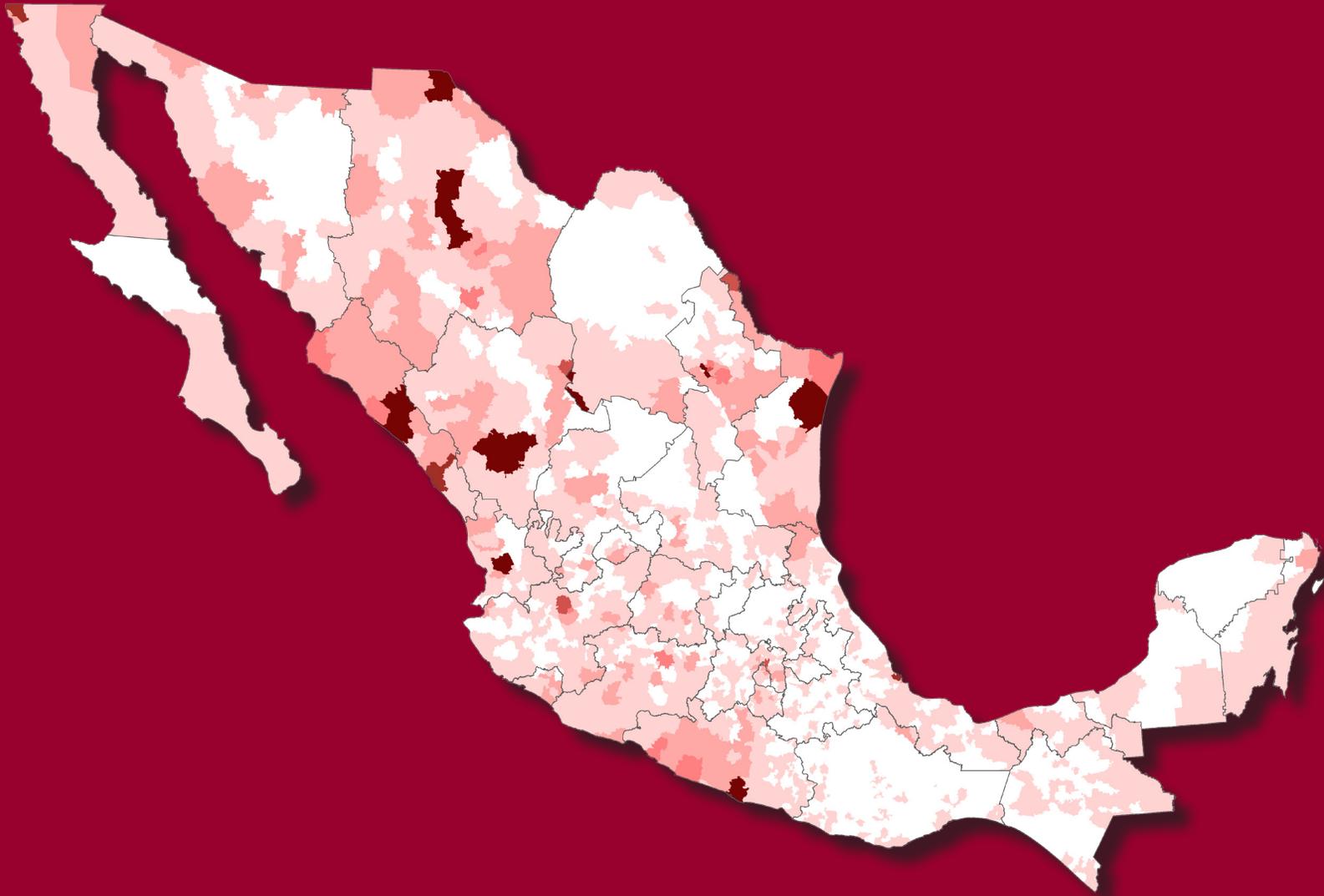


Drug Violence in Mexico

Data and Analysis Through 2011



Special Report

by Cory Molzahn, Viridiana Ríos, and David A. Shirk



Trans-Border Institute

Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies

University of San Diego

March 2012

About the Trans-Border Institute: The Trans-Border Institute (TBI) is based at the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego. TBI works to promote collaboration and understanding between the United States and Mexico, address challenges and opportunities that spring from the bi-national relationship, and advance the two countries' shared interests along the U.S.-Mexico border. The Institute administers a broad range of programs, research, events, and other activities involving scholars, practitioners, and students working to inform public debate, promote international cooperation, and surmount obstacles to cross-border cooperation.

About the Report: This is the third annual report by the Trans-Border Institute (TBI) on drug violence in Mexico. As with previous reports, the purpose of this study is to examine the available data, specific patterns, contributing factors, and policy recommendations related to growing toll of the drug war in Mexico. The report draws from the extensive research and analysis of the TBI Justice in Mexico Project (www.justiceinmexico.org), which in the past year has benefited from the generous financial support of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Tinker Foundation, and the Open Society Initiative. This report was also informed by conferences and workshops hosted by Brown University in April 2011, the United Nations Social Science Research Council in June 2011, Stanford University in October 2011, and the Guggenheim Foundation and the Woodrow Wilson Center in December 2011. The lead authors for this report were Cory Molzahn, Viridiana Ríos, and David A. Shirk.

ISBN-10: 0983567441

ISBN-13: 978-0-9835674-4-8

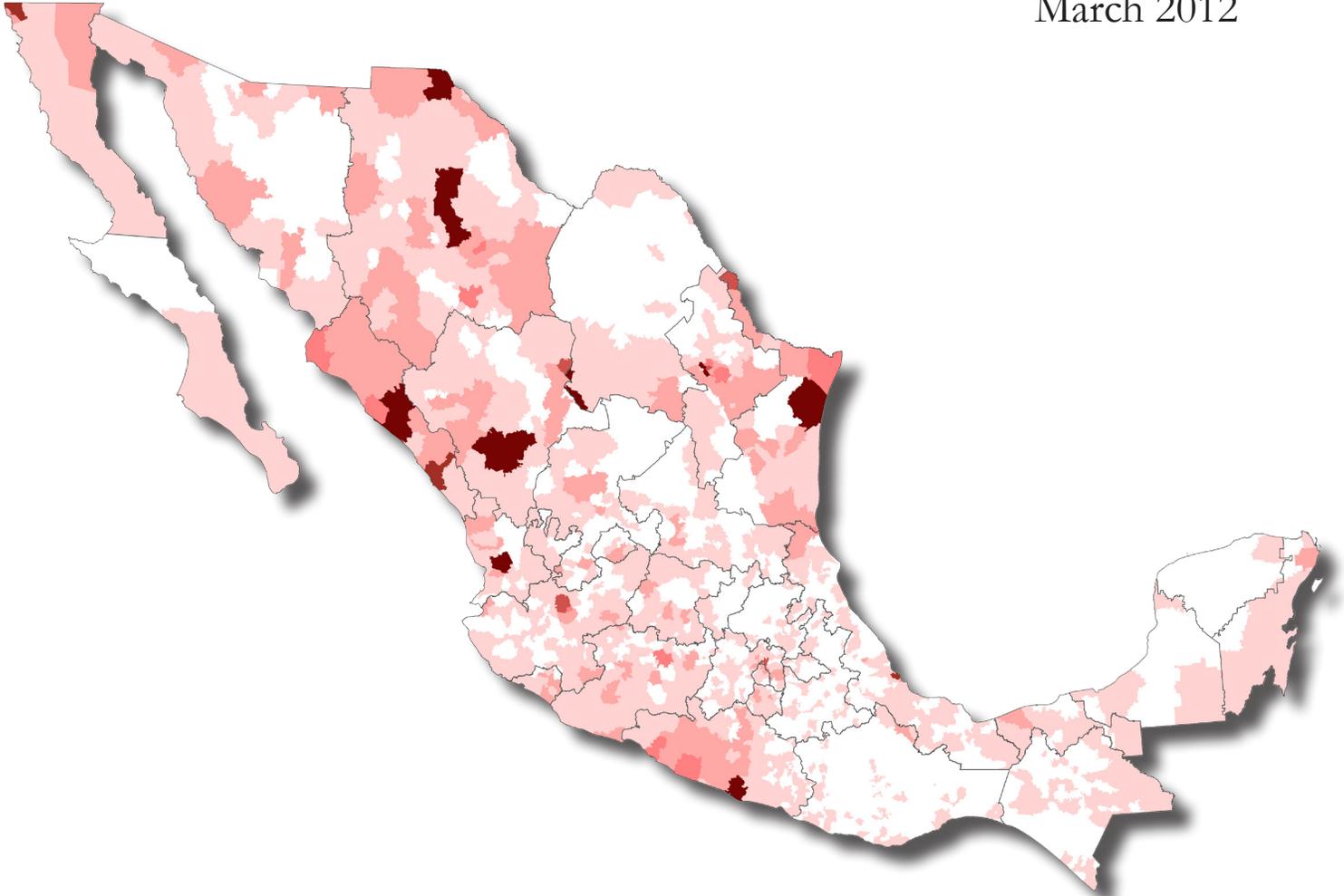
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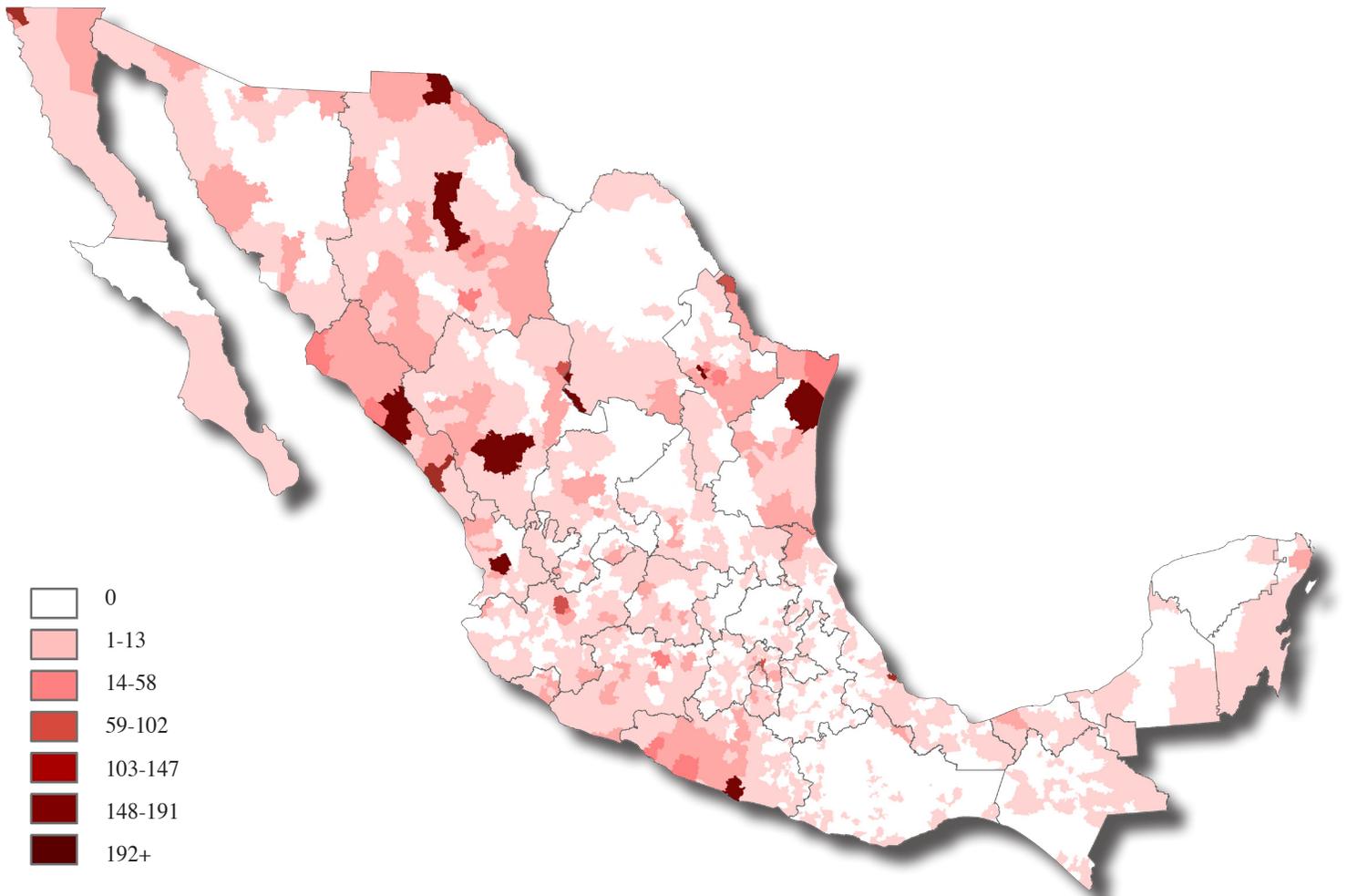
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Geographic Distribution of Organized Crime Related Killings in Mexico in 2011



