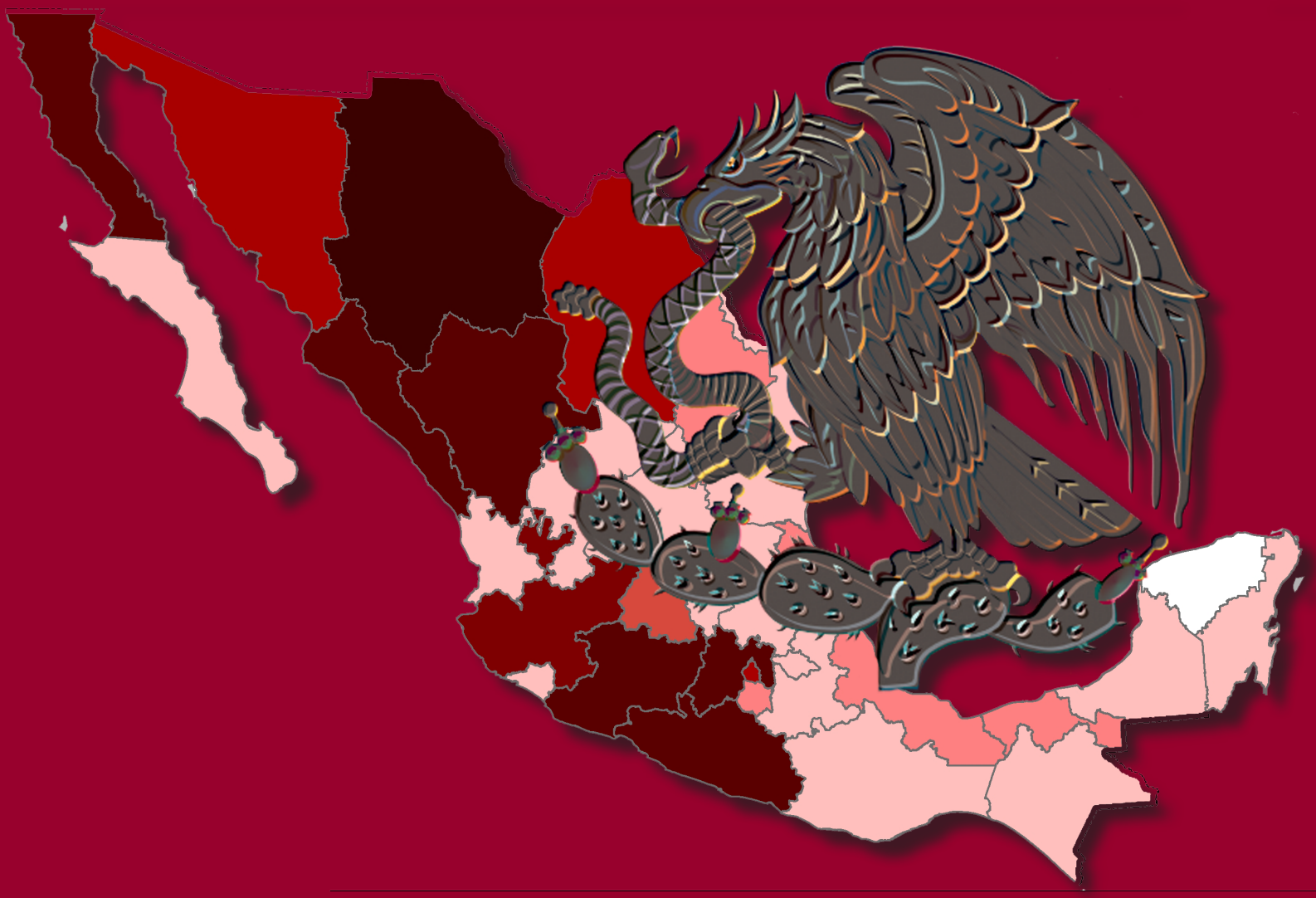
Drug Violence in Mexico

Data and Analysis from 2001-2009



Trans-Border Institute

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Mexico closed the decade with an unprecedented level of violence, given a record number of drug-related killings in 2009. In light of the spectacular nature of this violence and the challenge it represents for the Mexican state, this raises serious concerns for the Mexican public, for policy makers, and for Mexico's neighboring countries. This report provides an overview of the trends found in available data on drug-related killings in Mexico, and offers some brief observations the causes of violence and the effectiveness of recent efforts to combat organized crime.

Measuring Drug-Related Violence in Mexico

Prior to discussing Mexico's recent problems of drug-related violence, it is important to offer a disclaimer. There are no highly reliable data for measuring violence related to criminal activity by drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs). This is in part because such violence does not correspond to a specific legal category of criminal activity.

Hence, despite frequent references to "drug violence," "narco-violence," "cartel-related violence," "drug war violence," etc. by scholars, government, and media sources, there is considerable disagreement over the terminology typically used to describe this phenomenon. Lacking a more appropriate or widely accepted label, the term "drug-related violence" is used throughout this discussion.

