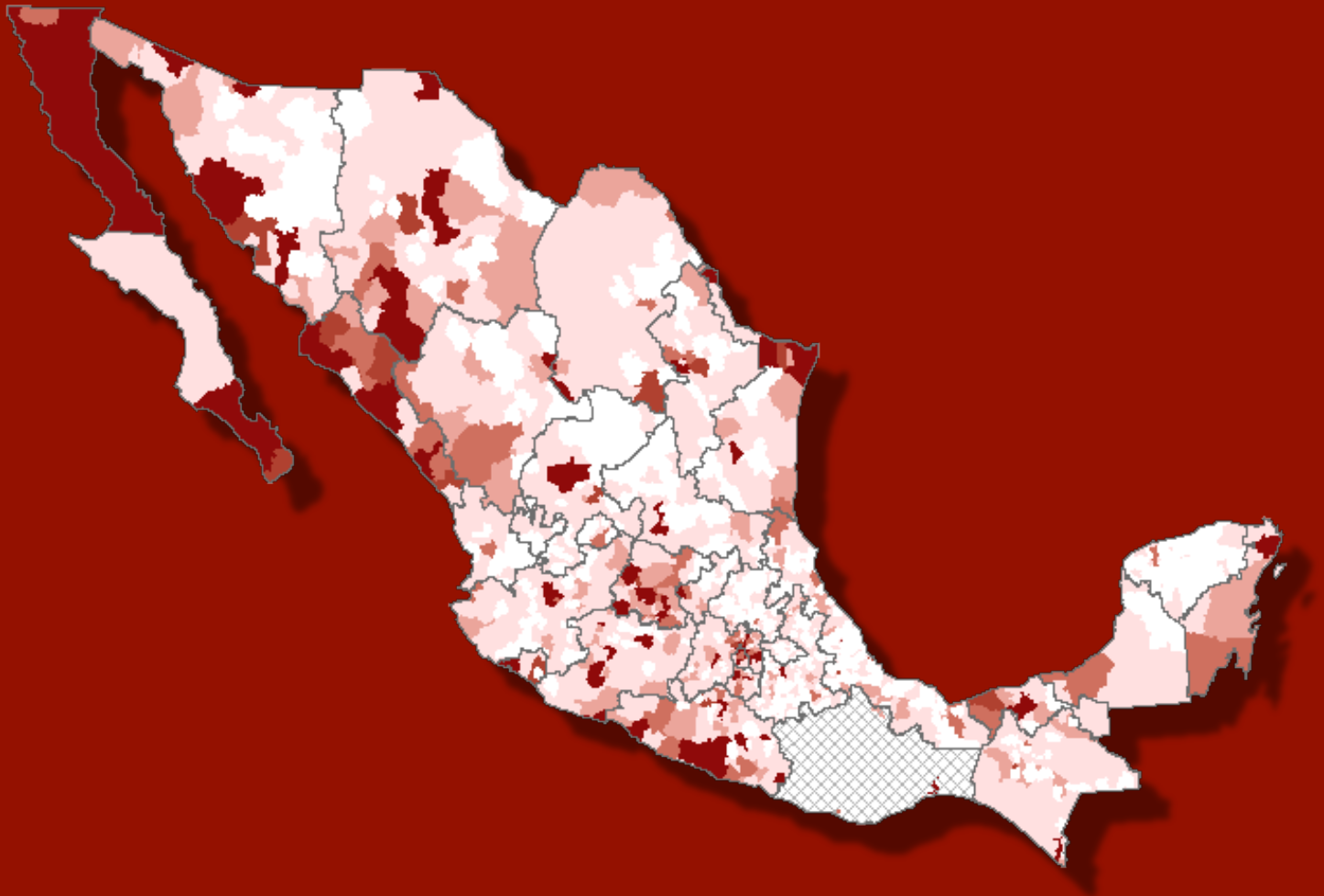


Drug Violence in Mexico

Data and Analysis Through 2015



SPECIAL REPORT

By Kimberly Heinle, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk



Justice in Mexico

Department of Political Science & International Relations

University of San Diego

APRIL 2016

About Justice in Mexico:

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

About the Report:

This is one of a series of special reports that have been published on a semi-annual by Justice in Mexico since 2010, each of which examines issues related to crime and violence, judicial sector reform, and human rights in Mexico. The *Drug Violence in Mexico* report series examines patterns of crime and violence attributable to organized crime, and particularly drug trafficking organizations in Mexico. This report was authored by Kimberly Heinle, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, and builds on the work of past reports in this series. The report was formally released on April 10, 2014 and was made possible by the generous support of The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. This report does not represent the views or opinions of the University of San Diego or Justice in Mexico's sponsoring organizations.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFO	Arellano Felix Organization, an organized crime group from Tijuana
AK-type	Avtomat Kalashnikova, assault rifle used by organized crime groups, e.g., AK-47
AR-type	Assault rifle typically used by organized crime groups, e.g., AR-15
BC Sur	Baja California Sur, a state in western Mexico
BLO	Beltran Leyva Organization, an organized crime group
CDG	Cartel del Golfo (Gulf Cartel), an organized crime group
CENAPI	Centro Nacional de Planeación, Análisis e Información Para el Combate a la Delincuencia (Mexican National Center for Planning, Analysis and Information for Combating Crime)
CIDA	Cartel Independiente de Acapulco (Independent Cartel of Acapulco), an organized crime group
CIDE	Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, a Mexican center for teaching and research in the Social Sciences
CISEN	Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional (Mexican Intelligence Agency)
CJNG	Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, an organized crime group
CNDH	Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (National Human Rights Commission)
CONAPO	Consejo Nacional de Población (National Population Council), a national agency for population estimates
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CPS	Cartel del Pacífico Sur (South Pacific Cartel), an organized crime group
CSN	Consejo de Seguridad Nacional (National Security Council)
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency, an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice
DTO	Drug trafficking organization
ENVIPE	Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (National Victimization and Public Security Perception Survey)
Edomex	Estado de México, a state in central Mexico
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation, an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía, e Informática (National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information)
KTO	Knights Templar Organization, an organized crime group based in Michoacán
LFM	La Familia Michoacana, an organized crime group
OCG	Organized crime group
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party), a Mexican political party
PGR	Procuraduría General de la República (Attorney General's Office)
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolution Party), a Mexican political party
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party), a Mexican political party
SCJN	Suprema Corte de Justicia Nacional (National Supreme Court of Justice), Mexico's supreme court.
SEDENA	Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (Mexican Secretary of Defense, Army and Air Force)
SEGOB	Secretaría de Gobernación (Mexican Interior Ministry)
SEMAR	Secretaría de Marina (Mexican Secretary of the Navy)
SNSP	Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (Mexican National Security System)
SSP	Secretaria de Seguridad Publica (Public Security Ministry)
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
U.S.	United States
USA	United States of America

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Violence is lower in Mexico than elsewhere in the Americas, but average for the region.**
Levels of violence are relatively lower in Mexico than in several other countries in the Americas, but are about average for the Western Hemisphere. Mexico's 2012 homicide rate of 21.5 was just above the region's average of approximately 21.4 homicides per 100,000 people. However, this was up nearly threefold from Mexico's rate of 8.1 per 100,000 in 2007. No other country in the hemisphere has seen such a large increase in the number or rate of homicides over the last decade.
- **Homicides had been declining through the mid-2000s, reaching a record low in 2007.**
Continuing a long-term trend, the number of intentional homicides documented by Mexico's National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information (INEGI) declined significantly under both presidents Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) and Vicente Fox (2000-2006). Under Zedillo, the number of intentional homicides declined fairly steadily from 15,839 in 1994 to 10,737 in 2000, totaling 80,311 homicides. The annual number of homicides fluctuated somewhat under Fox, but continued to decline generally, with a total of 60,162 homicides. Moreover, the number of homicides actually reached a record low of 8,867 intentional homicides in 2007, the first full year in office for Felipe Calderón (2006-2012).
- **Violence grew dramatically after 2008, with the number of homicides peaking in 2011.**
After President Calderón's first year, the number of intentional homicides documented by INEGI climbed sharply, with year-over-year increases of more than 58% in 2008, 41% in 2009, 30% in 2010, and 5% in 2011. The security situation in Mexico improved in 2012, resulting in a 4% decrease in homicides documented by INEGI, and then 16% and 15% decreases in 2013 and 2014, respectively, during Peña Nieto's first few years in office. All told, throughout the Calderón administration, INEGI reported 121,669 homicides, an average of over 20,000 people per year, more than 55 people per day, or just over two people every hour.
- **The total number of homicides appears to have increased by 8.1-8.7% in 2015.**
While INEGI released data for all 12 months of 2015, the data from the second half of the year is perceived to be incomplete. Yet based on a projection by Justice in Mexico using the first six month's data, the authors estimate a modest 8.1% rate of increase in INEGI's final data released later this year, increasing INEGI's 2014 total number of homicides from 20,010 to 21,631 in 2015. This is an unexpected increase from the authors' prediction in last year's report that INEGI's figures would *decrease* by roughly 9%. For its part, Mexico's National Security System (SNSP) suggests that the total number of intentional homicides in 2015 increased by 8.7% from 15,653 in 2014 to 17,013 in 2015. However, some analysts are skeptical about SNSP's data because of concerns about possible political manipulation by the Peña Nieto administration, so these findings should be viewed with caution.
- **Increases in cases of intentional homicide were registered in all but a handful of states.**
Fueling the national increase in homicides were increases in most states, with the largest increases registered in the Pacific coastal state of Guerrero, which increased from 1,514 cases in

2014 to 2,016 cases in 2015. A handful of states registered noticeable decreases, including Chihuahua (declining from 1,087 cases in 2014 to 945 cases in 2015) and Michoacán (declining from 904 cases in 2014 to 777 cases in 2015), which are especially notable because both states have been important focal points in efforts to combat organized crime.

- **Mexico's recent violence is largely attributable to drug trafficking and organized crime.**
A large part of the sudden increase in violence in Mexico is attributable to drug trafficking and organized crime groups. Tallies compiled independently by media organizations in Mexico suggest that at least a quarter and as many as half of all intentional homicides in 2015 bore characteristics typical of organized-crime related killings, including the use of high-caliber automatic weapons, torture, dismemberment, and explicit messages involving organized-crime groups. The Mexican newspaper *Reforma* put the figure at 4,892 organized-crime-style homicides in 2015 (though its coverage appeared to be less complete and less consistent with other sources than previous years), while *Milenio* reported 8,423 for the year.
- **High profile victims killed decreased slightly from 2014, though still remain high.**
According to Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* dataset, five current or former mayors or mayoral candidates were killed in 2015, down from six in 2014 and 12 in each of the two years prior. Most notably was the assassination of Aidé Nava González, a PRD mayoral candidate Guerrero who was not only the only female killed among the five documented, but also the only victim to be tortured and beheaded, all of which made headlines. Justice in Mexico also documented 15 journalists and media-support workers killed in 2015 in Mexico, same as 2014's tally. All but one of those victims was male, and two thirds of the murders occurred in only three states: Oaxaca (4), Veracruz (3), and Tabasco (3).
- **Mexico's shifting drug trafficking landscape has led to the emergence of *cartelitos*.**
The Cartel de Jalisco Nuevo Generación (CJNG) appears to be dominating the drug trafficking scene in Mexico, having moved into the power vacuum left by other cartels' decline, including most recently that of the Knights Templar Organization (KTO). As some cartels have grown weaker with the takedown of their leadership in previous years and their groups' resulting fragmentation, most of the now smaller, regional criminal organizations have far lesser capability to finance and manage major drug trafficking operations. These *cartelitos* are arguably a much greater threat to public security, in that they obtain revenue through kidnapping, robbery, and extortion.
- **President Peña Nieto's approval rating hits new low.**
Despite launching his presidency in 2012 with high hopes, in 2015, President Peña Nieto (2012-2018) saw the public's lowest approval rating and highest dissatisfaction rating not just for his first three years in office, but also surpassing his predecessors, Presidents Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006-2012). His unpopularity appears to have more to do with his administration's missteps and tone-deaf responses in a series of tragedies and scandals in recent years than with this past year's increase in homicides.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In response to the increases in crime and violence that have plagued Mexico over the past decade, the Justice in Mexico program at the University of San Diego began to track these problems in 2006. Initially, Justice in Mexico's monitoring efforts took the form of monthly bulletins distributed to academics, analysts, and journalists closely focused on rule of law and security issues in Mexico. However, as the number of homicides in Mexico began to escalate dramatically, Justice in Mexico produced its first special report on "drug violence" in early 2010. Over the years, the patterns of crime and violence in Mexico have shifted significantly, with major changes at the sub-national level.

There have been improvements in some geographic areas and troublesome increases elsewhere. Moreover, while levels of violence declined significantly year over year after the inauguration of Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto in December 2012, in 2015 the number of homicides in Mexico actually increased for the first time since then. As we discuss in this report, what also increased was the impatience of ordinary citizens in the face of the seeming complacency, ineptitude, and even complicity of Mexican government officials in relation to problems of crime and violence. What is clear is that the overall security situation in Mexico remains quite problematic, and major improvements to strengthen the rule of law are urgently needed.

While there are many forms of violence in Mexico that contribute to homicides in Mexico, for several years running a major portion of Mexico's homicides—at least a quarter and as many as half—have been directly attributable to drug trafficking organizations and other organized crime groups (OCGs). This presents a vexing problem for Mexican authorities, and raises serious questions about the merits of current counter-drug efforts around the world. For this reason, while it is also important to address other aspects of Mexico's recent crime and violence, this series of annual special reports focuses especially on the problem of so-called "drug-related" or "organized crime-style" violence, which we explain more extensively in Appendix A: Defining Drug-Related Violence.

Over the years, this series of special reports has tried to interpret and reconcile often confusing, imperfect, and even conflicting information from both official and non-governmental sources working on this issue. Indeed, too often, both the Mexican government and its critics tend to make imprecise or inaccurate statistical claims: for example, while the Mexican government has sometimes obscured the number of organized crime related homicides, critics and even conventional journalistic sources have sometimes tended to exaggerate that toll. As the seventh annual report on *Drug Violence in Mexico*, this study compiles the latest available data and analysis of trends to help separate the signals from the noise to help better understand the facets, implications, and possible remedies to Mexico's ongoing crisis of egregious violence, rampant organized crime, pervasive official corruption, and shocking human rights violations.

Today, the number of organized crime-style homicides in Mexico—between 65,000 and 80,000 killings since 2006—easily surpasses the number of battle-related casualties in several other major

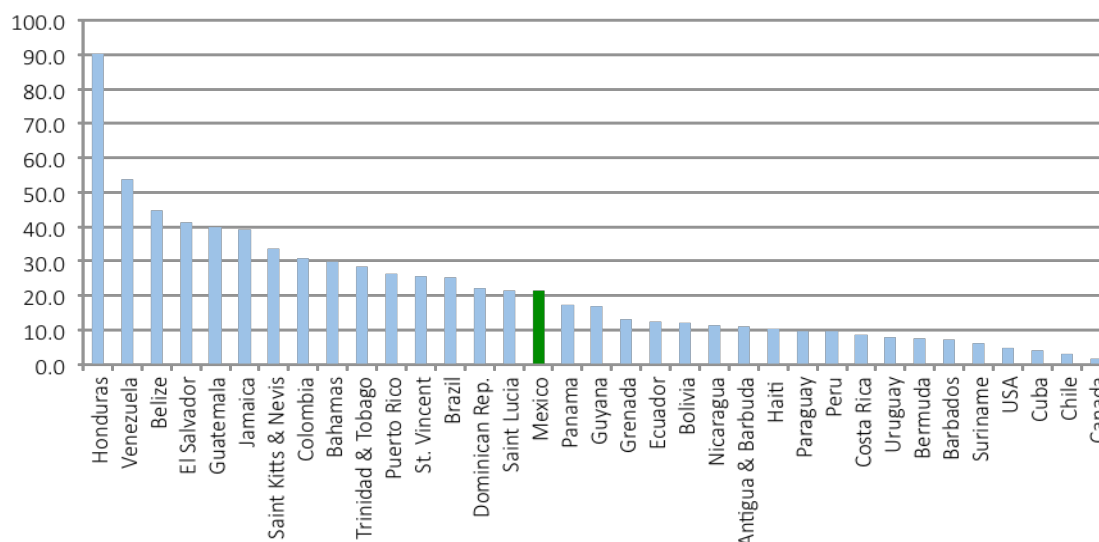
conflicts around the world. For example, more Mexicans have been killed by organized crime-style homicides than the number of U.S. soldiers killed in the War for Independence (4,000), the Mexican American War (13,000), the Spanish American War (2,000), World War I (53,000), the Korean Conflict (36,000), the Vietnam War (58,000), or the current conflicts in Afghanistan (2,000), and Iraq (4,000).¹ With this in mind, the authors sincerely hope that the information in this report will help policy makers, activists, and the public to come to consensus on bringing an end to the ongoing problem of organized crime-style violence in Mexico.

II. UNDERSTANDING MEXICO’S RECENT VIOLENCE

A. Mexico’s Violence in Perspective

It is important to note at the outset that how one measures violence is contingent on many, often highly subjective factors. By some measures, the level of violence in Mexico is “modest,” particularly within the Western Hemisphere. As Justice in Mexico has noted in previous reports, the latest data on homicide rates—one of the most commonly used indicators for comparing levels of violence—are much higher in other countries in the Americas. As illustrated in Figure 1, in recent years, Honduras has had nearly four times as many murders per capita as Mexico, El Salvador’s rate is three times as high, and Venezuela’s is more than twice as high. Even Colombia, which is frequently referenced as a “success story” in efforts to reduce crime and violence, has a homicide rate that is nearly 50% greater than Mexico’s.

Figure 1: National Homicide Rates (per 100,000 inhabitants) for Selected Latin American Countries



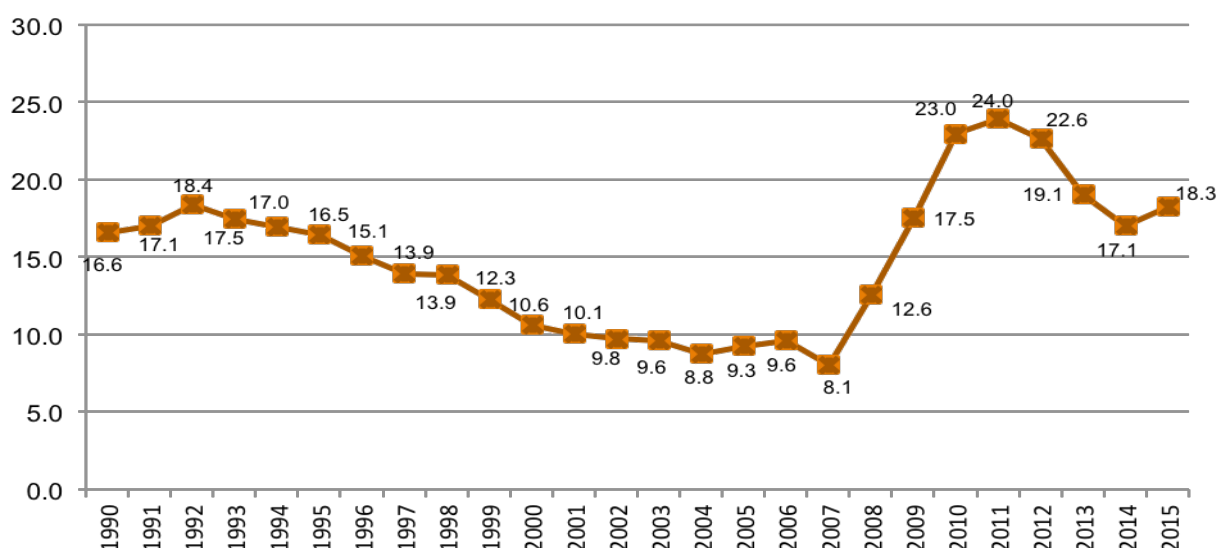
Note: This chart uses the latest available UNODC intentional homicide data for each country from 2012. See UNODC *Global Study on Homicide*, released March 2014.

¹ These figures reflect both “battle deaths” and “other deaths (in theater)” of U.S. soldiers registered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and are rounded to the lowest 1,000. These figures do not include non-combat deaths or the deaths of non-U.S. soldiers. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “Americas Wars,” (May 2015), http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs_americas_wars.pdf

Yet, this comparison offers little cause for celebration. Contemporary Latin America has some of the highest rates of criminal violence in the world, in many cases matching or exceeding the levels of violence seen during the civil conflicts that plagued the region decades ago. What is different today about violence in Latin America is that rather than fighting and dying for revolutionary ideologies, the region's young men are fighting and dying for little more than a fistful of dollars. Indeed, some reports in recent years suggest that paid gunmen and assassins working on behalf of organized crime groups earn as little as a few hundred dollars a month. In a sad twist on Francis Fukuyama's vision of our times, the "end of ideology" has wrought violence and conflict in Latin America on a scale and with a savagery that is perhaps even more horrific because there is no cause or deeper meaning.

While Mexico's violence is about average when it comes to the rate of homicides per capita, its security challenges are arguably of significant concern for a number of reasons. First, the rate of homicides in Mexico escalated quite dramatically in recent years, reversing a multi-decade downward trend. Historical data suggest that homicide in Mexico generally declined from the 1930s into the mid-2000s.² However, from 2007 to 2011, Mexico's rate climbed sharply, increasing threefold from roughly 8.1 to 23.5 homicides per 100,000, according to figures from Mexico's National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information, INEGI.³ While current data suggest a decline in homicides and the overall rate, the elevated level of homicide has provoked enormous alarm both domestically and internationally about the problem of violence in Mexico.