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Violence has risen dramatically in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America in recent years.** Increased violence in the hemisphere has prompted heightened security concerns for authorities, citizens, migrants, business travellers, and tourists. Mexico's overall homicide rate (18 per 100,000 inhabitants) is uncomfortably high, but pales in comparison to Honduras (82), El Salvador (66), Venezuela (49), Belize (41), and Guatemala (41), Colombia (33), the Bahamas (28), Brazil (22), and the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico (26).
-
- **There were over 50,000 organized crime murders in Mexico from 2006 through 2011.** The Mexican government documented 12,903 organized crime homicides in the first three quarters of 2011, bringing the total official tally to 47,515 such killings since President Felipe Calderón took office on December 1, 2006. Adding 2,624 drug related homicides documented by the daily newspaper Reforma in October, November, and December 2011, there just over 50,000 organized crime homicides from December 2006 through last year.
-
- **Such violence grew less sharply in 2011, but now causes over half of all homicides.** The 11% increase in 2011 was much lower than the rate of increase seen in 2008 (141.9%), 2009 (40.6%), and 2010 (58.8%). Still, 2011 had 1,650 more deaths than the previous year and nearly six times the number of killings in 2007. Moreover, while such violence was the cause of 31.9% of all intentional homicides in in 2007, by 2010 and 2011 organized crime killings accounted for 63.4% and 53.8% of all intentional homicides, respectively.
-
- **Violence remains highly concentrated in key drug trafficking areas, but has spread.** 70% of organized crime homicides occurred in just eight states in 2011, while 24% of the violence was concentrated in just five cities. In 2010, three states – Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Tamaulipas – alone accounted for over half of the nationwide total, but in 2011 the top three states, with Nuevo León replacing Tamaulipas, accounted for just over 41% of the violence as violence spread to new areas.
-
- **Violence declined along the U.S.-Mexico border, moving south.** In 2010, 50% of organized crime homicides occurred in Mexico's six border states, but their share dropped to 44% in 2011. Moreover, Mexican border cities accounted for 29.5% of such homicides in 2010, but only 17% in 2011. However, falling violence in the border states of Baja California and Chihuahua was partly offset by increases in Coahuila, Nuevo Laredo, and Tamaulipas. Southern states receiving more violence included Veracruz and Guerrero.

-
- **Violence increasingly targets authorities, reporters, and vulnerable populations.** A growing number of law enforcement personnel, officials, journalists, women, and children joined the ranks of Mexico's dead in 2011, and many victims of violence were subject to horrifying acts of torture and mutilation. On average, for every day of 2011, 47 people were killed, three of whom were tortured, one of whom was decapitated, two of whom were women, and ten of whom were young people whose lives were cut short by violence.
-
- **While some drug cartels remain intact, others have deteriorated and diversified.** With the exception of the two most powerful drug trafficking organizations, the Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas, Mexican organized crime groups have weakened, splintered, and become involved in a more diverse array of lower level criminal activities, including kidnapping, extortion, and other crimes that have a more direct effect on the general population.
-
- **U.S.-Mexico counter-drug collaboration remains strong, with room for improvement.** Nearly \$2 billion in U.S. aid to help fund Mexican and Central American counter-narcotics initiatives has boosted regional cooperation. However, numerous human rights violations have surfaced in Mexico, while U.S. investigations allowed guns and cash to flow into the hands of organized crime groups in Mexico. Greater oversight and coordination are needed, as well as a clear commitment to bilateral cooperation beyond the 2012 presidential elections.
-
- **Mexico urgently needs to implement police and judicial sector reforms.** To the extent that the federal government has previously relied on large force deployments to restore order in areas where violence is highly concentrated, the tendency toward widely dispersed, mass violence presents a significant challenge. The authors recommend a greater focus of resources and attention to the challenges of local police reform, state-level judicial reforms, and penitentiary reform at all levels.
-
- **More serious consideration of alternatives to current drug policy is needed.** Currently, there is little evidence that proposals for drug decriminalization or legalization—particularly half-measures such as allowing marijuana use for medical purposes—will have any significant effect on levels of violence in Mexico. However, the case for legalization is weakened by a lack of frank policy discussions about its possible implications; such discussions remain taboo in the halls of power despite growing political support for legalization among ordinary citizens in both countries.
-

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Introduction

In mid-January 2012, under pressure from media and watchdog groups, the Mexican government released new data on the casualties of the drug war in Mexico. These data confirmed that drug-related violence has steadily worsened since the beginning of the administration of President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-12), who has waged a vigorous effort to rid the country of drug trafficking and organized crime.

According to the Mexican government, there were over 47,500 documented “organized crime related homicides” from President Calderón’s inauguration on December 1, 2006 to September 30, 2011, though data from the fourth quarter were not available as of the release of this report.

While the levels of homicide in Mexico do not nearly approach some other Latin American countries, the toll of drug related violence has been unacceptably high. At the start of the Calderón administration, there was one drug related homicide every four hours; by 2011, the worst year on record, there was one every 30 minutes. Now, roughly half of all homicides in Mexico are attributable to drug violence.

Still, the government’s data confirmed prior assessments by the Trans-Border Institute (TBI) that the trajectory of violence began to shift in 2011, with a lower rate of increase than in previous years and significant declines in the number of homicides in certain key cities (Ciudad Juárez, Culiacán, and Chihuahua). At the same time, as reported by TBI throughout the year, it is clear that violence has begun to spread to new areas of the country, including the wealthy industrial metropolis of Monterrey and the vital port city of Veracruz.

In this report, the authors provide detailed analysis of the available empirical measures and patterns of drug related homicide, evaluate the underlying contributing factors, and the possible policy options to reduce the growing toll of the drug war in Mexico. In the process, the authors provide a comprehensive overview of the key trends and events in 2011 with respect to the activities of Mexico’s major criminal organizations. First, some discussion of the underlying data and methodologies that support this study is needed.

Data and Methodology: Monitoring Drug Violence in Mexico

The proliferation of crime and violence has been a primary concern for policy makers and the general public in Mexico for over a decade. While crime and violence began to rise noticeably in the mid-1990s, Mexico's situation has become even more critical in recent years due to clashes among organized crime groups involved in drug trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, and other illicit activities.

Of particular concern is the fact that Mexico's drug trafficking organizations have become more fractionalized and increasingly involved in a more diverse array of criminal activities, including kidnapping, extortion, and other crimes that have a more direct effect on the general population. In response to this growing security threat, the Mexican government has increasingly relied on the involvement of the military, as well as active U.S. collaboration, in some ways echoing the strategy employed in Colombia over the past decade.

Unfortunately, despite a barrage of daily headlines documenting this violence, there is an enormous gap in the amount of reliable data and analysis to evaluate the dimensions of the problem. The Mexican government has released data on the number and location of drug-related homicides only sporadically, and most recently only under pressure from civic groups and government watchdog agencies.

Moreover, the data released by the Mexican government has been incomplete, in that they exclude finer details commonly used to understand violent crime such as the gender, age, occupation, and time of death of the victims. This leaves officials, experts, and the public with an incomplete picture of Mexico's drug violence, making it difficult to diagnose the problem and prescribe solutions.

With this in mind, TBI has worked in recent years to monitor and catalogue drug related violence in Mexico by using a variety of sources. Since 2001, the Justice in Mexico Project (www.justiceinmexico.org) has conducted research on a variety of rule of law issues in Mexico, including persistent problems of crime and violence. For the past three years, using the best available data from the government and other sources, TBI has compiled monthly monitoring reports and a comprehensive annual report to provide an accounting of drug related violence, specifically.

TBI meets regularly with U.S. and Mexican government officials, academics, experts, and civic organizations in an effort to keep track of developments in Mexico. Also, over the past year, TBI has worked with over two dozen students and volunteers to document and classify individual homicides linked to organized crime by government and media sources, creating a unique, publicly available dataset of over 1,000 victims.

The goal of all these efforts is to help inform both Mexican and U.S. audiences—including policy makers, journalists, and the general public—about the public security situation in Mexico and the effects of the war on drugs. There are several other U.S.-based efforts that also attempt to document drug related violence in Mexico, including former U.S. enforcement officers who

oppose the drug war (www.leap.cc), a New Mexico librarian named Molly Molloy, who tallies the death toll in Ciudad Juárez (groups.google.com/group/frontera-list), and a legion of graduate students using sophisticated computer models.

In addition to these efforts, there are numerous Mexico-based initiatives that seek to track drug related violence in parallel to the Mexican government, often at great risk to the reporters and analysts who do so. Indeed, in 2011 alone, eight members of the media were killed in Mexico, at least three of whom were killed for their reporting on the drug trade. Among the confirmed victims was Maria Elizabeth Macias Castro, the editor of the Nuevo Laredo-based newspaper *Primera Hora*. Macias Castro was killed in September 2011 for comments she made on a social networking site under the call sign, “La Nena de Laredo.”

Another female reporter, Yolanda Ordaz de la Cruz, was found decapitated in Veracruz in July 2011, one month after another reporter named Miguel Ángel López Velasco, his wife, and son (a news photographer) were killed in their home in the same state. In both cases, authorities found evidence and identified suspects that appeared to be linked to organized crime.

Even in spite of violent threats against journalists, tracking drug related violence in Mexico would be inherently challenging, as noted in detail in previous TBI reports on this subject. “Cartel violence,” “narco-violence,” “drug violence,” and “narco-executions” (a term widely used in the Mexican media since 2006) are not formal categories in Mexican criminal law, and there is some disagreement over the appropriate terminology used to describe these phenomena. Establishing a verifiable connection to drug trafficking or organized crime activities requires proper police investigation and due process of law, which is too often lacking in Mexico.

This partly explains why the Mexican government does not refer directly to “drug related homicides,” but to “organized crime homicides” and homicides due to “presumed criminal rivalries,” as we discuss below. Regardless of what terms are used, these categories tend to refer to fairly specific types of violence. Mass-casualty shoot-outs in public plazas, corpses hanging from bridges, decapitated heads placed in front of public buildings, bodies deposited in mass grave sites, and killings that bear markings and messages from organized crime groups. While there are many names to describe such groups (see text box “Drug War Terminology”), the violence that they generate has become a major preoccupation for the Mexican government, ordinary citizens, business travelers, and tourists.

Drug War Terminology

The term “drug cartel” is frequently used to describe organized crime syndicates involved in the production, distribution, and sale of psychotropic substances. Some observers avoid using the term “cartel” because they presume that the use of this term in economics is limited to organizations that collude to set prices. However, in the study of economics, the term cartel has a more general interpretation than many observers realize, including formal, informal, or even implicit agreements among business associations, or firms, to control production, fix prices, limit competition, and/or segment markets by product, clientele, or territory. While price fixing is very uncommon in the illicit drug trade, it often includes efforts to minimize competition, establish protected territorial control of specific markets, and collude in a variety of ways that make the use of the term “cartel” appropriate. Still, there are several other terms used to describe the phenomenon:

Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs): This term is used when drug trafficking accounts for the primary share of proceeds for a particular organized crime group. The U.S. government avoids use of the term “drug trafficking organization” because such groups have increasingly diversified into other areas of criminal activity.

Trans-National Criminal Organizations (TCOs): The U.S. government’s preferred term is “trans-national criminal organization,” though some observers avoid using this term because many organized crime groups in Mexico are not actually transnational in the scope of their operations. Still, this term is arguably appropriate insofar as many organized crime groups are, in fact, active internationally.

Organized Crime Groups (OCGs): Because of the limitations and inaccuracies of the terms DTO and TCO, some observers give preference to the more generic term “organized crime group” that is used extensively in this report.

Ultimately, many terms used to describe organized crime are inadequate because they suggest a degree of cohesiveness and hierarchy that probably does not exist, at least not consistently, in the illicit drug trade. Moreover, they tend to dehumanize the individuals involved, and also distract us from the fact that the “enemy” comprises members of all segments and strata of society, from Mexican farmers, truck drivers, and auto-body mechanics to U.S. bankers, college students, and corrupt government officials.

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Mexican Government Data

The government's data on drug related violence are gathered through a collaborative task force coordinated by the Technical Secretary for the National Security Council (CNS) and involving multiple intelligence and law enforcement agencies. Specifically, these agencies include the Center for Investigation and National Security (CISEN), the National Center for Information, Analysis and Planning to Fight Crime (CENAPI) within the Office of the Federal Attorney General (PGR), the Public Security Secretariat (SSP), Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA), Secretary of the Navy (SEMAR), and the Secretary of the Interior (Gobernación).

The type of homicides monitored by this task force was initially labeled as “homicides allegedly linked to organized crime.” This category was reclassified in 2011 as “homicides allegedly caused by criminal rivalry.” To fit into this category, a homicide must meet two of six specific criteria resulting from official investigations into the activities of individuals presumed to be involved in organized crime. Among the relevant characteristics used to identify such homicides are signs of torture, the caliber of the arms used, and other particular characteristics of the modus operandi of Mexican criminal groups, such as wrapping the body with sheets or leaving written messages with the body.

Six government criteria for classifying organized crime homicides:

1. The victim was killed by high caliber firearms.
2. The victim presents signs of torture or severe lesions.
3. The victim was killed where the body was found, or the body was located in a vehicle.
4. The body was wrapped with sheets (cobijas), taped, or gagged.
5. The homicide occurred within a penitentiary and involved criminal organizations.
6. Special circumstances (e.g., victim was abducted prior to assassination (levantón), ambushed or chased, an alleged member of a criminal organization, or found with a narco-message (narcomensaje) on or near the body).