In terms of data, the Mexican government collects information on drug-related violence through various public security and intelligence agencies. However, its data are not widely accessible to the public and are not reported with regularity. Recent media reports cite PGR and SEDENA figures indicating that there were 7,724 drug-related killings in 2009. However, these data are not typically reported by the government in regular intervals, which makes it difficult to evaluate trends over time. Moreover, state and local governments frequently report their own tallies, which often conflate both "ordinary" and drug-related homicides.

The next best available source of information is violence documented by media sources, several of which have made an explicit attempt to categorize and track drug-related homicides. Although they report their data more regularly and openly, media sources have important limitations and exhibit wide disparities. For example, one major source of data on drug-related killings is the Mexican newspaper Milenio, which recently reported that there were 8,281 drug-related killings —nearly one every hour— in 2009. Another major media source that follows drug-related killings is the daily newspaper El Universal, which reported 7,724 drug-related killings in 2009. Finally, at year's end, Reforma news-

paper reported that there were only 6,576 such killings in 2009. (See Table 1)

This enormous variation —a range of 1,705 deaths between the lowest and highest estimates— is likely due to the use of different classifications for drug-related killings and different methodologies for data collection. As noted in Table 1, there is disagreement among the major media sources on the number of drug-related killings in almost every state. Indeed, the sole exception is Yucatán, where all three major media sources report no drug related killings in 2009.

In general, with the exception of Milenio, the major print media sources that document drug-related killings appear to be on par with or more conservative than the government in classifying and reporting drug-related homicides. However, because it has the most conservative estimates and regular reporting of its data, Reforma has been the primary source of statistics on drug-related violence referenced by the Justice in Mexico Project of the Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego.

Table 1a. Media Reporting of Drug-related Killings by State in 2009

	Milenio	El Universal	Reforma
Aguascalientes	32	21	34
Baja California	691	444	316
Baja California Sur	4	n.a.	1
Campeche	10	n.a.	2
Coahuila	98	115	151
Colima	1	15	12
Chiapas	31	26	30
Chihuahua	3,637	3,250	2,079
Distrito Federal	97	74	173
Durango	341	734	637
Guanajuato	108	177	146
Guerrero	881	672	638
Hidalgo	26	23	36
Jalisco	60	92	212
México (Edomex)	227	150	350
Michoacan	417	356	371
Morelos	76	74	77
Nayarit	23	24	22
Nuevo León	71	82	99
Oaxaca	141	n.a.	6
Puebla	8	13	26
Querétaro	12	12	14
Quintana Roo	42	24	27
San Luis Potosi	n.a.	n.a.	7
Sinaloa	814	930	767
Sonora	294	222	152
Tabasco	46	42	54
Tamaulipas	31	32	49
Tlaxcala	1	n.a.	3
Veracruz	28	57	55
Yucatán	0	0	0
Zacatecas	28	33	30
TOTAL	8,281	7,724	6,576

n.a. Figures unavailable for some states with low reporting rates, but may be included in the total.

Reforma has a large, national pool of correspondents who monitor and report the number of drug-related killings in their respective jurisdictions on a weekly basis. In terms of methodology, the number of drug-related killings Reforma reports has been consistently lower than official government estimates, which helps to avoid exaggeration. Indeed, Reforma appears to diligently avoid the conflation

of other homicides (e.g., those committed by drug users) that do not reflect high impact violence associated with organized crime. Instead, Reforma classifies drug-related killings as "narco-executions" (narco-ejecuciones) based on a combination of factors related to a given incident:

- use of high-caliber and automatic weapons typical of 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 organize crime

The Justice in Mexico project has compiled Reforma's data on drug-related killings as reported at the state level on a weekly basis since November 2007, as well as the annual totals by state from 2006 to 2009. These Reforma data form encapsulate the first three years of the administration of President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), and are made available to interested researchers through the project's website (www.justiceinmexico.org) as they become available.

Data on earlier trends in drug-related violence are less readily available, given that there was less media scrutiny on the phenomenon prior to recent years. One source, a recent report by Guadalajara-based researcher Marcos Pablo Moloeznik, draws on a combination of data reported by the PGR and Milenio to estimate the number of drug-related killings from 2001 to 2006, under Mexican President Vicente Fox Quesada, as ranging between 1,080 and 2,221 deaths annually. While these figures are also referenced below, most data used in this discussion are drawn from the above-noted information provided by Reforma.

Trends in Drug-Related Violence in Mexico

There are a number of observable trends in the available data on drug-related violence. The first is that drug-related violence has become extremely elevated since 2005, with dramatic increases in the level of drug-related violence in 2008 and 2009. This violence took place in spite of —or perhaps, as some would argue, as a result of— massive U.S. and Mexican government efforts to crack down on organized crime. The second is that there are important geographic dynamics to the distribution of violence; Mexico's drug violence is highly concentrated in just a few key states considered to be critical zones of production and trafficking. In terms of impacts, the extent to which drug-related violence impacted public officials, police, and women and minors under the age of 18 was especially noticeable over the last year. Lastly, of significant concern to U.S. officials and citizens, is the perceived cross-border "spill over" of drug-related violence from Mexico, which is extremely difficult to quantify.