Figure 2: Homicide Rate in Mexico (Per 100,000), 1995-2015



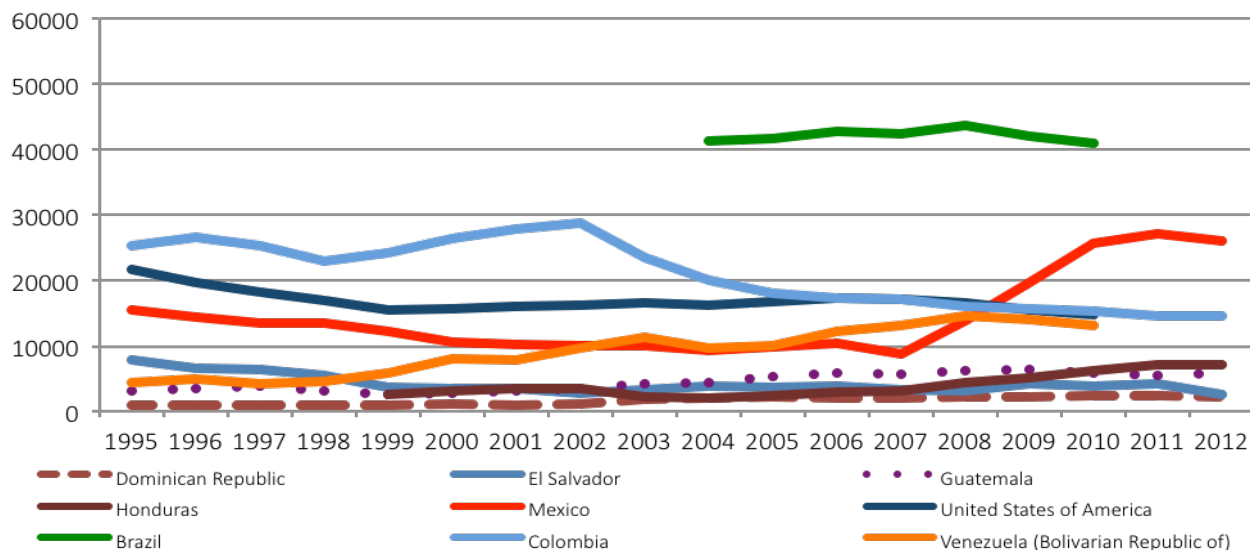
Source: INEGI. Authors' calculations based on INEGI homicide data and CONAPO's 2010 population estimates for all years. Results vary when revised CONAPO population estimates from later years are applied.

² Shirk and Ríos (2007) use data from homicide prosecutions to show the longer term, downward trend in homicides from the 1930s to the mid-2000s. Escalante (2009) uses actual homicide data to demonstrate that this trend continued from the 1990s to the late 2000s. See David A. Shirk and Alejandra Ríos Cázares. "Introduction: Reforming the Administration of Justice in Mexico." In *Reforming the Administration of Justice in Mexico*, edited by Wayne A. Cornelius and David A. Shirk. Notre Dame; La Jolla: University of Notre Dame Press; Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 2007; Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo. "Homicidios 1990-2007." *Nexos*, 2009.

³ It is important to note that these INEGI figures do not differentiate between intentional homicides and unintentional homicides (e.g., car accidents).

A second reason why Mexico's violence has provoked such enormous concern has to do with the sheer number of murders in the country that resulted from these increases. Because Mexico had an estimated population of over 121 million people in 2015—the third largest population among all countries in the Americas, after the United States and Brazil—even a modest increase in Mexico's homicide rate translates into the loss of thousands of lives.⁴ Indeed, during the four-year rise in violence from 2007 to 2011, the number of murders increased from 8,867 to 27,199. No other country in the Western Hemisphere saw such a large increase either in the homicide rate or in the absolute number of homicides over the last two decades.

Figure 3: Total Homicides in Selected Neighboring Countries, 1995-2012



Source: UNODC, homicides (1995-2011).

Of course, as we noted in previous years' report, not all forms of death provoke an equal sense of concern and alarm, and there is little doubt that Mexico's violence has provoked greater attention than other troubling problems around the world. For example, South Korea has had a suicide rate of 29 per 100,000 people in recent years; therefore, more South Koreans died by their own hand than the number of people murdered in Mexico even amid the worst of its violence. More broadly, as a matter of human security, nearly two thirds of deaths worldwide are attributable to non-contagious diseases, like coronary disease or diabetes, and roughly 16% of deaths are attributable to infectious diseases that are largely preventable, like AIDS and malaria.⁵ Thus, ordinary people around the world should be much more concerned about the possible dangers associated with cheeseburgers and mosquitoes than about being killed by other people, in Mexico or anywhere else.

Clearly, however, such everyday hazards are considered too mundane to grab headlines. Violence, on the other hand, is difficult to ignore precisely because it is outside the normal range of acceptable human conduct and experience. Murder, in particular, is a form of violence for which there are very low levels of tolerance in most societies around the world. When there is a sudden increase in the

⁴ The estimated population of Mexico in 2010 based on INEGI's national census was 112,336,538. The Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) revised estimate for Mexico's national population by mid-2014 was 119,711,492.

⁵ "10 Facts on Noncommunicable Diseases," World Health Organization, http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/noncommunicable_diseases/facts/en. Center for Strategic & International Studies, "Infectious Diseases: A Persistent Threat." <http://www.smartglobalhealth.org/issues/entry/infectious-diseases>

number of homicides, it is appropriate to pay attention and try to address the problem. What is particularly concerning about Mexico's sudden increases in homicides in recent years is that much or most of this violence is attributable to organized crime groups, commonly defined as groups of individuals acting in concert over a sustained period of time with the objective of deliberately violating established law, often with trans-national organizational capabilities and influences. Still, as scholars of organized crime have demonstrated, violence is not necessarily the norm even in the underworld.⁶ Thus, Mexico's recent surge in violence requires some understanding of recent dynamics among Mexican organized crime groups, particularly those involved in drug trafficking.

B. The Role of Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Mexico

In addition to understanding the scale and rate of crime and violence in Mexico in recent years, it is also necessary to underscore its sources. As this and past reports have demonstrated, recent increases in violence are closely connected to the problem of organized crime, and especially drug trafficking and related activities. Mexico's contemporary organized crime groups have their roots in the advent of alcohol and drug prohibition in the 1920s and 1930s. While alcohol smuggling from Mexico faded away almost immediately after prohibition was repealed in 1933, the smuggling of heroin and marijuana—both produced in Mexico—has continued into the present.

Drug trafficking became dramatically more profitable and well consolidated in Mexico when it became a major transit point for cocaine trafficking from Colombia to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s.⁷ With the decline of Colombia's major drug-trafficking organizations, Mexican criminal organizations came to dominate the business by the late 1980s. As they did, Mexican traffickers also became involved in producing and trafficking synthetic drugs, like methamphetamines and MDMA (Ecstasy). Like the Colombians that they superseded, Mexican traffickers were commonly described as "cartels" because they employed some of the same practices as business organizations that seek to generally reduce market competition (e.g., explicitly or implicitly negotiating territories for operation and distribution). Indeed, the lack of market competition was key to the success of Mexican drug traffickers, who are believed by many experts to have been directly involved in protecting and regulating the illicit drug trade.⁸

This relatively harmonious arrangement changed in the aftermath of the 1985 murder of U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, which led to intense U.S. pressure on Mexican authorities to arrest the three main leaders of the so-called Guadalajara Cartel. Both Ernesto Fonseca and Rafael Caro Quintero were arrested within months of Camarena's murder, while Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo managed to continue the cartel's operations until he was arrested in 1989. Thereafter, the splitting of the Guadalajara Cartel into rival, regionally based factions set in motion a competitive struggle for supply routes that has continued into the present. Starting in the early 2000s, that competition grew significantly more intense and more violent due to a series of

⁶ Andreas, P. and J. Wallman (2009). "Illicit Markets and Violence: What is the Relationship?" *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 52: 225-229.

⁷ See, for example: Elaine Shannon, *Desperados: Latin Drug Lords, U.S. Lawmen, and the War America Can't Win*. New York: Viking, 1988; Luis Astorga and David A. Shirk, "Drugs, Crime, and Violence," in Peter H. Smith and Andrew Selee (eds.) *Mexico and the United States: The Politics of Partnership*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013.

⁸ See, for example: Astorga Almanza, L. A. (2000). "Traficantes de drogas, políticos y policías en el siglo XX mexicano," in Claudio Lomnitz (ed.), *Vicios públicos, virtudes privadas: La corrupción en México*, Mexico City, CIESAS; Carlos Flores Pérez, "Organized Crime and Official Corruption in Mexico," in Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk. San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, 2009.

government crackdowns, internal power struggles, and splits among Mexico's organized crime groups.

Over the last several years, the accumulated toll of this violence has been the loss of tens of thousands of lives, and the problem has become a central preoccupation for both government officials and ordinary citizens. Moreover, as the level of violence in Mexico grew, it also became more diffuse in a number of ways. While there is now considerable evidence that the number of homicides in Mexico had begun to subside over the past few years, 2015 witnessed the first uptick in the country's homicide rates in three years, violence remains relatively high, and the security situation remains highly problematic in certain parts of the country. As such, careful monitoring and study continue to be needed to understand the manifestations, root causes, and possible solutions to the problem of violence in Mexico.

This report examines Mexico's drug-related and organized crime-style violence in substantial detail, drawing on over several years of data gathering and research, as well as the latest available data from a variety of sources. A full discussion of the data and methodology employed in this and previous reports can be found in the appendix. What must be said at the outset is that the information available to evaluate organized crime and violence in Mexico are highly imperfect and must be considered an approximation, at best. There are significant limits, gaps, and distortions found in the available data, and too often there is insufficient transparency about how data are compiled.

As in previous years, part of the purpose of this report is to sift through and analyze the available information in order to begin to make sense of what we know and what we do not. Thus, all of the claims presented are therefore necessarily tentative, and the authors have done their best to temper any claims, conclusions, or recommendations accordingly. Perhaps the most important recommendation that follows from this report is that the Mexican government and experts working on the problem of crime and violence in Mexico should work to increase the reliability, frequency, and timeliness with which data is made available for public scrutiny. Doing so will help to inform both the public and policy decisions in ways that will ultimately help to address the problem of crime and violence more effectively.

III. FINDINGS: DRUG VIOLENCE IN MEXICO

Previous *Drug Violence in Mexico* reports prepared by Justice in Mexico discuss the general trends in organized crime homicides for years prior to 2015 in considerable detail. The purpose of this report is not to revisit past discussions, but to examine the relevant findings for 2015.

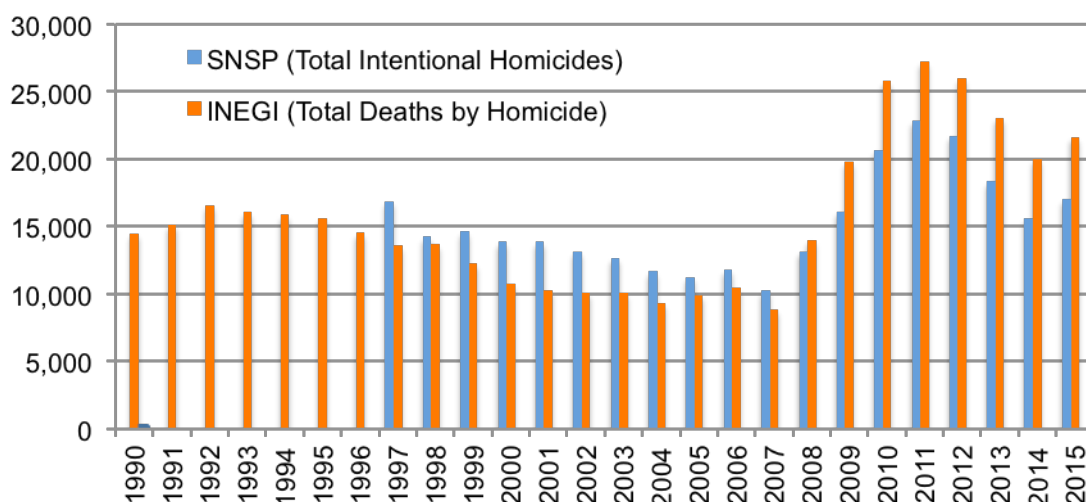
A. Homicide Levels Have Risen Slightly

As noted earlier, homicide levels in Mexico spiked dramatically from 2007 to 2011, and then began a three-year decline in 2012 continuing through 2013 and 2014. 2015, however, has shown the first increase in levels of homicide, counter to the Peña Nieto administration's reassurance that crime and violence was decreasing. Both of Mexico's official data sources on homicides—INEGI and the National Public Security System (SNSP)—have been consistent in documenting these trends (See Figure 4). It is important to note that INEGI's homicide data for any given year are typically made available in the latter part of the following year, so Figure 4 provides a projected figure for 2015. INEGI did release partial data for the second half of 2015 when this report went to print; however,

it does not appear to be comprehensive and is not expected to be released until summer 2016. Justice in Mexico has thus rendered a projected value for INEGI data for the latter part of 2015, which it has done in previous years with relative certainty. Just last year, for example, Justice in Mexico predicted INEGI would report 20,670 homicides for 2014, only 560 more than the 20,010 total actually released, a marginal difference of 3.2%.⁹ This year, we estimate that INEGI's tally for all homicides will increase by approximately 8.1%, bringing the total number of homicides reported for 2015 to roughly 21,631 from 20,010 in 2014, an increase of 1,621 victims.¹⁰

SNSP, meanwhile, has reported its figures for intentional homicides in 2015, which indicate an 8.7% increase from 2014, contrary to Justice in Mexico's prediction in last year's report. Once again, it is important to emphasize that despite elevated SNSP homicide levels, any slight uptick in homicide rates represents several thousands of individuals killed. SNSP's nearly 9% increase is a jump from 15,653 homicides in 2014 to 17,013 in 2015, a difference of 1,360 victims.

Figure 4: Total Annual Homicide Data in Mexico as Reported by INEGI & SNSP (1990-2015)



Sources: INEGI and SNSP.

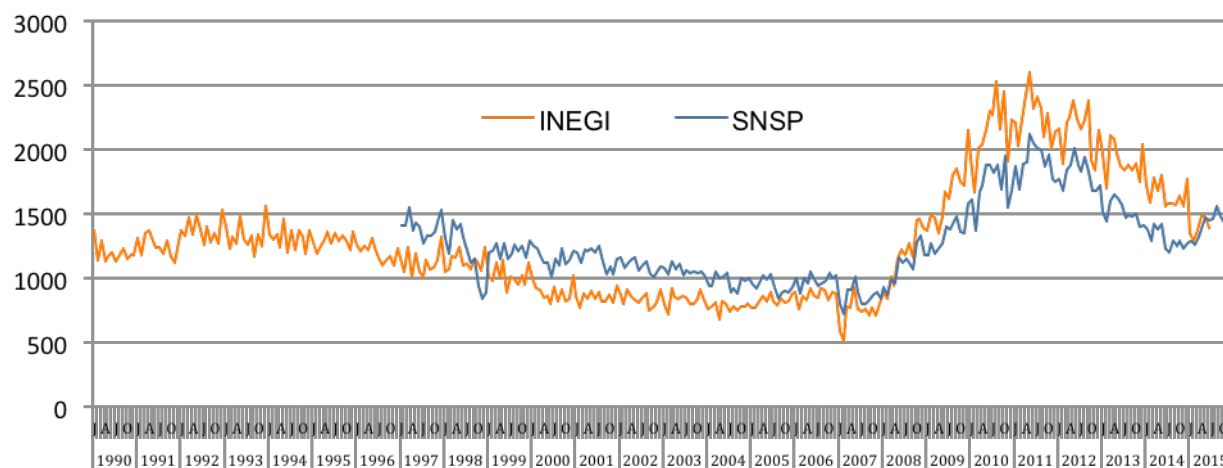
Disaggregating these data by month reveals some trends that might be missed in reviewing annual totals. First, since 2007, Mexico's homicide levels have been subject to relatively larger spikes and declines than in years past. There is also some variation within a given year, particularly at the peak

⁹ Here we must underscore that there is a significant difference in the methodologies for INEGI and SNSP, both in the type and method of data gathered. The fact that INEGI includes all homicides and SNSP focuses only on intentional homicides helps explain the higher figures reported by the former, at least since 2007. The authors have no explanation for why SNSP's figures consistently exceeded those of INEGI up to 2007, except the possibility that there may have been a change in methodology in either organization.

¹⁰ This is an approximation based primarily on the trajectory of SNSP's figures for intentional homicide. This report has offered such approximations—within a 2.5-5% margin of error—for INEGI's figures for 2012, 2013, and 2014. Rather than an identical rate of decline for both INEGI and SNSP, we suspect that as SNSP's intentional homicides increase, they will likely represent an increasing share of all homicides reported by INEGI. Thus, we estimate that the rate of increase reported by INEGI will be somewhat less than the 8.7% increase reported by SNSP this year. For 2015, the authors settled on a figure of about 8.1%, an increase roughly in proportion to the previous year's comparison of INEGI and SNSP data.

of violence between 2010 and 2012, as the number of homicides documented tended to be relatively lower in the first six months of the year, while surging in the second half of the year.

Figure 5: Total Monthly Homicides (2006-2015)



Sources: INEGI and SNSP.

Of course, past trends are not necessarily a good basis for future predictions, as exemplified by the trend reversal in 2015 with a slight uptick in homicides. Still, as reported last year, there does appear to be a structural shift in the violence in Mexico, as the number of homicides in certain highly conflicted parts of the country has subsided substantially. Yet it is important to recognize that since Mexico's violence accelerated more quickly than it has been decelerating, the number of homicides will not reach 2007 levels until well after 2020, assuming that we see a renewed downward trend of about 10% per year moving forward.¹¹ Given the moderately elevated levels of violence currently being reported for 2016 as this report goes to press, this seems unlikely.

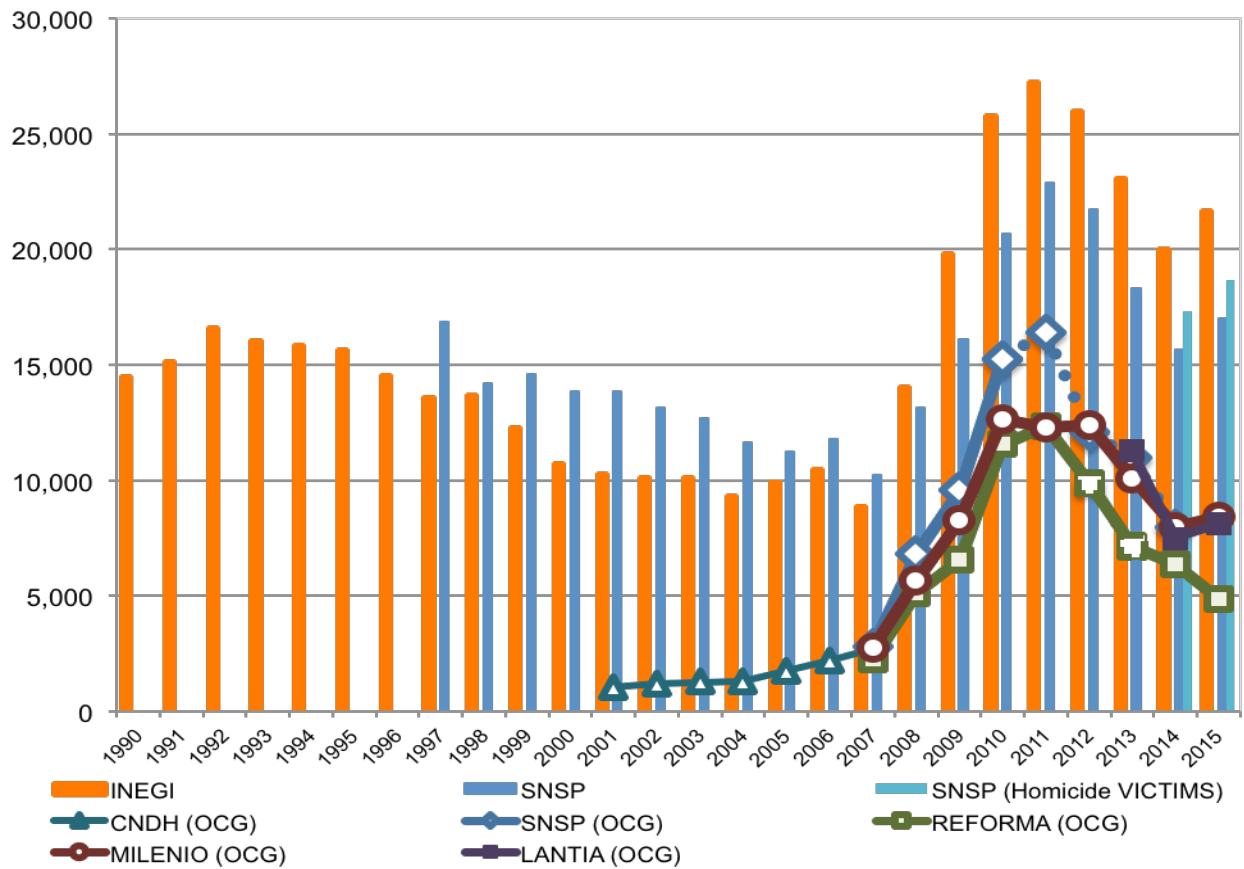
B. Organized-Crime-Style Killings Still Constitute a Major Share of Homicides

A review of data generated by various independent sources shows that a large proportion of homicides in recent years bears characteristics typically associated with organized crime-style violence: gun battles, group executions, torture, dismemberment, high powered weaponry, beheadings, “narco” messages, mass graves, and other methods used by drug trafficking and organized crime groups. Between a quarter and a half of all homicides identified in 2015 bore such characteristics. The solid lines in Figure 6 plot the available data on organized-crime-style homicides from SNSP (2007-2013), *Reforma* (2006-2012 and 2013-2015), and *Milenio* (2007-2015)¹²

¹¹ More specifically, from 2007 to 2011, the average annual rate of increase in the number of intentional homicides was greater than 20% according to SNSP and greater than 33% according to INEGI. The average annual rate of decline reported by SNSP from 2011 through 2014 was roughly 10%, but then increased 8.7% in 2015. Calculations for INEGI for 2015 also increased, meaning the 33% rate of decline reversed with the expected 8.1% increase, according to Justice in Mexico's estimation.

¹² As noted in the methodological discussion in the Appendix, one of the limitations of both official and non-governmental tallies of organized-crime-style homicides is that there are significant gaps in reporting by some sources, notably SNSP and *Reforma*.