Data are gathered independently by each of the agencies included in the task force. Data are then pooled and analyzed by CENAPI to avoid duplication and to corroborate the information from each case. At the time of this report, every single case contained in the dataset was still under official investigation by PGR and none of the details of these cases had been made public.

Thus, because investigations are ongoing, the government's official dataset on organized crime homicides should be considered a “work in progress.” As cases are investigated, some originally labeled as involving organized crime may be reclassified if there is inadequate evidence to support this characterization. However, to date, not a single case in the Mexican government's dataset has been reclassified for this reason, according to sources familiar with these data.

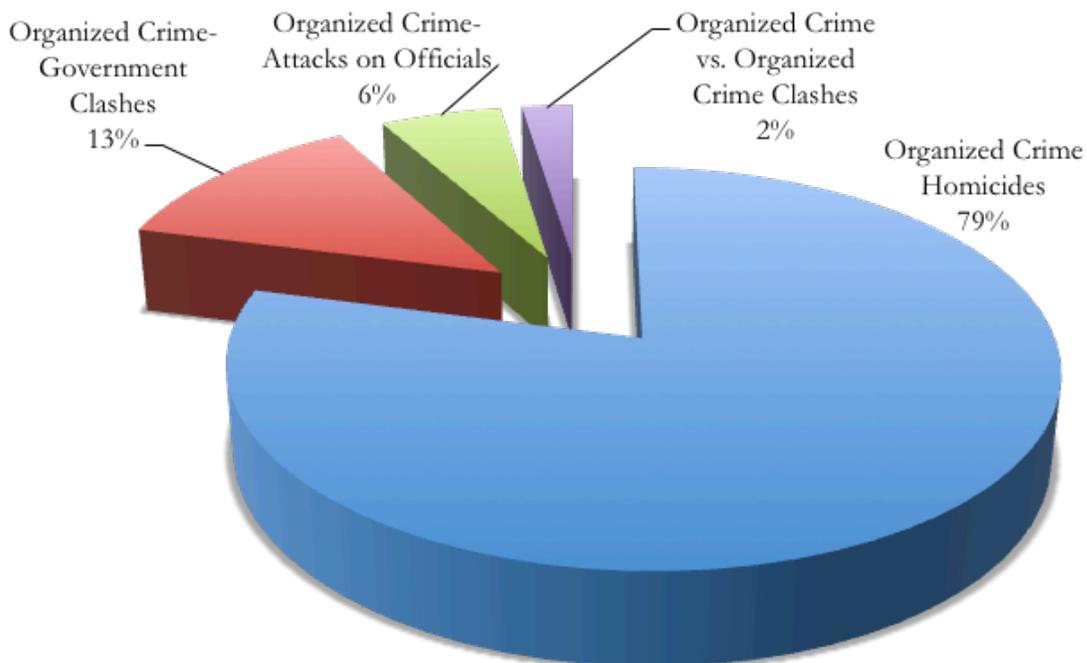
The Mexican government released aggregate data on the number of organized crime related homicides on two occasions, in January 2010 and January 2011. When the government's data was made available in January 2011, it did so voluntarily, directly through the Office of the President, and included data on 34,612 “homicides allegedly linked to organized crime” from the first four years of the Calderón administration.

In 2011, the government updated its data by releasing data on 12,903 “homicides allegedly caused by criminal rivalry” (fallecimientos por presunta rivaldad delincuencia) from the first nine months of that year, though it only did so under a directive to the PGR by the national transparency agency, the Federal Institute for Access to Information (IFAI).

More specific classifications provided by the Mexican government distinguish between incidents that involved clashes between presumed criminals and authorities, those in which authorities were the direct targets of violence, and those that resulted from open clashes among organized crime groups (OCGs). The four categories are formally defined as follows (with the corresponding January-September 2011 sub-totals listed in parentheses):

- 1) **Organized Crime Homicides (10,200):** Homicides resulting from presumed criminal rivalry (homicidio por presunta rivaldad delincuencia) including bodies of individuals found after abduction (levantones), torture, or gunshot wounds, as well as innocent victims that died as a result of wounds from assassins, organized crime associates, and drug traffickers;
- 2) **Organized Crime-Government Clashes (1,652):** Homicides resulting from confrontation with organized crime groups in which authorities had to use force (fallecimientos por agresion por enfrentamiento);
- 3) **Organized Crime Direct Attacks on Officials (740):** Homicides resulting from direct attacks by organized crime groups on government officials (fallecimientos por agresion directa);
- 4) **Organized Crime Clashes (311):** Homicides resulting from confrontations (fallecimientos por enfrentamiento) among organized crime groups, assassins, and commandos.

Figure 1. Official Breakdown of Organized Crime Homicides



The data provided by the government are further disaggregated by month and by municipality, with no additional specification about the victim in each case. As a result, the government's data cannot be corroborated. Moreover, many victims of violence simply "disappear," and are not counted in official tallies because there has been no systematic analysis of missing persons data in relation to organized crime killings. Also, since these data are not based on a formal court ruling or other legal criteria, it is also plausible that local PGR delegates have erroneously categorized them as involving organized crime, without adequate supporting evidence. Furthermore, it is even plausible that infiltration by criminal elements might lead to the inclusion, exclusion, or other mischaracterization of certain homicides that involve organized crime.

The fact that the government's publicly available dataset ends in September 2011 leaves no final "official" tally of violence for the full calendar year. The government insists that it was unable to provide more recent data due to technical limitations, since more homicides give CENAPI less time to assess whether a case is actually related to organized crime activities.

However, given that this did not prevent the release of all the data for 2007-10 in mid-January 2011, there is also speculation that the Mexican government has been withholding data that could reflect negatively on the incumbent National Action Party (PAN) as it gears up for the 2012 presidential election in July. Whatever the reason, the authors attempt to overcome the data gap by estimating the official trend for the final quarter of 2011 by referencing data compiled from Reforma newspaper, as discussed below.

Data Compiled by Reforma Newspaper

There are some alternative sources of information available to estimate the projected death toll for 2011. From 2007 to the present, TBI has relied on figures from Reforma, a Mexico City-based newspaper that releases its tallies of drug related violence on a weekly basis and utilizes a specific methodology for identifying "drug-related killings" (narcoejecuciones). Like the government, Reforma bases its classification on a combination of factors related to a given incident:

- use of high-caliber and automatic weapons typically employed by organized crime groups (e.g., .50 caliber, AK- and AR-type weapons);
- execution-style and mass casualty shootings;
- decapitation or dismemberment of corpses;
- indicative markings, written messages, or unusual configurations of the body;
- presence of large quantities of illicit drugs, cash or weapons;
- official reports explicitly indicting the involvement of organized crime.

Reforma has a national pool of correspondents who monitor and report the number of drug-related killings in their respective jurisdictions on a weekly basis. These data are then aggregated and reported at the state level on the paper's website.

Like government tracking efforts, Reforma's tally of drug related killings have significant limitations. Again, there is no legal basis or court-approved evidence upon which these judgments can

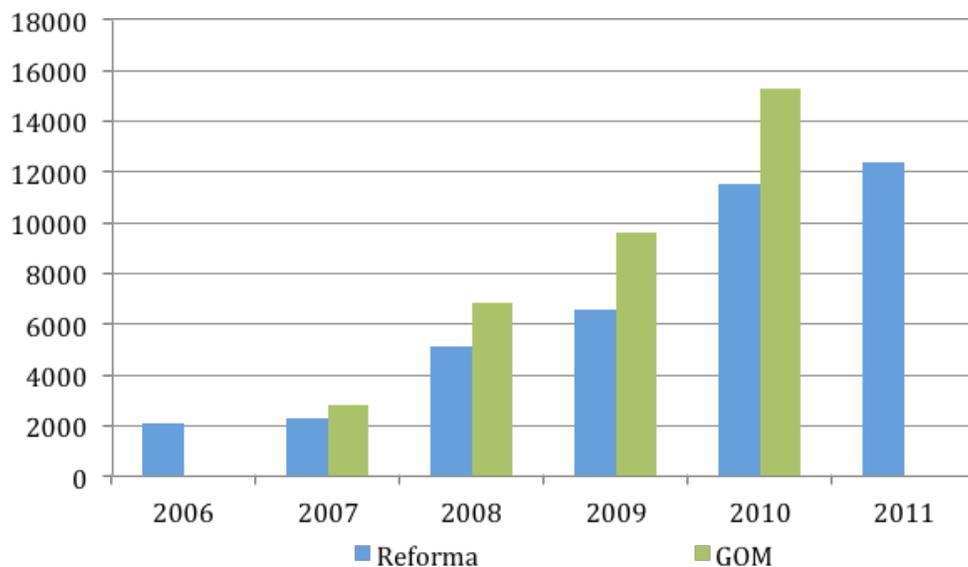
be based, making these classifications somewhat subjective. Reforma's geographic coverage and access to information about the victims is also significantly more limited than the government's, meaning that the newspaper cannot provide as extensive or as accurate an account of the death toll, particularly in areas that are less densely populated and accessible. As is the case of government tallies, Reforma does not release its detailed data on individual cases, so these cannot be corroborated.

Relatedly, unlike the government's data, Reforma's tallies are not available at the municipal level, since the number of correspondents the newspaper has is limited. Reforma's reporting of its own tallies occasionally exhibit inconsistencies from week to week, and in the past year the newspaper has been unresponsive to TBI requests to clarify such issues. Also, because of both the Mexican government's lack of transparency and the lack of detailed reporting by Reforma, it is not possible to know which of the government's "organized crime" killings are not included in Reforma's tallies of drug related homicides. As a result of these considerations, it is necessary to be cautious when using or interpreting these data.

That said, one benefit of relying on Reforma as an auxiliary source is that its data typically track somewhat predictably to trends found in government data. Also, its death toll usually undercounts the official number of organized crime homicides. Hence, Reforma's tally can be viewed as a conservative estimate that is unlikely to include "false positives," thereby avoiding a common error in statistical analysis. However, the main advantage of Reforma's reporting is the consistency with which its data are reported, both in terms of methodology and frequency.

TBI's compilations of Mexican government and Reforma data are available online (www.justicein-mexico.org). For the government of Mexico, TBI has compiled a single data sheet for the first five years of the Calderón administration. For Reforma, TBI has weekly data available from late 2007 to the present, though collection of the data in certain weeks was not possible due to TBI staff limitations. These data compilations make it possible to compare government and Reforma reporting of drug-related violence.

Figure 2. Government of Mexico (GOM) vs. Reforma Annual Tallies of Organized Crime Related Killings



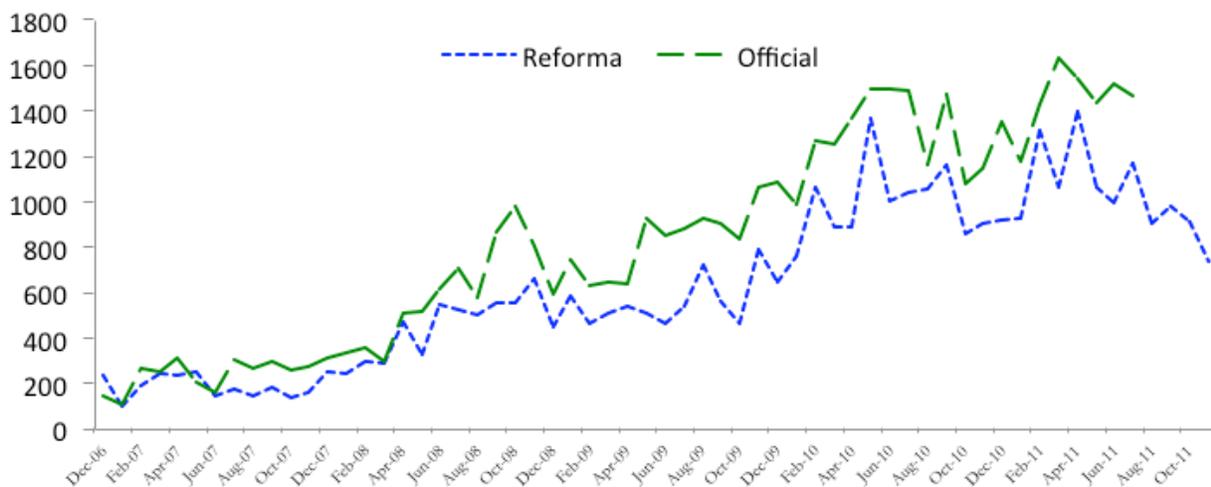
Overall, while the GOM estimated that there were 47,453 homicides from January 2007 through September 2011, Reforma's tally for the same period was 37,531, revealing a significant gap between the two. Moreover, looking at Reforma's track record over time, the newspaper has progressively missed a larger number of cases each year. Reforma had a variance of 551 cases in 2007, 1,618 in 2008, 3,027 in 2009, and 3,690 missing cases in 2010. This growing gap in the absolute number of homicides documented by Reforma would appear to be a significant problem. However, the proportion of the variance in each of these years has remained roughly 25% less than the total number of cases reported by the government: 19.3% less in 2007, 23.6% less in 2008, 31.4% less in 2009, 24.1% less in 2010, and 24.4% less in the first three quarters of 2011.

