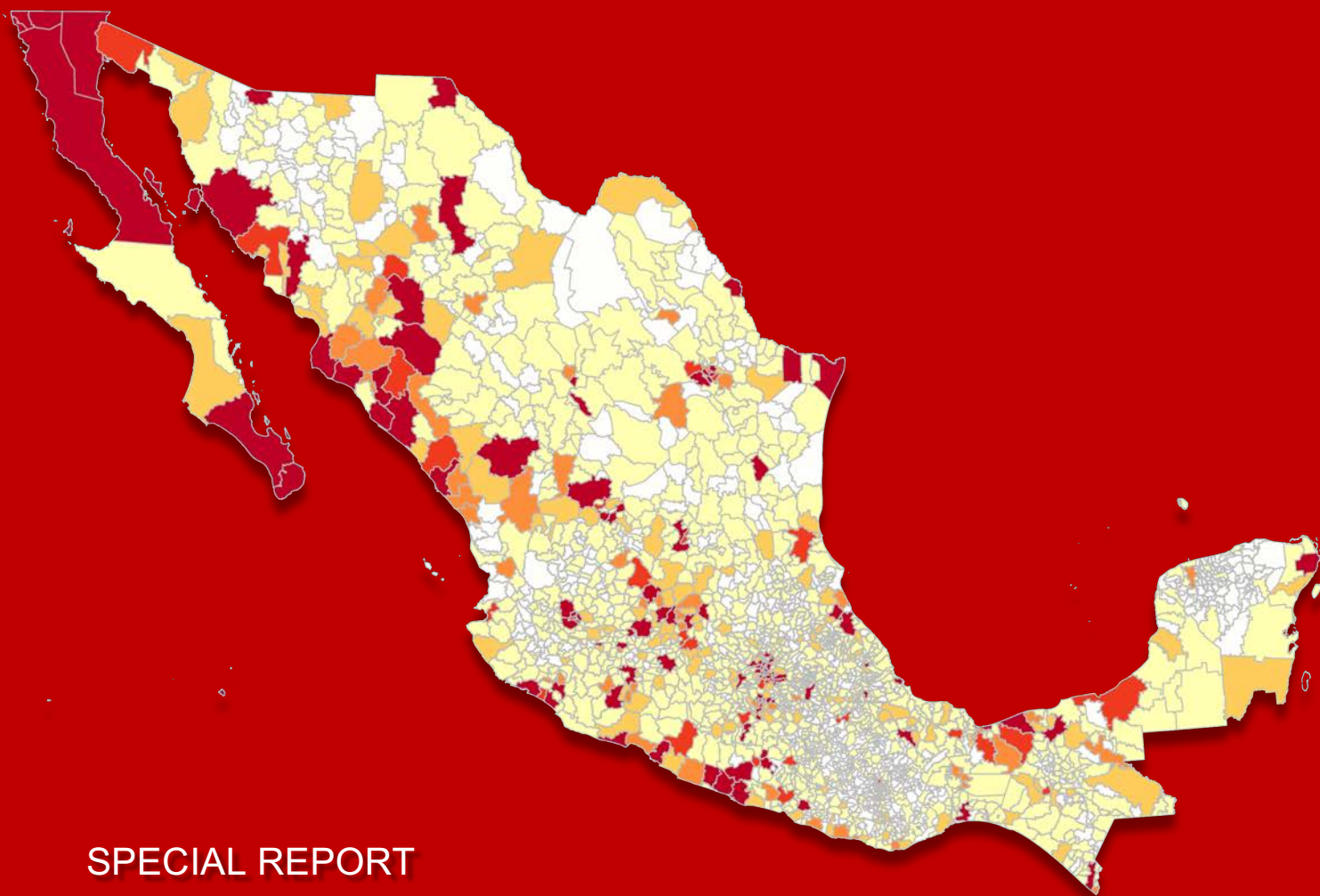


# Drug Violence in Mexico

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*Data and Analysis Through 2016*



## 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

**MARCH 2017**

## About Justice in Mexico:

Started in 2001, Justice in Mexico ([www.justiceinmexico.org](http://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 March 30, 2017 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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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS .....	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	2
I. INTRODUCTION.....	4
II. UNDERSTANDING MEXICO’S RECENT VIOLENCE .....	5
A. Mexico’s Violence in Perspective .....	5
B. The Role of Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Mexico.....	9
III. FINDINGS: DRUG VIOLENCE IN MEXICO.....	10
A. Homicide Levels Rose in 2015 and Continued to Increase Substantially in 2016 .....	10
B. Organized-Crime-Style Killings Constituted a Major Share of Homicides in 2016 .....	13
C. Shifting Geographic Patterns of Violence.....	16
1. <i>Geographic Dispersion of Intentional Homicides at Municipal Level on the Decline</i> .....	16
2. <i>Significant Increases in Local Centers of Violence</i> .....	21
3. <i>Distribution of Organized-Crime-Style Homicides</i> .....	22
D. Special Victims: Mayors and Journalists .....	25
1. <i>Mayors</i> .....	25
3. <i>Journalists</i> .....	27
E. Comparing Administrations.....	29
IV. KEY ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN 2016 .....	31
A. Concerns About General Socio-Economic Conditions.....	31
B. Dynamics Among Organized Crime Groups: Building the <i>Pax Sinaloa</i> .....	32
C. The Fall of Chapo Guzmán and the Unmaking of the <i>Pax Sinaloa</i> .....	35
D. The Rising Star of Jalisco’s New Generation Cartel .....	37
E. New Criminal Justice System Comes Into Effect .....	38
F. Continued Criticisms of the Peña Nieto Administration.....	40
G. Mexico’s Efforts to Combat Corruption .....	41
H. U.S.-MEXICO SECURITY COOPERATION .....	43
V. CONCLUSION .....	45
APPENDIX: DEFINITIONS, DATA, AND METHODOLOGIES .....	47
A. Defining the Problem .....	47
B. The Available Data Sources and Their Limitations .....	48
1. <i>Government Data on Homicide</i> .....	48
2. <i>Organized-Crime-Style Homicides</i> .....	49
3. <i>Analytical and Methodological Concerns</i> .....	51

## 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)
	EdomexEstado 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
MC	Movimiento Ciudadano (Citizen's Movement).Political party previously known as Convergencia por la Democracia)
OCG	Organized crime group
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party), Mexican political party
PGR	Procuraduría General de la República (Attorney General's Office)
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolution Party), Mexican political party
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party), 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