Figure 6: Comparison of Homicide and Organized Crime Homicide Data for Various Sources, 1990 through 2015



Sources: INEGI, SNSP, *Reforma*, *Milenio*, Lantia, CNDH. This figure also shows a bar plotting number of homicide victims for 2014 and 2015, recently released by SNSP.¹³

The last complete annual dataset from the Mexican government on organized crime-style homicides was released in 2010, so there has been no publicly available official annual figures on such killings since then. However, *Milenio*, which produced its figures throughout 2015, reported 8,423 organized-crime-style homicides for the year. Meanwhile, in 2015, *Reforma* put the figure for organized-crime-style homicides at 4,892, the lowest number reported by that newspaper since 2007 when it started reporting organized crime related deaths. However, it is important to note that *Reforma's* tallies have appeared to be less complete and less consistent in recent years than in the past. Justice in Mexico continues to monitor and record *Reforma's* figures, but with strong reservations about the reliability of its methodology and data. What is clear is that monitoring organized-crime related homicides is a precarious and extremely labor intensive exercise, and despite the enormous demand for such data there are few organizations with the capacity to reliably and effectively track, analyze, and report on the problem.

¹³ For the last two years, SNSP has been releasing new data reflecting the number of victims of homicide and other crimes. Such numbers are higher than previous SNSP data, as they measure actual victims of crimes whereas the traditional dataset from SNSP counts open investigations in which there could be more than one victim. Both numbers are still well below INEGI's tally.

Determining the approximate proportion of homicides resulting from organized-crime-style violence depends upon which sources are used to calculate each figure (See Table 1). Based on the estimated number of INEGI homicides provided above, in 2015 organized-crime-style homicides represented approximately 25%-40% of the total number of all homicides, depending on whether we reference the tallies of *Milenio* (38.9%), *Reforma* (22.6%), or the consulting firm Lantia (37.5%).¹⁴ Because SNSP intentional homicide figures are typically lower than those produced by INEGI, tallies of organized-crime-style homicides represent a significantly larger proportion—30-50%—of all homicides when SNSP data are referenced using these same tallies and estimates: *Milenio* (49.5%), *Reforma* (28.8%), and Lantia (47.7%). In short, whether organized-crime-style homicides represent just one-in-four or as many as half of all homicides, they continue to be a major form of murder in Mexico.

Table 1: Percentage of INEGI and SNSP Homicides Attributed to Organized-Crime-Style Homicide in *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and Lantia Tallies, 2006-2015

YEAR	SNSP OCG (as % INEGI)	SNSP OCG (as % SNSP)	MILENIO OCG (as % INEGI)	MILENIO OCG (as % SNSP)	REFORMA OCG (as % INEGI)	REFORMA OCG (as % SNSP)	LANTIA OCG (as % INEGI)	LANTIA OCG (as % SNSP)
2006	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	20.3%	18.0%		
2007	31.9%	27.6%	31.3%	27.0%	25.6%	22.1%		
2008	48.8%	52.0%	40.5%	43.2%	36.6%	39.0%		
2009	48.5%	59.6%	41.8%	51.4%	33.3%	40.9%		
2010	59.3%	73.9%	49.1%	61.2%	45.0%	56.0%		
2011	60.3%	71.8%	45.1%	53.8%	45.4%	54.1%		
2012	46.5%	55.6%	47.8%	57.1%	38.2%	45.6%		
2013	47.7%	60.0%	43.8%	55.1%	31.1%	39.1%	48.9%	61.5%
2014			39.9%	51.1%	32.0%	40.9%	37.5%	47.9%
2015			38.9%	49.5%	22.6%	28.8%	37.5%	47.7%
AVE	47.9%	56.4%	42.4%	50.0%	34.2%	39.5%	43.2%	54.7%

Sources: INEGI, SNSP, *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and Lantia for all available years and projections. Note: This table shows the proportion of organized-crime-style homicides relative to all homicides, as reported by each source (relative to the two official sources of data on homicide: INEGI and SNSP). For percentages shown in red, one or both sources in the comparison are based on projections estimated by the authors.

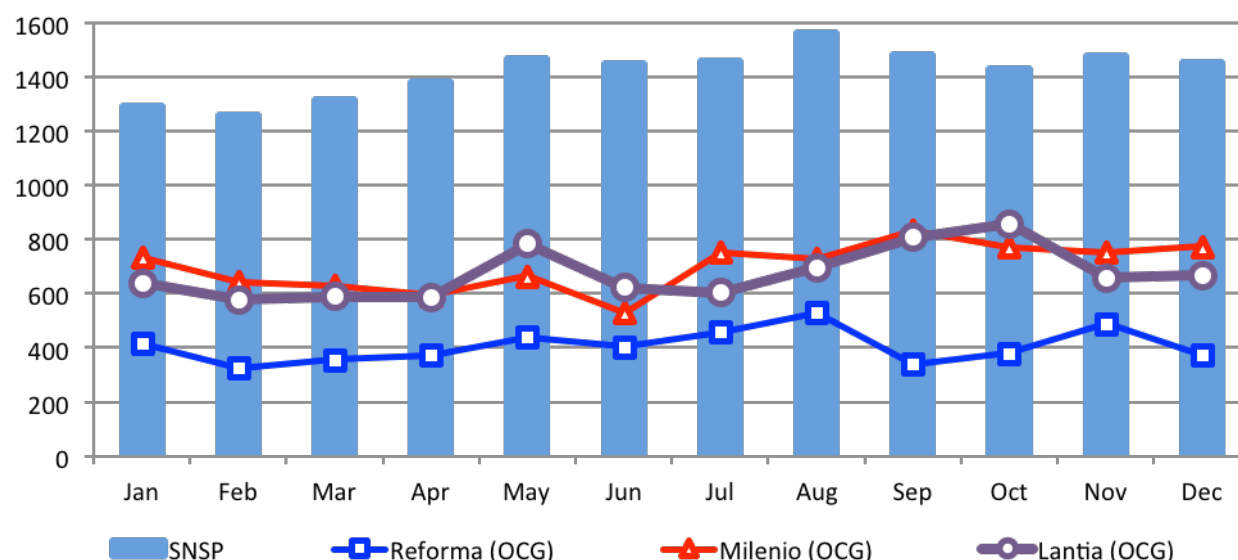
The number of organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Milenio* in 2015 represented almost 50% of the total number of intentional homicides reported by SNSP that same year, though this constituted the lowest proportion reported by *Milenio* since 2008. If the authors' 2015 projections for INEGI are reasonably accurate, then the number of organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Milenio* would constitute about 38.9% of the total number of homicides for that year, just 0.2% higher than last year's data, which was the lowest proportion since 2008.¹⁵ More conservatively, comparing *Reforma's* tally for 2015 to the authors' projection for INEGI in the same year, it would appear that organized-crime-style homicides made up just under a quarter of all homicides in

¹⁴ Lantia is a consulting firm headed by Mexican security expert Eduardo Guerrero. Lantia's data are not publicly available for previous years.

¹⁵ By any measure, organized crime style homicides were at their lowest proportion in 2007, but the comparison is made here to 2008 because of this was the year that homicides made a dramatic increase, reversing historical trends.

Mexico, the lowest proportion than at any point since *Reforma* began recording data in 2007. In short, while the number of homicides increased in 2015, the proportion attributable to organized crime stayed relatively the same compared to 2014's data or decreased slightly in *Reforma's* case.

Figure 7: Comparison of Intentional Homicides and Organized Crime Homicides for Various Sources in 2015



Source: SNSP, *Milenio*, *Reforma*, and Lantia.

Finally, it is worth comparing the monthly data available from 2015 for intentional homicides reported by SNSP and organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and Lantia. It seems that there was a rather high degree of consistency among figures on organized-crime-style homicide reported by *Milenio* and Lantia, ranging at most in July by 148 homicides, a notable difference, and as little as five homicides in April. Meanwhile, *Reforma's* figures deviated considerably from those of the other two independent sources, particularly in September, October, and December of 2015 when the difference between the homicides reported reached between 470 and 496 bodies. It is worth noting as well that the figures produced by *Milenio* and Lantia are both more closely correlated to the general homicide figures generated by SNSP than are those produced by *Reforma*.

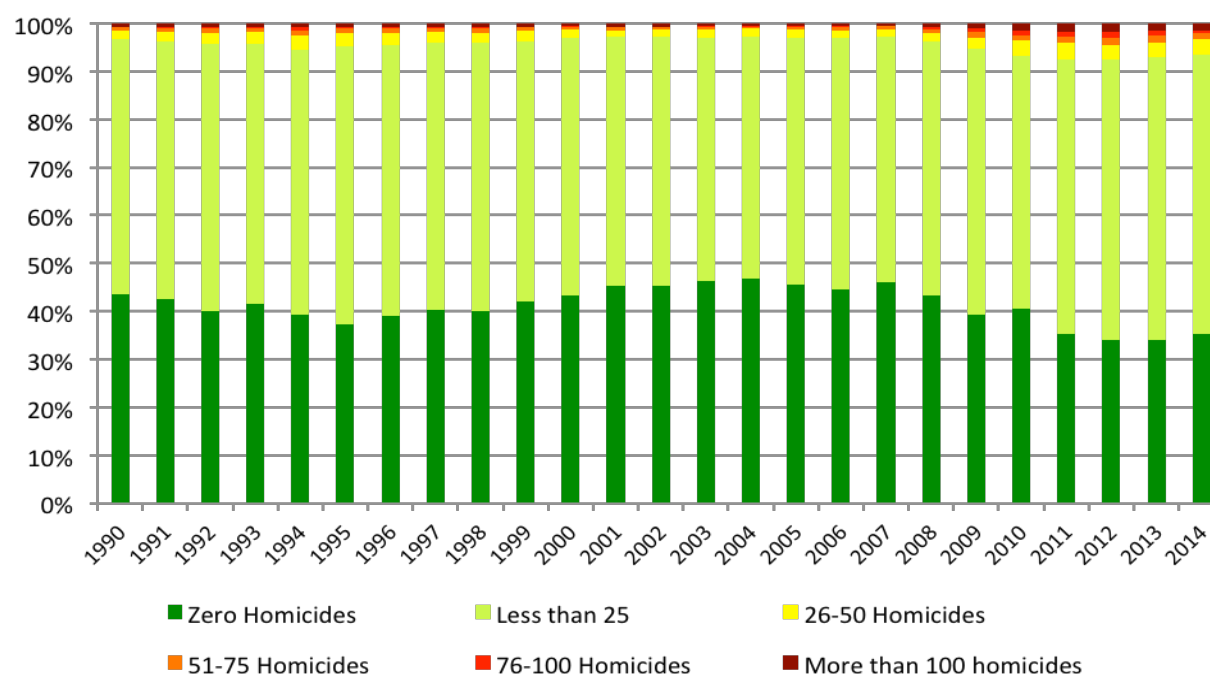
C. Shifting Geographic Patterns of Violence

While there is a general perception that Mexico's violence is pervasive and persistent throughout the country, the reality is that violence has been highly localized, has been sporadic, and has frequently shifted from one geographic area to another in recent years. Using the data on homicides and organized crime-related homicides available at the municipal and state levels, respectively, the authors review some of the trends and shifts in the geographic distribution of violence below.

1. The Geographic Dispersion of Intentional Homicides at Municipal Level Increases

In past reports, one of the most important findings about the geographic distribution of violence in Mexico is that over the last several years the phenomenon of homicide not only increased in number but also became dispersed throughout more areas of the country. In 2007, the historic low point in homicide rates in Mexico, INEGI figures reported that approximately 1,073 of Mexico's roughly 2,450 municipalities had zero homicides, as illustrated in Figure 8.¹⁶ Indeed, for the entire Fox administration (2000-2006) and the first year of the Calderón administration (2006-2012), there was a historically unprecedented period in which over 40% of Mexican municipalities saw not a single murder. Thereafter, Mexico experienced a fairly steady decline in the number of “murder-free” municipalities each year, reaching a low of 727 municipalities in 2012. Meanwhile, during the same time period, there was steady increase in the number of municipalities with more than 25 homicides, growing from 62 in 2007 to 178 in 2012. However, in 2013, the geographical dispersion of homicide reversed for the first time since 2007. That is, from 2012 to 2015, the number of municipalities with more than 25 homicides declined from 178 to 136. What is concerning, however, is that the number of municipalities with zero homicides also decreased during that time from 727 to 646, indicating that homicides are happening in more municipalities nationwide. Given the anticipated release of INEGI's complete dataset in mid-2016, the authors expect the data to confirm the increase in geographic dispersion of intentional homicides in Mexico.

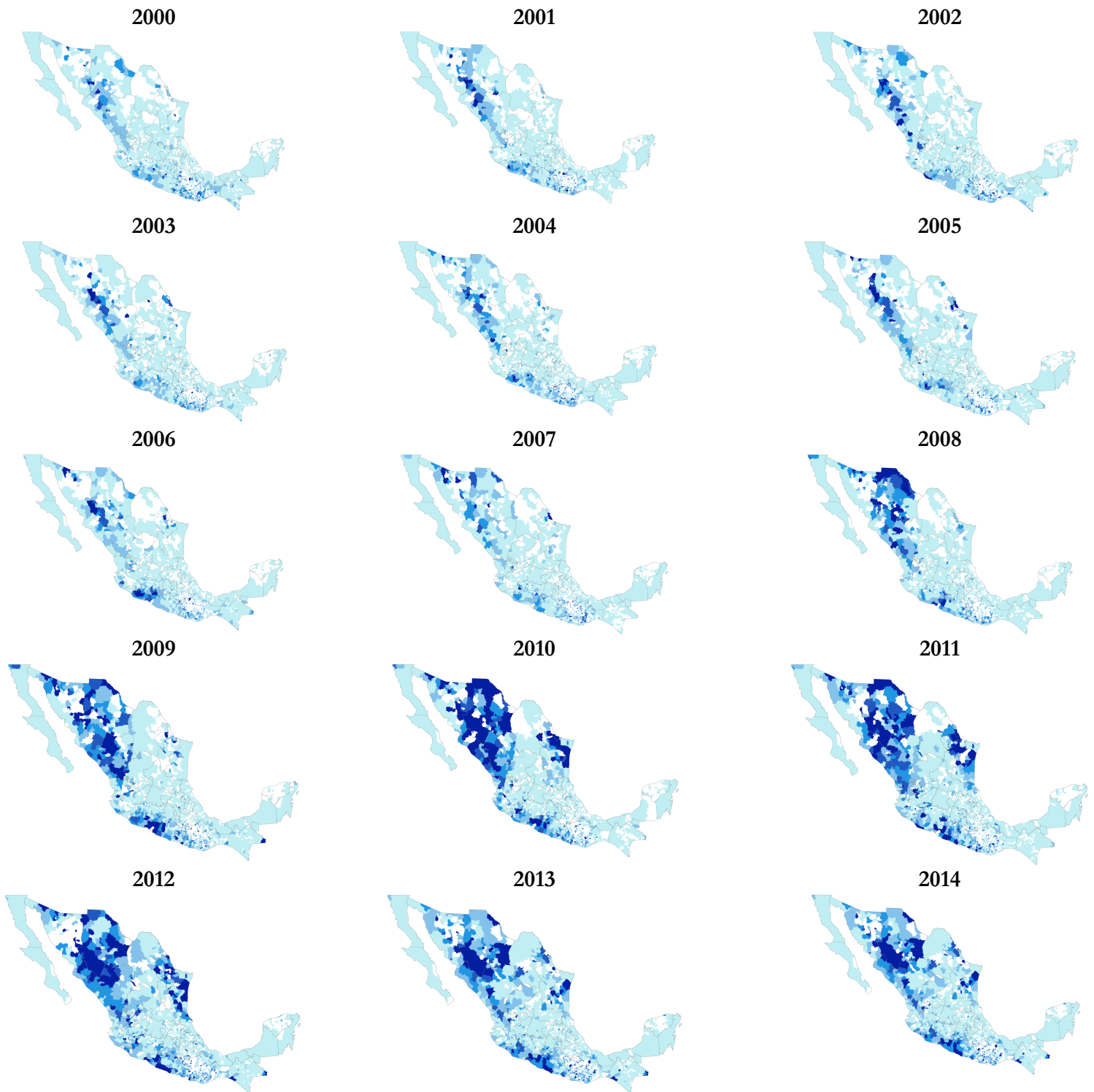
Figure 8: Distribution of Homicides at the Municipal Level, 1990-2014



Source: INEGI.

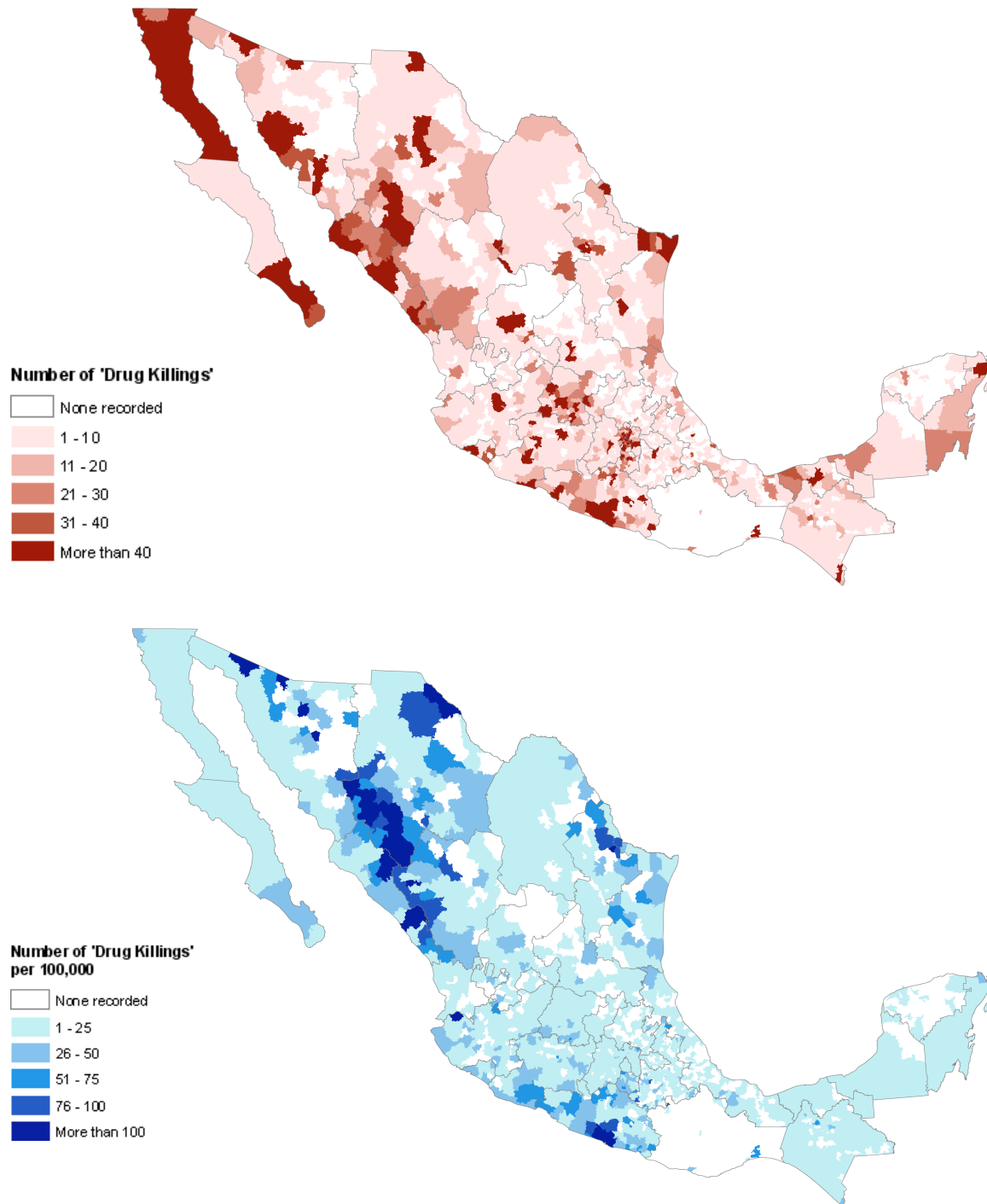
¹⁶ These figures are approximate because there is no data for some municipalities. Also, the number of municipalities in Mexico changes from time to time as new ones are created. From 2012 to 2013, for example, it appears that dozens of new municipalities were added to INEGI's homicide dataset.

Figure 9: Geographic Distribution of Homicides Per 100,000 Inhabitants, by Municipality, 2000-2014



Source: INEGI. Maps generated by Theresa Firestine.

Figure 10: Geographic Distribution of Homicides by Total Number (Red) and Homicide Rate (Blue) at the Municipal Level in 2015



Source: SNSP and CONAPO. Maps generated by Theresa Firestone.