The Number and Rate of Drug-Related Killings in Mexico

The two most immediately observable trends in drug-related violence in Mexico have to do with the growth in the absolute number and the rate of drug violence (controlling for population). Media reports regularly reference the number of drug-related killings from 2006 to the present; roughly 16,000 killings, mostly concentrated in 2008 and 2009. However, taking a longer view from 2001 to the end of the decade, it is worth noting

Figure 1. Drug-Related Killings in Mexico, 2001-2009

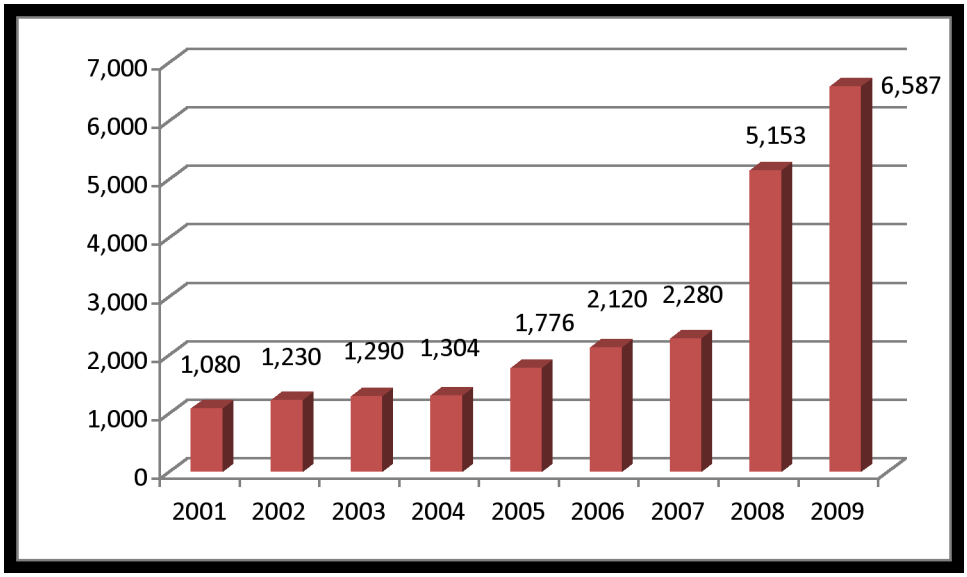
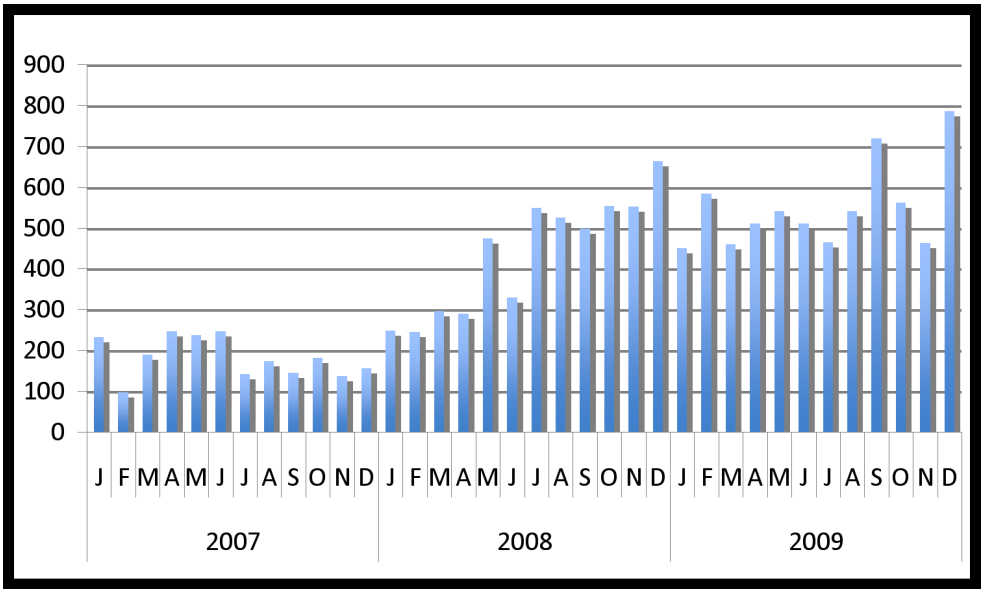