- **This report examines trends in violence and organized crime in Mexico through 2016.** Over the years, this series of Justice in Mexico special reports has compiled and attempted to reconcile often imperfect, confusing, and even conflicting information from both official and non-governmental sources regarding trends in violence and organized crime, and particularly “drug-related” violence. As the eighth 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 the ongoing crisis of violence, corruption, and human rights violations associated with the war on drugs.
- **Mexico has experienced dramatic increases in crime and violence in recent years.** 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), but rose dramatically a year after President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) took 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. No other country in the Western Hemisphere saw such a large increase either in its homicide rate or in the absolute number of homicides over the last two decades.
- **After a decline in 2012-2014, homicides began to rise again in 2015 and jumped 20% in 2016.** Official homicide statistics from Mexico’s National Security System (SNSP) registered significant decreases in 2012 (about 5%), in 2013 (about 16%), and in 2014 (about 15%), before climbing upwards again in 2015 (+7%) and 2016 (+22%). SNSP reported the number of intentional homicides at 18,650 in 2015 to 22,932 in 2016. The worsening of security conditions over the past two years has been a major setback for President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), who pledged to reduce violence dramatically during his administration.
- **In 2016, increases in cases of intentional homicide were registered in 24 states.** Fueling the national increase in homicides were increases in 24 states. Notably, the largest increases were registered in Colima with a 600% increase from 2015 to 2016, Nayarit (500% increase), and Zacatecas (405% increase), all of which have an important role in drug production or trafficking and are contested by rival organized crime groups. Meanwhile, several states registered noticeable decreases, including Querétaro with a 69% decrease in intentional homicides and Campeche with a 24% decrease.
- **Local officials and journalists remained prime targets of violence in 2016.** According to Justice in Mexico’s *Memoria* dataset, seven current or former mayors were killed in 2016 (in comparison five mayoral candidates, two sitting mayors, and one former mayor were killed in 2015). Justice in Mexico also documented 11 journalists and media-support workers killed in 2016 in Mexico, continuing a slight downward trend from the 14 killed in 2015 and 15 killed in 2014.
- **Mexico’s recent violence is largely attributable to drug trafficking and organized crime.** What is particularly concerning about Mexico’s sudden increases in homicides in



recent years is that much or most of this elevated violence appears to be attributable to “organized crime” groups, particularly those involved in drug trafficking. While there are important methodological problems with compiling data on organized crime-related killings, tallies produced over the past decade by government, media, academic, NGO, and consulting organizations suggest that roughly a third to half of all homicides in Mexico bear signs of organized crime-style violence, including the use of high-caliber automatic weapons, torture, dismemberment, and explicit messages involving organized-crime groups. In 2016, there was greater disparity in the estimated number of organized crime-style killings documented by some sources (6,325 according to *Reforma* newspaper and 10,967 according to *Milenio*), but the proportion of total homicides was at least 25% and perhaps greater than 40%.

- **“El Chapo” Guzmán’s arrest and extradition appear to be partly fueling violence.**  
The notorious kingpin leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, was arrested in early 2016. Guzmán had been arrested previously in 2001, after which he escaped prison. He was then arrested in 2014, only to escape again in 2015. After the most recent arrest, demands for Guzmán’s extradition to the United States where he would face a 17-count indictment came to fruition. In early 2017, Guzmán arrived in New York to face charges of organized crime, murder, and drug trafficking, among others. The analysis in this report suggests that a significant portion of Mexico’s increases in violence in 2015 and 2016 were related to inter- and intra-organizational conflicts among rival drug traffickers in the wake of Guzmán’s re-arrest in 2016.
- **Constitutional deadline for New Criminal Justice System implementation passes.**  
The New Criminal Justice System (NJSP) is in full effect nationwide, with the constitutional deadline for all 32 states to launch the system having passed on June 18, 2016. The justice system’s overhaul from the traditional ‘mixed inquisitorial’ model of criminal procedure to an ‘adversarial’ model is significant step toward strengthening Mexico’s democracy. However, many recognize that substantial further efforts will be needed to bolster the rule of law.
- **President Peña Nieto’s approval rating hits new low amid concerns about corruption.**  
Despite some important achievements, in 2016 President Peña Nieto (2012-2018) received the public’s lowest approval rating not just for his first four years in office, but the lowest of all time for any president since Mexico began documenting approval ratings. In addition to accusations of corruption in his government and among fellow PRI politicians, Peña Nieto’s unpopularity also reflects dissatisfaction with the country’s recent economic and security problems, including the federal government’s poor handling of the disappearance and murder of dozens of students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero in 2014.
- **President Donald Trump prioritizes counter-narcotics efforts in Mexico.**  
Drug trafficking from Mexico has become a more urgent concern in light of the mounting heroin epidemic in the United States, with the U.S. Center for Disease Control reporting that heroin-related deaths quadrupled to more than 8,200 people from 2002-2013. Initial diplomatic signals suggest that newly inaugurated U.S. President Donald Trump wants to push the Mexican government to reinvigorate its counter-narcotics efforts and also work to increase U.S. security measures along the 2,000 mile Southwest border. However, tensions between the two countries could undermine the close law enforcement and security cooperation achieved under the administrations of presidents George W. Bush (2000-2008) and Barack Obama (2008-2016).



# Drug Violence in Mexico

## *Data and Analysis Through 2016*

### 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 a major initiative in 2006 to systematically monitor these problems. Initially, Justice in Mexico's monitoring efforts took the form of monthly bulletins distributed to a network of academics, analysts, journalists, and government officials 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 to help inform a more general audience. As Justice in Mexico's eighth annual report on *Drug Violence in Mexico*, this study compiles the latest available data and analysis to help separate the signals from the noise to examine the facets, implications, and possible remedies to the ongoing crisis of violence, corruption, and human rights violations in Mexico.

This year's report comes at a watershed moment, since international attention has become heavily focused on Mexico's security challenges, as well as its complex, interdependent relationship with the United States. In this context, there is an enormous need for detailed and nuanced analysis to better address these problems, as there is much that can be gained by careful and strategic approach by both the Mexican and U.S. governments. This report aims to help policy makers, experts, and stakeholders better understand and evaluate Mexico's ongoing security problems, and also contributes to the broader comparative analysis of organized crime, violence, and rule of law promotion, in general.

Over the years, the levels and patterns of crime and violence in Mexico have shifted dramatically. For example, after decades of gradual decline, violence increased considerably after 2007, which marked a record low point in homicides in Mexico. By 2011, the country's homicide rate had tripled and public anxiety about crime and violence reached record levels. While violence declined modestly in the first two years after the inauguration of Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto in December 2012, we have since observed significant increases in the number of homicides in Mexico in 2015 and 2016. As discussed in this report, the Mexican government did achieve some notable accomplishments in recent years, including the arrest and extradition of Sinaloa Cartel kingpin, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, and the inauguration of Mexico's New Criminal Justice System (Nuevo Sistema de Justicia Penal, NSJP). Still, the overall security situation in Mexico remains quite problematic, and further improvements to strengthen the rule of law are urgently needed.

Of particular concern is the problem of organized crime, and particularly drug trafficking. For several years running, a major portion of Mexico's homicides—somewhere around a third to 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 effectiveness and merits of current counter-drug efforts around the world. For this reason, 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.

While we recognize that there are important methodological problems with compiling data on organized crime-related killings, tallies produced over the past decade by government, media, academic, NGO, and consulting organizations suggest that roughly a third to half of all homicides in Mexico bear signs of organized crime-style violence, including the use of high-caliber automatic weapons, torture, dismemberment, and explicit messages involving organized-crime groups.<sup>1</sup> Thus, over the years, the authors of this series of special reports have tried to objectively interpret and reconcile the often confusing, imperfect, and even conflicting information generated by both official and non-governmental sources working on this issue. 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-style homicides, critics and even conventional journalistic sources have sometimes tended to exaggerate that number (e.g., erroneously attributing all of the 175,000-200,000 homicides in Mexico since 2006 to the war on drugs).

