refocus counter-drug efforts away from heavy handed law enforcement measures to more evidence-based public health approaches centered on harm-reduction. Also, deep and focused efforts to strengthen and professionalize

¹³⁹ The members cited increasing levels of violence, disappearances, and the targeting of human rights activists and journalists, imploring the United States to reassess U.S. security assistance to Mexico. Notably, the letter emphasized that the targeting of cartel kingpins—a strategy that the United States had previously promoted—had not been effective in decreasing violence, and instead, may have exacerbated it. U.S. Members of Congress to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2021, <https://lowenthal.house.gov/sites/lowenthal.house.gov/files/Sec.%20Blinken%20human%20rights%20in%20Mexico%20signed.pdf>.

¹⁴⁰ The high level security dialogue also included Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo, Attorney General Merrick Garland, and Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas. “Ebrard asegura que Iniciativa Mérida se terminó,” *Forbes*, September 29, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com.mx/politica-ebard-asegura-que-iniciativa-merida-se-termino/>

¹⁴¹ Amb. Earl Wayne, “Bilateral Effort for a Common Good,” *Pulse News Mexico*, Accessed October 19, 2021. <https://pulsenewsmexico.com/2021/10/19/drugs-guns-and-money-a-bilateral-war-for-a-common-good/>

¹⁴² “U.S.-Mexico High-Level Security Dialogue,” *White House Fact Sheet*, October 8, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/08/fact-sheet-u-s-mexico-high-level-security-dialogue/>

civilian police and prosecutorial agencies are critically needed in order to disrupt transnational criminal organizations and their financial networks. Arguably, the Mexican government already has a strong legal framework for combatting organized crime, thanks to dozens of laws establishing penalties and procedures for dealing with criminal actors. However, what is missing in many cases is the political will, institutional capacity and integrity, and professionalism in law enforcement to ensure the proper administration of justice. In this sense, continued U.S.-Mexico cooperation under the new Bicentennial Framework appears to offer some promising opportunities for progress.

CONCLUSION

Since beginning this series of reports in 2009, Justice in Mexico has emphasized that the problems of organized crime and violence in Mexico are highly consequential, complex, and often interconnected. This report details the unprecedented levels of violence that Mexico continues to face more than a decade later. While some indicators of crime (e.g., homicide, kidnapping, extortion, and robbery) decreased modestly in 2020 and 2021, this appears to be at least partly attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic. With more public interaction allowing for a return to predatory and opportunistic crimes, there may be a resurgence of such crimes during the recovery.

In order to address this, what Mexico desperately needs is to develop greater institutional capacity and integrity in its law enforcement institutions, as well as a more effective strategy for addressing the threat posed by organized crime. To date, efforts to address this threat have had mixed success, at best, and by most accounts have been lackluster. While it is commendable that President López Obrador has abandoned the failed “kingpin” strategy, Mexico still needs an alternative strategy – a series of deliberate steps – to reduce the power of organized crime and overall levels of violence. Recent developments in U.S.-Mexico security cooperation may help to achieve these goals, but the path ahead remains long and uncertain.

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