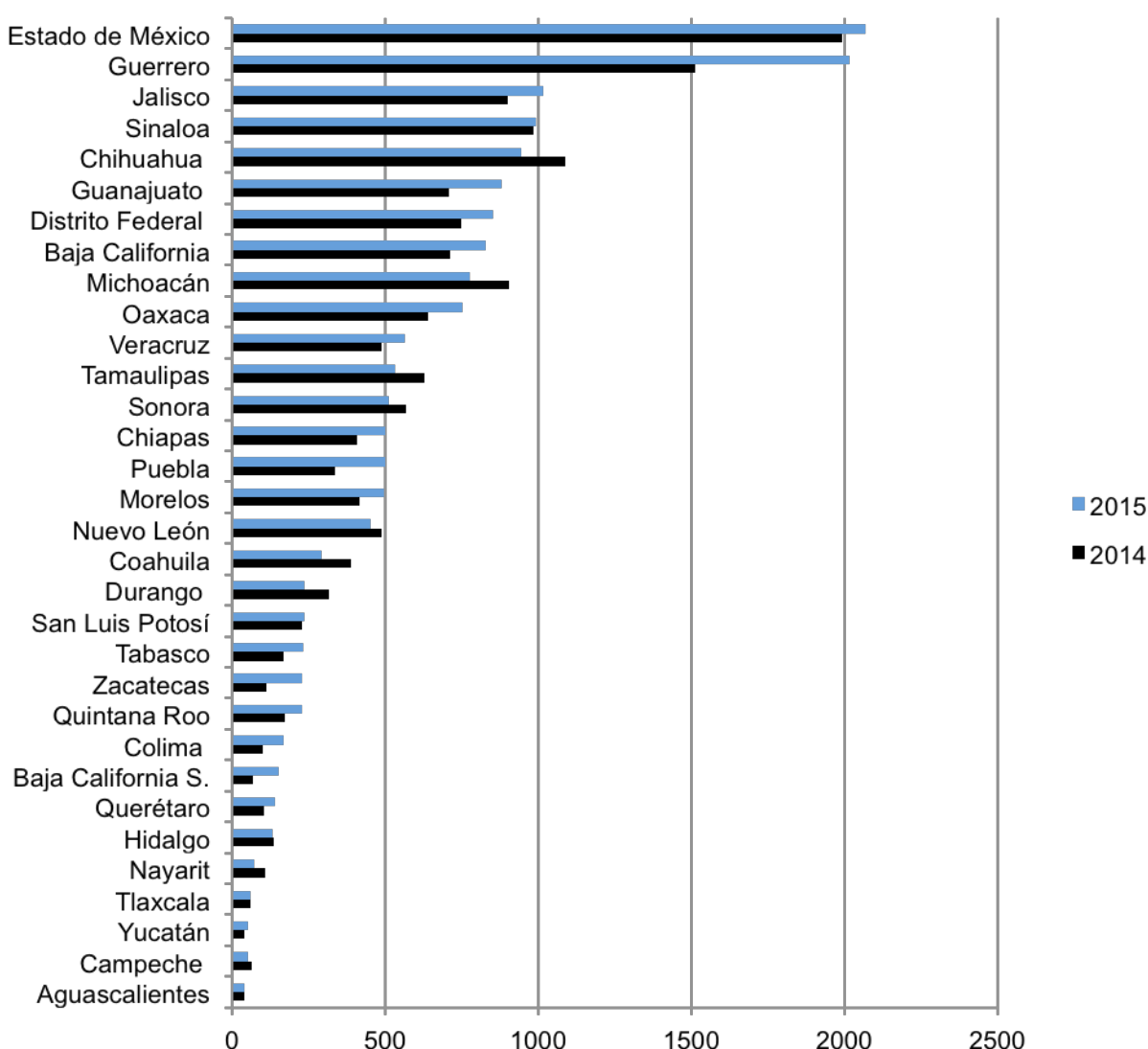
Note: The legend for the figure showing the total number of homicides per municipality was mislabeled by the authors in our previous 2014 report (entitled *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis from 2013*). The red map in the figure above is now correctly labeled to show the number of homicides (not the rate per 100,000 people).

Maps in Figure 9 above further illustrates the geographic distribution of violence in Mexico showing municipal homicide rates from 1999 through 2014, as reported by INEGI. Maps in Figure 10, also above, show homicides by municipality (in red) and homicide rate by municipality (in blue) using CONAPO population estimates. Taken together, this series of maps makes apparent the increase and geographic dispersion of homicides from 2007 to 2012 (especially after 2009), as well as the relative increase of such homicides per capita during that period. We also see that violence receded significantly from 2012 onward, according to the available data from both INEGI and SNSP. In addition, there were some important changes that became especially noticeable in 2014. For example, from 2010 to 2013, at least 35 municipalities have had more than 100 murders per 100,000 people, regardless of whether the rate is calculated using available INEGI or SNSP figures. However, in 2014, SNSP's data suggest that the number of municipalities with more than 100 homicides per capita dropped to just 21 municipalities, the same number calculated for 2015.

It is necessary to underscore again that the SNSP's data was incomplete for a significant number of municipalities at the time that authors downloaded and began working with these data in February 2015, as was the case in the author's report for the previous year. Thus, it is very possible that the number of municipalities with homicide rates over 100 per 100,000 inhabitants is under-reported at this time. That is, using an updated SNSP dataset or using the INEGI figures that will be released later this year, the reduction and receding of violence may be less than appears to be the case using the available preliminary data.

Lastly, these maps also show that homicides have been regionally concentrated in the major drug trafficking zones in the northwest, the northeast, and the Pacific Coast. The states that were hardest hit by violence after 2008 include the six Mexican border states—Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas—as well as the Pacific states of Sinaloa, Nayarit, Michoacán, and Guerrero. However, violence began to diminish in certain areas in 2011 and 2012, particularly as the number of homicides fell in key states in northern Mexico, including Baja California, Sonora, and Chihuahua.

Figure 11: Intentional Homicides by State, Comparing 2014 to 2015



Source: SNSP.

In 2015, using the data available from SNSP on homicides illustrated in Figure 11, we see that the states with the largest number of intentional homicides were the State of Mexico (Edomex) (2,070), Guerrero (2,016), Jalisco (1,017), Sinaloa (993), Chihuahua (945), and Guanajuato (879). Five of six of these states, excluding Guanajuato, were also among the six states with the highest number of intentional homicides in 2014. Nearly all of these states, except Chihuahua, also saw an increase in the number of murders compared to the previous year.¹⁷ This is notable because it demonstrates the ongoing security crises in these particular states, specifically México and Guerrero, which ranked again as the two states with the highest counts of intentional homicide nationwide. As Justice in Mexico noted in the April 2015 *Drug Violence in Mexico* report, the continued growth of organized-

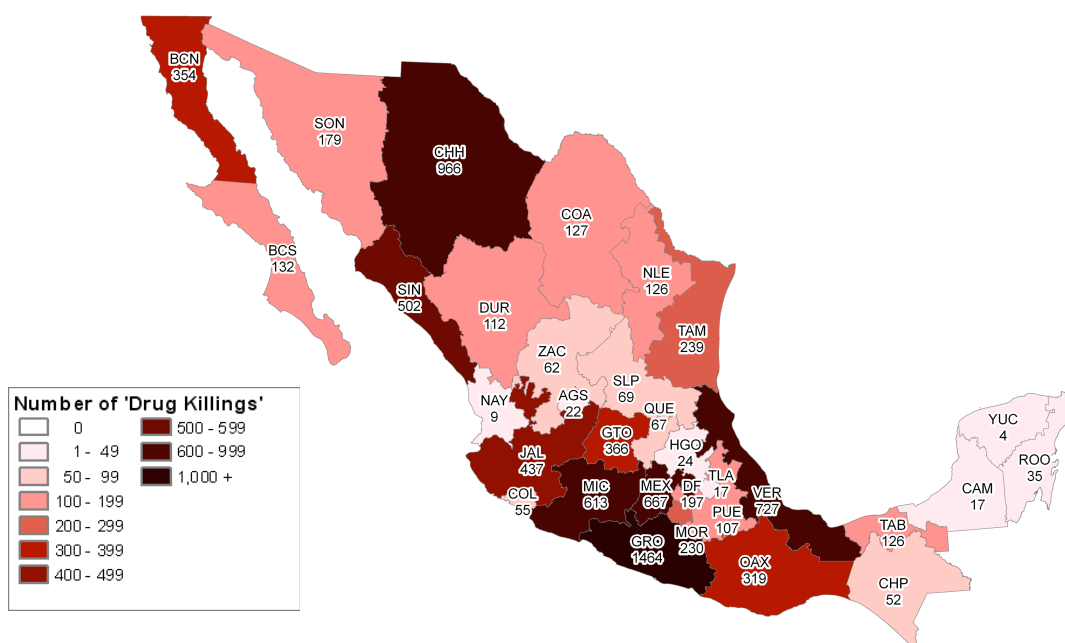
¹⁷ In fact, only 12 Mexican states saw a decrease in homicides in 2015: Nayarit (-35%), Coahuila (-25%), Durango (-24%), Campeche (-20%), Tamaulipas (-15%), Michoacán (-14%), Chihuahua (-13%), Sonora (-10%), Nuevo León (-8%), Aguascalientes (-7%), Tlaxcala (-3%), and Hidalgo (-1%). It is also worth noting that Chihuahua saw the most dramatic reduction in absolute numbers of intentional homicides between 2014 and 2015, decreasing from 1,087 bodies in 2014 to 945 in 2015.

crime-style violence in the state of México also has political salience given that President Enrique Peña Nieto had been its governor. Nationwide, the largest decreases in homicides in 2015 were found in the states of Nayarit (-35%), Coahuila (-25%), Durango (-24%), Campeche (-20%), and Tamaulipas (-15%). Meanwhile, the five Mexican states exhibiting the largest increases in homicide in 2015 were Baja California Sur (116%), Zacatecas (102%), Colima (69%), Puebla (48%), Tabasco (39%), and Querétaro (35%), according to SNSP.

2. Distribution of Organized-Crime-Style Homicides

The Mexican government has not reported any data on the number of organized-crime-style homicides since 2012. Thus, as noted above, the only data available for such homicides in 2015 are those reported at the state level by independent sources, such as the Mexican newspaper *Milenio*, which reported a total of 8,423 individual homicides that appeared to involve organized crime.¹⁸ According to these figures, more than half of organized-crime-style homicides were concentrated in the top five states, totaling 4,437 homicides of 8,423: Guerrero (1,464), Chihuahua (966), Veracruz (727), México (667), and Michoacán (613). Beside Veracruz, which replaced Sinaloa, the other four states were among the same list in 2014. In 2015, the states with the least organized-crime-style homicides remained unchanged from 2014: Aguascalientes (22), Campeche (17), Tlaxcala (17), Nayarit (9), and Yucatán (4). The distribution of organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Milenio* is reflected in Figure 12 and the year-over-year change is represented in Figure 13.

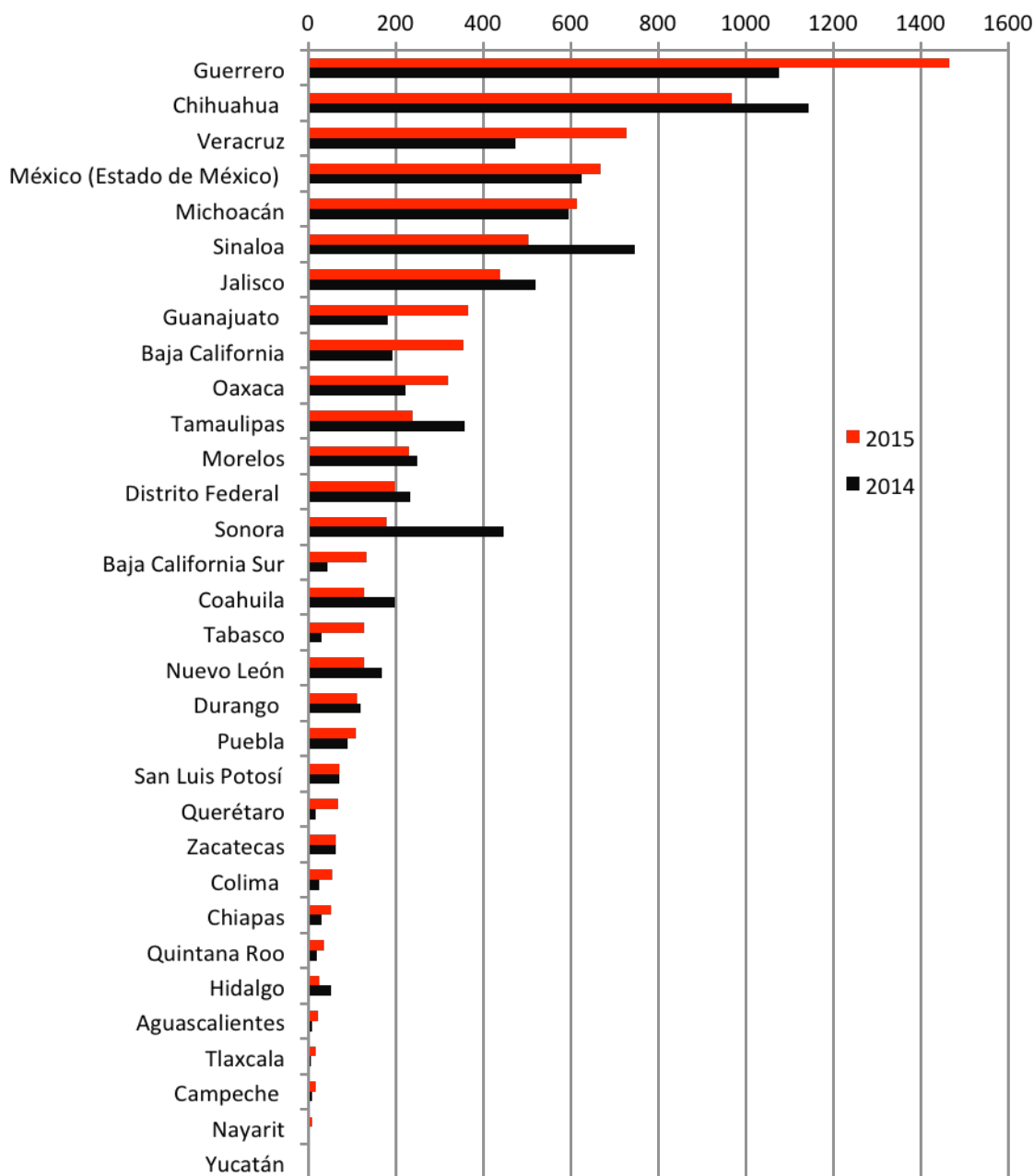
Figure 12: Organized-Crime-Style Homicide Map for 2015



Source: *Milenio*. Map generated by Theresa Firestone.

¹⁸ In past years, the authors of this report have relied on *Reforma*'s tallies of organized-crime-style homicides. However, here we give preference to *Milenio* over *Reforma* because the latter has been less consistent in its monitoring of organized-crime-style homicides and less forthcoming with its data than the former.

Figure 13: Organized-Crime-Style Homicides by State, Comparing 2014 to 2015



Source: *Milenio*.

The year-to-year comparison of organized-crime-style homicides tracked by *Milenio* shows in Figure 13 that organized-crime-style violence seems to have slightly increased in 2015, according to available evidence. There were twice as many Mexican states (20) that saw an annual decrease in organized-crime-style homicides compared to the number that saw an increase (11).¹⁹ Unlike 2014 when homicides decreased, the total annual decrease among states with declining organized-crime-style homicides in 2015 (-1,087) was not offset by the total increase in rising states (1,517).

¹⁹ Yucatán was the only state that saw no change, with only three such killings in both 2013 and 2014.

Thus, assuming that there was adequate publicly accessible information to reliably track and monitor such killings, *Milenio's* data lend credibility to official data showing an increase in homicide for 2015. However, if media coverage of homicides were biased or incomplete, this would result in significant underreporting of organized-crime-style homicides nationwide or possibly in certain regions where media coverage is more scarce (e.g., rural) or subject to manipulation. For example, some critics of the Peña Nieto administration contend that there has been an effort by the Mexican government to discourage media reporting on crime and violence, which could limit the availability of information through press releases and other sources that might inform the public about organized-crime-style homicides. This suggests that the increase in organized crime-style homicides could be greater than reported here.

With these caveats in mind, there was clearly a significant level of organized-crime-style violence in 2015. As in previous years, such violence was not randomly distributed but centered primarily in major drug production and trafficking areas. In 2015, we also see that the states with the largest number of organized-crime-style homicides were concentrated in Guerrero (1,464), Chihuahua (966), Veracruz (727), México (667), and Michoacán (613). In all of these states, drug violence therefore appears to be a predominant factor explaining homicides, since organized-crime-style homicides amount to almost half the number of homicides reported by SNSP for 2015 (8,423 homicides of 17,013 total).²⁰

The five states that saw the largest numerical decrease in organized-crime-style homicides from 2014 to 2015 were Sonora (-266), Sinaloa (-245), Chihuahua (-177), Tamaulipas (-117), and Jalisco (-81), for a combined total of 886, a significant drop from the 1,967 decrease reported in 2014. The five states that saw the largest percentage decreases in organized-crime-style homicides from 2014 to 2015 were Sonora (-59.8%), Hidalgo (-53.8%), Coahuila (-35.2%), Tamaulipas (-32.9%), and Sinaloa (-32.8%).

The five states that saw the largest numerical increase in organized-crime-style homicides in 2015 were Guerrero (+389), Veracruz (+254), Guanajuato (+186), Baja California (+83.4), and Oaxaca (+97), with a combined total of 1,087, a significant increase from the 696 OCG-related homicide rise in 2014. The five states that saw the largest percentage increases in organized-crime-style homicides were Tabasco (334.5%), Querétaro (318.8%), Baja California (214.3%), Tlaxcala (183.3%), and Aguascalientes (175.0%).

3. Significant Increases in Local Centers of Violence

The increase in violence in 2015 was also apparent in the data for the ten municipalities that registered the highest number of homicides, particularly in the top five. From 2008 through 2011, as measured by the number of homicides, the largest share of homicides was concentrated in the border metropolis of Ciudad Juárez, but thereafter the number of homicides in that city declined significantly.

²⁰ In the case of Veracruz, the number of organized crime-style homicides estimated by *Milenio* actually exceeds SNSP's homicide estimates for 2015 by 112 deaths. This is likely explained because either or both of the following are true: (1) SNSP's data is still incomplete for 2015 or (2) in these figures, SNSP reports on the number of criminal investigations of homicides rather than the actual number of homicides. In Veracruz, SNSP recorded 615 homicide *cases*, which is significantly less than *Milenio's* tally of 727 homicide *victims*. Nationwide, SNSP's tally of homicide cases for 2015 was 18,650, while *Milenio's* tallied 10,227 individual homicide victims.

Table 2: Total Number and Rate (Per 100,000 Inhabitants) of Overall Homicides by Municipality, 2010-2015

#	Municipality	2010	Rate	Population
1	Ciudad Juárez	2738	206	1,453,788
2	Chihuahua	670	82	835,797
3	Culiacán	587	68	819,332
4	Tijuana	472	30	1,641,168
5	Acapulco de Juárez	370	47	701,673
6	Mazatlán	320	73	429,598
7	Torreón	316	49	615,910
8	Gómez Palacio	277	84	335,638
9	Tepic	230	61	363,987
10	Nogales	196	89	218,948

#	Municipality	2011	Rate	Est. Pop.
1	Ciudad Juárez	1460	100	1,453,788
2	Acapulco	1008	145	695,711
3	Monterrey	700	62	1,132,282
4	Culiacán	649	79	822,665
5	Chihuahua	554	66	835,797
6	Torreón	455	72	633,928
7	Tijuana	418	25	1,692,340
8	Ecatepec de Morelos	325	19	1,752,143
9	Mazatlán	307	71	433,889
10	Guadalupe	254	36	705,053

#	Municipality	2012	Rate	Est. Pop.
1	Acapulco de Juárez	1271	184	689,496
2	Ciudad Juárez	850	58	1,476,025
3	Monterrey	685	61	1,128,592
4	Culiacán	471	57	825,709
5	Torreón	792	126	628,107
6	Chihuahua	587	69	846,861
7	Tijuana	320	18	1,743,928
8	Nuevo Laredo	544	132	410,653
9	Cuernavaca	270	73	369,958
10	Ecatepec de Morelos	533	30	1,759,650

#	Municipality	2013	Rate	Est. Pop.
1	Acapulco de Juárez	883	129	683,048
2	Tijuana	492	27	1,795,949
3	Culiacán	479	58	828,459
4	Ciudad Juárez	453	30	1,497,806
5	Ecatepec de Morelos	312	18	1,766,387
6	Monterrey	266	24	1,124,610
7	Chihuahua	251	29	857,557
8	Torreón	238	38	633,928
9	Zapopan	217	16	1,361,212
10	Morelia	209	27	760,718

#	Municipality	2014	Rate	Est. Pop.
1	Acapulco de Juárez	590	70	837,271
2	Tijuana	462	27	1,696,430
3	Culiacán	399	43	928,801
4	Ciudad Juárez	389	28	1,411,179
5	Ecatepec de Morelos	349	20	1,743,268
6	Chihuahua	184	20	899,868
7	Morelia	182	24	762,431
8	Leán	166	11	1,514,077
9	Chilpancingo	166	64	260,365
10	Iztapalapa (CdMx)	160	9	1,806,218

#	Municipality	2015	Rate	Est. Pop.
1	Acapulco de Juárez	902	107	843,414
2	Tijuana	612	36	1,722,348
3	Culiacán	441	47	938,715
4	Ecatepec de Morelos	355	20	1,760,705
5	Ciudad Juárez	269	19	1,423,166
6	Chilpancingo	212	81	263,115
7	Guadalajara	193	13	1,506,359
8	Iztapalapa (CdMx)	181	10	1,801,846
9	Zapopan	176	13	1,340,283
10	Nezahualcóyotl	172	15	1,174,479

Source: SNSP and CONAPO.

In 2014 and 2015, SNSP statistics still placed Ciudad Juárez as the municipality with the fourth and fifth highest number of homicides, respectively, though this number increased by perhaps as much as 31% from 2014, though 2014 had decreased by nearly 14% from 2013's numbers. Meanwhile, the number of homicides increased in Acapulco, the city that has registered the most homicides since

2012, swinging from 1,271 annual homicides (2012) to 883 (2013) to 590 (2014) and back up to 902 (2015). (See Table 2).

It is also notable that nearly all of the ten most violent cities in Mexico experienced an increase in the number of homicides, with the only exception being Ciudad Juárez in the state of Chihuahua. Also, for the first time since 2013, a Mexican municipality, Acapulco, had a homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants over 100 (107 homicides per 100K), followed by Chilpancingo (81 per 100K). Despite these rising rates, one positive note on the top ten municipalities chart was Chihuahua's departure from the list in 2015 following four continuous years from 2011 to 2014 of hovering as a municipality with the fifth or sixth highest homicide rate nationwide.

D. High Profile Victims

The characteristics of victims of homicide in Mexico fit with some of the general patterns of homicides around the world. Homicides are committed primarily by men and against men. Firearms, especially high caliber weapons, are an important *modus operandi* for intentional homicide. However, there are some aspects of homicide, and especially organized-crime-style homicides, that stand out, particularly the extreme nature of the violence employed, the extent to which public officials and journalists are often targeted, and the extent to which military and especially police have been targeted. We discuss these issues in some detail below.