Even recognizing the enormous challenges in estimating the actual number of organized crime-style homicides in Mexico, the number of such killings is clearly unacceptably high. According to Mexican newspapers *Reforma* and *Milenio*, respectively the tally amounts to between 74,745 and 91,565 killings since 2007, easily surpassing the number of battlefield 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 U.S. 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).<sup>2</sup> The information in this report is intended help policy makers, activists, and the public to recognize and address the powerful influence of organized crime groups on the levels of violence in Mexico.

## II. UNDERSTANDING MEXICO'S RECENT VIOLENCE

### A. Mexico's Violence in Perspective

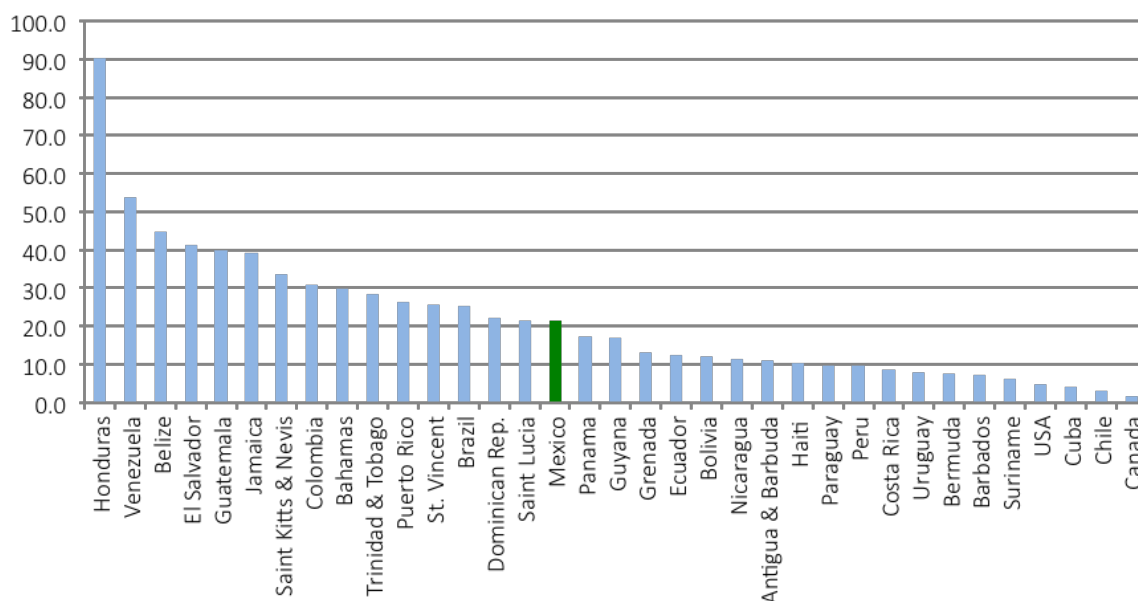
It is important to note at the outset that conceptualizations and metrics of crime and violence are always contingent on many, often highly subjective factors, so researchers must consider multiple complexities, nuances, and perspectives. By some measures, the level of violence in Mexico is “average,” at least in the contest of the Western Hemisphere. As Justice in Mexico has noted in previous reports, the most recent available comparative data on homicide rates—one of the most commonly used indicators for comparing levels of crime and violence—indicates that Mexico is close to the mean for 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 had a homicide rate that is nearly 50% greater than Mexico's in recent years.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2016, there was greater disparity in the estimated number of organized crime-style killings documented by some sources (6,325 according to *Reforma* newspaper and 10,967 according to *Milenio*), but the proportion of total homicides was at least 25%.

<sup>2</sup> These figures reflect the number of casualties attributed to both “battle deaths” and “other deaths (in theater)” of U.S. soldiers registered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “Americas Wars,” (May 2015), [http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs\\_americas\\_wars.pdf](http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs_americas_wars.pdf). Figures for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq are those reported by the Defense Casualty Analysis System, [https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report\\_oif\\_all.xhtml](https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_oif_all.xhtml) All figures indicated here are rounded down to the nearest 1,000<sup>th</sup>.

**Figure 1: National Homicide Rates (per 100,000 inhabitants) for Selected Latin American Countries through 2014**



Note: This chart uses the latest available UNODC intentional homicide data for each country from 2012-14. See UNODC *Global Study on Homicide*, released March 2014, and UNODC Statistics Online (<http://data.unodc.org>).

Yet, this comparison offers little cause for celebration, given that Latin America has some of the highest rates of criminal violence in the world. For many Latin American countries, violence is a problem that stretches back to the wrenching civil conflicts that plagued the region during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> However, what seems different about violence in Latin America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that rather than fighting and dying for democracy or revolutionary ideologies, the region's young men are fighting and dying for criminal enterprises. 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

Unlike many other Latin American countries, from the 1930s onward Mexico experienced a relatively high degree of political stability and low levels of internal conflict for the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, historical data suggest that homicide in Mexico generally declined from the 1930s into the mid-2000s.<sup>5</sup> 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,

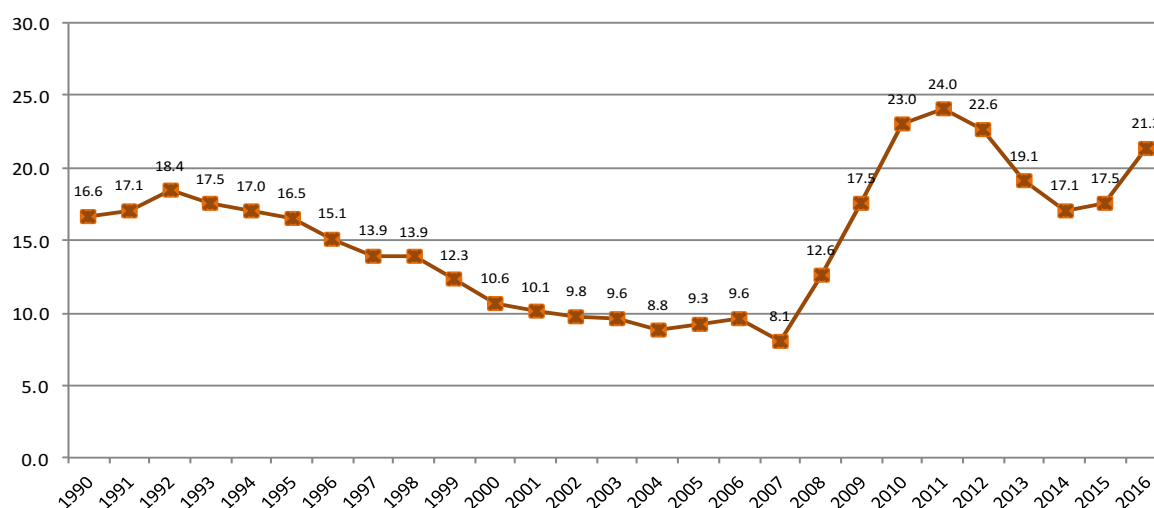
<sup>3</sup> Tina Rosenberg, *Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America*, (New York: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. "The Future of History: Can Liberal Democracy Survive the Decline of the Middle Class?" *Foreign Affairs, Council on Foreign Relations*. Vol. 91, No. 1 (January/February 2012), pp. 53-61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23217147>

<sup>5</sup> 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 registered 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.