Figure 2. Monthly Drug-Related Killings in Mexico, 2007-2009

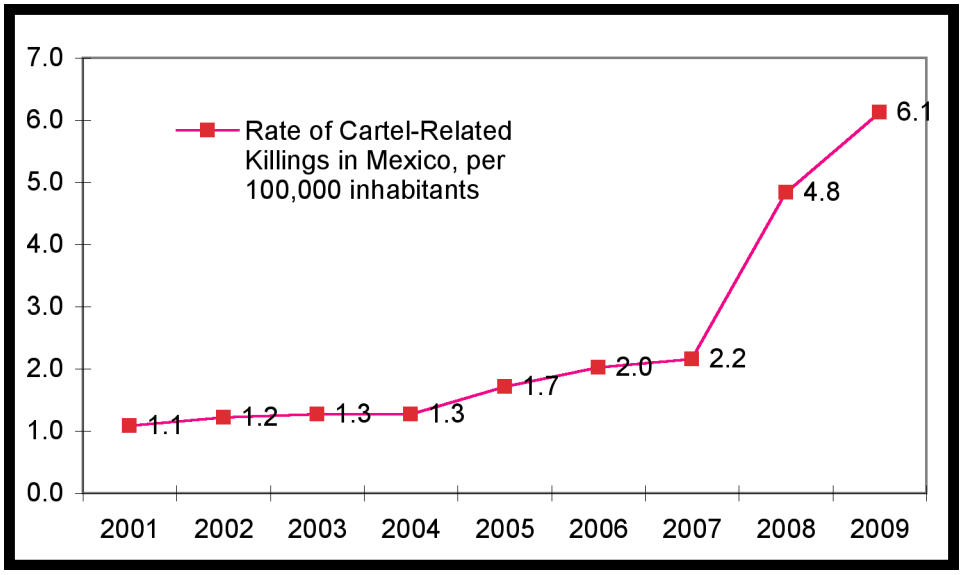


Sources: Data for 2001-2005 from Marcos Pablo Moloeznik, "Principales efectos de la militarización del combate al narcotráfico en México," in Renglones, No. 61, Sept. 2009-Mar. 2010, Guadalajara: Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, A.C., 2009. Data for 2006-2009 compiled from Reforma in Justice In Mexico Project Narcobarometer Database (www.justiceinmexico.org).

that the number of reported drug-related killings in Mexico exceeded 20,000 deaths (See Figure 1).

While generally higher since 2008, it is important to note that violence has occurred in significant spikes at different points in time. The first significant spike occurred in March 2008, the first time that the number of drug related killings exceeded 400 deaths in one month. However, after a one month lull in June 2008, drug related killings have consis-

Figure 3. Drug-Related Killings in Mexico, 2001-2009



Population estimates from Consejo Nacional de Población (www.conapo.gob.mx).

tently exceeded that number. While there are no clear patterns or cycles to the violence, there were major spikes in the fall and holiday season in both 2008 and 2009, as well as significant lulls at the start of each summer. In terms of major surges, September and December 2009 significantly surpassed the record number of drug-related killings observed in December 2008.

These absolute figures must be contextualized by controlling for population to determine the "rate" of drug-related killings. From 2001-2007, the rate of drug-related killings was relatively low, ranging between 1 to 2.2 drug-related killings per 100,000 people each year. However, the rate of drug-related homicides increased dramatically over the last two years of the decade; more than doubling to 4.8 per 100,000 in 2008 and growing by nearly 20% to 6.1 per 100,000 in 2009 (See Figure 3).

According to conventional estimates, the total number of homicides in Mexico has steadily declined since the mid-20th century, and has ranged between 10 and 12 per 100,000 inhabitants over the last decade. Based on the above figures, drug-related killings represent just 10-20% of all homicides nationwide for most of this period. However, the dramatic increase in such killings in the last two years suggests that they now represent a larger proportion of intentional homicides, and have likely pushed Mexico's murder rate significantly higher than in the recent past.

Geographic Distribution of Violence

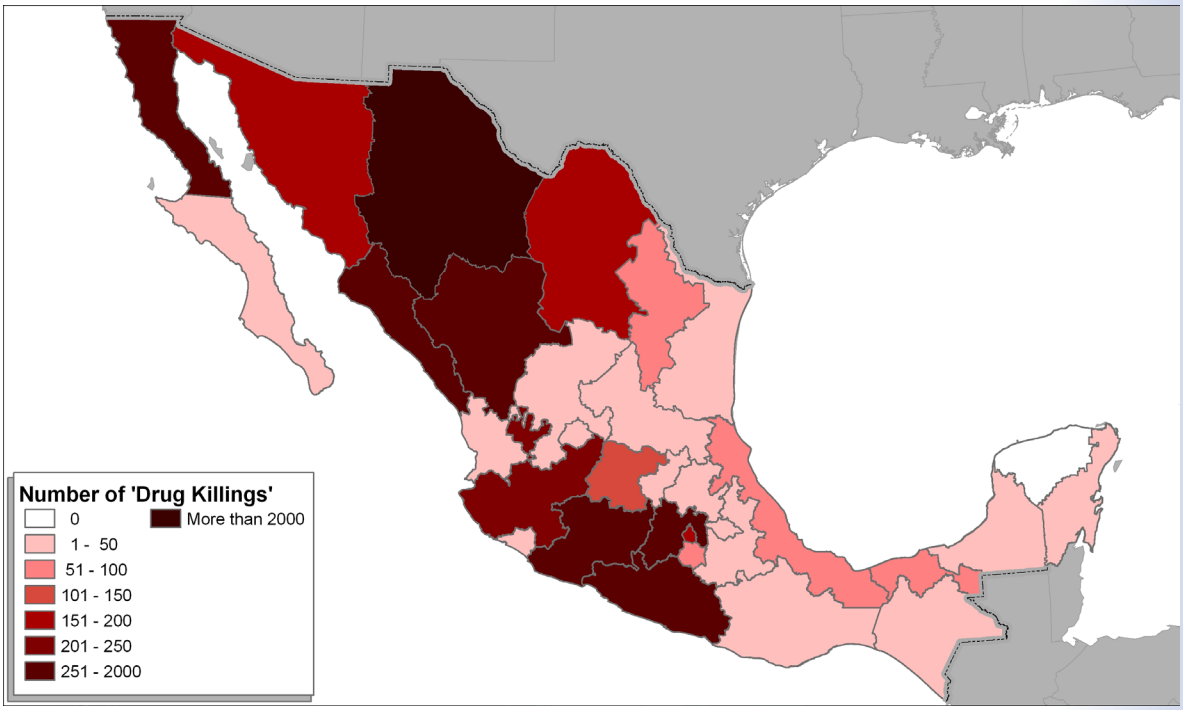
From the outset of the Calderón administration in 2006 to the present, there has been significant variation in the distribution of violence in Mexico. In 2006, violence was mainly concentrated in three Gulf Pacific states: Michoacán, Sinaloa, and Guerrero. At that point, the national rate of violence was 2 drug-related killings per 100,000 people, while Michoacán's 543 killings (more than 25% of the national total) gave it a rate of 13 killings per 100,000 people. The following year, however, Michoacán saw a sharp decline —to just 238 drug-related killings (10.5% of the national total), or 6 per 100,000— at the same time that the national rate remained somewhat steady (2.2 per 100,000). Meanwhile, Sinaloa became the state most intensely affected by violence, as measured by its rate of over 13 drug-related killings per 100,000 people in 2007. At the same time, other states began to experience significant increases in the number and rate of drug-related killings (particularly in the northern border region).