Looking at all years for which there is comparable data, timing appears to explain a significant part of the variance between government and Reforma data, though it is not clear why. Some months, particularly January, are better covered by Reforma, which has typically only missed about 9% of the cases documented by the government in that month. By comparison, Reforma has missed an average of 41% of the cases in November over the years for which comparable official data are available.

Table 1. Government of Mexico (GOM) vs. Reforma Annual Tallies of Organized Crime Related Killings, 2006-2011*

	2006*	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2011
GOM Data						Q1-3*	Q4
Annual total	n.a.	2,826	6,837	9,614	15,273	12,903	n.a.
Cumulative total	n.a.	2,826	9,663	19,277	34,550	47,453	n.a.
Reforma Data							
Annual total	2,120	2,280	5,219	6,587	11,583	9,742	2,624
Cumulative total	2,120	4,400	9,619	16,206	27,789	37,531	40,155

Figure 3. Government of Mexico (GOM) vs. Reforma Monthly Tallies of Organized Crime Related Killings, 2006-2011



Overall, Reforma does a better job monitoring homicides during the first half of each year, during which it manages to track on average 83% of all cases, compared with only 71% in the second half of the year. When accounting for the total tally in real numbers rather than in percentages, January has been the month with the smallest variance (856) and August the one with the largest (1,379). These temporal variances could be related to varied news cycles or staffing allocations.

In addition to temporal variance over the calendar year, there is significant geographic variance between the government and Reforma. From 2007-11, the states where Reforma underestimated most in absolute terms were Chihuahua, Tamaulipas and Michoacán with 4,049, 1,084 and 988 fewer cases, respectively. This means Reforma missed between 31% and 41% of all official cases documented in these states.

Government of Mexico (GOM) vs. Reforma Tallies, Jan-Sep 2011				
	GOM Data	Reforma Data	Variance (+/-) from GOM	
Aguascalientes	41	29	-12	-29%
Baja California	250	101	-149	-60%
BC Sur	10	7	-3	-30%
Campeche	10	4	-6	-60%
Chiapas	62	26	-36	-58%
Chihuahua	2,289	1,518	-771	-34%
Coahuila	572	400	-172	-30%
Colima	94	71	-23	-24%
Distrito Federal	122	132	10	8%
Durango	709	809	100	14%
Edomex	580	374	-206	-36%
Guanajuato	155	34	-121	-78%
Guerrero	1,538	1,303	-235	-15%
Hidalgo	35	29	-6	-17%
Jalisco	622	570	-52	-8%
Michoacan	544	257	-287	-53%
Morelos	206	91	-115	-56%
Nayarit	353	204	-149	-42%
Nuevo León	1,133	1,377	244	22%
Oaxaca	110	50	-60	-55%
Puebla	55	40	-15	-27%
Querétaro	17	16	-1	-6%
Quintana Roo	48	29	-19	-40%
San Luis Potosi	139	127	-12	-9%
Sinaloa	1,100	1,049	-51	-5%
Sonora	239	106	-133	-56%
Tabasco	88	53	-35	-40%
Tamaulipas	1,108	595	-513	-46%
Tlaxcala	7	2	-5	-71%
Veracruz	538	212	-326	-61%
Yucatán	1	1	0	0%
Zacatecas	128	126	-2	-2%
National total	12,903	9,742	-3,161	-24%

* Data for January-September 2011 only.

In other states, like Campeche, Oaxaca, Chiapas and Veracruz, the share of drug-related homicides that Reforma failed to capture was greater than 60%. The large discrepancies in the latter states do not affect Reforma's overall tally of drug related homicides significantly, however, because they have had relatively small numbers of drug-related homicides (41 in Campeche; 566 in Oaxaca; 366 in Chiapas; and 1,340 in Veracruz).

A closer look at the variance between government and Reforma data in 2011 provides additional useful insights. In 2011, there were only three states where Reforma's monitoring identified more drug related killings than the government. While Reforma tracked 1,377 homicides in the state of Nuevo León from January through September 2011, the government's official tally found only 1,133 killings; an undercount of 244 cases (22%) by the Mexican government, assuming that Reforma's tallies are accurate. A similar variance, although less severe, was also present in the Federal District and the state of Durango, where the Mexican government's figures were lower than Reforma's by 10 cases (8%) and 100 cases (14%), respectively.

The fact that the government's calculations for ten states in 2011 were more than double the level indicated by Reforma suggests that threats against reporters and other limitations may have hindered the media from effectively tracking homicides in these states. For example, the government's tally for Tamaulipas (1,108) was more than double those of Reforma's, and its tally for Veracruz (595) was nearly four times greater than Reforma's (138). Violence and widespread criminal impunity in these states has had a chilling effect on the media, as well as some government efforts to collect data in certain areas.

In short, the available data on Mexican drug violence have different strengths and weaknesses. The variance between the official tally and Reforma's count illustrates the media's limits in tracking all cases under investigation by the government and the need for greater transparency from the Mexican government. This variance also affords a certain degree of confidence that Reforma's tallies are generally quite conservative estimates of the total amount of drug-related violence. Moreover, we believe that the correspondence in the overall trends detected by the newspaper make it possible to estimate aggregate trends with a greater degree of confidence than mere retrospective averaging. Considering variances at the state and national level between the two sources, the authors calculate the likely trend for drug related violence through the end of the year 2011 (see textbox discussion).

Reforma identified an additional, 2,624 drug related homicides for the final quarter of 2011 (October-December), which suggests that the government of Mexico's final tally for this period will be around 3,253 organized crime homicides, assuming a 24% variance between these sources at the national level. That would bring the total number of organized crime homicides for 2011 to around 16,400. Cumulatively, the number of organized crime homicides for the first five years of the Calderón administration would be well above the threshold of 50,000 deaths, or 10,000 per year on average.

Projecting Official Results for 2011

In the absence of government data for the last three months of 2011, it is tempting to try to estimate the final official tally for the year based on the average for the first nine months. Doing so would lead to a prediction of over 17,000 killings, as suggested by the private intelligence firm Stratfor in its January 2011 report on drug violence. Unfortunately, such estimates are overly simplistic and fail to take into consideration a significant downward trend observable in Reforma's data in the latter part of the year. Considering that the newspaper typically underestimates drug-related homicides by about 25%, the authors used the national- and state-level trends identified by Reforma from October to December 2011 to estimate the government's projected final count for 2011 (considering both the temporal and state-level variances noted above). This provides what is probably a more precise estimate of the government's anticipated final tally for 2011, which is likely to be around 16,400 organized crime homicides. That would bring the total number of organized crime homicides to more than 50,800 deaths from December 2006 to December 2011, confirming the estimates of numerous observers and non-governmental organizations.

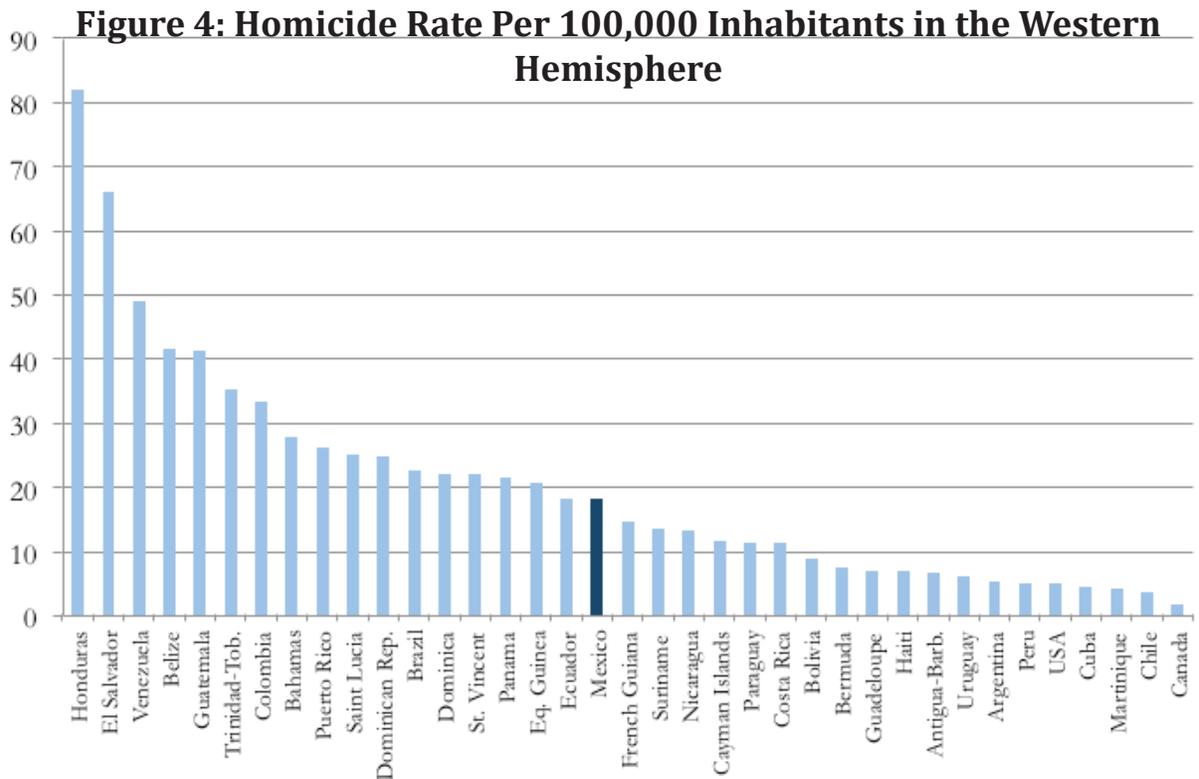
Description of Overall Trends

Sorting through various monitoring efforts described thus far, the authors give preference to the government's official tally of suspected organized crime homicides, recognizing that these figures may include cases not related to drug trafficking. At the same time, in order to demonstrate trends that predate the current administration, the authors refer to official statistics obtained from Reforma, the Mexican national statistical agency (INEGI), the World Health Organization (WHO), and other agencies and data gathering efforts. While the numbers vary across these different sources, the trends that they reveal are closely correlated. What emerges is a statistical profile of drug violence and victimization in Mexico.

Before discussing these trends, it is worth noting that things could be much worse for Mexico. While the toll of recent organized crime homicides in Mexico has been enormous, some perspective is needed to contextualize this violence. As bad as things might seem, Mexico's national homicide rate (18 per 100,000 inhabitants) is about average for the hemisphere. Moreover, Mexico's homicide rate pales in comparison to Honduras (82), El Salvador (66), Venezuela (49), Belize (41), and Guatemala (41), Colombia (33), the Bahamas (28), Brazil (22), and the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico (26). In other words, it is important not to exaggerate Mexico's security situation.

Violence Continues to Rise, But Far Less Sharply

There is still no doubt that Mexico's security is bad, and grew significantly worse in 2011. Orga-



Source: <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/homicide.html>

nized crime homicides have increased to become the greatest share of all homicides, as well as the primary cause of unnatural death for young people in Mexico. In 2007, drug violence was the cause of 31.9% of all intentional homicides documented by the Mexican statistical agency, INEGI. By 2010 and 2011, drug violence accounted for 63.4% and 53.8% of all intentional homicides (homicidio doloso), respectively.

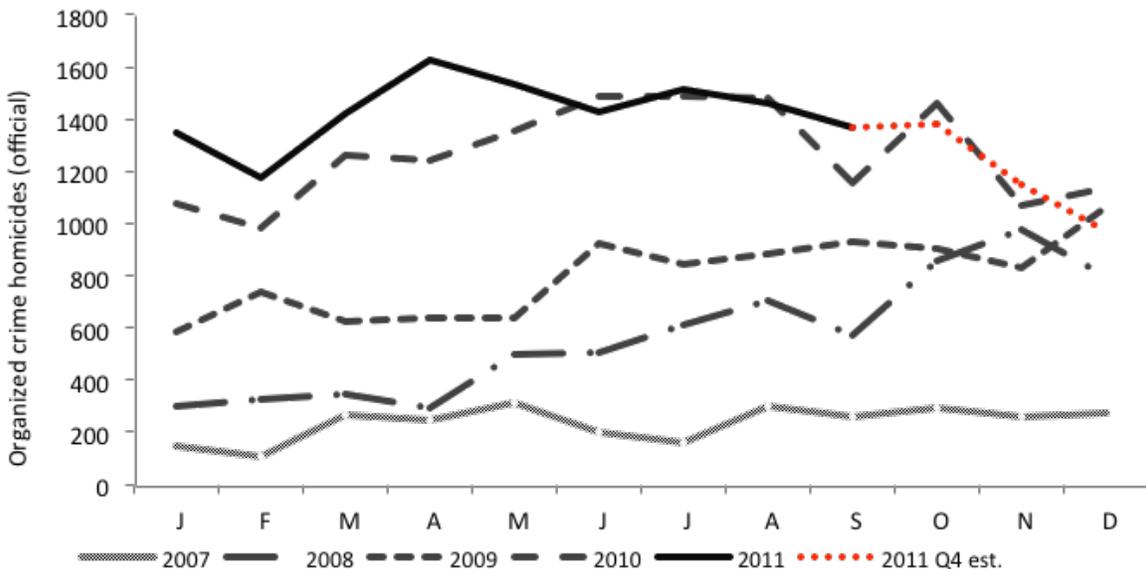
Mexico’s overall homicide rate thus hinges critically on whether drug violence will recede or worsen in the coming years. The Mexican government’s official tally of organized crime killings from January through September 2011 suggests that such violence increased by 11% from the same period in 2010. This estimated increase is roughly in proportion with the estimates by Reforma, which documented a 9.8% increase comparing the same time periods. These increases suggest that Mexico’s homicide rate for 2011 will rise, possibly pushing Mexico to the levels seen in Ecuador or even Panama, but still remaining low compared with the worst cases in Latin America.