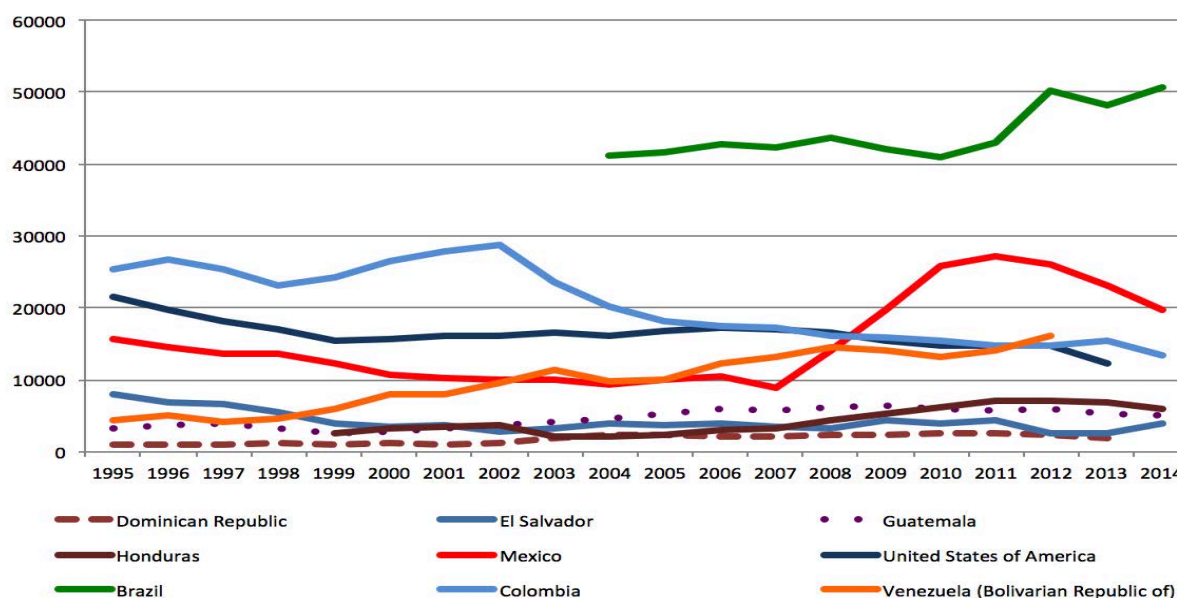
Geography, and Information (INEGI), as illustrated in Figure 2.<sup>6</sup> The elevated level of homicide has provoked enormous alarm both domestically and internationally about the problem of violence in Mexico.

**Figure 2: Homicide Rate in Mexico (Per 100,000), 1995-2016**



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.

**Figure 3: Total Homicides in Selected Latin American Countries, 1995-2014**



Source: UNODC, homicides (1995-2014). Note: comparable data for countries listed here are available only through 2014.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that these INEGI figures do not differentiate between intentional homicides and unintentional homicides (e.g., car accidents).

Mexico's elevated violence is of special concern in Latin America. Unlike smaller countries with higher homicide rates, even a small increase in Mexico's homicide rate translates into a far greater human toll, because of the size of its population. In 2016, Mexico had an estimated population of over 119 million people, the third largest population among all countries in the Americas, after the United States (324 million) and Brazil (200 million). Thus, even a modest increase in Mexico's homicide rate translates into the loss of thousands of lives.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, during the four-year surge 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 in the absolute number of homicides over the last two decades, as illustrated in Figure 3, which identifies the total number of homicides in selected Latin American countries.

That said, there are other "man-made" problems of far greater magnitude, so why focus on murder?<sup>8</sup> Nearly two thirds of all 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.<sup>9</sup> Thus, 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, whether in Mexico or anywhere else. Evidently, such everyday hazards are considered too mundane to grab headlines or strike fear into our hearts. Interpersonal 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 number of homicides, it is appropriate to pay attention, understand the contributing factors, and try to resolve the problem.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that violence predictably affects some populations more than others. For example, as we reported in some detail in our 2016 report, perhaps the most obvious and universal observation that can be made about homicide, in general, is that it is a predominantly male problem. That is, in Mexico and all around the world, homicides are committed primarily by men and against men. Indeed, Mexican men are about eight times more likely to be homicide victims than women.<sup>11</sup> However, 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, while 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 males at the bottom of the economic spectrum. Indeed, the OECD estimates

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<sup>7</sup> 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 for 2016 was 119,666,531.

<sup>8</sup> One illustration is the phenomenon of suicide in South Korea, which has reached a rate of 29 per 100,000 people in recent years, meaning that more South Koreans died by their own hand than the number of Mexicans murdered even during the worst of period Mexico's violence. Yet, comparatively Mexico's epidemic of interpersonal violence has received far more international attention than South Korea's self-inflicted deaths. Ranjit Kumar Dhawan, "Why Koreans Commit Suicide," *The Korea Times*, December 20, 2015. [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2016/09/162\\_193603.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2016/09/162_193603.html)

<sup>9</sup> "10 Facts on Noncommunicable Diseases," World Health Organization, [http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/noncommunicable\\_diseases/facts/en](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>

<sup>10</sup> As Rodríguez Ferreira explains, homicide has been used as a reasonable proxy for violent crime as well as an indicator of levels of violence and security; and has become a defining element in assessing the presence of organized crime or, and as an indicator of instrumental violence. Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, "Violent Mexico: Participatory and Multipolar Violence Associated with Organised Crime," in *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, Vol 10, No 1, 2016, <http://www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/395/pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> As calculated using INEGI's 2015 data and CONAPO's estimated population for Mexico in that year (120,422,144 inhabitants), Mexican men had a homicide rate of 14.6 per 100,000 inhabitants, while Mexican women had a rate of 1.9 per 100,000. For this calculation, Justice in Mexico uses INEGI homicide numbers for men (17,620 homicides) and women (2,277 homicides) because, as noted in this report, INEGI's dataset for 2016 was incomplete at the time of the publication of this report.



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 in recent years.<sup>12</sup>

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

What is particularly concerning about Mexico’s surge in homicides in recent years is that much or most of this increase appears to be attributable to organized crime groups. Organized crime groups are commonly defined as a collection of individuals acting in concert over a sustained period of time with the objective of deliberately violating the law.<sup>13</sup> Still, as scholars of organized crime have demonstrated, violence is not necessarily the norm even in the underworld.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Mexico’s recent surge in violence requires some understanding of recent dynamics among Mexican organized crime groups, particularly those involved in drug trafficking.

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.<sup>15</sup> As Mexican criminal organizations came to dominate the cocaine trade in the late 1980s, they expanded into 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 reduce market competition (e.g., explicitly or implicitly negotiating territories for operation and distribution).