By 2008, as Mexico's overall rate of drug-related killings more than doubled, three states experienced rates of violence far greater than in previous years. The state of Chihuahua, home to the traditionally lucrative smuggling corridor of El Paso-Ciudad Juárez, accounted for nearly a third of all drug-related killings, with a rate of 49.1 killings per 100,000. Meanwhile, already embattled Sinaloa saw an increase to 25.7 killings per 100,000. Lastly, Baja California's rate of drug-related killings nearly quadrupled to 19.6 per 100,000. Far from a national phenomenon, these three states accounted for more than half of all of Mexico's drug-related killings that year.

In 2009, drug-related violence increased moderately at the national level, thanks partly to absolute increases in Chihuahua and Sinaloa and to the dispersion of violence to other states. Especially notable was the increase in drug-related violence in Durango and Guerrero, Sinaloa's neighboring states in the so-called "Golden Triangle" region. Still, the overall concentration of violence remains in states along the U.S.-Mexico border, which saw a significant increase in the overall rate of violence, from 12.57 to 13.45 drug-related killings per 100,000 from 2008 to 2009, in large part due to the extremely high death toll in Chihuahua.

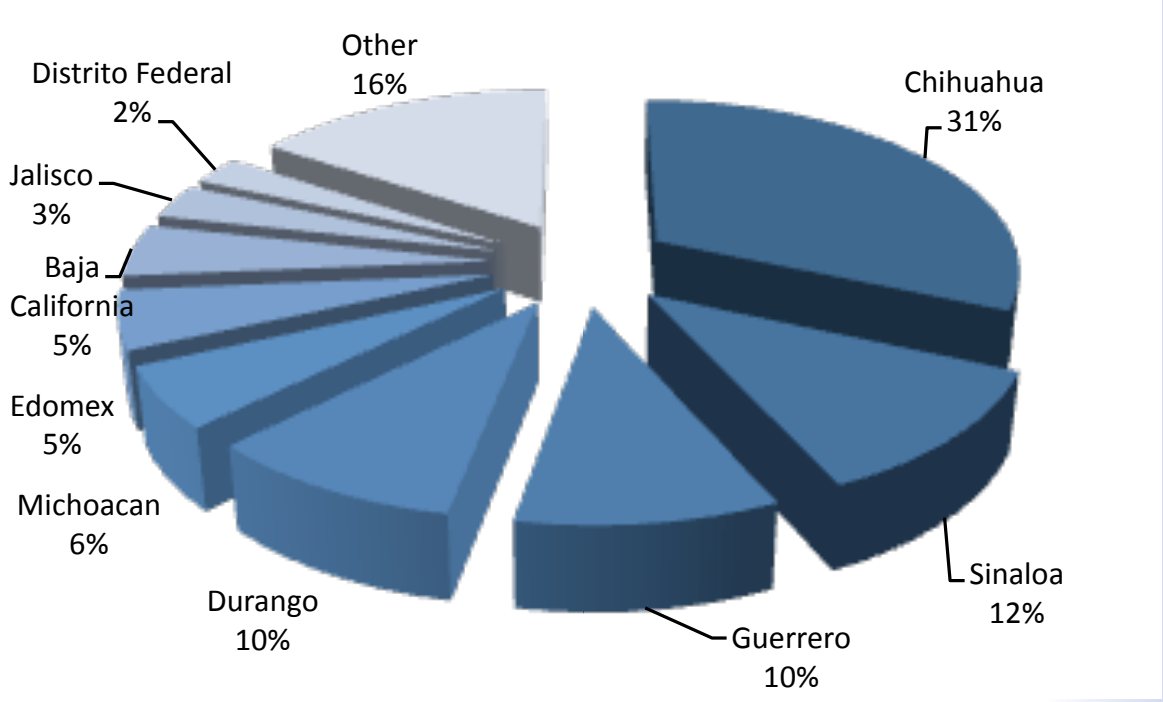
One notable exception along the border was Baja California, which saw a significant drop in both the number and rate of drug-related killings throughout most of the year. Baja California went from a rate of 19.6 per 100,000 in 2008 (nearly one in eight killings nationwide) to just 10.1 per 100,000 (about one in twenty nationwide). As a result of this apparent turnaround, some authorities and experts began to suggest that Tijuana was a success story in reducing drug-related violence. However, the relative calm in Baja California was broken in late 2009, as a spate of violence beginning in late November dramatically increased the rate of drug-related killings seen in previous months. While Baja California had a rate of about 20 drug-related killings per month during most of 2009, December brought a death toll of roughly 80 drug-related killings by Reforma's count.