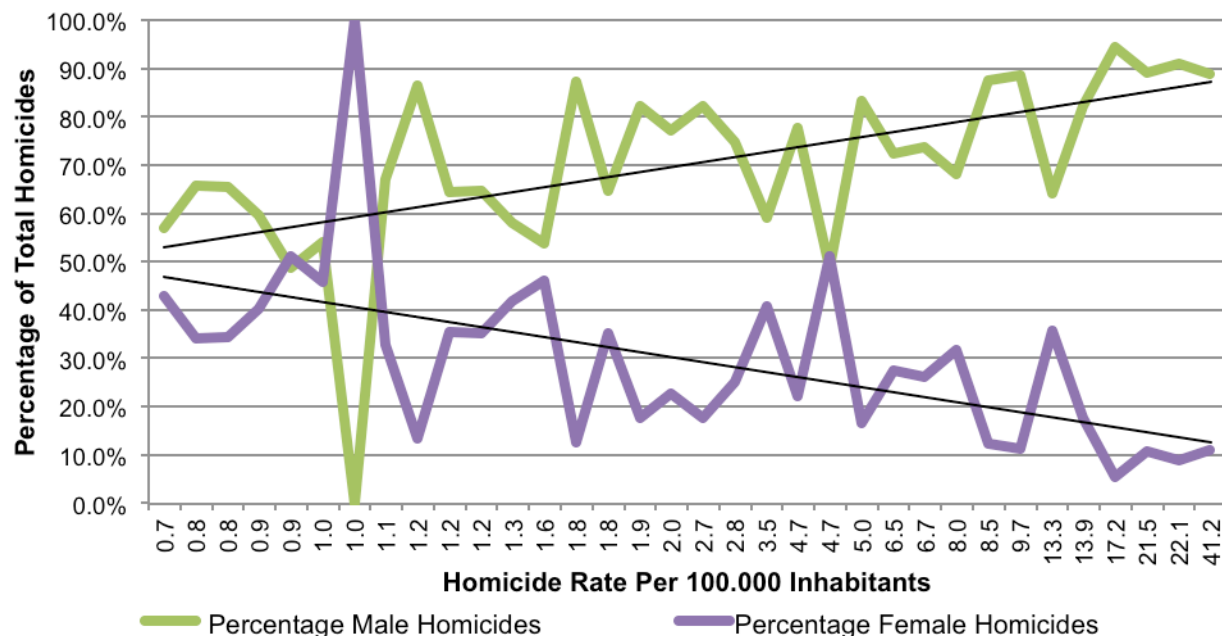
1. General Population

The most obvious, but under-appreciated observation that can be made about homicide anywhere in the world is that it is a predominantly male problem. This is certainly the case in Mexico. As calculated using INEGI's data and CONAPO's estimated population for Mexico in 2014 (117,207,465), Mexican men have a homicide rate of 14.9 per 100,000 people, while Mexican women have a homicide rate of 2.1 per 100,000 people.²¹ Moreover, it is perhaps worth noting here a curious paradox of gender-based violence: in general, the more women that are killed as a proportion of *all* homicides, the lower the homicide rate overall. The more evenly distributed homicides are between both men and women, the lower the overall homicide rate tends to be. Data from the 35 countries for which male/female percentages on homicide were available in the *UNODC Global Study on Homicide* suggest that this is a general trend (See Figure 14).²²

²¹ Justice in Mexico uses CONAPO's 2014 population estimate (117,207,465) and INEGI homicide numbers for men (17,503 homicides) and women (2,408 homicides) to calculate the homicide rate because INEGI's dataset for 2015 was incomplete at the time of this report's publication.

²² This figure was generated by former Justice in Mexico intern Rita Kuckertz. The only country we excluded was Iceland because there was only one recorded homicide in 2012 and it was female, thus skewing the graph.

Figure 14: Male/Female Percentages of Total Homicides in 34 Countries



Prepared by Rita Kuckertz. Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2013. *Global Study on Homicide 2013: Trends, Context, Data*. Vienna: UNODC.

As the figure illustrates, lower homicide rates overall tend to be associated with gender equality in the distribution of homicides among men and women.²³ This trend reflects the fact that—while women are often specially targeted for violence (as we discuss later)—men pay a higher price when violence increases in a society.

As we have indicated in previous years, this requires some serious thought about why men are more likely to participate in and die from violence. If we think about elevated levels of homicide as a problem that disproportionately affects men, perhaps we can better devise public policies to address the gender dynamics of the problem. One thing seems clear: the leading cause of death for young men in Mexico hinges on economic status, since wealthy young men are more likely to die of car accidents and those of modest means more likely to be murdered. An important part of the problem, it appears, is a lack of educational and employment opportunities for those at the bottom of the economic spectrum. The OECD estimates that 1 in 4 of young men in Mexico are “*ninis*”—youths who neither study nor work (*ni estudian, ni trabajan*)—and their number has been on the rise.²⁴

With regard to organized-crime-style homicides, as reported in last year’s report, using the Justice in Mexico *Memoria* database, the authors have also found that the vast majority of victims—at least 75%—were identified as men, with just 9% of the victims identified as female (the remainder were unidentified). Surprisingly, the average age of victims of organized-crime-style homicides is about 32

²³ Listed here from least to greatest homicide rate are the countries indicated in Figure 14: Slovenia, Denmark, Spain, Austria, New Zealand, Czech Republic, Tonga, Australia, Ireland, Croatia, Serbia, Hungary, Finland, Malawi, Armenia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Montenegro, Malta, India, United States of America, Latvia, Albania, Republic of Moldova, Lithuania, Iraq, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Grenada, South Sudan, Panama, Mexico, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador.

²⁴ Pierre-Marc René, “OCDE: crece número de ‘ninis’ en México,” *El Universal*, November 24, 2015, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/sociedad/2015/11/24/ocde-crece-numero-de-ninis-en-mexico>

years, which appears to contradict widespread assumptions that organized crime violence involves uneducated, unemployed, and disaffected youths. However, the authors also believe that the deaths of older persons—especially those of government personnel—are more likely to be over-reported in the media sources used to build the *Memoria* database, so these figures must be interpreted with consideration of the biases inherent in information gleaned from media reports.

2. Mayors

Assassination of current, former, elected, substitute or candidates to the mayoral position in Mexico is a serious concern. The murder of political positions threatens the democratic process and undermines the rule of law. According to an ongoing investigation, “Atentan contra alcaldes,” by Mexico news media source *El Universal*, there were ten former mayors (*ex alcaldes*), six family members of mayors (*familiares de alcaldes en funciones*), two mayors in office (*alcaldes en funciones*), and two mayoral candidates (*candidados a alcalde*) murdered in 2015 alone.²⁵ This is down six homicides from its 2014 count of 26 murders of individuals connected to or in the mayoral office.

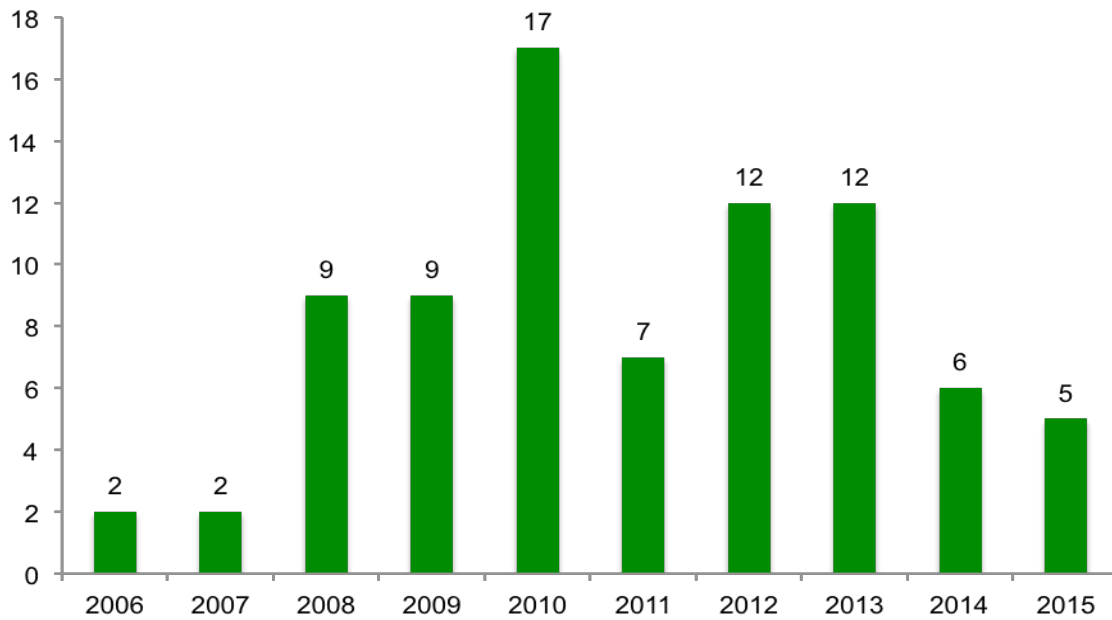
Justice in Mexico’s *Memoria* dataset includes 80 mayors and former mayors killed from 2006 through 2015, many with the characteristics of organized-crime-style homicides. While the peak of violence in Mexico occurred during 2011, the year with the most killings of mayors, as documented in *Memoria*, was actually 2010, when 17 cases were reported. Despite the reduction of the total number of homicides in Mexico since 2011 until 2015, there have been a total of 35 mayors (former, current, candidates, etc.) killed with 12 in 2012, 12 in 2013, six in 2014, and five in 2015.

Of the five murdered the past year, Justice in Mexico found three to be mayoral candidates (3), one a mayor (1), and one a former mayor (1). According to Justice in Mexico’s data, the party affiliation of the victims in 2015 was diverse, including ties with the PRI (2), PRD (1), PVEM (1), and MORENA (1). All of the cases took place the Southwestern part of Mexico, specifically the states of Guerrero (2), Guanajuato (1), Michoacán (1), and Oaxaca (1). In 80% of the homicides, the victim was male, and in all of those cases, the use of torture was not reported, but the use of firearms was. In the fifth case involving female mayoral candidate Aidé Nava González, which occurred in March 2015, Nava was tortured and beheaded. The other four murders occurred in the months of May (2) and June (2). In all but one of the five cases, the mayoral candidate, mayor, or former mayor was the only victim. The age of the victim was only documented in two of the cases, averaging 39 years old.

In 2015, the mayoral candidates, mayors, and former mayors whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico include: Aidé Nava González (PRD mayoral candidate for Chilpancingo, Guerrero), Ulises Fabian Quiroz (PRI mayoral candidate for Chilapa de Álvarez, Guerrero), Enrique Hernández Salcedo (MORENA mayoral candidate for Yerecuaro, Michoacán), José Alfredo Jiménez Cruz (former PRI mayor for Santa María Chimalapa, Oaxaca), and Rogelio Sánchez Galán (PVEM current mayor for Jerecuaro, Guanajuato). Justice in Mexico acknowledges that while *Memoria* may collect information on mayors, former mayors, and mayoral candidates, it currently does not account for other political candidates such as Hector López Cruz, a PRI municipality council (*regidor*) candidate for Huimanguillo, Tabasco or Miguel Ángel Luna Munguía, a PRD Federal Deputy (*diputado federal*) candidate for Valle de Chalco, Edomex, both of whom were murdered in 2015.

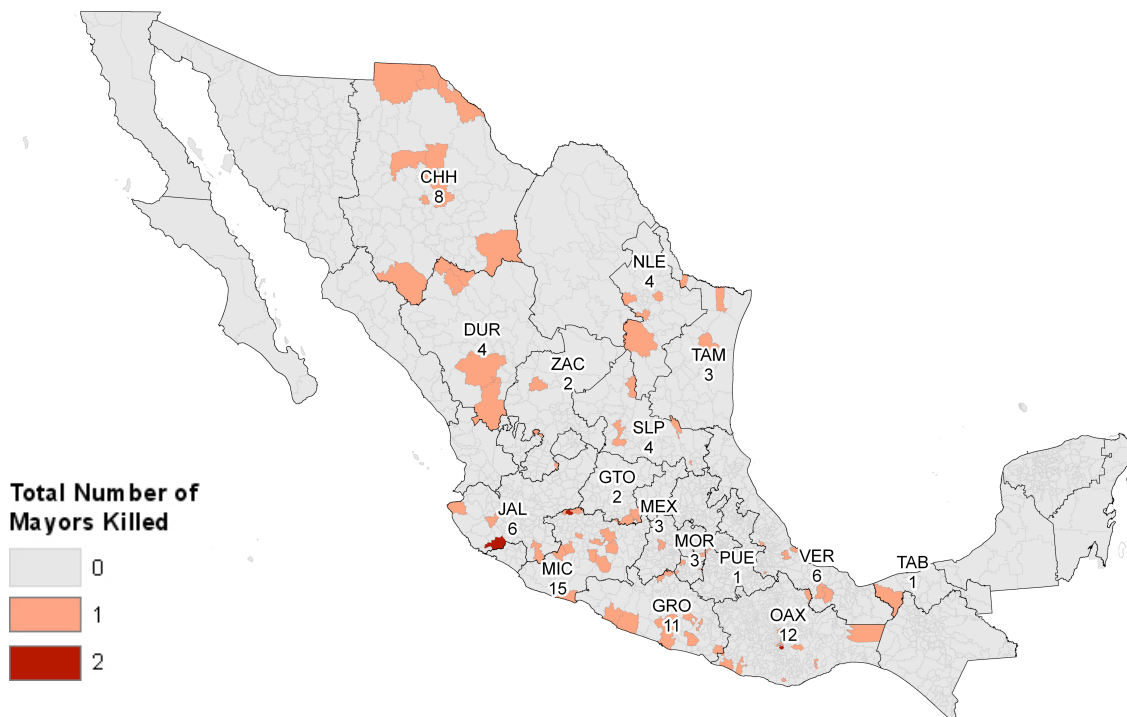
²⁵ “Atentan contra alcaldes.” *El Universal*. Last referenced March 23, 2016.
<http://interactivo.eluniversal.com.mx/2016/alcaldes-asesinados/>

Figure 15: Mayors & Ex-Mayors Killed in Mexico
(January 2006-December 2015)



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset. Map generated by Theresa Firestine.

Figure 16: Map of Mayors & Ex-Mayors Killed in Mexico
(January 2006-December 2015)



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset. Map generated by Theresa Firestine.

3. Journalists

As reported in previous years, dozens of reporters and media workers have been killed or disappeared in Mexico, making it one of the world's most dangerous places for journalists. The various organizations tallying homicides involving reporters in Mexico use different criteria for tallying and classifying this violence, since motives are often difficult to confirm. For example, one of the most respected sources, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), focuses primarily on cases where a murder was confirmed to have been committed in relation to the journalist's profession. From 1992 through 2015, CPJ reported that there were 36 such confirmed cases, 44 unconfirmed cases, and four media-support workers killed in Mexico. 75% of those confirmed cases involved reporters working the crime beat, almost one-third involved reporters working on issues related to corruption, and a quarter involved reporters working on political issues. CPJ ranks Mexico as the eighth deadliest country worldwide, placing in 2015 only behind Syria (14 journalists killed), France (9), Brazil (6), and Bangladesh, Iraq, South Sudan, and Yemen, each with five (5).²⁶

In 2015, CPJ reported that there were 71 reporters murdered worldwide that matched their criteria, with four confirmed cases and one unconfirmed case in Mexico. The four CPJ-confirmed cases include:

- José Moisés Sánchez Cerezo, journalist and owner of *La Unión*, was kidnapped on January 2, 2015 from his home in Medellín de Bravo, Veracruz. He was decapitated, dismembered, and found dead on January 24.²⁷
- Armando Saldaña Morales, journalist for *La Ke Buena 100.9 FM*, was found dead on May 4, 2015 in Acatlán de Pérez Figueroa, Oaxaca.²⁸
- Filadelfo Sánchez Sarmiento, director of *La Favorita 103.3 FM La Voz de la Sierra Sur*, was killed on July 2, 2015, by two unidentified gunmen in Miahuatlán de Porfirio Díaz, Oaxaca.²⁹
- Rubén Espinosa Becerril, a media worker for *AVC Noticias*, *Proceso*, and *Cuartoscuro*, was killed on July 31, 2015 in Mexico City. His body was found August 2, along with four female victims.³⁰

CPJ's criteria for identifying the murders of reporters and media workers are fairly conservative, since they focus only on cases where there is a confirmed motive associated with the journalist's profession. The organization Article 19, meanwhile, documented eight murders of media workers in 2015, double CPJ's count. Taking into account all attacks on media and journalists, including homicides and non-lethal attacks, Article 19 reports that 2015 was the most violent year on record in Mexico since 2009, with 397 cases registered. This is an increase from 2014's 326 attacks. To put this

²⁶ "71 Journalists Murdered in 2015/Motive Confirmed." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 28, 2016. <https://www.cpj.org/killed/2015/>.

²⁷ "José Moisés Sánchez Cerezo: La Unión." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 28, 2016. <https://www.cpj.org/killed/2015/jose-moises-sanchez-cerezo.php>

²⁸ "Armando Saldaña Morales: La Ke Buena 100.9 FM." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 28, 2016. <https://www.cpj.org/killed/2015/jose-moises-sanchez-cerezo.php>

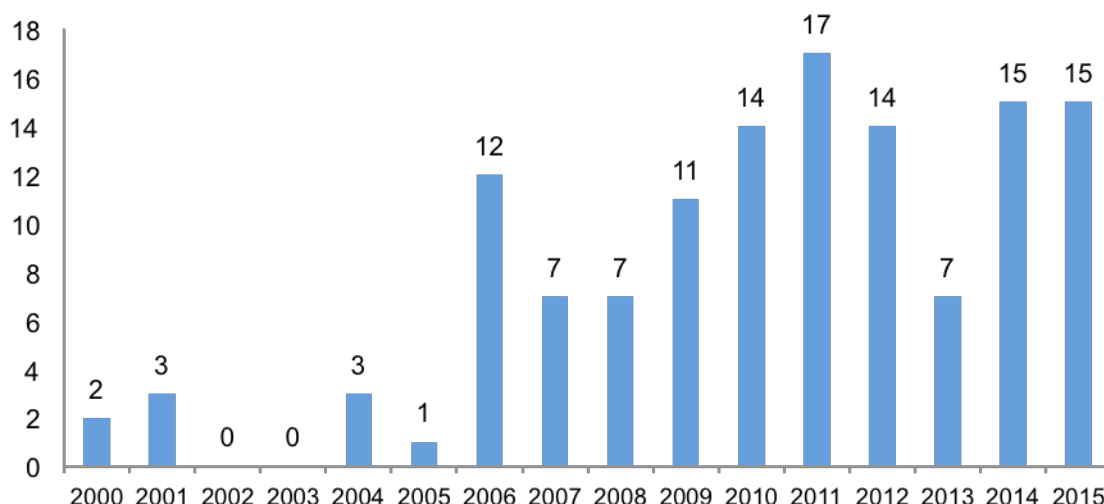
²⁹ "Filadelfo Sánchez Sarmiento: La Favorita 103.3 FM La Voz de la Sierra Sur." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 28, 2016. <https://www.cpj.org/killed/2015/filadelfo-sanchez-sarmiento.php>

³⁰ "Rubén Espinosa Becerril: *Proceso*, *AVC Noticias*, *Cuartoscuro*." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 28, 2016. <https://www.cpj.org/killed/2015/ruben-espinosa-becerril.php>

increase into perspective, “According to [Article 19’s] report, during the three years of the Enrique Peña Nieto government, 1,073 attacks have been documented, i.e. one every 22 hours.”³¹

The Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset is less conservative, because it takes into account cases of both media workers and journalists who may have been victims of intentional homicide for a variety of motives not limited to their reporting. From 2000 to 2015, Justice in Mexico has identified at least 132 journalists and media-support workers who were murdered, with the vast majority of these deaths (123) occurring in or after 2006. This tally includes journalists and media-support workers employed with a recognized news organization at the time of their deaths, as well as independent, free-lance, and former journalists and media-support workers (Figure 17). In 2015, Justice in Mexico entered 15 such individuals into the *Memoria* dataset, and 4 as of publishing day of this report in 2016.

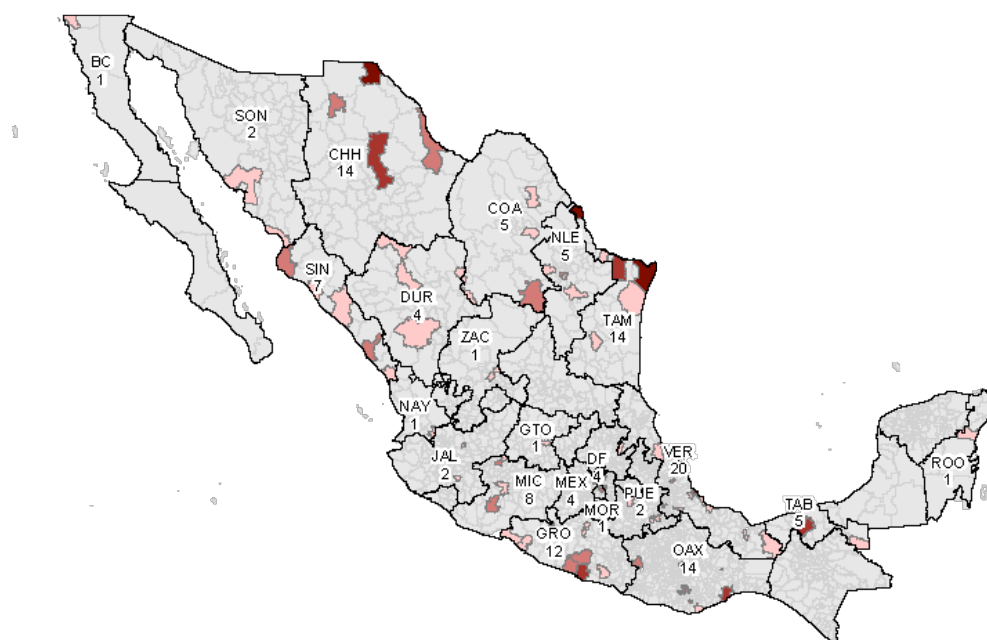
Figure 17: Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico (January 2000-December 2015)



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset.