Key to the success of Mexican drug traffickers in the 1980s was protection from corrupt government officials, who were directly involved in supervising and regulating the illicit drug trade.<sup>16</sup> As such, drug traffickers were able to operate undisturbed by Mexican law enforcement agencies, and sometimes with their explicit involvement. Under these circumstances, there was relatively little violence between competing drug trafficking organizations. However, this apparently harmonious

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<sup>12</sup> 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>

<sup>13</sup> For scholars and analysts of “organized crime,” developing even a basic conception the phenomenon is highly polemical. According Klaus Von Lampe, a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York and a renowned expert on the topic, there are at least 180 different academic, statutory, and agency definitions that have been developed to characterize the phenomenon of organized crime. Klaus von Lampe, Maarten van Dijck, Rob Hornsby, Anna Markina, and Karen Verpoest, “Organised Crime is... Findings from a cross-national review of literature,” in: Petrus van Duyne, Almir Maljevic, Maarten van Dijck, Klaus von Lampe, James Newell (eds.), *The Organisation of Crime for Profit: Conduct, Law and Measurement*, Nijmegen: Wolf Legal Publishers, 2006, 17-42. von Lampe maintains a running tally of different conceptualizations of organized crime on his website. “Definitions of Organized Crime,” [www.organized-crime.de/organizedcrimedefinitions.htm](http://www.organized-crime.de/organizedcrimedefinitions.htm) (July 11, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Andreas, P. and J. Wallman (2009). “Illicit Markets and Violence: What is the Relationship?” *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 52: 225-229.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example: Astorga Almanza, L. A. (2000). “Tráfico 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.

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 Ángel Félix 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 control over production areas and 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 government crackdowns, internal power struggles, and splits among Mexico’s organized crime groups.

Careful monitoring and study of violence involving organized crime groups is therefore needed to understand the manifestations, root causes, and possible solutions to the problem of violence in Mexico. 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. Thus, as in previous years, a major objective 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. All of the findings presented here are 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 improve 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 2016 in considerable detail. The purpose of this report is not to revisit past discussions, but to examine the relevant findings for 2016. That said, because many patterns have continued over the years, the structure and content of this report follows a similar format and draws heavily on past findings.

#### A. Homicide Levels Rose in 2015 and Continued to Increase Substantially in 2016

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. Homicides then rose in 2015, an increase which continued through 2016. Both of Mexico’s official data sources on homicides—INEGI and the National Public Security System (SNSP)—have been consistent in documenting these trends, though they have different methodologies and tallies (See Figure 4).<sup>17</sup> It is important to

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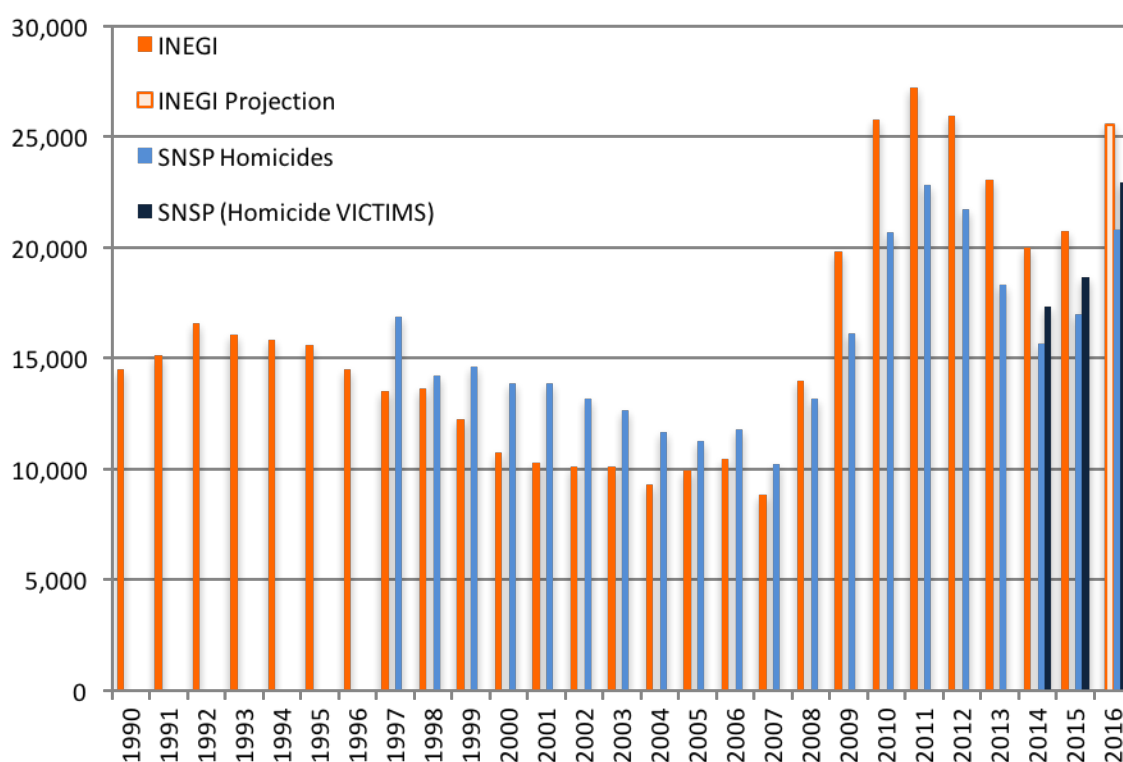
<sup>17</sup> INEGI reports the number of individual homicide victims identified by medical examiners and makes these data available at the state and municipal level for both federal (*fuero federal*) and local jurisdiction (*fuero común*) crimes since 1990. SNSP reports homicide cases handled by law enforcement investigations and makes these data available for the



note that INEGI's homicide data for any given year are typically made available in the latter part of the following calendar year. For this reason, in Figure 4, the authors provide a rough estimate for the number of homicides INEGI will likely report in 2017.<sup>18</sup> INEGI did release partial data for the second half of 2016 as this report was being prepared; however, it does not appear to be comprehensive and the full INEGI dataset is not expected to be released until summer 2017.

SNSP, meanwhile, has reported its figures for intentional homicides in 2016 at 20,789 cases and 22,932 victims, which reflect increases of 22.2% and 23%, respectively, from the previous year. Again, even an increase of a ten or twenty percentage points represents thousands of additional individuals killed. The increase reported by SNSP represents a jump from 18,650 homicides in 2015, a difference of 4,282 additional victims in 2016.