Meanwhile, Mexico’s 10-11% increase in 2011 constitutes an improvement in the trajectory of violence in Mexico. That is, the rate of increase in 2011 looks relatively good compared with the increases seen in 2008 (141.9%), 2009 (40.6%), and 2010 (58.8%). If violence in 2011 had increased at past rates, there would have been between 20,000 to 30,000 drug related homicides in a single year.

Based on the available official data alone, the fact that the arc of violence began to plateau in 2011 suggests that Mexico may have reached a critical turning point, or at least a lull after years of escalation. Indeed, since the high point of March 2011, which saw an all-time monthly record of 1,630 official organized crime killings, violence diminished significantly through September.

Figure 5. National Totals of Organized Crime Homicides By Month from 2007-2011

(Authors’ Estimates for Final Quarter of 2011, October-December)



Moreover, using Reforma's data to make informed projections, this trend holds true through the end of 2011 and into 2012.

The fact that the trajectory of violence is leveling off is small cause for celebration. The fact remains that violence continued to increase overall in 2011, remains at extraordinarily high levels, and could easily spike unexpectedly in 2012, as has happened in the past. There were nearly six times the number of killings in 2011 compared with 2007. Moreover, at the high volume of killings Mexico is currently experiencing, the 11% percent increase in 2011 still amounts to an estimated 1,650 additional unnecessary deaths over the previous year.

Geographic Trends: Concentration and Dispersion of Drug Violence

The general geographic trend of Mexico's violence in recent years has been a high degree of concentration in certain cities and rural areas primarily associated with drug trafficking or cultivation. The most violent state was Chihuahua, with 2,925 organized crime homicides accounting for 17.8% of the national toll in 2011. Four other states, Tamaulipas (1,257 killings), Nuevo León (1,472 killings), Sinaloa (1,481 killings) and Guerrero (1,813 killings), surpassed one thousand organized crime homicides each, accounting for another 36.7% of Mexico's organized crime homicides. Six other states that had more than 500 killings each accounted for another 29.3% of the total. Following the trend seen in previous years, about half a dozen of states—notably Yucatán, Campeche, Tlaxcala and Baja California Sur—have been largely free of violence, with less than 15 cases of organized crime homicides observed during the whole year.

The highest casualties of violence are found in just a handful of Mexican cities, where thousands of people were victims of organized crime violence in 2011. The concentration of violence is further illustrated by the fact that only 17 cities had more than 100 organized crime homicides in 2011, 26 had between 50-100, and 163 had between 10-50. The most violent city was Ciudad Juárez, as has been the case since 2008. Ciudad Juárez had 2,101 organized crime homicides in 2010, and 1,206 such homicides during the first nine months of 2011. Although the number of organized crime homicides in that city dropped by more than 30% compared with the same time period in 2010, the total for 2011 was probably still greater than 2,000 organized crime homicides. In Monterrey, in the state of Nuevo León, the number of killings reached nearly the same level, at least a threefold increase over 2010.

These are two cities of slightly over 1 million inhabitants with more than 2,000 homicides each in 2011. By comparison, nine of the 10 most populous cities of the United States—New York City (209), Los Angeles (613), Chicago (441), Houston (195), Philadelphia (318), San Antonio (88), San Diego (38), Dallas (133), and San Jose (41)—had 2,076 homicides, combined in 2011. Current data were not available for Phoenix, the seventh largest U.S. city, which had 122 homicides in 2009. However, the point remains that many U.S. citizens may find it difficult to comprehend the level of violence occurring right next door.

Meanwhile, in January 2012, the Mexican non-governmental organization Citizens' Council for Public Safety and Justice (Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal) reported that 19 Mexican cities were among the 50 most violent cities in the world during 2011. Of the cities included, five were in the world's top ten, including Acapulco, Ciudad Juárez, Torreón, Chihuahua,

Table 3. Monthly Totals of Organized Crime Homicides By State in 2011, With Authors' Estimates for Final Quarter (October-December)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Agascalientes	7	8	5	5	5	7	2	1	1	0	0	6	47
Baja California	36	16	41	28	30	26	21	22	30	57	25	20	351
BC Sur	2	0	0	1	0	2	1	4	0	1	3	0	14
Campeche	1	1	4	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	10
Coahuila	40	46	50	40	62	94	79	64	97	106	70	103	851
Colima	7	15	11	2	15	12	10	13	9	11	8	4	117
Chiapas	11	7	7	13	4	4	6	9	1	0	0	0	62
Chihuahua	301	268	254	251	213	252	273	231	246	264	238	134	2,925
Distrito Federal	23	15	12	17	12	8	11	17	7	14	18	14	167
Durango	69	20	51	174	222	59	43	39	32	23	46	53	830
Guanajuato	20	19	12	21	15	24	13	14	17	5	0	5	164
Guerrero	144	134	162	152	193	164	213	222	154	148	105	22	1,813
Hidalgo	6	3	10	9	0	2	0	1	4	4	2	7	48
Jalisco	65	41	76	59	65	80	96	75	65	48	106	71	847
Mexico State	42	71	50	65	47	79	79	72	75	33	60	31	704
Michoacan	42	43	63	51	67	86	68	74	50	61	47	36	688
Morelos	20	23	33	25	19	16	19	29	22	18	32	20	276
Nayarit	40	30	45	45	61	32	36	42	22	10	9	3	375
Nuevo León	110	84	81	90	141	153	212	150	112	118	126	95	1,472
Oaxaca	20	9	9	13	11	6	10	14	18	2	7	9	128
Puebla	3	12	11	4	6	7	2	9	1	6	6	8	74
Querétaro	0	5	4	2	2	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	17
Quintana Roo	7	3	8	1	5	6	3	8	7	5	5	7	65
San Luis Potosi	34	26	15	11	28	6	8	3	8	4	12	3	159
Sinaloa	114	98	123	176	105	117	121	134	112	127	130	124	1,481
Sonora	41	24	53	31	16	16	17	10	31	41	18	23	320
Tabasco	7	3	14	6	19	13	12	10	4	0	2	3	93
Tamaulipas	90	107	162	291	141	78	73	80	86	86	11	52	1,257
Tlaxcala	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	2	0	4	0	4	14
Veracruz	39	25	43	39	21	77	63	96	135	180	63	107	888
Yucatán	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Zacatecas	10	20	12	6	13	4	28	13	22	9	6	11	154
National total	1,351	1,176	1,424	1,630	1,539	1,433	1,519	1,461	1,370	1,383	1,153	974	16,414

Table 4. Top Ten Most Violent Municipalities in Mexico in 2010 and 2011 (Compared to Largest Cities in the United States)

	2010		2011 (Q1-3)		2011
Municipality	Casualties	Municipality	Casualties	Largest U.S. Cities	
Juarez	2,101	Juarez	1,206	Los Angeles	613
Chihuahua	536	Acapulco	795	Chicago	441
Culiacan	465	Torreón	476	Philadelphia	318
Tijuana	349	Chihuahua	402	New York	209
Torreón	256	Monterrey	399	Houston	195
Gomez Palacio	244	Durango	390	Dallas	133
Mazatlan	233	Culiacan	365	Phoenix	122
Acapulco	174	San Fernando	292	San Antonio	88
Nogales	167	Tepic	196	San Jose	41
Ahome	166	Mazatlan	191	San Diego	38
TOTAL	4,691		4,712		2,198
*Only considers months from January to September of each year. Unlike with state-level statistics authors were unable to accurately predict the number of drug-related homicides happening in the last three months of 2011 using newspaper sources.					

and Durango. In 2011, Monterrey and Veracruz were newly added to the list, while Tijuana, Matamoros, and Reynosa were dropped from the top 50.

Violence Decreased in Some Places, But Spread More Widely

Using the above-mentioned projections for 2011, the most important estimated annual reductions in violence from 2010 to 2011 occurred in Chihuahua, (approximately 1,500 fewer organized crime homicides), Sinaloa (approximately 300 fewer), Baja California (approximately 190 fewer) and Sonora (approximately 175 fewer). Other states that experienced reductions of more than 10% with respect to 2010 were Morelos, Oaxaca, Distrito Federal and Chiapas. Changes in Chihuahua alone accounted for over two-thirds of all the reductions in violence happening in the country, while the next largest reductions were found in Sinaloa (which accounted for roughly 14% of the total estimated reduction).

At the municipal level, where reliable projections are not possible due to a lack of comparable data from other sources, increases and decreases must be measured comparing the official data from January to September 2011 to the same period from the previous year. The largest decreases were found in Juárez (859 fewer organized crime homicides), Tijuana (166 fewer) and Chihuahua (134 fewer). When accounting for proportions rather than total toll, the largest reductions in organized crime homicides were concentrated in Miguel Alemán, Nogales, and Culiacán, which saw at least a 70% reduction in violence compared with 2010.

Unfortunately, these significant reductions in organized crime homicides were offset by increases elsewhere in the country, resulting in a greater geographic distribution of violence in 2011 than in 2010. In 2010, three states – Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Tamaulipas – alone accounted for over half of the nationwide total, but in 2011 the top three states, with Nuevo León replacing Tamaulipas, accounted for just over 41% of the violence. Violence rose most noticeably in Nuevo León, with an increase of approximately 850 organized crime homicides, Veracruz (an increase of 709), Guerrero (an increase of approximately 680) and Coahuila (an increase of approximately 470). Changes in these four states alone likely accounted for 77% of all the increases in violence that occurred in 2011.

Veracruz presents an especially dramatic example, with drug-related homicides rising from an estimated 113 organized crime homicides from 2007 to 2010, to 888 such killings in 2011 alone. As a result, Veracruz moved from being the 16th most violent state in Mexico to the 6th place, in just one year. No other state experienced such a dramatic increase in the ranking of organized crime homicides in 2011, even though violence threefold in Zacatecas (from 37 cases in 2010 to 154 in 2011) and twofold in Tlaxcala (from 4 to 14 cases).

At the municipal level, there was dispersion of violence in 2011, as noted by Mexican criminologist Eduardo Guerrero in an article in Nexos magazine. The largest increases were found in Acapulco (612 more cases), Monterrey (166 more cases) and Durango (134 more cases). The largest proportional increases from 2010 to 2011 were found in the cities of Veracruz (from 7 to 155), Boca del Río (1 to 94) and San Nicolás Garza (from 10 to 77).

Figure 6. Geographic Distribution of Organized Crime Related Killings in Mexico January 1, 2008 to September 30, 2011