Figure 4. Drug-Related Killings in Mexico in 2009, by State



Source: Data compiled from Reforma in Justice In Mexico Project Narcobarometer Database (www.justiceinmexico.org).

Figure 5. Total Share of Drug-Related Killings in 2009, by State



Source: Data compiled from Reforma in Justice In Mexico Project Narcobarometer Database (www.justiceinmexico.org).

Overall, the odds of being the victim of a drug-related killing in Mexico in 2009 were fairly low (around 1 in 16,300). As noted above, this probability was significantly higher in certain states, notably Chihuahua (roughly 1 in 1,600), Durango (roughly one in 2,400), and Sinaloa (roughly 1 in 3,400). Still, the vast majority of drug-related violence occurs between and among organized crime groups. If you do not happen to be or have ties to a drug trafficker, the odds of being killed by one are extremely slim.

This said, drug violence has had a significant impact on some others operating close to the world of organized crime. According to Reforma's data, an estimated 35 soldiers and nearly 500 police died as casualties of Mexico's drug violence in 2009. This represents roughly 7% of all drug-related killings. Presuming that innocent bystanders reflected a relatively smaller proportion of the total remaining (e.g., less than 3%), this suggests —as government officials have claimed in the past— that roughly 90% of drug-related killings in Mexico involve ranking members and foot soldiers of the DTOs.

While the profile of DTO operatives is not well documented. Government statements indicate that the average drug-related homicide victim is male and 32 years old, though there appears to be a growing number of female and younger casualties. Meanwhile, in addition to highly trained professionals, DTOs also appear to employ otherwise unaffiliated, untrained young men as part-time enforcers and hit men for as little as $300 a job. It is likely that the latter are mainly drawn from among Mexico's low-income neighborhoods, though middle- and upper-class families are not immune from participation in or targeting by organized crime.

Meanwhile, in 2009, Reforma also reported a greater number (424) and proportion (10%) of women among the deceased compared to the previous year, when the 189 women reported dead represented just under 4% of all drug-related homicides. The growing prominence of women among the dead was noteworthy as several lady capos and "narco-novias" (narco-girlfriends) caught national attention. Also noteworthy in the final months of 2009 was the fact that several minors —in their early- and mid-teens— fell victim to drug-related violence.

Lastly, in recent years, investigative reporters and newsrooms have been especially targeted for drug-related threats and violence, making Mexico one of the world's most dangerous countries for journalists. Drug trafficking organizations reportedly have "press spokespersons" who direct messages to news rooms in northern Mexico, often with instructions to portray the government in a negative light. Those journalists that organized crime groups perceive to be a threat are harassed or even killed, often with overt messages warning other reporters to take note.

Causes and Evolution of Drug-Related Violence in Mexico

Based on available data and current research on drug-trafficking in Mexico, the recent escalation and varied geographic patterns of drug-related violence appear to be the result of several immediate factors:

- the fractionalization of organized crime groups;
- decentralization of political-bureaucratic corruption;
- recent government efforts to crack down on organized crime (through military deployments and the disruption of DTO leadership structures).

In addition, experts speculate that there may be larger macro-level factors contributing to the violence, such as shrinking drug demand in the United States; increased border interdiction; rising drug prices; or growing domestic demand in Mexico. However, it is not clear to what extent any of these larger trends has a significant or direct impact in increasing violence.

What is clear is that there has been a dramatic shift in Mexico over the course of the last 30 years. During the 1980s, many current top DTO operatives—virtually all of them with roots in Sinaloa—worked within the same loosely knit set of allied organizations that controlled different commissions, or plazas, for smuggling drugs into the United States. During this period, DTOs operated with tremendous impunity thanks to the considerable protection afforded by corrupt officials at very high levels in the Mexican government.

Beginning in the late 1980s, however, the relative tranquility that existed among different drug trafficking groups began to erode. In part, this discord appears to have been attributable to the capture of Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo, believed to be the top drug trafficker of the 1980s. Félix Gallardo was arrested by Mexican authorities in 1989, in part due to the intense U.S. pressure following the torture and murder of DEA agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena in 1985.

Thereafter, Félix Gallardo came into conflict with one of his former cronies, Hector "El Guero" Palma Salazar. This feud developed into a major clash between different DTO factions, including the so-called Tijuana, Juárez, and Sinaloa cartels. The "Tijuana Cartel" is headed by members of Arellano Félix family, who are originally from Sinaloa and believed to be kin to Félix Gallardo. The "Juárez Cartel," the most powerful organization of the 1990s, was headed by Amado Carillo Fuentes. Carillo Fuentes was dubbed the "Lord of the Skies" because he pioneered large airborne shipments to transport drugs from Colombia to the United States when he worked with Félix Gallardo in the 1980s.