**Figure 4: Total Annual Homicide Data in Mexico as Reported by INEGI and SNSP (1990-2016)**



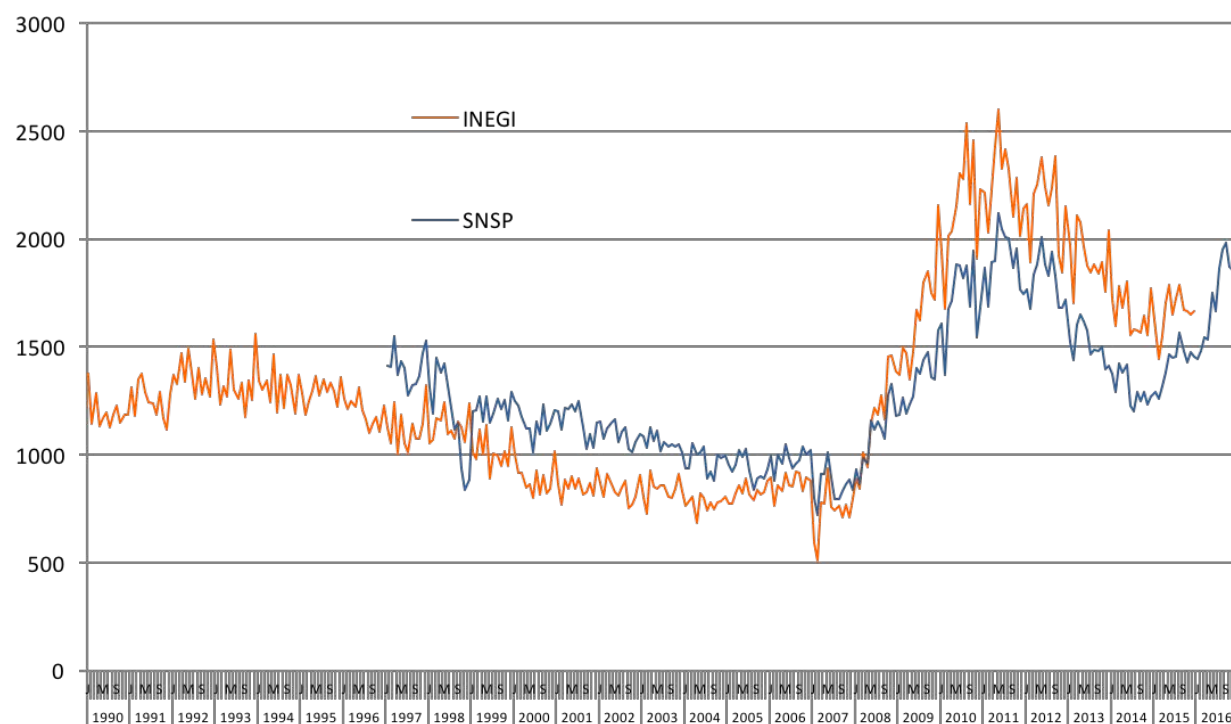
Sources: INEGI and SNSP. Note: Figures for 2016 reflect authors projections for INEGI data to be released in mid-2017, as noted in the text above.

number of homicide cases (including cases that include more than one victim) from 1997 to 2013. Importantly, SNSP also began to report the number of individual homicide victims starting in 2014. There is some disparity between INEGI and SNSP figures due to the above noted differences in methodology. While it appears obvious that law enforcement authorities have not been handling some of the cases reported by medical examiners in recent years, the authors have no explanation for why SNSP's figures consistently exceeded those of INEGI up to 2007.

<sup>18</sup> The authors estimate that in mid-2017 INEGI will report around 25,539 homicides for 2016. We came to this estimate by tabulating the average percentage difference in the number of homicides reported by INEGI and SNSP over a five-year period. This method has typically resulted in a reliable estimate for past reports, typically within +/- 5% of the actual number subsequently reported by INEGI. In last year's report, for example, the authors estimated that INEGI's tally for all homicides would be around 21,631 in 2015 (the actual reported figure was 20,762, within about 4.2% of our estimate).

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 substantial variation within a given year, particularly at the peak 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. These patterns suggest that violence has come in surges that reflect the intense conflicts that have erupted at different points in time between organized crime groups.

**Figure 5: Total Monthly Homicides (2006-2016)**



Sources: INEGI and SNSP.

Of course, past trends are not necessarily a good basis for future predictions, as made clear by the backsliding that has resulted in late-2014 and into 2016. Still, considering the high levels of violence Mexico has experienced during this period, it is likely to continue for some time. Indeed, even if homicides see a renewed downward trend of about 10% per year as they did from 2012 to 2014, it is unlikely that the number of homicides would fall to 2007 levels until well after 2020.<sup>19</sup> Over the next four years, *ceteris paribus* we should realistically expect Mexico to remain a “extremely violent society” in which between 75,000 and 90,000 people will die by the hand of another with no clear victims or perpetrators.<sup>20</sup>

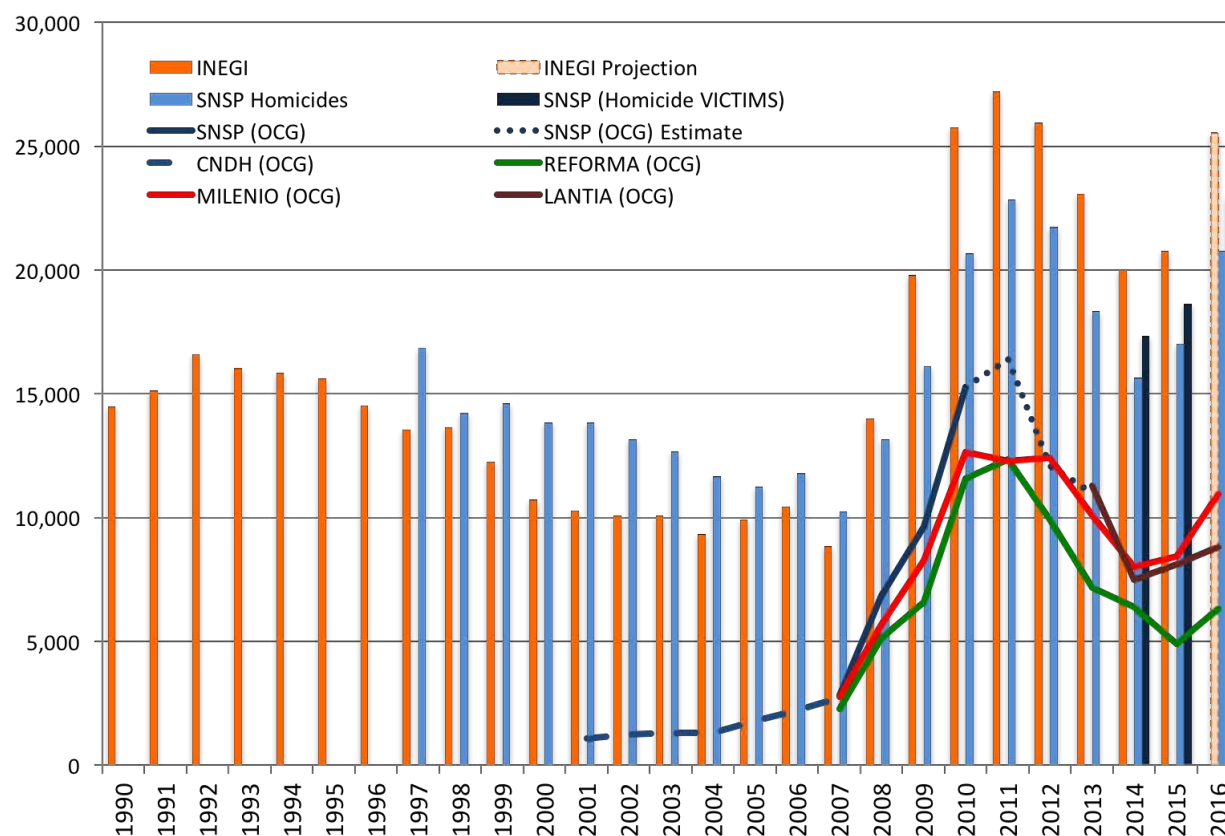
<sup>19</sup> More specifically, from 2007 to 2011, the average annual rate of increase in the number of intentional homicides was greater than 20% according to SNSP and greater than 33% according to INEGI. The average annual rate of decline reported by SNSP from 2011 through 2014 was roughly 10%, but then increased 8.7% in 2015 and 22.2% in 2016. Calculations for INEGI for 2016 also increased, meaning the 33% rate of decline reversed with the expected year-over-year increases, according to Justice in Mexico's estimation.