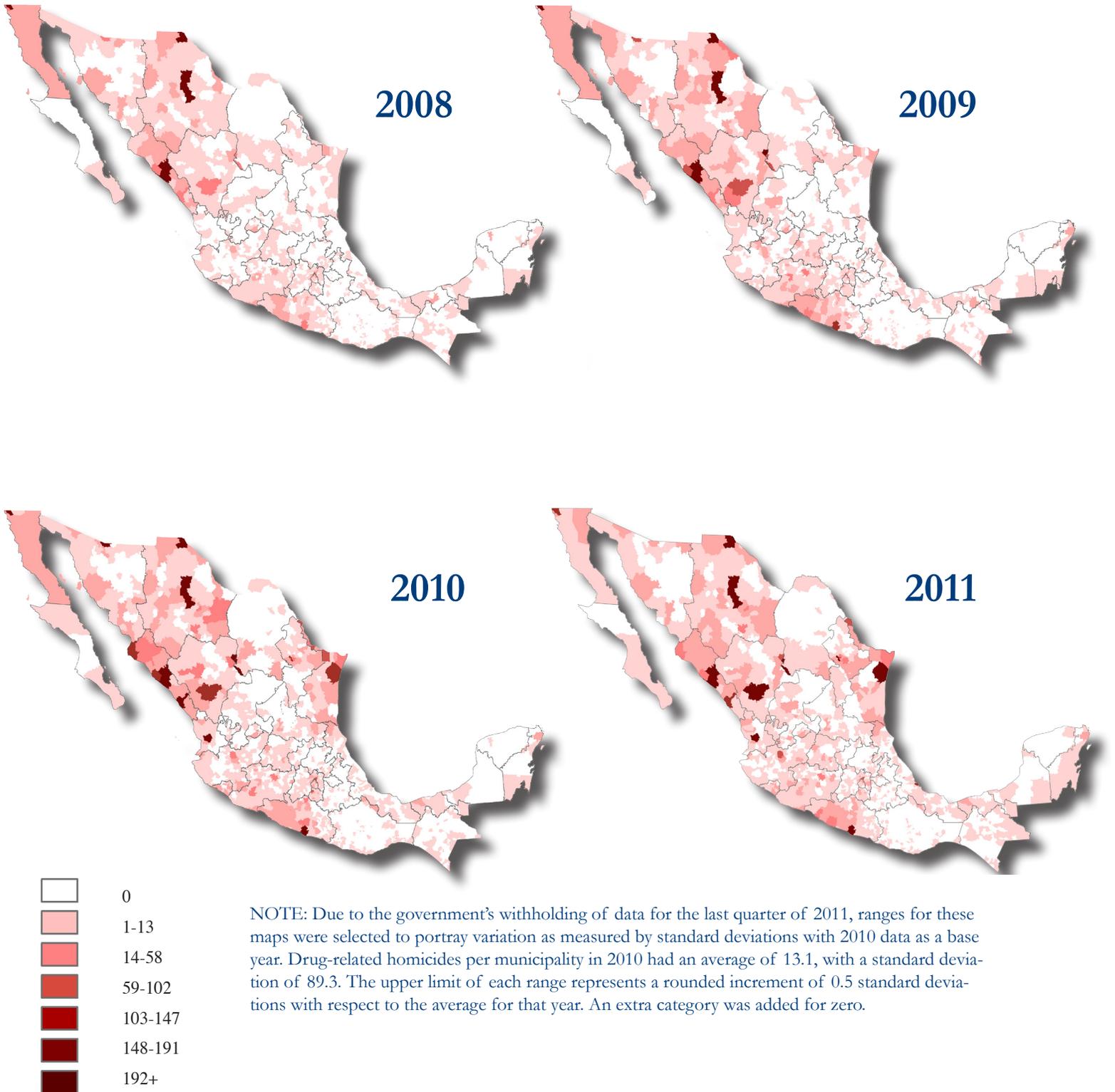


Table 5. Dispersion of Organized Crime Homicides at the Municipal Level

Municipalities with:	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
100 or more organized crime homicides	2	4	7	18	17
50 to 99 organized crime homicides	3	4	7	19	26
10 and 49 organized crime homicides	40	62	103	146	163
Zero drug-related homicides	799	612	515	401	427

At the same time, violence grew more widely distributed to a larger number of municipalities, continuing the trend seen in previous years. While the five most violent cities in Mexico accounted for roughly 32% of drug related killings in 2010, they accounted for only about 24% of the violence in 2011. In 2010, Ciudad Juárez alone accounted for 18.2% of the violence, while in 2011 it only accounted for 9.5%. To provide some perspective, in order to match the proportion of violence found in Ciudad Juárez in 2010, we would need to add the killings found in two more cities, Acapulco (6.9%) and Torreon (4.5%), to its share of violence in 2011.

Consistent with this trend toward the dispersion of violence, the number of municipalities with 50-100 drug-related homicides grew from 3 in 2007 to 26 through September 2011, while the number with 10-50 drug-related homicides grew from 40 to 163 during the same time period. At the same time, the number of cities that had no drug related homicides declined from 799 in 2007 to 401 in 2010, though this was partially offset by the first three quarters of 2011 when in the number of municipalities with no drug related killings increased by 6% (427 total). The fact remains that only a fraction of Mexico's municipalities (16%) are untouched by violence.

The relocation of violence is particularly noticeable at the border. In 2010, 50% of officially registered organized crime related homicides occurred in Mexico's six border states. In 2011 the share of such homicides in Mexican border states dropped to 44%. At the municipal level, the changes are even more noticeable, shifting from 29.5% of all killings found in border municipalities in 2010 to only 17% in 2011. Since the decline in violence in the state of Chihuahua (from 4,427 to 2,925 cases) was nearly negated by the sharp increases in Nuevo León and Coahuila, the growing share of violence in non-border states reflects a real and worrisome absolute increase in violence in Mexico's interior.

Special Victims of Drug Violence

While the Mexican government's publicly released data are not disaggregated beyond raw numbers, Reforma's tally and other sources provide some indication about the trends affecting certain special categories of victims, including military and law enforcement authorities (i.e. policemen, soldiers), politicians, journalists, and young people.

Since 2008, the year in which Reforma first started counting police and military victims, at least 377 police officers and 35 soldiers have been executed per year. The tally for 2011 was 547 policemen and 44 soldiers, a reduction of 168 and 17, respectively, from 2010. Meanwhile, politicians have also been significantly targeted, including the 29 mayors (i.e. presidentes municipales) assassinated since 2007, according to a list of mayoral assassinations compiled from newspaper reports beginning over the last fifteen years. That said, while six mayors were assassinated in 2011, this was significantly lower than the 15 mayors killed in 2010. It is unclear whether this downward trend will continue into 2012, an election year.

Figure 7. Mayors Assassinated in Mexico, 1994-2011

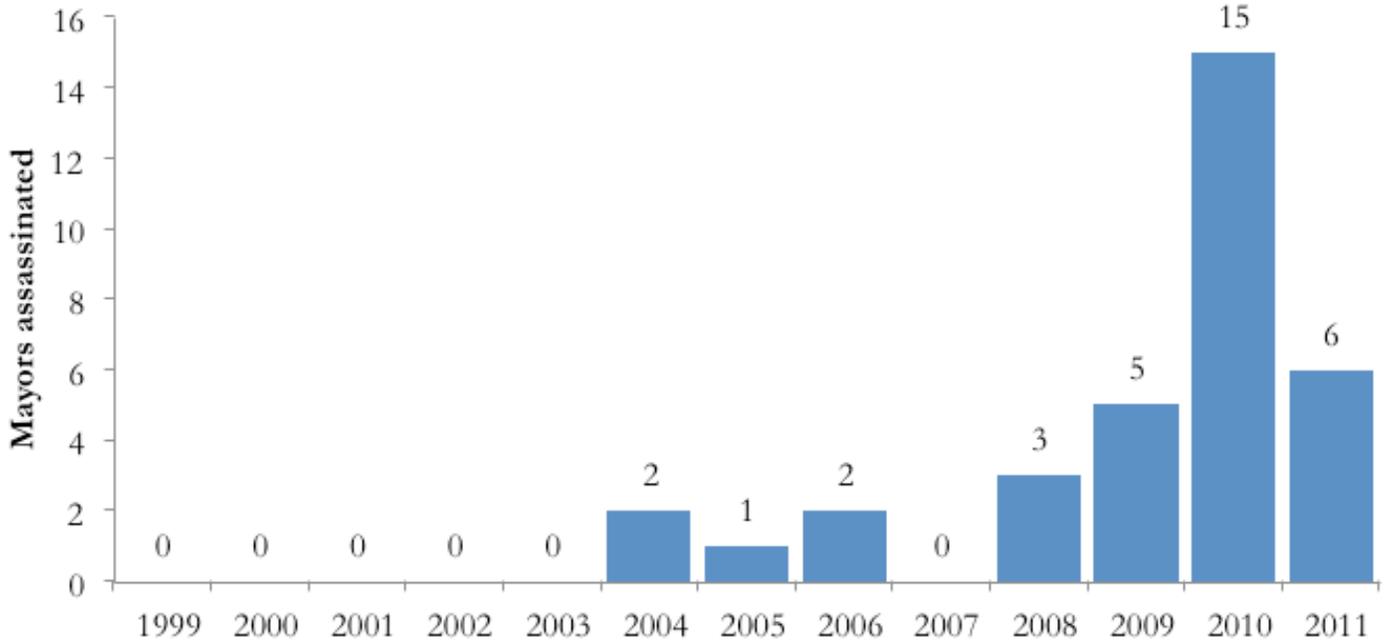
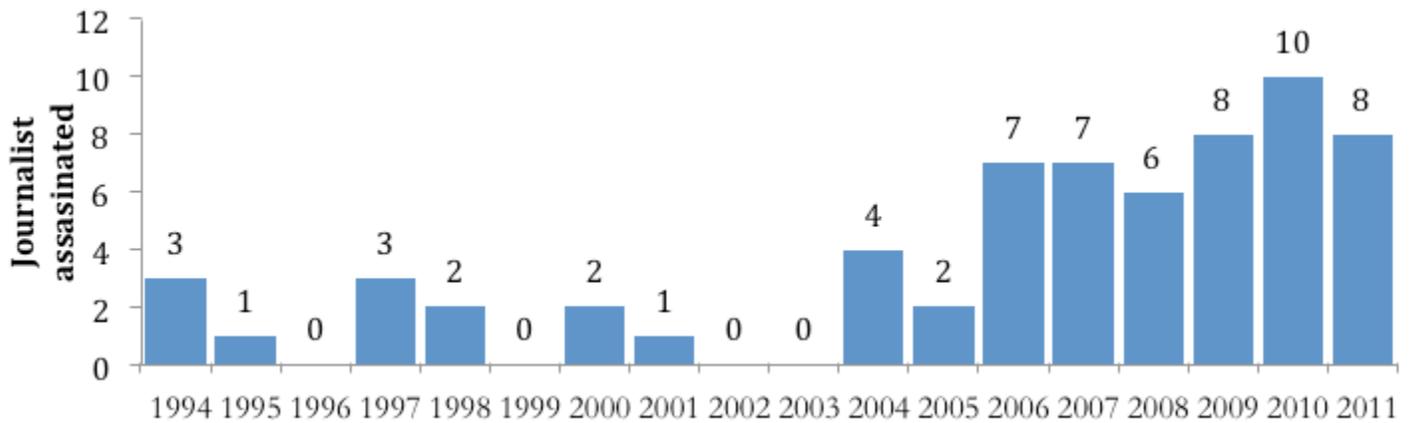


Figure 8. Journalists Assassinated in Mexico, 1994-2011



Meanwhile, in 2011, Mexico continued to be among the top-five countries in the world with the largest number of assassinations of journalists, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. On average more than 7 journalists have been killed in Mexico each year since 2007, with a record of 10 assassinations in 2010. In December 2011, the press freedom advocacy group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) identified the state of Veracruz as one of the 10 most dangerous places in the world for practicing journalism. The organization based its finding on the three journalists killed in that state in 2011, and another 12 that had to go into exile due to what RSF deemed to be “inaction, even complicity from the authorities” regarding threats to journalists. Veracruz now ranks among cities in Egypt, Libya, Syria, and the Ivory Coast as the most dangerous in the world for journalists.

RSF pointed to the worsening security conditions in the state, including the military operation Veracruz Seguro, as reasons for the state's dubious recognition. Veracruz Seguro was initiated in October 2011, following the discovery of 35 bodies abandoned on a main thoroughfare in the city of Boca del Río. "In 2011, Veracruz became the new epicenter of the federal offensive against the cartels," the organization said, adding that "various types of criminal commerce intersect [in the state], that go from trafficking drugs to contraband gasoline."

Meanwhile, according to Reforma's data-gathering efforts, recent years have seen an increase in the number and proportion of women killed amid the rise in Mexico's violence. While only 194 women were killed by organized criminal activity in 2008, 904 lost their lives to such violence in 2011. At the same time, the share of organized crime homicides that killed women went from 3.7% per year to 7.3% in just three years.

In addition to women, the youth sector of the population has been hit hard by the violence. In September 2011, *El Universal* reported that the number of young people aged 15 to 29 that were killed by drug related violence has increased significantly, becoming the leading cause of death for young people in recent years: 2007 (366), 2008 (1,638), 2009 (2,511), and 2010 (3,741). The latter trend has led many authorities and experts to push for greater efforts to address the problem of uneducated and unemployed youth known as "ni-ni's" because they neither study, nor work (*ni trabajan, ni estudian*).

Overall, at least 9.5% of all victims of drug-related violence in 2011 were tortured before being executed (1,173 cases), and 4.5% of the bodies were found decapitated (556 cases). The number and proportion of torture cases and decapitations grew in 2011 relative to 2010, when they represented 7.8% and 3.4% of cases, respectively. Reliable statistics are not available for other acts of brutality, including the mutilation of bodies both before and after death. Still, the available data suggests that violence is not only more prevalent, but also crueler and more gruesome. The partial profile of victims that emerges from the scant data found in publicly available sources is stark. A growing number of law enforcement personnel, officials, journalists, women, and children joined the ranks of Mexico's dead in 2011, and many victims of violence were subject to horrifying acts of torture and mutilation. On average, for every day of 2011, 47 people were killed, three of whom were tortured, one of whom was decapitated, two of whom were women, and ten of whom were young people whose lives ended in organized crime related violence.

Analysis of Recent Trends

The above noted trends are widely attributed to the Mexican government's efforts to crack down on organized crime groups, and the fractionalization of organized crime groups that has occurred in recent years. Below, we examine these two general trends, with special attention to the trends in 2011.