Beginning in the early 1990s, but especially after Carillo Fuentes' death in 1997, two protégés of Palma — Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán and Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada— began to directly challenge the AFO. In the process, they consolidated a powerful network

of DTOs, also known as "The Federation," by developing ties to other organizations.

By this point, the web of drug trafficking networks in Mexico had become significantly more complex. For example, the larger cartels maintained relationships with —and, in some cases, accepted tribute from— smaller, mid-level drug trafficking networks, like the Sonora-based Caro Quintero organization and the Colima-based Amezcua organization.

Meanwhile, other DTOs began to take a more prominent role. Chief among these was the so-called "Gulf Cartel," a long-standing smuggling network based primarily in northern-coastal states along the Gulf of Mexico. This organization was headed by Juan García Abrego until the late 1990s, but was brought to national prominence by his successor, Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, who in 2001 recruited elite Mexican military personnel —who became known as "Zetas"— as enforcers for his organization. Since Cárdenas' arrest and extradition to the United States in 2003 and 2007, respectively, the Zetas are believed to have taken over the drug trade in the Gulf and parts of Mexico's southeast.

Also important in recent years have been other, newly emergent groups that entered the fray —notably La Familia Michoacána (LFM) and the Beltran Leyva Organization (BLO), which broke with the Guzman-Zambada organization— contributing to further violence and a recasting of alliances among DTOs in recent years. In 2009, the Mexican government directly targeted both LFM and the BLO, delivering major blows to these organizations. This, in turn, contributed to significant instability and violent competition for control of their distribution networks, provoking a record level of violence in the fall and holiday season of 2009.

What stands out about the evolution of drug-related violence in recent years is the extent to which it has been driven by competition among Mexican DTOs. As noted above, this competition was virtually non-existent as Mexican DTOs began to take over smuggling routes from struggling Columbian traffickers in the 1980s. Effectively, in the 1980s, Mexican DTOs operated primarily under a single hierarchy, with significant protection from the state. Many experts, therefore, speculate that the centralization of power and pervasive corruption under the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (1929-2000) contributed to the relative harmony and success of Mexican DTOs at this early stage.

Today, however, Mexico enjoys much greater political pluralism, and has experienced significant decentralization of power to state governors and mayors. By and large, this has been a positive development, since the lack of democratic competition and the excessive centralization of power in Mexico for most of the 20th century led to significant corruption and abuses. However, as a result of Mexico's contemporary political situation, the dynamics of competition among DTOs have changed in ways that contribute to greater competition.

Lacking a unified, overarching hierarchy of corrupt state officials to limit competition, the organization of drug trafficking has become more fractionalized. Competing orga-

nizations now vie for influence at both the national and sub-national level, sometimes competing to corrupt officials in different agencies within the same administration. As DTOs vied against each other they are rumored to have negotiated various pacts and truces; however, these appear to be short-lived. The end result is a much more chaotic and unpredictable pattern of violent conflict among DTOs than Mexico has ever seen.

Final Considerations

The ultimate question is whether the Mexican government has a strategy that can achieve its frequently stated goal of breaking DTOs into smaller and more manageable pieces. Thus far, its de facto strategy has included four components: (1) the direct involvement of military personnel in combating organized crime groups; (2) the sequential targeting of specific organizations for the dismantling of leadership structures; (3) long-term investments and reforms intended to improve the integrity and performance of domestic law enforcement institutions; and (4) the solicitation of U.S. assistance in terms of intelligence, material support, and the southbound interdiction of weapons and cash.

At least in the short term, this strategy appears to have had mixed success, at best. The Mexican government reports that it is succeeding in dismantling organized crime networks. To their credit, the determination shown by Mexican government officials during the last two presidential administrations to combat DTOs head on suggests a sea change in political will compared to previous administrations. As a result, there have been important gains in recent years, including disruptions of the leadership structures of virtually every major DTO except for the Guzmán-Zambada organization.

Today, the Calderón administration's explicit agenda is to breakdown the operational structures of DTOs as a means to convert them from a national security problem (i.e., capable of corrupting and directly challenging the state) into a local public security problem (i.e., disaggregated, local criminal organizations). In the end, government officials hope to achieve a result similar to that seen in Colombia, which dismantled its major DTOs in the 1980s and 1990s.

One problem is figuring out whether this strategy is working: when violence increases, the government claims that it has succeeded in destabilizing the DTOs; when violence declines, the government claims that it has asserted control. If it intends to succeed, the Mexican government will need to show both continued progress in taking out major DTOs —particularly the formidable Guzmán-Zambada organization— while also significantly reducing the violence that persists in conflict-ridden "hot spots" like Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Durango, and Baja California.