<sup>20</sup> Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, “Violent Mexico: Participatory and Multipolar Violence Associated with Organised Crime,” in *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, Vol 10, No 1, 2016, <http://www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/395/pdf>.

## B. Organized-Crime-Style Killings Constituted a Major Share of Homicides in 2016

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 25.4% and as many as 52.8% of all homicides identified in 2016 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 2013-2016), and *Milenio* (2007-2016). Authors’ estimates are reflected by dotted lines based on calculations noted in the Appendix.<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 6: Comparison of Homicide and Organized Crime Homicide Data for Various Sources, 1990 through 2016**



Sources: INEGI, SNSP, *Reforma*, *Milenio*, Lantia, CNDH. This figure also shows a bar plotting number of homicide victims for 2015 and 2016, recently released by SNSP.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> 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*.

<sup>22</sup> In 2014, SNSP began releasing data reflecting the number of victims of homicide and other crimes. Such numbers are higher than previous SNSP data, which referred to homicide case investigations (including cases involving multiple homicides). The number of victims reported by SNSP from 2014 to 2016 was approximately 10% greater than the number of homicide cases the agency reported in each year. This suggests that 10% or fewer homicide investigations in Mexico are focused on more than one victim, while the vast majority of cases are focused on individual victims.

The last annual dataset from the Mexican government on organized crime-style homicides was released in 2010, so there have been no publicly available official figures on such killings since. However, *Milenio*, a Mexico-based news outlet, has generated figures for the number of organized crime-style homicides from 2007 to 2016, when it reported 10,967 such killings for 2016. Meanwhile, *Reforma* newspaper has tracked such killings for roughly the same period and in 2016, put the figure for organized-crime-style homicides at 6,325, up nearly 29% from its 2015 tally of 4,892 such homicides. The 2015 calculation was the lowest number reported by *Reforma* since 2007, when it started reporting organized crime related deaths, which seems to reflect a change in *Reforma*'s methodology or data gathering capabilities.<sup>23</sup>

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 2016 organized-crime-style homicides represented approximately 25.4%-44.0% of the total number of all homicides, depending on whether we reference the tallies of *Milenio* (44.0%), *Reforma* (25.4%) or the consulting firm Lantia (35.4%).<sup>24</sup> Because SNSP homicide figures are typically lower than those produced by INEGI, tallies of organized-crime-style homicides represent a larger proportion—30.4%-52.8%—of all homicides when SNSP data are referenced using these same tallies and estimates: *Milenio* (52.8%), *Reforma* (30.4%), and Lantia (42.5%). In short, whether organized-crime-style homicides represent just one-in-four or over 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, 2006-2016**

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 (Como % INEGI)	LANTIA OCG (Como % 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			40.6%	49.5%	23.6%	28.8%	39.1%	47.7%
2016			42.9%	52.8%	24.8%	30.4%	34.6%	42.5%
AVERAGE	49.0%	57.2%	42.4%	50.0%	34.2%	39.5%	43.2%	54.7%

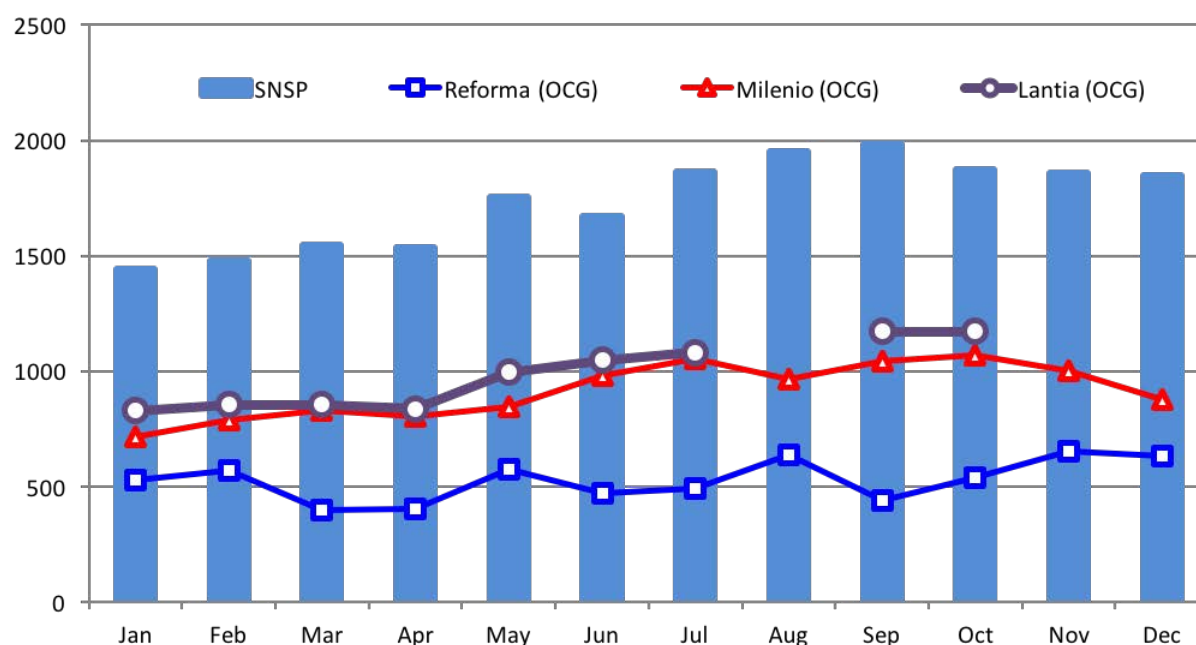
Sources: INEGI, SNSP, *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and Lantia for all available years and projections. Note: This table shows the proportion of organized-crime-style homicides relative to all homicides, as reported by each source (relative to the two official sources of data on homicide: INEGI and SNSP) and rounded to the nearest tenth. Percentages shown in red reflect are based on projected figures for INEGI calculated by the authors.

<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> Lantia is a consulting firm headed by Mexican security expert Eduardo Guerrero. Justice in Mexico compiles this information from Leo Zuckerman's column in the Mexican Newspaper Excelsior. Data missing was not reported by the cited source.

The number of organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Milenio* in 2016 represented 52.8% of the total number of intentional homicide cases reported by SNSP, the highest proportion reported by *Milenio* in three years. If the authors' 2016 projections for INEGI are reasonably accurate, then the number of organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Milenio* would constitute about 44.0% of the total number of homicides last year, slightly higher than the 40.6% observed in 2015.<sup>25</sup> More conservatively, comparing *Reforma*'s tally for 2016 to the authors' projection for INEGI in the same year, it would appear that organized-crime-style homicides made up just over a quarter of all homicides in Mexico, the second lowest proportion than at any point since *Reforma* began recording data in 2007. This is a potentially important finding because, if accurate, *Reforma*'s figures could signal a reduction in the proportion of killings that appear to involve organized crime and a proliferation of more "ordinary" forms of violence. Alternatively, it may simply reflect a growing disparity in the data emanating from different organizations tracking organized crime-style violence due to shifting methodologies or data gathering capabilities. In either case, the fact remains that even by the most conservative estimates a significant portion—at least a quarter—of all homicides in Mexico bears characteristics frequently associated with organized crime.