Mexican Counter-Drug Efforts

Since the international prohibition of psychotropic substances beginning in the early 20th century, Mexican authorities have maintained efforts to eradicate illicit drug production, interdict contraband, and disrupt the organizations that traffic in these substances. However, at different

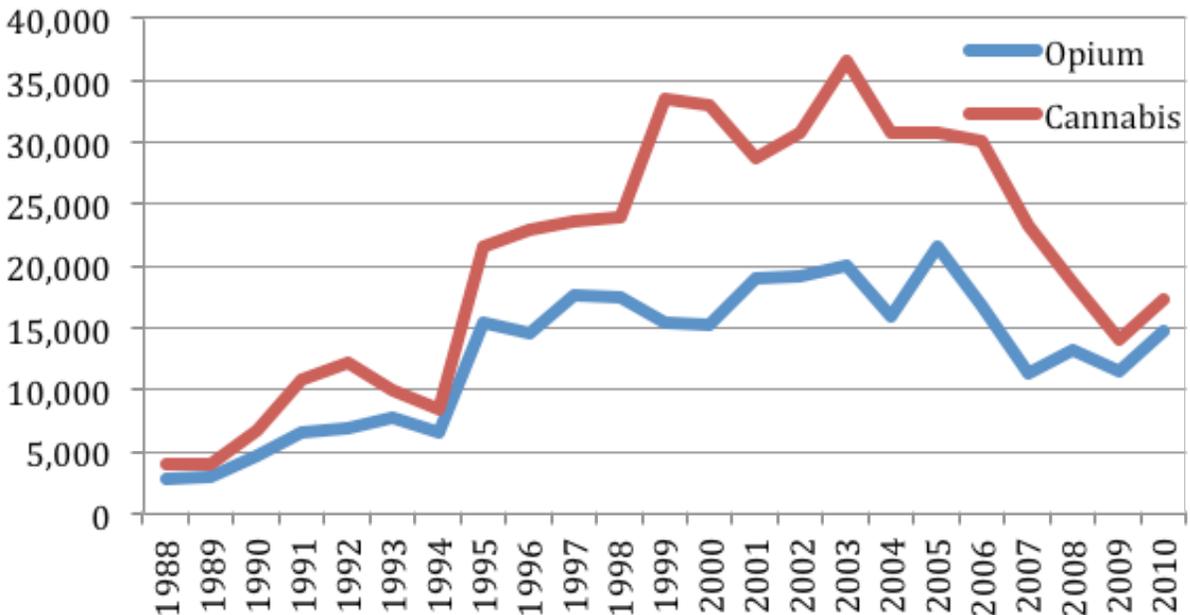
points in time, the Mexican government has placed greater emphasis on certain strategies over others. Often, such efforts have been hindered by the adaptability of organized crime groups, widespread corruption among government officials, and a lack of shared priorities and trust in U.S.-Mexico collaborative efforts.

By the 1980s, President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-88) proclaimed drug trafficking to be a national security problem, partly under pressure from U.S. authorities displeased by the fact that Mexican traffickers were beginning to take over cocaine smuggling routes from their Colombian counterparts. Despite de la Madrid's proclamation, drug trafficking continued to grow in Mexico under his successor, Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94), as the share of cocaine passing through Mexico into the United States grew from 30% in the mid-1980s, to at least 50% by the 1990s.

In this context, the eradication of the illicit crops Mexico produces domestically —opium and marijuana, especially— appeared to be a top priority for Mexican authorities, as eradication efforts reached very high levels in the late 1990s and early 2000s under Mexican presidents Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) and Vicente Fox (2000-2006). These blows significantly altered the balance of power, contributing to intense conflict among the cartels, which in turn generated growing levels of violence (see text box on the next page). The infighting and competition that ensued set the stage for the Calderón administration to confront drug trafficking organizations in a very direct way upon taking office, emphasizing the potential threat they posed to national security and drawing heavily on the support of the military.

Under President Calderón, counter drug efforts become much more intensely focused on seizures of illicit drugs and arrests of drug traffickers, than on eradication. Indeed, while opium and especially marijuana crop eradication fell precipitously in the first four years of the Calderón administration, authorities attained high levels of drug seizures (especially for opium and meth-

Figure 10. Illicit Crop Eradication in Mexico, 1988-2010

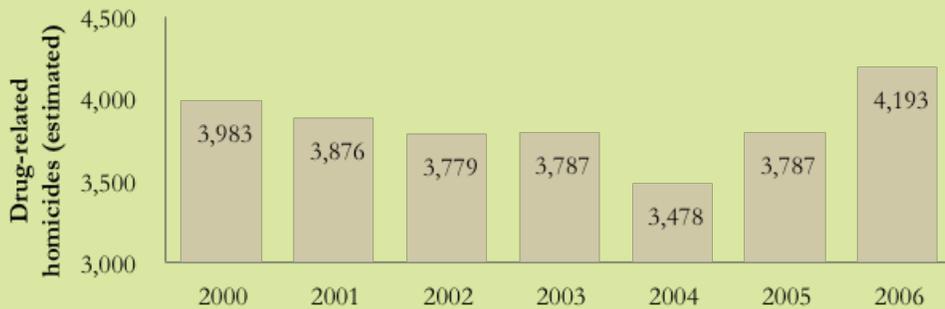


Measuring Historical Trends in Drug Violence

Fairly little is known about the temporal and geographical patterns of this type of violence prior to 2006. There is little empirical evidence of when or where the drug-related violence first escalated. Using a multiple imputation algorithm and Bayesian statistics as part of her Ph.D. dissertation, Rios has developed a methodology to measure the historical trends of drug-related homicides.

The Rios algorithm draws on documentation of how violence correlates with the demand and supply of illegal drugs, as well as with other types of homicides and crimes. The resulting measures provide information of drug-related homicides in historical perspective, for 2000-2010, yearly, for all Mexican states, and 100 selected municipalities.

Figure 9. Drug Related Killings Estimated Retrospectively, 2000-2006



The numbers of drug-related homicides calculated by Rios provide three important insights. First, drug-related violence was likely limited to 3,000-4,000 thousand cases for all years from 2000 to 2006, which is higher than other estimates for this period generated by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH). Second, drug-related violence had been diminishing systematically, along with all homicides in Mexico from 2000 until 2005. At that point, prior to the start of the Calderón administration, drug related violence started to escalate. Third, drug related violence escalated quickly. In just one year, from 2004 to 2005, the historical projection for drug related killings likely increased by nearly 9%. Violence increased by nearly 11% from 2005 to 2006, and was concentrated largely in Chihuahua and Michoacán. Together these two states accounted for about 38.7% of all the 501 new cases that occurred in 2005.

Documenting historical patterns of drug violence is important because critics argue that the Calderón administration launched its assault on drug traffickers as a political move to legitimize the administration after the controversial presidential election of 2006. These estimates suggest that drug-markets were already unstable and were becoming increasingly violent since at least 2004, providing at least a plausible justification for the government's efforts. Still, as the authors argue in this report, regardless of political motivations, the Calderón administration clearly failed to anticipate the spiral of violence that subsequently resulted from government intervention, continued destabilization, and increased competition in the drug trade.

amphetamine) and the average number of drug-related arrests each year reached record levels. Meanwhile, Calderón also worked with his northern counterparts, George Bush (2000-08) and Barack Obama (2008-) to develop a nearly \$2 billion U.S. assistance program known as the Mérida Initiative, which focuses on counter-drug assistance, judicial reform, and community development. The articulation of this framework to address a mutual threat by focusing the shared responsibilities of each country helped boost cross-border collaboration and intelligence sharing to make further gains against drug trafficking organizations.

U.S.-Mexico cooperation under the Merida Initiative has also been criticized for having slow and bureaucratic processes for transferring aid, and for a lack of effective cross-border and inter-agency coordination (including major scandals over clandestine U.S. programs to allow guns and money to flow to drug traffickers in Mexico). However, overall the program is viewed as a success by both the Calderón and Obama administrations, and collaboration under the initiative is credited with significant blows to drug trafficking organizations.

The Reconfiguration of Organized Crime in Mexico

The regulatory environment in which organized crime groups operate significantly determine the dynamics among them. The trends in violence discussed earlier are therefore at least partly a reflection of counter-drug efforts in Mexico over the last two decades. For example, in the 1980s, the arrest of one of the pioneers of cocaine smuggling in Mexico, Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, and his associates in the Guadalajara Cartel contributed to the emergence of a new era of competition among four major drug trafficking organizations: 1) the Juárez Cartel, 2) the Tijuana Cartel, 3) the Sinaloa Cartel, and 4) the Gulf Cartel.

While these four organizations dominated the drug trade for most of the 1990s, they exhibited rivalries and tensions that later exploded into major conflicts, particularly after the arrest or killing of key drug kingpins like Benjamín Arellano Felix of the Tijuana Cartel (arrested in 2002) and Osiel Cárdenas of the Gulf Cartel (arrested in 2003) during the Fox administration.

During the Calderón administration, the splintering of organized crime groups and related infighting—particularly in the Beltrán Leyva cartel following the death of Arturo Beltrán Leyva in December 2009—contributed to a further escalation of violence in Pacific and central states, most notably Guerrero, which has seen increases in its ejecuciones of around 50% over the past two years, amassing 984 in 2010 and 1,536 in 2011. The epicenter of violence in that southern Pacific state has been in the resort city of Acapulco, which has seen its tourism industry decimated by large-scale, public acts of violence by warring cartel splinter groups.

Jalisco has seen a similar surge over the past year. In November, 26 bodies were found bound and gagged in Guadalajara, casualties of what security experts believe is an escalating battle between the Zetas and the Sinaloa drug cartel for control of Mexico's second-largest city, previously relatively unaffected by cartel violence. The surges in these two states have more than offset a 30% decline in ejecuciones in Sinaloa, which was the most violent Pacific state in 2010 and 2009, eclipsed in 2011 by Guerrero.

The loss of leadership within certain criminal organizations (cartels) has led to the emergence of

smaller, splinter organizations operating in the local level and at different stages. The most emblematic cases of splits within cartels are the rupture between the Gulf Cartel and their former allies, the Zetas, and the one within the Arellano Felix Organization (AFO), also known as Tijuana Cartel, that occasioned dramatic episodes of violence in cities such as Nuevo León, Tijuana, and Torreón. Reforma points out six specific new cartels that rose from breaks in the structure of three bigger organizations: the Beltran Leyva Organization (BLO), the Sinaloa Cartel, and La Familia Michoacána (LFM).

The killing of Arturo Beltrán Leyva, “El Barbas,” in December of 2009 provoked a split within the BLO and the further creation of two rival fractions, one that maintained the line of command of the cartel with Arturo’s sibling, Hector Beltrán Leyva, “El H,” as the leader, and the other created by Edgar Valdés Villareal, “La Barbie.”

In March 2010, Sergio Villareal Barragán, “El Grande,” a lieutenant for “El H,” broke with him and created the South Pacific Cartel (Cartel del Pacífico Sur, CPS). Then in August 2010, “La Barbie” was detained and his group further split and created two new rival organizations, the first being the Independent Cartel of Acapulco (Cartel Independiente de Acapulco, CIDA) in November 2010 led by Carlos Antonio Barragán Hernández, “El Melón,” and Moises Montero Álvarez, “El Coreano,” who was arrested on August 2011.

The second organization created was La Barredora, led by Heder Jair Sosa Carvajal, “El Cremas,” and Christian Arturo Hernández Tarín, “El Chris,” who was arrested in October 2011. While the CPS seems to be in extinction –with its principal leaders arrested, “El Grande” in September 2010 and Julio Jesús Radilla Hernández, “El Negro Radilla” in May 2011–, and the CIDA weakened –with “El Coreano” arrested–, La Barredora was considered to be rising despite the arrest of “El Chris.”

Very recently, however, on the morning of February 10, 2012, Jonathan Martínez Santos, thought to be the second in command and operative leader of La Barredora, was detained in Acapulco, which is considered to be a big blow to the organization. The CPS and La Barredora are currently fighting for the control of Acapulco, which, along with the whole state of Guerrero in general, experienced a dramatic spike in drug related violence during the 2011. The state saw more than 1,500 homicides last year, more than 50% above the state levels for 2010.

The Sinaloa Cartel, arguably the most powerful organization in Mexico, also experienced some schisms. With the capture of important lieutenants –Oscar Orlando Nava Valencia, “El Lobo,” in October 2009 and Juan Carlos Nava Valencia, “El Tigre,” in May 2010– the group commanded by Ignacio “Nacho” Coronel started to have internal divisions. From the Sinaloa Cartel, the group known as “The Resistance” (La Resistencia) emerged from Nacho Coronel’s group in June 2010 and was led by Ramiro Pozos González, “Molca,” operating in the states of Jalisco and Michoacán.

Later that year, in July 2010, Nacho Coronel was killed by the Army and that led to the emergence of a new group in August 2010 called the Jalisco Cartel “New Generation” (Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG). The Resistance has been weakened because of its dispute with CJNG and also

for the arrest of one of its leaders in February of 2011, Victor Manuel Torres García, “Papirín.”

CJNG, on the other hand, appears to be growing in influence in Jalisco and has moved to Veracruz through an offshoot that calls itself “Mata Zetas” (Zeta Killers) where they maintain an open fight against the Zetas. They also have disputes with The Resistance and LFM. Like Guerrero, Veracruz experienced an increase in drug related violence by the middle of 2011, making the total number of killings nearly 350, whereas in 2010 it was closer to 50.