³¹ Ortega, Ariadna. “2015, El Año Más Violento Para La Prensa: Artículo 19.” *CNN Expansión*. March 17, 2016. <http://expansion.mx/economia/2016/03/16/2015-el-ano-mas-violento-para-la-prensa-articulo-19>. “Mexico Press Freedom: 2015 Most Violent Year for Press – Article 19.” *Mexico Voices*. March 17, 2016. <http://mexicovoices.blogspot.com/2016/03/mexico-press-freedom-2015-most-violent.html>

Figure 18: Map of Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico (January 2000-December 2015)



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset. Map generated by Theresa Firestine.

The Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset includes 15 media workers killed in the year 2015, the same number recorded in 2014 and almost double Article 19's tally. All but one of the victims in 2015 was a Mexican male with an average age reported of 45 years old.³² The weapons used in the homicides were identified as firearms (10) and knives (1), while torture was also reported in three cases and decapitation in one. According to Justice in Mexico's findings, the murders took place in the states of Oaxaca (4), Veracruz (3), Tabasco (3), the State of México (1), Chihuahua (1), Federal District (1), Guanajuato (1), and Nayarit (1). The media workers killed included journalists, reporters, photojournalists, correspondents, photographers, station directors, and activists. In two-thirds of the cases, the media workers were the only victims.

In 2015, the reporters and media workers whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico include (chronologically oldest to most recent): Jazmín Martínez Sánchez (*Televisa*), Jose Moisés Sánchez Cerezo (*La Unión*), Flavio García Jimenez (Informativo Nacional Reportaje), Abel Manuel Bautista Raymundo (*Radio Spacio 96.1*), Armando Saldaña Morales (*La Ke Buena y Radio Max*), Ismael Díaz Lopez (*Tabasco Hoy*), Gerardo Nieto Álvarez (*El Tábano*), Juan Mendoza Delgado (*Escribiendo La Verdad*), Filadelfo Sánchez Sarmiento (*La Favorita 103.3*), Edgar Hernández García (*Oaxaca Foro Político*), Rubén Manuel Espinosa (*Proceso/Cuatroscurro*), Juan Heriberto Santos Cabrera (*Orizaba en Red*), Aurelio Hernández Herrera (*Presente*), José Joaquín Pérez Morales (*Presente*), and Jose Luis Rodríguez Muniz (Programa Piloto en Facebook).

E. Comparing Administrations

As noted in previous years, under Mexican presidents Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) and Vicente Fox (2000-2006), the number of overall homicides documented by INEGI declined significantly. In total,

³² Age was only recorded in 134 of 156 cases on file.

under Zedillo, INEGI documented 80,311 homicides, with an average of 13,385 people killed per year, or more than 36 people per day, or roughly 1.5 per hour (Table 3).³³ The average annual decline in homicides over the course of the Zedillo administration was 6.2%. Under Fox, the number documented by INEGI was 60,162 homicides, with an average of 10,027 people killed per year, more than 27 people per day, or roughly 1.1 per hour, from 2001 to 2006. That represented an average annual decline of 0.3% in homicides during the Fox administration.

Table 3: Homicides and OCG-style Homicides by Presidential Term

Source	Salinas (1990-1994)*	Zedillo (1995-2000)	Fox (2001-2006)	Calderón (2007-2012)	Peña Nieto (2013-2015)
INEGI Homicides	78,094	80,311	60,162	121,613	64,704**
SNSP Homicides	n.a.	n.a.	74,389	104,794	50,997
CNDH-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	8,901	8,297	n.a
SNSP-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	63,032	n.a
Reforma-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	47,845	18,455
Milenio-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	54,087	26,511
LANTIA (OCG)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	26,900
% OCG (SNSP/Milenio)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	52%	52%

Note: * Data for Salinas' first term in 1989 were not available. ** Figures in red reflect the authors' estimates and projections based on available data. Also, this table corrects a miscalculation of SNSP homicides from 2007 to 2012 in the initial release of this report.

Under President Calderón (2006-2012), the number of intentional homicides annually increased more than two and a half times from 10,452 in 2006 to 27,213 in 2011, according to INEGI figures. INEGI's data for 2012 shows that in the last full year of Calderón's term there was a slight decline in the total number of homicides to about 4% to 26,037. All told, throughout the Calderón administration, INEGI reported 121,669 people killed, an average of over 20,000 people killed per year, more than 55 per day, or just over two every hour.

Based on INEGI's official figures from 2013 and 2014, and the authors' projections for 2015, it appears that more than 64,000 people have been murdered over the course of the first three years of the Peña Nieto administration. This is just over 22,000 more homicides in the first half of EPN's *sexenio* than during Calderón's first three years in office. As such, the annual average number of homicides under the Peña Nieto administration remains about 6% higher than during the Calderón administration, whose first two years saw relatively lower rates of homicide. Thus, there were more than 59 homicides per day during the first three years of the Peña Nieto administration, or well over two murders every hour. Based on INEGI's tally of 64,704 homicides from 2013 to 2015, at least a quarter of these homicides (18,455 according to *Reforma*), if not more than 40% (26,511 according to *Milenio*), took place under circumstances appearing to involve organized crime.³⁴ By *Milenio*'s count, then, one Mexican dies every hour as a result of organized crime-style violence.

³³ Mexico's six-year presidential terms are inaugurated on December 1, so the years presented here are missing data from the first month in office and include data from one month after their term began.

³⁴ While the average annual homicide rate went up during the Peña Nieto administration, the average annual rate of organized crime style homicides was slightly lower, primarily because organized crime related violence only spiked dramatically after 2007.

IV. KEY ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN 2015

As noted in the findings above, in 2015 the number of homicides in Mexico increased slightly for the first time since Peña Nieto took office. Though this increase is relatively small compared to previous years, it is nonetheless troubling. For one, it suggests that previous progress in reducing homicides was not necessarily attributable to the increased effectiveness of law enforcement or government policy. Additionally, it raises questions about current dynamics among organized crime groups, and whether there is potential for escalation moving forward. Arguably, 2015 was a difficult year for Mexico, with stagnant economic growth, a devalued peso, and a serious fiscal crisis due to falling oil prices. It is quite possible that these economic factors may have contributed to increased violence throughout the country, as people on the margins turn to illicit economic activities to supplement lost income. Given that the economic picture does not appear to look much brighter in 2016, this could spell bad news for Mexico.

Whatever the case, a careful examination is clearly needed to evaluate the overall trends in violence in Mexico in 2015, as well as the specific factors associated with drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime. This section provides a very brief background on these problems and examines several of the major developments that occurred in 2015 in relation to organized crime and violence in Mexico. Headlines in 2015 were dominated by a number of spectacular events, such as the July escape of Mexico's most wanted drug kingpin, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán. While this story was arguably important, there were several other developments in 2015 that require consideration, including the proliferation of regional organized crime groups, Mexican government efforts to reform the country's justice sector, activists efforts to promote drug policy reform, and international investigations into human rights abuses in Mexico. The mood of the country is also worth noting, as Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto reached new lows in public appraisals of his administration at mid-point of his six-year term. What is apparent is that 2015 was a year of mixed results, at best, and that progress in strengthening the rule of law in Mexico will not be swift or straightforward.

A. Background: The Long Road from Camarena to Ayotzinapa

With little fanfare, the year 2015 commemorated the 30-year mark since the 1985 assassination of Drug Enforcement Agency operative Enrique Camarena, which many experts consider to be a critical juncture that ramped up both U.S. and Mexican efforts to combat drug trafficking in Mexico. Camarena had helped to uncover operations of a major Mexican drug trafficking organization that became known as the Guadalajara Cartel. While the details are contested, U.S. authorities claimed that the Guadalajara Cartel operatives were responsible for Camarena's kidnapping and murder, and may have been protected by Mexican government authorities. Some former Mexican government authorities have recently advanced the claim that CIA operatives were responsible for Camarena's death, adding fresh controversy to one of the great, unsolved mysteries of the drug war. Whatever the case, following Camarena's death, U.S. and Mexican authorities began directing greater attention and resources to combat Mexican drug trafficking organizations, with both countries subsequently declaring that drug trafficking was now a "national security" problem. What Richard Nixon had metaphorically described in 1971 as the "war on drugs" had become literal.

A decade later, Mexico was ground zero in that conflict and the once-powerful Guadalajara Cartel had become fragmented into at least three regionally based factions—the so-called Sinaloa, Juárez, and Tijuana Cartels. The former-Guadalajara Cartel operatives who rose to the head of these newly

emergent drug trafficking organizations—Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán and Ismael Zambada, Amado and Vicente Carrillo Fuentes, and Benjamín and Ramón Arellano Felix, respectively—dominated Mexico’s regional drug production and transit centers, alongside Osiel Cárdenas, the newly established head of Mexico’s long-standing Gulf Cartel (Cartel del Golfo, CDG). This period saw important counter-drug efforts, including the arrests of Hector “El Guero” Palma, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, and other major traffickers and government conspirators, like Mexico’s drug tsar General Gutiérrez Rebollo. Nonetheless, this period also produced heightened competition and conflict among Mexico’s major criminal organizations, leading to growing concern among U.S. and Mexican authorities about the threat of drug violence.

By the early 2000s, the administration of President Vicente Fox (2000-2006) had succeeded in arresting the heads of some of the country’s most powerful drug trafficking organizations, including both Benjamín Arellano Felix in 2002 and Osiel Cárdenas in 2003. By then, both the Juárez and Sinaloa cartels had significantly recovered from previous setbacks, including the 1997 death of Amado Carrillo Fuentes and the 1998 arrest of Joaquín Guzmán (who escaped from prison in January 2000). These emboldened cartels appeared poised to establish a new dominion over the entire Mexican drug trade, and pushed into the territory of their weakened rivals. The resulting clashes in the mid-2000s produced a shocking level of violence, including killings targeting government officials and journalists, as well as new forms of violence—such as decapitations—that appeared to draw lessons from terrorists halfway around the world.³⁵ Even so, it is worth noting that absolute levels of homicide actually had been on the decline since the 1990s, and the casualties of organized crime-style killings numbered only 1,000-2,000 murders each year.

By 2006, though, the new government of President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) opted to make counter-drug efforts the major focus of his administration, deploying troops and federal police to high violence areas and attempting to “recapture” public spaces controlled by organized crime. Initially, this effort had very little noticeable effect in provoking greater violence; as noted earlier, 2007 marked a historic low in overall homicide levels. However, by 2008, violence spiked dramatically, apparently because of a rift between the Sinaloa Cartel and its former allies in the Juárez Cartel and a smaller group known as the Beltrán Leyva Organization. What unfolded was a multi-front conflict between the Mexican government and various major and regional organized crime groups, which have proliferated in number with each major kingpin that was arrested or killed in the ensuing years. All told, from 2006 to 2012, an estimated 60,000 people were killed in organized crime-style homicides and related violence, or about half of the roughly 120,000 homicides that occurred during the Calderón administration.

Upon his inauguration on December 1, 2008, President Enrique Peña Nieto hoped to turn the tide and refocus his six-year term on other priorities, like improving education and the economy. The Peña Nieto administration adopted the upbeat slogan, “Moving Mexico,” while *Time* magazine famously featured the president himself on its cover with the caption “Saving Mexico.” With successive decreases in the national homicide rate over his first two years, government authorities expressed confidence that the tide had indeed begun to turn for Mexico and President Peña Nieto was lauded internationally for his efforts.

Yet, even as the absolute number of homicides declined, there were other glaring problems, including the spread of violence to new geographic areas (notably, southern Pacific states like

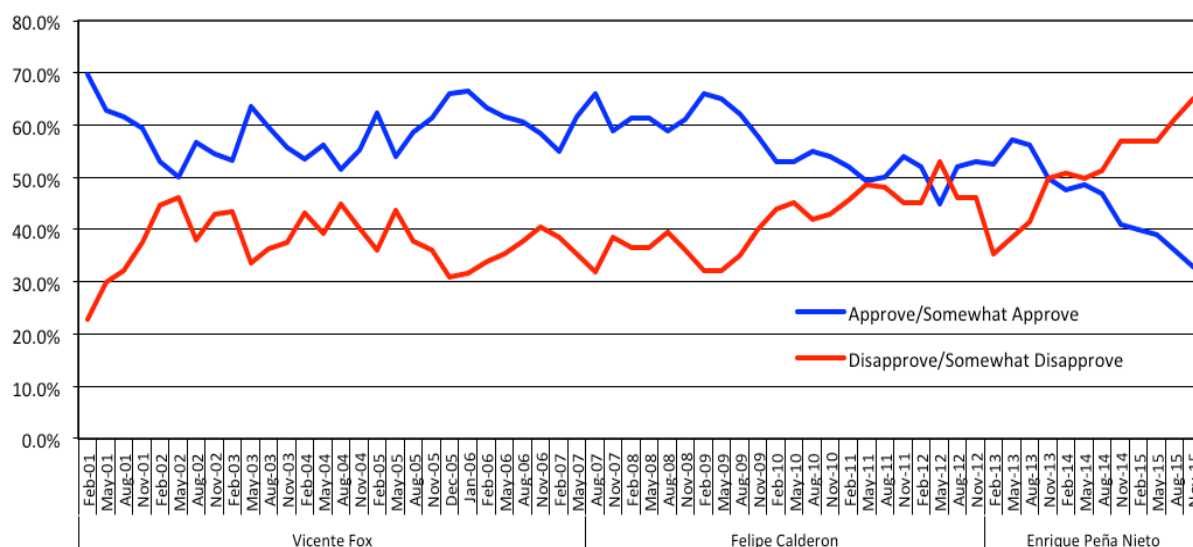
³⁵ Contrary to popular opinion, the earliest use of decapitation by Mexican organized crime groups appears to date back to April 2006, well after the first video recorded use of this tactic by Islamic extremists in the Middle East.

Guerrero, Jalisco, and Michoacán), the emergence of controversial citizen self-defense forces, increased targeting of government officials and journalists, numerous unresolved disappearances, and serious human rights violations. In August 2014, for example, a group of suspects was killed in an extra-judiciary fashion by military personnel in the city of Tlatlaya, State of Mexico (Edomex), where President Peña Nieto had previously served as governor. Meanwhile, the still unresolved disappearance of a group of 43 students from a rural teaching college in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero in September 2014, has become the country's most contentious human rights case in decades, as the victims' families continue to demand a proper investigation into the whereabouts of the missing students.

B. Difficulties for the Peña Nieto Administration

In 2015, as many of the above noted developments have continued to unfold, President Peña Nieto saw new lows in public assessments of his efforts to improve the country's security situation. Having pledged that he would cut homicide levels in half during his first year in office, some of President Peña Nieto's poor public opinion levels arguably partly reflect dissatisfaction over the recent reversals in the public security situation. Yet, the president's approval ratings began to deteriorate well before the increase in homicides in 2015, so his unpopularity appears to have more to do with his administration's missteps and tone-deaf responses in a series of tragedies and scandals over the past three years. These incidents include the Tlatlaya massacre, the disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa, allegations of political and financial corruption in the Peña Nieto administration (including claims against his wife and his finance minister), and the handling of drug kingpin Joaquín Guzmán.

Figure 19: Public Approval and Disapproval Ratings for Presidents Vicente Fox, Felipe Calderón, and Enrique Peña Nieto, 2000-2015



Source: Consulta Mitofsky.

In response to sinking poll numbers, the Peña Nieto administration has made a number of changes to key cabinet positions related to law enforcement and security. In February 2015, five months after the disappearance of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa, Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam was

replaced by Arely Gómez González and ratified by the Mexican Senate in March 2015.³⁶ Gómez González had previously served in various positions within the Mexican Supreme Court and other institutions under the Mexican judiciary, the PGR, and had most recently been serving as Senator for the PRI from 2012 to 2015, being a key actor for the approval of the new unified National Code of Criminal Proceedings, a fundamental tool to support state and federal implementation of the new criminal justice system.

Under the new criminal justice system to be fully effective in June 2016, the Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) is supposed to be replaced by a new agency known as the National Attorney General's office (Fiscalía General de la Nación, FGN). In August 2015, just prior to his annual address to the Mexican Congress, President Peña Nieto replaced National Security commissioner Monte Alejandro Rubido with the Interior Ministry's anti-kidnapping tsar, Renato Sales Heredia, an experienced prosecutor.³⁷

C. The Sinaloa Cartel and Mexico's Emerging *Cartelitos*

Few things boosted public assessments of the Peña Nieto administration more than the capture of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán in February 2014, and few things undermined the administration's credibility in the eyes of the public more than Guzmán's even more spectacular escape in July 2015. The Sinaloa Cartel has been the single most powerful criminal organization in Mexico throughout the 2000s. Led by former affiliates of the Guadalajara Cartel, the Sinaloa Cartel is based in the southern Pacific state that bears its name, and from which many of the drug traffickers have heralded since the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, Guzmán and Ismael Zambada have long been considered to be business partners and among the most successful of Mexico's drug traffickers.

While Guzmán has established an international reputation—in part because of his legendary escape from a Mexican prison in 2000—Zambada has typically maintained a much lower profile. The specific nature of their business relationship and organizational model is unclear. It is doubtful that either of the two is the formal "head" of a hierarchical command structure, yet the Sinaloa Cartel clearly has capabilities that few other criminal organizations in Mexico can emulate. Engaging in major trafficking operations—particularly for cocaine—requires substantial financial capability, a sophisticated supply chain, and an ability to obtain official protection at key production and transit points. In this regard, the capacities of its rivals in the Tijuana Cartel, the Gulf Cartel, the Juárez Cartel, and the Knights Templar Organization (KTO) now appear to be significantly reduced.

³⁶ Shortly after her appointment, Gómez named several assistant attorneys general charged with Regional Control, Criminal Procedure, and Constitutional Injunctions (Gilberto Higuera Bernal), Investigations of Federal Crimes (José Guadalupe Medina Romero), the Implementation of the New Criminal Justice System (Rommel Moreno Manjarrez), Juridical and International Affairs (José Alberto Rodríguez Calderón), and the Investigation of Organized Crime (Felipe de Jesús Muñoz Vázquez). "Senado ratifica a Arely Gómez al frente de la PGR," *El Financiero*, March 3, 2015, <http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/nacional/senado-ratifica-a-arely-gomez-al-frente-de-la-pgr.html>; "Arely Gómez da a conocer nombramientos en PGR," *El Economista*, March 23, 2015, <http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2015/03/23/arely-gomez-da-conocer-nombramientos-pgr>

³⁷ Formally, Sales Heredia had been head of Coordinación Nacional Antisecuestro. "Anuncia Enrique Peña Nieto cambios en el gabinete," *Excelsior*, August 27, 2015, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2015/08/27/1042514>

Indeed, given the significant problems the Peña Nieto administration confronted in 2013 and 2014 in the state of Michoacán, the federal government made targeting the KTO a special priority in 2015. Following an extended period of intelligence gathering, Mexico's Federal Police (Policía Federal, PF) arrested KTO leader Servando Gómez Martínez, "La Tuta," on February 27, 2015 at a house in Morelia, Michoacán.³⁸ Gómez, formerly an elementary school teacher, had climbed the ranks of the now evidently defunct Michoacán Family (La Familia Michoacana, LFM) criminal organization and, following the splintering of that group in 2010, joined Nazario Moreno, also currently in government custody, to form the KTO.³⁹ While the main leaders of the KTO have been neutralized, remnants of the organization persist in the state of Michoacán and appear to be continuing to engage in criminal activities.

Following Gómez's arrest, security experts like Gerardo Rodríguez anticipated that the KTO's downfall would lead to a process of fragmentation, accompanied by a strengthening of the KTO's principal rival, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG) (see Text Box: CJNG), as well as attempts by the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas to try to retake lost territory, including the port of Lázaro Cárdenas. Indeed, as National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) national security expert Javier Oliva notes, this process—particularly the increased activity of the CJNG—had already begun during the time that Gómez was occupied with avoiding the latest federal operation to capture him.⁴⁰

Cartel de Juárez Nueva Generación (CJNG): The CJNG an organized crime group based Jalisco, with reported presence in Baja California, Colima, the Federal District (DF), Guerrero, Guanajuato, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit, and Veracruz. The group is allegedly led by Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, "El Mencho," who reportedly once worked as a police officer in Cabo Corrientes and Tomatlán, both coastal municipalities of Jalisco, and who served three years in jail in the United States on heroin trafficking charges. After his release from prison, Oseguera Cervantes continued to work closely with the Milenio Cartel's purported leader Armando Valencia Cornelio. Following Valencia's arrest in 2003, the Milenio Cartel was taken over by new leadership, which then formed an alliance with the Sinaloa Cartel (in opposition to the Zetas).

After a January 2010 federal operation that targeted and killed Ignacio "Nacho" Coronel, a top Sinaloa Cartel operative in Jalisco, the Milenio Cartel suffered a split. CJNG was one of two groups that emerged, with Oseguera Cervantes as its leader, who remained aligned to members of the Valencia family. The other splinter group, known as "The Resistance" (La Resistencia), was led by Ramiro "El Molca" Pozos González and allied itself with La Familia Michoacana. The arrest of Pozos González in September 2012 and subsequent blows to La Familia Michoacán and its successor, the Knights Templar Organization (KTO), paved the way for CJNG's ascendance.

Authorities have made some high-profile arrests of CJNG members, notably of Rubén Oseguera González, "El Menchito," son of the group's leader, in January 2014 and of Abigael González Valencia, "El Cuini," the alleged group's head of finances, in February 2014. Nonetheless, a federal district court judge ordered El Menchito to be released from prison in January 2015 due to insufficient evidence against him. Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes is now considered to be a primary objective of both the U.S. and Mexican governments, and his organization is widely regarded as a serious public security threat for Mexico.

³⁸ Arrested alongside Gómez were his girlfriend, María Antonieta Luna Ávalos (27), and seven of Gómez's bodyguards. The same day, a separate operation in Mérida, Yucatán captured Gómez's brother, Flavio Gómez Martínez, the alleged KTO financial chief.