Meanwhile, critics charge that none of the gains so far has made any significant progress toward the larger goal of reducing the illicit flow of drugs to consumers or the profits earned by organized crime groups, let alone in reducing the overall level of violence. Indeed, some experts attribute increased violence to the government's actions. Breaking up cartel-like monopolies leads to competition, and among DTOs competition equals

violence. Still others note that the involvement of the military opens a Pandora's box that includes possible human rights violations by the armed forces, as well as the defection of military personnel (like the Zetas) to work for the enemy. Finally, critics also note that in Colombia —the model cited by many Mexican and U.S. officials— drug cartels have simply been replaced by violent gangs involved in various forms of violent crime, contributing to mass internal displacement and citizen insecurity.

Such criticisms may prove relevant in the midterm elections to be held in July 2010. Some members of the leftist political opposition, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), claim that Calderón's crackdown on organized crime was an intentional strategy to gain legitimacy after a highly contested 2006 electoral victory. Meanwhile, members of the old ruling party assert that Mexico's current security crises is the result of an inept, inexperienced hand at the wheel of state. The PRI hopes to convince voters that it can get violent organized crime back under control. Some politicians from various parties —including Mr. Calderón's National Action Party (PAN)— have gone so far as to suggest a return to complicity with the DTOs as a means of restoring order.

Meanwhile, in Mexico and abroad, many have pointed to the on-going bloodshed in Mexico as a reason to re-think current strategies and approaches to the "War on Drugs." In 2009, several leading Latin American leaders, including former Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo, spoke out critically against the current policy emphasis on the criminalization of drugs, and called for a new approach centered on "harm reduction" through prevention and treatment. Along these lines, Mexico significantly revised its minor drug possession laws in 2009 to specify the quantities for which a person can be arrested by authorities. The measure —which has been criticized for effectively decriminalizing drugs— has not yet taken full effect, but is intended to reduce street-level corruption and facilitate treatment for habitual drug users. However, many in Mexico argue that without changes in U.S. drug policy Mexico's efforts to combat DTOs or address its own growing domestic demand for drugs will be futile.

Such changes may already be under way. Over the last few years, several U.S. states have decriminalized minor drug possession (e.g., favoring fines over incarceration) and legalized medical marijuana consumption (i.e., permitting marijuana use with a prescription). Moreover, in March 2009, U.S. attorney general Eric Holder signaled that his office would no longer focus on prosecuting medical marijuana dispensaries that are compliant with state law, despite federal prohibitions on all marijuana consumption. Meanwhile, at the urging of Congressman Eliot Engle, an ardent supporter of the Mérida Initiative, the lower chamber of the U.S. Congress approved a new commission to evaluate U.S. domestic and international counter-drug initiatives. The Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission Act (H.R. 2134) was debated and passed by the House of Representatives on December 8, 2009, and was referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee the next day.

Whether or not H.R. 2134 is approved by the Senate, developments in Mexico in 2010

will no doubt play a significant role in the ongoing debate over the effectiveness of current U.S. drug policy. 2009 was a year of unprecedented violence in Mexico, due to the extraordinary number of drug-related killings in certain states. Given that recent blows against key DTOs will produce more turmoil over the ensuring months, the toll of drug-related violence will likely remain high at the start of the new decade.

Endnotes:

For example, references to "drug violence" are deemed by some scholars as placing a primary emphasis on drugs, rather than other causes or types of violence linked to organized crime. References to "narco-violence" are problematic because the term narcotic refers more properly to only one subset of illicit drugs. Other security experts take issue with references to Mexican organized crime groups as "cartels," since the term has different connotations in the field of economics. Still others bristle at the use of the term "drug war" because of the policy approaches that follow from metaphorical references to warfare. While these arguments have merit, they ultimately come down to semantic differences beyond the scope of this discussion.

These figures were obtained from PGR/SEDENA by the news agency Imagen del Golfo (www.imagendelgolfo.com) and reported on 1/5/10. According to this article, there were 560 killings in 2006, 3,537 in 2007, 5,903 in 2008, and 7,742 in 2009. The same report indicates that there were 195 females killed in 2008 and 425 in 2009; 535 police in 2008 and 470 in 2009; and 52 and 35 military personnel in 2008 and 2009, respectively. Meanwhile, a recent El Universal article reports the same figure for 2009, but different figures for all previous years: 1,573 in 2005, 2,221 in 2006, 2,673 in 2007, and 5,630 in 2008. Esther Sánchez, "Aumenta nivel de violencia del narco," El Universal, January 1, 2010.

"Un ejecutado cada hora durante 2009," Milenio, January 2, 2010.

Milenio, for example, reports nearly 700 cartel related killings in Baja California, a figure that appears to include virtually all homicides for the state.

This could reflect a lack of access to complete information from official sources, as well different classification systems by official sources, and even erroneous reporting on the part of either the government or the media.

These criteria were outlined for the Trans-Border Institute by a Reforma reporter who works closely with these data.

Moloeznik, M. P. (2009). "Principales efectos de la militarización del combate al narcotráfico en México." Renglones(61).

In Mexico, a country of more than 100 million people, the odds of being killed in a drug-related homicide were one in 16,328; almost three times less likely than being killed in an automobile accident in the United States (about one in 6,500). Bailey, Ronald. "Don't Be Terrorized: You're More Likely to Die of a Car Accident, Drowning, Fire, or Murder." Reason.com (http://reason.com/archives/2006/08/11/dont-be-terrorized).

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