With the killing of the founder and leader of La Familia Michoacána, Nazario Moreno González, “El Chayo,” in December of 2010, the organization split into two different groups, one commanded by José de Jesús Méndez Vargas, “El Chango Méndez,” that kept the name and principles of LFM, and the other led by Servando Gómez Martínez, “La Tuta,” that call themselves the Knights Templar (Los Caballeros Templarios), which went public later in March 2011.

With the capture of “El Chango Méndez” in June 2011, LFM was almost dismantled, while the Knights Templar continues to grow today in influence and control of Michoacán despite disputes with LFM and the Zetas. “La Tuta” now shares command of the Knights Templar with Enrique Plancarte Solís, “Quique Plancarte.” Michoacán also experienced an increase in violence last year, although not as dramatic as in Veracruz or Guerrero.

Recommendations for Addressing Mexico’s Drug Violence

In the face of Mexico’s recent violence, some assessments equate the country’s troubles with a variety of nightmare scenarios. After Mexico’s sharp increase in violence in 2008, a report by the U.S. Joint Forces Command pointed to Mexico as one of two countries worldwide—along with Pakistan—most likely to suffer a sudden collapse into a failed state. More recently, an emerging discourse in Washington suggests that Mexico’s woes are a sign of domestic insurgency or narco-terrorism. Such characterizations appear to seriously misdiagnose the problem, and yet they have gained significant traction in policy-making circles.

Discussions about violence in Mexico often raise concerns about the limits of state capacity, but the characterization of Mexico as a failed state greatly exaggerates the extent to which organized crime groups have effectively supplanted the state. While there are a significant number of “captured spaces” in Mexico, these are primarily found in relatively isolated, rural areas. Moreover, when proper force is applied, such spaces have been restored to full government control.

The problem—and the fundamental flaw of “failed state” claims about Mexico—is that organized crime groups are not primarily concerned with capturing territory. Organized crime groups can function quite well—and, indeed, perhaps most effectively—in spaces where state capacity is strongest. Hence, Mexican organized crime groups have flourished for many years in the country’s largest, most productive cities, and will likely continue to do so.

The second assessment of Mexico’s violence characterizes organized crime groups as a kind of “insurgency,” intent on directly challenging and perhaps overtaking the state. This characterization is employed primarily by analysts schooled in counter-insurgency (COIN) doctrine. However, this perspective ignores the fact that most of Mexico’s violence is not the result of a vertical

conflict between state and non-state actors. Rather, according to the data reviewed here, Mexico's violence is primarily characterized by a horizontal conflict among non-state actors.

This is a tremendously important distinction that requires a re-thinking of the utility of COIN doctrine in the Mexican context. While counter-insurgency measures might be appropriate where rebel groups seek to overthrow the state—as is the case in Afghanistan, Congo, or Colombia—the objectives and logic of Mexican organized crime groups is very different.

Understanding Mexico's current security crisis requires a deeper appreciation of the fact that Mexico is a relatively young democratic state that is still ongoing a process of democratic consolidation. As part of that process, Mexico has been undergoing a nearly two-decade reconfiguration of the state's rule of law functions, including a series of judicial sector reforms that began in 1994.

As a result of current weaknesses in the judicial sector, the vast majority of crimes (over 75%) are not even reported. Mexican citizens distrust law enforcement officials both because of the perception that authorities are unable to solve crimes, and due to the problem of widespread corruption—and even criminal activity—on the part of justice system professionals, most notably the police. To restore order, **there is a need to greatly improve the functioning of the criminal justice system.** As noted by Mexican criminologist Guillermo Zepeda, only about one in five reported crimes are fully investigated and an even smaller fraction of these results in trial and sentencing. The net outcome is widespread criminal impunity, with only one or two out of every 100 crimes resulting in a sentence. As a result, for the victims of crimes in Mexico, there is rarely any justice.

This points to the fact that **there is a need for greater prosecutorial effectiveness in Mexico.** Indeed, in recent years, while federal authorities have made major arrests, prosecutions have lagged or experienced humiliating reversals in cases where organized crime involvement was strongly suspected. Examples include the case of dozens of state and local authorities arrested for corruption in Michoacán in 2009—known as the “Michoacánazo”—and the 2011 case of former Tijuana mayor Jorge Hank Rhon, who was acquitted on charges of illegal gun possession due to insufficient investigation and improper evidence gathering.

The Mexican government should learn from these blunders, assess current challenges faced by prosecutors, and develop a rigorous course of training for the country's state and local prosecutors. Probing institutional assessments and studies—such as the Justiciabarómetro survey of prosecutors conducted by the Trans-Border Institute in 2011—are needed to help diagnose current weaknesses and provide benchmarks to evaluate advances.

Meanwhile, there are a number of U.S. initiatives currently underway by Harvard University, the American Bar Association's (ABA) Rule of Law Project, the National Center for State Courts, the Center for Western Attorneys General (CWAG), and other institutions to bolster Mexico's capacity in this regard. Such efforts will require substantial and sustained support from the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development to be effective over the next five to ten years.

Enhancing prosecutorial effectiveness is only part of the equation. Under Mexico's current system, justice is hampered by lengthy, inefficient criminal proceedings that often lack an adherence to due process and result in serious human rights violations. As illustrated by the Grammy winning film, *Presumed Guilty* (Presunto Culpable), police investigators and investigative agencies exhibit disturbing patterns of corruption and abuse (including widespread use of torture), defendants are frequently held in "pre-trial detention," pre-trial detainees are often mixed with the general prison population while they await trial and sentencing, and many defendants languish in jail for months or years without a sentence. Ultimately, a guilty verdict is most likely when a suspect is poor and the crime is petty.

All this points to a need to raise the professional standards for police and prosecutors through **a more effective system of public defenders and greater adherence to due process** in the administration of justice in Mexico. Indeed, the best quality control for the judicial system is a good public defender system. Police and prosecutors must be at the top of their game if they wish to convict a guilty suspect that is well-represented in court.

While there are a number of U.S. and Mexican government programs for the training of judges and prosecutors, support for similar programs for training public defenders and private attorneys are more rare and even less well funded. The Mexican Interior Ministry should **place greater priority on the training of public defenders at the federal and state level**, and the U.S. State Department should move urgently to provide assistance for such programs under the Mérida Initiative.

Ultimately, these efforts are contingent on the successful implementation of the 2008 judicial reforms that introduce new oral, adversarial criminal proceedings that will enable judges, prosecutors, and public defenders to introduce greater transparency, efficiency, and fairness to the administration of justice in Mexico. However, currently, there is insufficient high-level leadership for these reforms among the three federal branches of government. While the Secretary of the Interior has an Assistant Secretary that is dedicated to implementing the reforms, this agency is under-resourced, has had too low of a profile to hold sway with other agencies and branches, has struggled to build public support for the reforms, and is still working to develop tangible measures for documenting the progress and effectiveness of the reforms.

Hence, there is a **need for greater coordination and leadership in support of Mexico's judicial reform implementation**. Ideally, the incoming president will take ownership of the judicial reform project, as the current leading candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto, did when implementing similar reforms in the state of Mexico. Indeed, the fact that the PRI was largely responsible for passing the 2008 judicial reform at the national level and similar reforms in key state, like Chihuahua and Nuevo León, suggests that the old ruling could breath new life into judicial reform efforts, particularly as public demand for justice continues to grow.

This raises the issue of oversight, engagement, and accountability, and the need for greater civic empowerment to recapture lost spaces, heal communities torn apart by violence, and reconstitute the social fabric in Mexico. Over the last decade, there has been a proliferation of civic organizations organized around public security concerns, including groups like Mexico United Against

Crime (México Unido Contra la Delincuencia) and the Citizens' Institute for the Study of Insecurity (Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios Sobre la Inseguridad, ICESI). The most notable current group of this nature is known as the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (Movimiento para la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad, MPJD), led by Javier Sicilia. The activism of such groups can ultimately provide a firm social foundation for combatting crime and violence.

However, authorities will need to head the increasing calls from civic groups and citizens for a re-evaluation of the priorities and strategies of the war on drugs. For example, critics point out that the militarized strategy pursued by President Calderón has only contributed to greater infighting within and among organized crime groups, as illustrated earlier. Moreover, the deployment of the armed forces has led to a significant and growing number of allegations of corruption and human rights against members of the military. Perhaps most important is the question of measuring progress in counter-drug efforts.

After the loss of 50,000 lives, what do the U.S. and Mexican governments have to show for it? Despite measureable improvements on certain measures—eradication, drug seizures, and arrests—overall flows of drugs remain relatively uninhibited by these efforts. U.S. and Mexican officials have rarely managed to eradicate or interdict more than a minor share of overall production and consumption, with the supply and accessibility of drugs to consumers remaining at sufficiently reasonable prices to sustain fairly steady rates of consumption.

Indeed, in terms of lifetime use of drugs, consumption patterns appear to be fairly unchanged, with the exception that—despite relatively lower numbers of young children using drugs—the proportion of the adult population that has at least experimented with drugs during their lifetime has grown to nearly 50% of the population. Perhaps not coincidentally roughly the same percentage now supports the legalization of drugs in the United States. Currently, however, there is too little evidence that drug decriminalization or legalization—particularly half-measures such as allowing marijuana use for medical purposes—will have any significant effect on levels of violence in Mexico. However, the case for legalization is weak primarily because frank policy discussions about its possible implications remain taboo in the halls of power in both countries, despite growing political support for legalization among ordinary citizens.

As a result, there has been little serious effort to project the economic, health, and societal effects that legalization might have, least of all the implications for Mexico. Positions on this issue are highly polarized, and—in the absence of serious scrutiny and hard facts—are based mainly on personal opinion, rather than a systematic calculation of the costs and benefits of the status quo versus an alternative policy regime where drug consumption is both tolerated and strictly regulated. More serious analysis, reflection, and debate on the question of legalization is needed in the respective domestic contexts of both countries, in official bilateral discussions between the United States and Mexico, and in multi-lateral forums such as the Organization of American States and the United Nations.

Concluding Observations

While Mexico is experiencing a serious security crisis, the case that Mexico is a failed state or suffering from insurgency are greatly exaggerated. The authors illustrate that the levels of homicide in Mexico are definitely much higher than a decade ago, but about average compared with the rest of the Americas. Still violence in 2011 was higher than previous years, and more widespread, and therefore cannot be ignored.

While most of the violence is attributable to increased competition among drug trafficking organizations, these conflicts are exacerbated by government efforts. For the past five years, the Calderón's administration has orchestrated a direct and concerted effort to break the country's powerful cartels into smaller more manageable pieces. The guiding premise of this strategy has been that is necessary to transform drug trafficking organizations from a national security threat into a local public security problem by "fragmenting" or "atomizing" organized crime groups.

In its public commentary and analysis, the Trans-Border Institute has consistently questioned the wisdom of that strategy, since smaller, less organized crime groups are likely to be more volatile and a greater danger to the general public. Indeed, the data and analysis in this report illustrate that there has been a shift from "organized" to "disorganized" crime in Mexico, as conflicts among factions and splinter groups have escalated. The primary result, as noted in this report, is that violence in Mexico is becoming less geographically concentrated, is affecting a greater number of municipalities, and there is a growing number of casualties in small and medium sized towns throughout the country. These trends in turn have a much more widespread effect on ordinary Mexican citizens.

To the extent that the federal government has previously relied on large force deployments to restore order in areas where violence is highly concentrated, the tendency toward widely dispersed, mass violence presents a significant challenge. This trend underscores the urgent need for strengthening the capacity and integrity of state and local law enforcement agencies, courts, and penitentiaries to cope with the growing threat of localized violence. The authors specifically recommend a greater focus of resources and attention to the challenges of local police reform, state-level judicial reforms, and penitentiary reform at all levels.

At the same time that organized crime groups have splintered and fractionalized, the authors note that at least one large, powerful drug trafficking organization—the Sinaloa Cartel— remains relatively unaffected by high-level government arrests, and retains tremendous capacity to traffic drugs into the United States. Other organizations, including its main rivals at this time, Los Zetas, have experienced diminished capacity, and have resorted to a variety of alternative illicit activities to turn a profit, including kidnapping, extortion, and various forms of theft (e.g., stealing oil from pipelines).

Because of the latter trend, the authors underscore the need to reevaluate strategies that prioritize success in counter-drug efforts over the basic security of ordinary citizens. Meanwhile, considering the persistence of the drug trade, growing criticisms of the war on drugs, and rising public support for drug legalization, both countries should work with other partners in the international community to examine the potential costs, benefits, and public health implications of legal drug consumption.

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Acknowledgements

Octavio Rodriguez, Kimberly Heinle, and Dylan Heyden made direct written contributions and edits to different sections of this report. The report also benefited from research assistance and editorial recommendations from Felicia Gomez, Andrea Fernandez, and Chelsea Jensen. Several colleagues provided valuable input as the authors developed the content for this report, including Luis Astorga, John Bailey, Howard Campbell, Rafael Fernández de Castro, David Gaddis Smith, Eric Olson, Shannon O'Neill, Peter H. Smith, Richard Snyder, and Joel Wallman. The authors also thank the entire TBI staff for their involvement and support in preparing this report. All TBI maps are produced by Theresa Firestone. The lead authors bear sole responsibility for any errors of fact or omission.



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