³⁹ The new organization retained the pseudo-religious doctrines of its predecessor, while branching out into activities including extortion and infiltration into Michoacán's mining and agricultural sectors. The group's presence in Michoacán reached its pinnacle in early 2013, triggering the emergence of "self-defense" groups (grupos de autodefensa) in the Tierra Caliente region. Supported by embattled agricultural producers, these self-defense forces decried the government's failure to address the aggressive tactics of the KTO, which had drastically extended its reach across the state, including Mexico's second largest port in Lázaro Cárdenas.

⁴⁰ Muedano, Marcos. "Expertos prevén que se desate disputa de crimen por la plaza." *El Universal*. February 28, 2015; Muedano, Marcos. "La Tuta: tuve que tomar el poder en Michoacán." *El Universal*. February 28, 2015; "Captura de La Tuta no reduce el narcotráfico, dicen expertos." *La Jornada*. March 1, 2015.

The efforts to the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación to move into the vacuum created by the blows to the KTO became clear in the ensuing months, the criminal organization engaged in spectacular acts of violence and blockades in the central Pacific state of Jalisco and surrounding areas starting on May 1.⁴¹ An army helicopter was shot down over a rural area of Jalisco, killing at least three soldiers, wounding 12 others, and leaving three others missing. While many celebrated the International Labor Day holiday, CJNG operatives torched businesses and set up roadblocks throughout the state, including the state capital, Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city.

The *New York Times* observed that the May 1 attacks had been the latest among a series of violent clashes that killed four elite Gendarmerie units just several months before in March and 15 state police officers in April, and appeared to be a response to federal government efforts targeting the New Generation Cartel.⁴²

In short, the landscape of drug trafficking in Mexico now appears to be dominated by one powerful “cartel” amid many *cartelitos*. Because most of the smaller, regional criminal organizations have far lesser capability to finance and manage major drug trafficking operations, these *cartelitos* are arguably a much greater threat to public security, in that they obtain revenue through kidnapping, robbery, and extortion. In some ways, this situation resembles Colombia's after the fall of the Medellín Cartel. In Colombia, the homicide rate significantly declined over the course of the 1990s with the arrest and subsequent killing of kingpin Pablo Escobar. However, homicide rates in Colombia rebounded in the early 2000s—partly due to the proliferation of smaller, regional organized crime groups—before continuing to decline to the current thirty-year lows. While some suggest that Colombia's reduced violence has been attributable to improved public security, others point to the restructuring of organized crime groups and accommodations among them.⁴³ Whatever the case, Colombia's example suggests that the rate of homicides may continue to vary in accordance with the shifting dynamics among organized crime groups, rather than maintain a constant trajectory.

D. Mexico's Human Rights Crisis

The past year brought to light new revelations, frustrations, and much needed scrutiny regarding the problem of human rights abuses in Mexico. The October 2015 release of four soldiers initially charged in relation to the extrajudicial killing of nearly two dozen alleged gang members in the state of Mexico, an incident known as the “Tlatlaya Massacre,” (See Textbox: Abuses in Tlatlaya) fueled criticisms that the Mexican military continues to be “armed with impunity” to commit human rights violations.

⁴¹ Media reports suggest that the May Day violence was triggered by federal efforts to capture Oseguera Cervantes, who was reportedly born in Aguililla, Michoacán, which in the 1990s was home to a drug trafficking organization run by the Valencia family, also known as the Milenio Cartel.

⁴² Randal C. Archibold, “Mexican Helicopter Shot Down, Killing 3 Soldiers,” *New York Times*, May 1, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/02/world/americas/mexican-helicopter-shot-down-killing-3-soldiers.html?emc=eta1&_r=2

⁴³ Elyssa Pachico, “Colombia on Track for Least Violent Year in 3 Decades,” *Insight Crime*, January 8, 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/colombia-on-track-for-least-violent-year-in-3-decades>

In June 2014, soldiers in the Mexican military killed 22 unarmed persons suspected of kidnapping in Tlatlaya, State of Mexico (Edomex). Accounts from witnesses and a report published by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) said that 15 of the 22 individuals killed were shot by members of the Mexican Army despite having surrendered.

Also, during the course of 2015, the Mexican public continued to express frustration and outrage over the September 2014 massacre and disappearance of dozens of students and citizens by authorities in the southwest Pacific state of Guerrero.

Background—Abuses in Tlatlaya: State prosecutors allegedly detained two of the three surviving witnesses in Tlatlaya, beat them, repeatedly asphyxiated them with a bag, and threatened them with sexual abuse to force them to confess to having links to people killed in the incidents, and to say that the military was not responsible for the killings, according to the CNDH. They also threatened and mistreated a third witness, and forced the three witnesses to sign documents they were not allowed to read. Fallout from the incident included the arrest of seven members of armed forces and one official, although four of the military members were eventually released in October 2015, which only further heightened concern about the validity of the Attorney General's Office's (PGR) investigation into the matter.

—*Prepared by Justice in Mexico Visiting Scholar Karol Derwich, Krakow University.*

On September 26, 2014, dozens of student protestors and innocent civilians came under fire and were assaulted by police, and dozens were taken into custody in the town of Iguala, Guerrero. 43 students from a rural teacher's college based in the nearby town of Ayotzinapa who were taken into custody were never seen again, and quickly became known as the "Ayotzinapa 43." Ironically, many of these students had been organizing a series of protests in preparation for a national demonstration in Mexico City on October 2, 2014, the 46th anniversary of the 1968 massacre and disappearance of scores of students organizing political protests in the Mexico City.

Details gradually emerged suggesting that Iguala Mayor José Luis Abarca Velázquez and his wife, María de los Ángeles Pineda Villa, were angered by the students' protests and allegedly ordered municipal police to "teach them a lesson." Shortly after the students were detained and turned over to a local organized crime group known as the Guerreros Unidos, Mayor Abarca and his wife went into hiding and were only found weeks later. It took the federal government until January 2015 to confirm that the students were actually dead and, while authorities searched, they unearthed dozens of other victims, whose bodies had been buried in and around Iguala in recent years, suggesting that such disappearances—perhaps with similar government complicity—were pervasive. Due to its findings that government institutions and officials were explicitly involved, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) declared that the Ayotzinapa case constituted a grave violation of human rights, and launched its own investigation (see Textbox: Investigating the Ayotzinapa 43).

While Ayotzinapa has become a major focal point of international attention on human rights issues, there are other pervasive and systematic problems in the use of state power that work to the detriment of basic individual protections in Mexico.

In 2015, another human rights matter that drew international attention was the case of dual U.S. and Mexican citizen Nestora Salgado. Mother of three and grandmother of five, Salgado is a community activist who had returned to her native Mexico after an extended period in the United States, where she had migrated without papers, was granted amnesty in the 1980s, and later became a naturalized citizen.⁴⁴ After returning to Mexico, Salgado became involved in the CRAC, a long-standing community-policing group operating in the heavily indigenous municipality of Olinalá, Guerrero.⁴⁵ Such groups have a constitutional basis in the autonomy granted to indigenous communities in Mexico. Conflicts between authorities and local community organizers in Guerrero date back at least to the 1970s, a period that many refer to as Mexico's Dirty War. Salgado was eventually elected by her community to lead the force of roughly 70 CRAC community police members.

At the time of Comandante Salgado's arrest in 2013, the CRAC was mired in disputes with authorities and rival community organizations, and Salgado maintained that her arrest and the charges against her (including robbery, kidnapping, and murder) were politically motivated.⁴⁶ Then 41 years of age, Salgado was subjected to solitary confinement in a federal prison in Tepic, Nayarit, where she suffered various illnesses. After her arrest, Salgado's family sought assistance from International Human Rights Clinic at the Seattle University School of Law, the Miguel

Background—Investigating the Ayotzinapa 43: In

2015, the investigation of the case made limited progress, at best. If anything, the case became more muddled amid conflicting findings from government and NGO investigators. After a yearlong investigation, the Attorney General's Office (PGR) released its findings in September 2015, which confirmed the official version sustained by Mexican authorities since 2014. That version alleges the students were arrested by the local police on the mayor's request, passed to a local gang called the Guerreros Unidos, who then killed the students and incinerated the bodies in the local dumpster.

That version has also been widely disputed throughout Mexico and the international community. The students' families continue to demand evidence that their loved ones were actually killed and incinerated, and discredit the government's official version until they can prove it. The families' persistent demands and activism launched a civic movement in 2014 that, to date, continues to pressure the Peña Nieto administration to provide a full and transparent account of what happened. In addition, members of the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes, GIEI), a group formed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), also has publicly criticized the government's official version. GIEI declared that there is not enough evidence to conclude that the students were burned at the dumpster. In addition, investigations undertaken by another group of specialists from Argentina have questioned the official version, arguing that no trace of the victims has been found except for remains from one student. For its part, however, the Peña Nieto administration has continued to place the blame solely on the local authorities, including former Mayor Abarca and his wife, the local police force, and the Guerreros Unidos.

The case of Ayotzinapa constitutes a serious state crisis, given the alleged involvement of actors in the disappearance and presumed murder of unarmed citizens and political protestors. It also disturbingly highlights the problem of cooperation between certain state actors, in this case the local police, with organized crime groups, which appears to be a widespread problem not only in Iguala, but throughout the country.

—Prepared by Justice in Mexico Visiting Scholar Karol Derwich, Krakow University.

⁴⁴ Blanche Petrich, "Nestora Salgado: aún guardo pruebas sobre red de trata infantil," *La Jornada*, January 19, 2015, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2016/01/19/nestora-salgado-aun-guardo-pruebas-sobre-red-de-trata-infantil-8234.html>

⁴⁵ Amanda Coe, "Mexico Drug War-Guerrero: Letter to Commander Nestora Salgado," Translation of *La Jornada* article by Abel Barrera Hernández. Coe's translation provides background information cited above which was not in the original article.

⁴⁶ Alberto Nájjar, "Nestora Salgado, la polémica "comandanta" mexicana acusada de 50 secuestros," *BBC Mundo*, October 9, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/10/151008_nestora_salgado_polemica_comandanta_mexico_an

Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center, and other human rights organizations.⁴⁷ As her case attracted growing international attention, Salgado was transferred from the Tepic maximum-security prison to the Tetepan Social Rehabilitation Center for Women (Centro Femenil de Readaptación Social, CEFERESO) in Mexico City in May 2015, where her health gradually improved. The federal district court in the capital, Chilpancingo, finally acquitted Salgado in March 2016, thanks in part to evidence that, at the time of the alleged crimes, Salgado was giving a press conference over ninety miles away. While Salgado's release from prison offered a moment of triumph, the CRAC claims that its members are among hundreds of political prisoners languishing in incarceration. Salgado has pledged to fight for their release.

These and other illustration of Mexico's failure to protect against systematic human rights abuses resulted in condemnations in the United States, which led to a reduction in funding for the U.S.-Mexico security cooperation agreement known as the Mérida Initiative. To support this agreement, the U.S. Congress appropriated \$2.5 billion, and through November 2015 the United States had expended a total of more than \$1.5 billion to assist Mexico through this program.⁴⁸ These funds have been used to support counter-narcotics, judicial reform, border enforcement (on both the northern and southern Mexican borders), and community development initiatives in Mexico.

It is important to note that, particularly following the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa 43, the Mérida Initiative has been criticized for providing money, support, and equipment to Mexico amid widespread corruption and human rights abuses, as well as the perceived ineffectiveness of overall counter-drug efforts.⁴⁹ In light of these concerns, the U.S. State Department has previously established requirements for conditioning a portion of U.S. assistance on Mexico's human rights record, and in October 2015 the State Department recommended that Congress withhold 15% of Mérida Initiative funding for the 2015 fiscal year.⁵⁰ In full disclosure, in 2014 the Justice in Mexico program accepted a \$1.1 million grant from the U.S. State Department as part of the Mérida Initiative to provide a training and educational exchange program for 240 faculty members and students from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).⁵¹ These funds were not subject to the cuts described above.

⁴⁷ "Family seeks release of Renton woman detained in Mexico." *Associated Press*. November 26, 2013.

⁴⁸ Seelke and Finklea (2016) report that for fiscal year 2016 the U.S. government has authorized \$119 million for the Mérida Initiative, and for 2017 an additional \$139 million is anticipated. Clare Ribando Seelke and Kristin Finklea, "U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond," Congressional Research Service Report (R41349), February 22, 2016, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41349.pdf>

⁴⁹ Jesse Franzblau, "Why Is the US Still Spending Billions to Fund Mexico's Corrupt Drug War?" *The Nation*, <http://www.thenation.com/article/us-connection-mexicos-drug-war-corruption/>

⁵⁰ From 2008 through 2015, Congress required that at least a portion (15 percent) of U.S. support through the Mérida Initiative be contingent on specific human rights conditions. Also, in 2014, the U.S. State Department did not to submit a human rights progress report for Mexico, as required in the appropriation bill for that fiscal year, which caused Congress to cut U.S. assistance to Mexico by \$5.5 million. According to Seelke and Finklea, the FY2014 appropriation legislation (P.L. 113-76) had required the State Department to provide a human rights report that year. However, there are not similar stipulations for Congressionally authorized funding for the 2016 fiscal year. Seelke and Finklea (2016), p. 2.

⁵¹ In 2015, this grant was renewed at full funding for another two years, for an additional \$2.35 million. More information about this program can be obtained at: www.justiceinmexico.org/oasis.

E. Mexico's Accountability Problem

While this report focuses primarily on issues related to organized crime and violence, and especially drug violence, this subject illustrates a pervasive affliction that affects many aspects of life in Mexico—and arguably Latin America more broadly—namely, the problem of impunity. Despite more than a decade of research, monitoring, and reforms promoting rule of law, impunity undoubtedly remains Mexico's core problem. Thus, it is no surprise that Mexicans are increasingly frustrated not only by the inability of authorities to bring criminals to justice, but also the systemic lack of mechanisms to prevent and punish the pervasive and never ending examples of corruption and abuse by authorities and others who hold privilege in Mexican society.

In 2015, as León Krauze observed in the *New Yorker*, Mexico's impunity problem has been illustrated all too vividly by the case of four privileged young men accused of abducting and gang raping a 17-year-old school girl in January of the same year.⁵² Months after the fact, at the request of the father of the victim, the young men—dubbed “Los Porkys de Costa de Oro” in reference to another national scandal—apologized for their actions at a meeting that was arranged by their fathers, all wealthy and prestigious figures in the community, including a former mayor. However, when the victim later decided to press charges, the young men retracted their confessions, local authorities failed to take any action, and the frustrated father of the victim released video and audiotapes of the young men's confession. The case has provoked enormous public outrage and much needed attention to the problem of sexual assault and gender-related violence in Mexico.

Background—Mexico's “Femicides” and Crimes Against Women: For nearly two decades, the number and brutality of “femicides”—the murder of females motivated by their gender—has been a major focus of attention in Mexico. Although the number of femicide cases in 2015 declined in Ciudad Juárez to 46 such deaths according to non-profit organization Mesa de las Mujeres, down slightly from in 2014, rates of femicide increased in other states. In Veracruz there were 93 femicides in the first nine months of 2015, and the number increased in the State of Mexico (Edomex). Overall, the number of reported femicides has consistently grown each year in Mexico, and INEGI data suggests that six out of every ten women in Mexico are victims of violence. Still, such targeted crimes occur in a country where only 1% of all crimes and violence are punishable. With a staggering level of impunity in Mexico, it is therefore no surprise that femicides also fall victim to impunity. According to the “Estudio de la implementación del tipo penal de feminicidio en México: causas y consecuencias 2012 y 2013,” only 1.6% of femicide cases ended with a sentence.

—Prepared by Justice in Mexico Visiting Scholar Karol Dervich, Krakow University.

The opposite of impunity is accountability, a concept that is far too absent in Mexico. 15 years ago, the freedom of information act signed by President Vicente Fox in 2001—arguably the single most important accomplishment of his administration—laid a foundation for promoting accountability in Mexico. Seven years later, the sweeping judicial sector reforms signed by President Felipe Calderón in 2008 introduced a new set of due process guarantees and procedures intended to advance the principle of accountability in criminal investigations, prosecutions, and trials. If those reforms—which will be fully effective nationwide in June 2016—are successful, their long-term effect of those could help to produce a major paradigm shift in Mexico's criminal justice system. This, at least, is the hope of those working to advance Mexico's judicial sector reforms. On the other hand, critics point out the cost and uneven pace of implementing the reforms thus far, as well as the need for a major

⁵² León Krauze, “Los Porkys: The Sexual-Assault Case That's Shaking Mexico,” *New Yorker*, April 14, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/los-porkys-the-sexual-assault-case-thats-shaking-mexico>

cultural change among judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and the general population. What is absolutely clear is that Mexico's rule of law challenges will not be easily or quickly resolved, and no one measure is likely to be the silver bullet to kill the beast of impunity.

F. Push to Legal Marijuana in Mexico

To the above point, 2015 saw a major push to rethink one of the factors that has most contributed to the impunity of organized crime groups in Mexico: the lucrative illicit black market created by the international prohibition of drugs. Many experts have argued that part of the solution to Mexico's problems of violent organized crime lies in making a major change in international drug policy. Specifically, drug policy reformers like Drug Policy Alliance president and founder Ethan Nadelmann argue for ending the prohibition of psychotropic substances and opting instead for the legalized production, distribution, and consumption in a way that better protects public health.

In recent years, advocates of legalization have gained momentum and support, with the proliferation of legislation permitting medical marijuana use under specified conditions or in specific localities in countries such as Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, France, and Finland; marijuana cultivation under specified conditions, in small scale, or in specific localities in countries such as Colombia, Spain and Jamaica; and even minor possession of roughly 10 grams or less for recreational marijuana use under specified conditions or in specific localities including Canada, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Norway, the Netherlands, North Korea, Portugal, the United States; and even legally regulated cultivation, distribution, and consumption under specified conditions or in specific localities (including the United States and Uruguay).⁵³ In 2015, Mexico attracted international attention in relation to its policies on marijuana, as the country's Supreme Court issued a ruling in November 2015 favoring four individuals who asserted that they had a constitutional right to grow and consume marijuana. Because Mexican Supreme Court verdicts in a single case do not set binding constitutional precedents, it would require four additional rulings in similar cases to grant all Mexican citizens the same constitutional right to produce and use marijuana. However, the case attracted considerable international attention, and stoked speculation about the prospect for further legalization of drugs in Mexico and elsewhere.

Indeed, in November 2015, while publicly stating his opposition to the legalization of drugs, President Peña Nieto called for a national conversation on this topic, hosted a series of public dialogues, and advocated for the United Nations to host a major forum on this topic on April 19. As this report went to print, President Peña Nieto changed his plans unexpectedly to announce that he would attend the U.N. General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) and make a declaration of Mexico's official position on the legalization question.⁵⁴ In addition to the considerable changes that have occurred in the landscape of international drug policy, it is noteworthy that this session—originally planned for the twenty-year mark in 2018—was moved up to 2016 at the request of the three countries that have arguably been hardest hit by drug violence in recent years: Colombia, Mexico, and Guatemala. In his remarks at the forum on April 19, 2016, Peña Nieto announced a ten-point plan to shift from the current prohibition framework to a regulated public health approach. Three days later, on April 21, Peña Nieto further criticized drug prohibition, and announced his proposal to authorize the legalization of minor possession (up to 28 grams),

⁵³ Emma Brant, "Where in the world can you legally smoke cannabis?," Newsbeat, BBC, October 30, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/29834450/where-in-the-world-can-you-legally-smoke-cannabis>

⁵⁴ The forum marked the third time the United Nations has hosted a special session on this topic: the last time was in June 1998.

becoming the first sitting Mexican president to do so. How soon the president's proposals will be viable is unclear, since opinion polls suggest that most Mexicans—about two thirds—oppose legalization, in contrast to the United States, where over half of adults favor marijuana legalization.

V. CONCLUSION

The authors have made our best possible effort to work with the available data to provide an objective assessment of Mexico's security situation, the problem of organized crime, and especially violence related to drug trafficking. The general conclusion of this report is that there has been an increase in the number of homicides in Mexico in 2015, with worrying incidences of organized crime-style violence around the country. While the data presently available are incomplete, this finding is consistent with both government reports and the view of numerous scholars and experts that follow these trends carefully in Mexico. Ultimately, the authors see this reversal of fortune as evidence that progress in improving Mexico's public security situation will be neither certain nor straightforward. Moreover, it is also clear that a reduction in violence in a given year or location cannot necessarily be attributed to more effective law enforcement.

The factors that lead to an escalation of violence are multiple and complex. Improvements in Mexican law enforcement are indeed necessary, but they are only part of the equation. Individuals will only be stripped of impunity when the criminal justice system rests on the fundamental principle of accountability, which underscores the importance of promoting continued progress on judicial reform in the years to come. This principle is especially relevant when it comes to the issue of human rights abuses, which—as noted in this report—are becoming a problem of growing international concern with regard to the drug war in Mexico.

Also, in terms of promoting greater public security in Mexico, it is clear that there is a need for more effective efforts to address the socioeconomic roots of violence, most importantly providing decent educational and employment opportunities so that young people (particularly men) have viable alternatives to crime and violence. Lastly, while modifications to Mexican and international drug policy appear to be imminent, it is clear that many organized crime groups in Mexico have already moved into a variety of other illicit activities and will not fade quietly away even if all psychotropic substances were legalized tomorrow.

Based on these findings, the authors offer the following general recommendations for future progress in reducing the problems of organized crime and violence in Mexico:

1. **Binding Mexico to Continued Judicial Reform:** In 2008, Mexico's Congress bound Mexico to a deadline for implementation of judicial reform efforts. Now that Mexico is on the verge of meeting that deadline, it is time for Mexico's Congress to create binding legislation on the metrics, goals, and deadlines for the next eight years to ensure continued progress on judicial reform. Specifically, for example, the Mexican Congress could establish that states must begin to track and report data on prosecutorial and judicial caseloads; that states must survey judicial system operatives, victims, and prison populations to track "user satisfaction" levels; and that the federal government must provide an annual report to Congress on the status of criminal justice reform implementation.
2. **Bolstering Human Rights Protections:** Current concerns about the participation of government actors in grave human rights abuses against both crime suspects and ordinary

citizens. As a means to protect human rights, Mexican authorities need to not only rebuke and punish the “bad apples,” but also address the systemic factors that have contributed to such abuses. For example, the Mexican government should consider empowering the country’s national ombudsman to play a stronger role in addressing human rights abuses, either in the initiation of formal proceedings or even in the ultimate prosecution of abusers. Also, in order to demonstrate its disposition to resolve these problems and gain greater international legitimacy, the Mexican government should work cooperatively with intergovernmental agencies and outside experts to help address its domestic human rights abuses.

3. **Addressing the Socioeconomic Roots of Crime and Violence:** As numerous studies have noted, rampant crime and violence are strongly linked to socio-economic factors. Too little has been done to address these factors, and particularly the issues that affect young, disaffected males between the ages of 18-35 who represent the vast majority of perpetrators and victims in Mexico’s recent wave of violence. Mexican government should consider instituting a national campaign to provide educational and job opportunities targeting young men, possibly by creating incentive plans for higher educational attainment similar to those used in the successful “Oportunidades” program that helps reduce poverty among school-age Mexican girls.
4. **Public Education on Marijuana:** The Mexican government has recently pronounced its intention to soften prohibitions on the production, distribution, and consumption of marijuana, but has not expanded this easing of prohibitions for all psychotropic substances. Many respected advocates of drug policy reform insist that efforts to legalize any psychotropic substance must be carefully regulated to avoid serious problems, including drug abuse by minors, driving under the influence, and other possible threats. As Mexico embarks on its efforts to legalize minor possession and consumption of the drug, the federal government’s health ministry should launch an aggressive public education campaign on the effects and risks of marijuana consumption.

As we have noted repeatedly over the years, the fight against organized crime in Mexico is very likely far from over. Due to the suppression of the Colombian cocaine supply, the liberalization of international drug policy, and the fragmentation of major drug trafficking operations, illicit drug traffickers will likely continue to try to bolster their profits by expanding production and distribution of heroin, methamphetamine, and other banned substances. Meanwhile, regional organized crime groups with limited drug trafficking capabilities will continue to seek out other diversified criminal activities, such as kidnapping, extortion, and grand theft. Moreover, there is much work to be done to improve the governmental and societal response to addressing these problems. Sustained efforts to evaluate the problem of organized crime and, above all, a sincere commitment on the part of the Mexican government are necessary to reduce its impact.

APPENDIX: DEFINITIONS, DATA, AND METHODOLOGIES

Previous reports have identified the significant conceptual and methodological complexities of monitoring violence in Mexico. In this section, we review these issues with some discussion of the problem of defining “drug violence” and the specific sources of data that employed in this report.

A. Defining the Problem

The terms “drug violence” and “drug-related homicides” are widely used in the media and in the popular understanding of Mexico’s recent security challenges. Yet, there is no formal definition of these concepts in Mexican criminal law. Indeed, historically, Mexican law has made few distinctions among different types of homicide.⁵⁵ Labeling homicides by specific characteristics therefore involves some degree of subjective interpretation. For example, while the concept of “intra-family violence” might seem rather straightforward, there could be multiple and competing notions of what constitutes a homicide that occurs within a “family.”⁵⁶ The same methodological challenge exists when classifying and counting other categories of crime, such as “hate crimes” targeting persons based on the victim’s ethnicity or sexual orientation. Indeed, sociologists and criminologists would be quick to point out that “crime” itself is a socially constructed and culturally variable concept.

Thus, although government officials, scholars, and media sources make common references to terms like “drug violence,” “narco-violence,” “cartel-related violence,” “drug-war violence,” “organized-crime-related violence,” etc., there are naturally significant challenges in attempting to catalogue and measure such violence. Efforts to focus narrowly on drug-trafficking-related violence are problematic because the activities of drug traffickers have diversified significantly into other areas of organized crime. Indeed, the very definition of “organized crime” is itself much debated among scholars and experts: the term is used interchangeably to describe an affiliation, a lifestyle, and a type of crime.⁵⁷ Moreover, the scale, scope, complexity, and purpose of “organized-crime groups,” or OCGs, vary widely, from neighborhood-based associations (e.g., “gangs”) to smugglers (e.g., drug-trafficking organizations, DTOs) to sophisticated financial conspiracies (e.g., “white-collar crime”).

⁵⁵ The most common formal charges used at the federal and state level are intentional homicide (*homicidio doloso*) and unintentional manslaughter (*homicidio culposo*). In July 2012, modifications were made to Article 325 of the Federal Criminal Code (*Código Penal Federal*)—and various state codes throughout the country—to establish “femicide” (*femicidio*) as an official category for homicides committed for reasons of gender. Any further attributes of a particular homicide or group of homicides fall outside of the statutory classifications established under Mexican law.

⁵⁶ For example, if a person is killed by their domestic partner, does that constitute “intra-family” violence? If someone is killed by an ex-spouse, is that still violence within the “family”? If someone is killed by a fourth cousin that they never met, should that case be considered one of “intra-family violence” or merely a random coincidence among strangers?

⁵⁷ As Maltz (1976) notes, defining and studying organized crime is complicated and, like all forms of crime, subject to evolving societal norms and biases. Contemporary official and scholarly definitions tend to emphasize the sustained and concerted efforts of individuals to deliberately defy the state for material gain. Moreover, as Naim (2006) and Bjelopera and Finklea (2012) point out, contemporary discussions of organized crime focus especially on its transnational nature and its ability to challenge the state, especially in an era of accelerated flows of goods, people, and capital across national borders. See: Jerome P. Bjelopera and Kristin M. Finklea, “Organized Crime: An Evolving Challenge for U.S. Law Enforcement,” *CRS Report for Congress*. January 2012. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2012); Michael D. Maltz, “On Defining ‘Organized Crime’: The Development of a Definition and a Typology,” *Crime & Delinquency* 1976 22: 338; Moises Naim, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers, and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2006).

In Mexico, there is a formal legal definition of organized crime. Since 1996, Mexico's constitution has formally defined organized crime (*delincuencia organizada*) as “a de facto organization of three or more persons, [existing] in permanent or recurring form to commit crimes, according to the terms of the relevant area of the law.” The concept exists also in the Federal Criminal Code, and Mexico's federal legislature has also established special legislation to address organized crime through the Federal Law Against Organized Crime (*Ley Federal Contra la Delincuencia Organizada*).⁵⁸ Similarly, there are legal statutes that characterize and define drug trafficking as a specific form of organized crime. Hence, there is a legal basis for labeling homicides that are related to organized crime activities in Mexico as “organized crime killings.”

However, establishing a connection is problematic. To fall within the legal categories described above, any crime or individual associated with organized crime must first be prosecuted and the perpetrators found guilty. Unfortunately, criminal investigations on homicide take a considerable amount of time, and often go unresolved in Mexico, so there may be no charges or conviction—that is, no legal basis—upon which to base the connection to organized crime. As a result, often no formal legal determination can be made in a particular case. All of this leaves virtually any discussion of the violence attributable to “drug trafficking” or “organized crime” in Mexico open to subjective interpretation and unsubstantiated allegations.

Despite all of these conceptual and methodological issues, it is also difficult to ignore the extraordinary characteristics of the violence that Mexico has recently experienced, or the role that DTOs and OCGs have played in it. Such groups use specific types of weapons, specific tactics (e.g., targeted assassinations, street gun battles, etc.), extreme forms of violence (e.g., torture, dismemberment, and decapitation), explicit messages to authorities and each other (e.g., notes, signs, and banners), and public displays of violence intended to spread fear (e.g., bodies hanging from bridges). Hence, there is value in attempting to isolate and study such violence because of the very significant role that drug-trafficking organizations and other organized crime groups currently play in the manufacturing of violence in Mexico.

B. The Available Data Sources and Their Limitations

As noted earlier, homicide is one of the most frequently referenced measures of violence around the world. Compared with other violent crimes, like assault, robbery, rape, or kidnapping, homicide has a relatively high rate of reporting, in part because it is difficult to conceal. Even in Mexico, where there is a high degree of criminal impunity—with fewer than 25% of crimes reported, and just 2% of all crimes punished—homicides are more likely to be reported, investigated, and punished than other forms of violent crimes. Hence, homicide data provide an important measure of Mexico's recent violence.

1. Government Data on Homicide

Official data on homicides in Mexico are available from two sources. First, public-health records filed by coroners' offices can be used to identify cases where the cause of death was unnatural, such

⁵⁸ Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, *Ley Federal Contra la Delincuencia Organizada*. (Last version published on March 14, 2014). <http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/101.pdf>

as cases of gunshot wounds, stabbings, lacerations, asphyxiation, etc. While all datasets have limitations, the most consistent, complete, and reliable source of information in Mexico is the autonomous government statistics agency, INEGI, which provides data on death by homicide and other forms of violent crime. It must be noted that INEGI's homicide figures include both intentional and unintentional homicides, such as car accidents.

A second source of data on homicide comes from criminal investigations by law enforcement to establish a formal determination of intentional criminal wrongdoing, and the subsequent conviction and sentencing of suspects charged with these crimes. The National Public Security System, SNSP, compiles and reports data on the number of cases involving intentional homicides that are identified and investigated by law enforcement. In recent years, SNSP has released its homicide data on a monthly basis to provide more timely access to information. It should be noted that this is an enormous feat, and highly uncommon; not even the FBI Uniform Crime Report provides such timely updated information on homicides.

A more recent source of data comes from actual victims of homicide and crimes also tracked by SNSP. As mentioned above, SNSP has been releasing this new dataset where numbers of homicides are—evidently—much higher than the traditional homicide investigations tally because they feature actual people killed instead of crime investigations where there could be more than one victim. In the future the SNSP's victim tally could become a better tool to analyze the phenomenon of homicide, despite the fact that a comparability analysis cannot be made because there are currently only two years worth of data available. Thus it will be necessary to still consider SNSP's traditional dataset that includes homicides investigations as a source of analysis, as it provides close to 20 years of data. Nonetheless, SNSP numbers on victims and even more on crime investigations are still much lower than those from INEGI.

The variance between public health and law enforcement homicide statistics appears to be attributable to the different timing and methodologies by which cases are classified. The inclusion of unintentional homicides by INEGI is a major factor that must be taken into consideration when using its figures. Still, the general trends identified by both sources are closely correlated.⁵⁹ All sources therefore provide important points of reference for this report, particularly given concerns by some experts that SNSP figures may be more vulnerable to manipulation by law enforcement authorities at different levels.

2. Organized-Crime-Style Homicides

Neither of the two official sources on homicide statistics identifies whether there is a connection to organized crime in a particular case, such as “drug” killings. However, both government and independent sources have attempted to do so by examining other variables associated with a given crime. For example, characteristic signs of possible organized crime involvement in a homicide might include the fact that the victim was carrying an illegal weapon, was transporting drugs, had

⁵⁹ The key source of the discrepancy is that homicides are identified by different means and reported at different times. Coroners' reports are based on autopsies conducted at the time that a body is found, and are reported for that calendar year. Hence, a person killed the year before, or even a decade ago, will be registered in the year of the autopsy. Law-enforcement efforts to document homicides generally reflect the calendar year in which a formal charge of homicide was levied. SNSP data may also include homicides that were not identified through a coroner's examination. Still, the statistical correlation in the years where the two data sets overlap (1997-2012) produces a Pearson's coefficient of .949, which suggests a very strong relationship between the two variables being measured.

been abducted, was killed in a particular fashion, or was under investigation for organized crime activities. These kinds of details are available to criminal investigators and analysts and are compiled by the SNSP (e.g., CISEN, CENAPI, SSP, SEDENA, SEMAR, and SEGOB).⁶⁰

Based on such characteristics, in addition to tracking the total number of homicides, the Mexican government has also maintained records for the last several years on the number of homicides attributable to drug trafficking and organized crime. Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) reported early figures on "drug-related" homicides from 2000-2008, based on data from the Mexican Attorney General's Office (PGR).⁶¹ However, just as violence began to increase, the Mexican government stopped releasing this information on the grounds that organized crime killings are not codified by law and are methodologically difficult to compile. This provoked significant pressure from researchers, media organizations, civic groups, and the government's autonomous transparency agency, leading the government to release such information sporadically from 2010 to 2013.⁶² However, since mid-2013, the Mexican government has not released comprehensive figures identifying the number of organized crime-style figures. Critics argue that the refusal to release data on such killings reflects a politically motivated effort by the Peña Nieto administration to change the media narrative about Mexico's security situation.

Because of the limitations of government data—and a lack of transparency on how these data are collected—several media sources, non-governmental organizations, and researchers conduct their own independent monitoring of efforts on homicides and organized-crime-related violence. Such efforts typically involve identifying and recording homicides reported by authorities and media sources, and then isolating those cases that bear characteristics typical of DTOs and OCGs. Mexican media organizations with national coverage—notably, the Mexico City-based newspaper *Reforma* and *Milenio*—have been the most consistent, comprehensive, and reliable in such monitoring efforts.⁶³ In addition to such government and media tallies, several organizations, researchers, and individuals—such as Molly Molloy at New Mexico State University and Chris Kyle at the University of Alabama—have attempted to develop other datasets, tallies, and lists of violent acts in Mexico.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ According to Mexican security expert Viridiana Ríos, who worked with the office of the Mexican president on analyzing these data, during the Calderón administration, the Technical Secretary for the National Security Council (CSN) coordinated the compilation of these data at that time.

⁶¹ Moloeznik, Marcos Pablo (2009). "The Militarization of Public Security and the Role of the Military in Mexico," in Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk (eds.), *Police and Public Security in Mexico*, San Diego: University Readers, 2012.

⁶² As noted in previous reports, in 2009, Justice in Mexico filed four formal "access to information" requests and made numerous requests to the Mexican government to obtain data on drug-related violence. The government repeatedly denied these requests, and inquiries by other researchers, on the grounds that no such data existed. Then, in January 2010 and January 2011, SNSP released data on the number and location of the organized-crime-related homicides tracked internally by the government, including 47,453 homicides that were believed by the Mexican government to involve OCGs, dating from January 2007 through September 2011. In November 2012, the outgoing Calderón administration announced that the government would no longer release any data on organized crime-related killings. The incoming Peña Nieto administration initially took a similar stance, but then began to report such figures during the first half of 2013. Cory Molzahn, Viridiana Ríos, David A. Shirk. *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011*, (San Diego, CA: Justice in Mexico, 2012).

⁶³ Until recently, the Mexico City-based newspaper *Reforma* was the main source of data on drug-related violence referenced by Justice in Mexico. However, while *Reforma* faithfully reported these data publicly throughout the Calderón administration, its weekly reporting stopped abruptly and without explanation in December 2012, just as President Peña Nieto took office. In mid-2013, *Reforma* resumed its reporting of these data, though since the start of 2014 they have begun to do so with less detail than in the past. For this reason, Justice in Mexico has worked to incorporate data from *Milenio* and also the Lantia consulting group headed by Eduardo Guerrero and reported by *Excelsior* in Leo Zuckermann's column "Juegos de Poder."

⁶⁴ For example, as reported in Justice in Mexico's report, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2014*, University of Alabama at Birmingham professor Christopher Kyle's Guerrero Violence Project (GVP) database has

Other sources, including *El Blog del Narco* and the *Menos Días Aquí* blog, have contributed to the tracking and reporting efforts by developing online platforms for reporting and sharing data on the problem of violence in Mexico.

Along these lines, Justice in Mexico has worked with dozens of research associates, university students, and volunteers to construct a dataset that documents and classifies individual, high profile homicides that bear characteristics that suggest a link to drug trafficking and organized crime. This dataset—called *Memoria*—currently includes more than 5,000 victims, including nearly 3,000 identified by name and other individual characteristics (e.g., gender, age, narco-messages, etc.).⁶⁵ This dataset forms a basis for several observations made within this report. In addition, this report also provides projections to fill data gaps for some homicide and organized-crime-style homicide figures to account for the missing data from incomplete sources, using a multiple imputation technique to extrapolate periods for which data are missing.⁶⁶

3. Analytical and Methodological Concerns

As made clear above and in previous reports, the available data have significant limitations. First, there is no dataset that spans the time period and levels of analysis that are of interest. SNSP figures on intentional homicide are available starting in 1997 and through 2015, including monthly figures for all of 2015.⁶⁷ However, SNSP's municipal level data on organized-crime-style homicides run from December 2006 through September 2011, and also from January 2013 to June 2013. There are also gaps in the data available for *Reforma* newspaper for monthly figures on organized-crime-style homicides, though such data are available from *Milenio*. Justice in Mexico has attempted to compensate for these missing figures by using estimations calculated to reflect likely patterns wherever possible. However, the lack of continuity and timeliness in data collection efforts makes it necessary to rely on different sources and occasional inferential projections to address different questions.

identified more than 10,000 cases of homicide in the state of Guerrero that have been coded for various characteristics, geo-referenced, and plotted on an interactive online map, viewable at: <http://bit.ly/1wczk0u>. See also, Chris Kyle, "Violence and Insecurity in Guerrero," Mexico Institute and Justice in Mexico Briefing Paper Series on *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Organized Crime*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; University of San Diego, January 20, 2015.

⁶⁵ This dataset was referenced in previous reports as the Victims and Violence Monitor. In 2013, the dataset was renamed "*Memoria*" to reflect its effort to analyze and respect the memory of those affected by such violence, whatever their identity or role. The dataset includes cases reported both by the media and the government, typically involving certain types of weapons, methods of killing, markings, and messages declaring organized crime affiliations, etc. These efforts have been conducted through intensive data gathering workshops hosted by Justice in Mexico and through an online portal developed to facilitate consistent reporting and coding of data. Each case is reviewed and vetted by Justice in Mexico staff before being incorporated into the dataset.

⁶⁶ As reported in Justice in Mexico's report, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2014*, this technique leverages a multiple regression model to estimate the variable of interest (e.g., homicides reported by INEGI) based on a number of other data sources for those same time periods, up until the point in time when the outcome variable is no longer available. The model is then used to predict the missing values of the outcome variable forward in time based on the same alternate sources still available. The authors are grateful to Dr. Topher McDougal for his guidance and assistance in generating these predictions using STATA. For more information on multiple data imputation in statistical methodologies, please see: Andrew Gelman and Jennifer Hill, "Missing Data Imputation," in Andrew Gelman and Jennifer Hill, *Data Analysis Using Regression and Multilevel/Hierarchical Models*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. 529-543.

⁶⁷ SNSP data at the municipal level are available from 2011 to 2013.

In terms of methodological concerns, there are also questions regarding the techniques for identifying and categorizing cases of drug-trafficking and organized-crime-style homicides. As discussed above, efforts to do so are largely based on the identification of symptoms that suggest organized crime activity: specific types of weapons (high-caliber, assault-type weapons), specific tactics (targeted assassinations, street gun battles, etc.), extreme displays of cruelty (torture, dismemberment, and decapitation), and explicit messages directed to authorities, each other, and the public (often called “narco-messages”). Whether such characteristics provide adequate proof of organized crime involvement is highly debatable, since individuals may well engage in such violence in an attempt to disguise otherwise “ordinary” homicides. There are also important questions about the effectiveness of official identification of intentional homicide victims. Estimates by the public interest think tank *México Evalúa* suggest that as many as 80% of homicides in Mexico go unpunished, whereas INEGI found through its annual ENVIPE survey (Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública) that perpetrators in only 1% of all crimes in Mexico are held accountable, in large part because of the limited capacity of the country’s federal and state agencies to investigate them properly.⁶⁸ In addition, there is also a large number of missing persons whose fate remains a mystery.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, hundreds of homicide victims only turn up weeks or months after the fact, as evidenced by the discovery of mass graves in many different parts of the country, particularly those areas most affected by drug trafficking and organized crime activities.⁷⁰ For all of these reasons, the authors recognize that their findings can only be as valid as the official and independently collected data that is available.

⁶⁸ México Evalúa, *Seguridad y Justicia Penal en los estados: 25 indicadores de nuestra debilidad institucional*.

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/86758591/Seguridad-y-Justicia-Penal-en-los-estados>. “Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública.” *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*. September 2015.

<http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/encuestas/hogares/regulares/envipe/envipe2015/default.aspx>

⁶⁹ In 2015, Mexico’s Secretary of the Interior (SEGOB) released its “2014 Annual Report of Missing or Disappeared Persons,” in which it reported 24,812 missing persons, as of December 31, 2014. This number is up 4,000 from the database released in 2012 by Centro de Investigación y Capacitación Propuesta Cívica, a Mexico City-based non-governmental organization, which revealed a list of 20,851 persons who went missing from 2006 through 2012, far greater than the number of missing persons reported at the time by official sources. The *Propuesta Cívica* database is reportedly based on a “secret” list obtained from the PGR. “INFORME ANNUAL 2014: Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas (RNPED).” *Secretaría de Gobernación*. August 2015.

http://www.senado.gob.mx/comisiones/derechos_humanos/docs/Informe_Anual_2014_RNPED.pdf Anabel Hernández, “Supera los 25 mil, la lista secreta de desaparecidos,” *El Diario*, December 29, 2012.

http://diario.mx/Nacional/2012-12-29_86eda41c/supera-los-25-mil-la-lista-secreta-de-desaparecidos/ At the time of this report, the actual dataset is accessible through the Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad Con Democracia, A.C. (CASEDE) at the following site: <http://www.seguridadcondemocracia.org/biblioteca-virtual/derechos-humanos/bases-de-datos-sobre-personas-desaparecidas-en-mexico-2006-2012.html>

⁷⁰ For example, at least 177 bodies were identified in 2011 in the largest mass gravesite attributed to OCGs. The mass grave was discovered in the town of San Fernando in the northeastern border state of Tamaulipas; most of the victims were killed by blunt instruments, and most appeared to be migrants and travelers passing through the state. With dozens of smaller gravesites discovered throughout northern Mexico, this may suggest a shift in tactics among organized-crime groups to different means of obtaining revenue and lower-profile methods of killing. In the recent past, competition and conflict over territorial control among drug trafficking organizations may have provided strong incentives for organized-crime groups to send violent signals to authorities and rivals, including running gun battles, public executions, video-recorded murders, leaving dead bodies in the streets, and the like. However, as some Mexican organized-crime groups are now increasingly seeking revenue by preying on “non-combatants,” such as Central American migrants, they appear to be less interested in advertising their handiwork to authorities and to each other, and more interested in evading detection and confrontation.

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