**Figure 7: Comparison of Intentional Homicides and Organized Crime Homicides for Various Sources in 2016**



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

Finally, it is worth comparing the monthly data available from 2016 for intentional homicides reported by SNSP and organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and Lantia. It seems that there was a very high degree of consistency among figures on organized-crime-style homicide reported by *Milenio* and Lantia, ranging at most in May 2016 by 148 homicides and as little as 24 homicides in March 2016. It is important to note again that our compilation of Lantia's data for 2016 was incomplete with several months missing at the time of this publication's release. Once again, *Reforma*'s figures deviated considerably from those of the other two independent sources,

<sup>25</sup> 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.



particularly in September of 2016 when *Reforma* reported 439 organized crime-style homicides, yet *Milenio* reported 1,041 and *Lantia* 1,170, differences of 602 and 731 bodies, respectively.

As reported in last year's report, using the Justice in Mexico *Memoria* database, the authors have found that the vast majority of victims of organized crime-style violence—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 33 years, which appears to contradict widespread assumptions that organized crime violence involves uneducated, unemployed, and disaffected youths. However, it is also the case 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 may illustrate the biases inherent in information gleaned from media reports.

## 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, sporadic, and geographically mobile (moving from one geographic area to another) over the 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. Geographic Dispersion of Intentional Homicides at Municipal Level on the Decline

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 reported that approximately 1,108 of Mexico's 2,466 municipalities (about 46%) had zero homicides, as illustrated in Figure 8.<sup>26</sup> 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 registered not a single murder.<sup>27</sup>

After 2007, however, Mexico experienced a steady decline in the number of “murder-free” municipalities each year, reaching a low of 818 municipalities (about 33%) in 2012. At the same time, there was substantial increase in the number of municipalities with a total of more than 25 homicides, growing from 65 in 2007 to 179 in 2012. During that time period, the number of municipalities with more than 100 homicides quadrupled from 10 in 2007 to 41 in 2012. After 2012, however, the number of “violence free” municipalities increased slightly (reaching 889, or about 36%, in 2015), the number of municipalities with more than 25 homicides declined (falling to 157 in

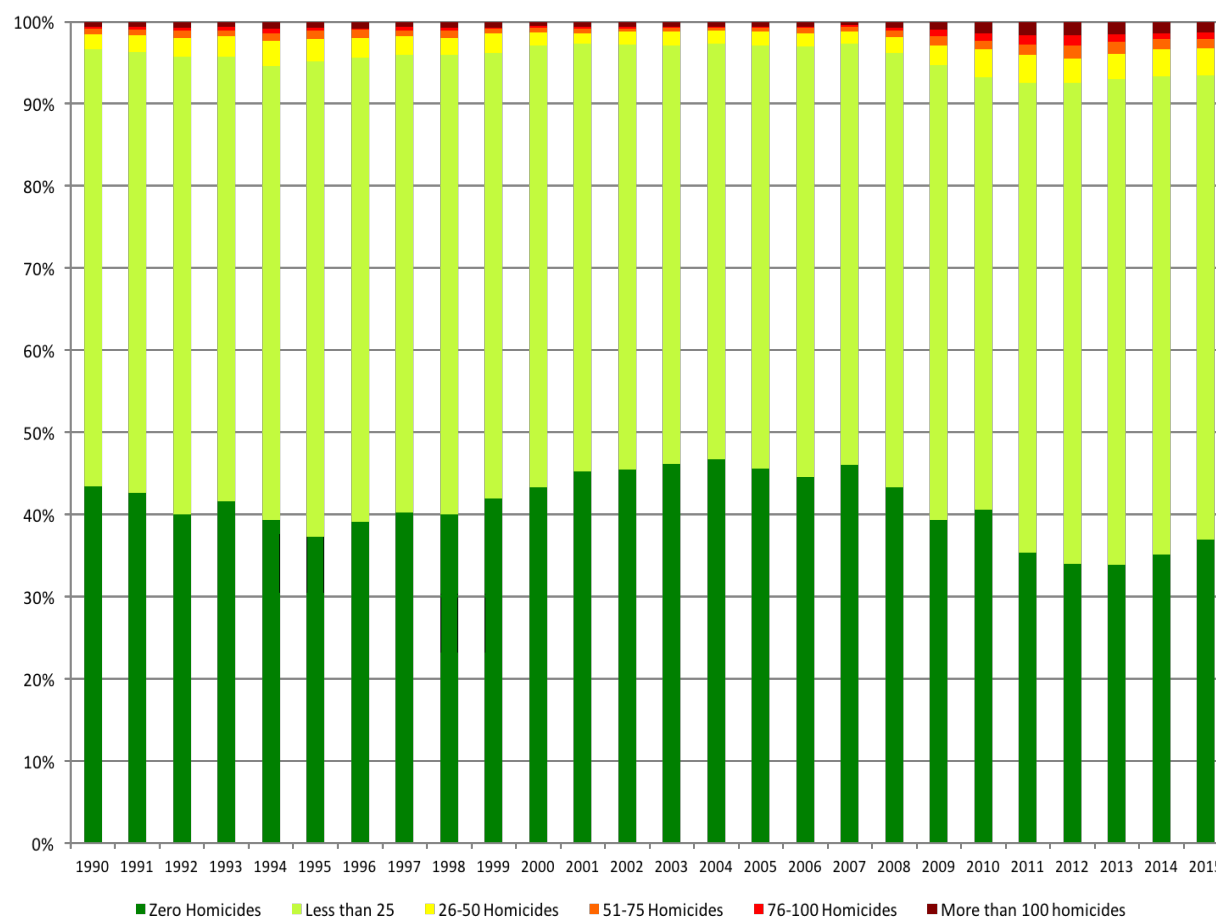
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<sup>26</sup> These figures are approximate because there is no data for some municipalities. Also, the number of municipalities in Mexico changes from time to time as new ones are created. From 2012 to 2013, for example, it appears that dozens of new municipalities were added to INEGI's homicide dataset.

<sup>27</sup> The figures we report here, which differ slightly from previous reports, are based on more recent, corrected data from INEGI for the number of homicides that occurred in these years. Adjustments to the INEGI dataset are made each year to differentiate between the number of murders that were “registered” in a given year and those which actually “occurred” in that year. Here we give preference to INEGI data over SNSP because they refer to individual homicides and because SNSP data are not available for as long a time series and are not as complete across years.

2015), and the number of municipalities with more than 100 homicides also dropped (falling to 32 in 2015). These trends are interesting because, there was a roughly 8% increase in the number of homicides nationwide in 2015. Yet, rather than spreading to new places or increasing in those with high levels of violence, homicides increased in municipalities that had relatively lower levels of violence (1-25 homicides per year). This suggests, perhaps, that the problem of homicide in 2015 had slightly less to do with the kind of spectacular mass-casualty events than we had seen in the last few years. It will be necessary to review INEGI's forthcoming homicide data to determine whether this trend continued in 2016.

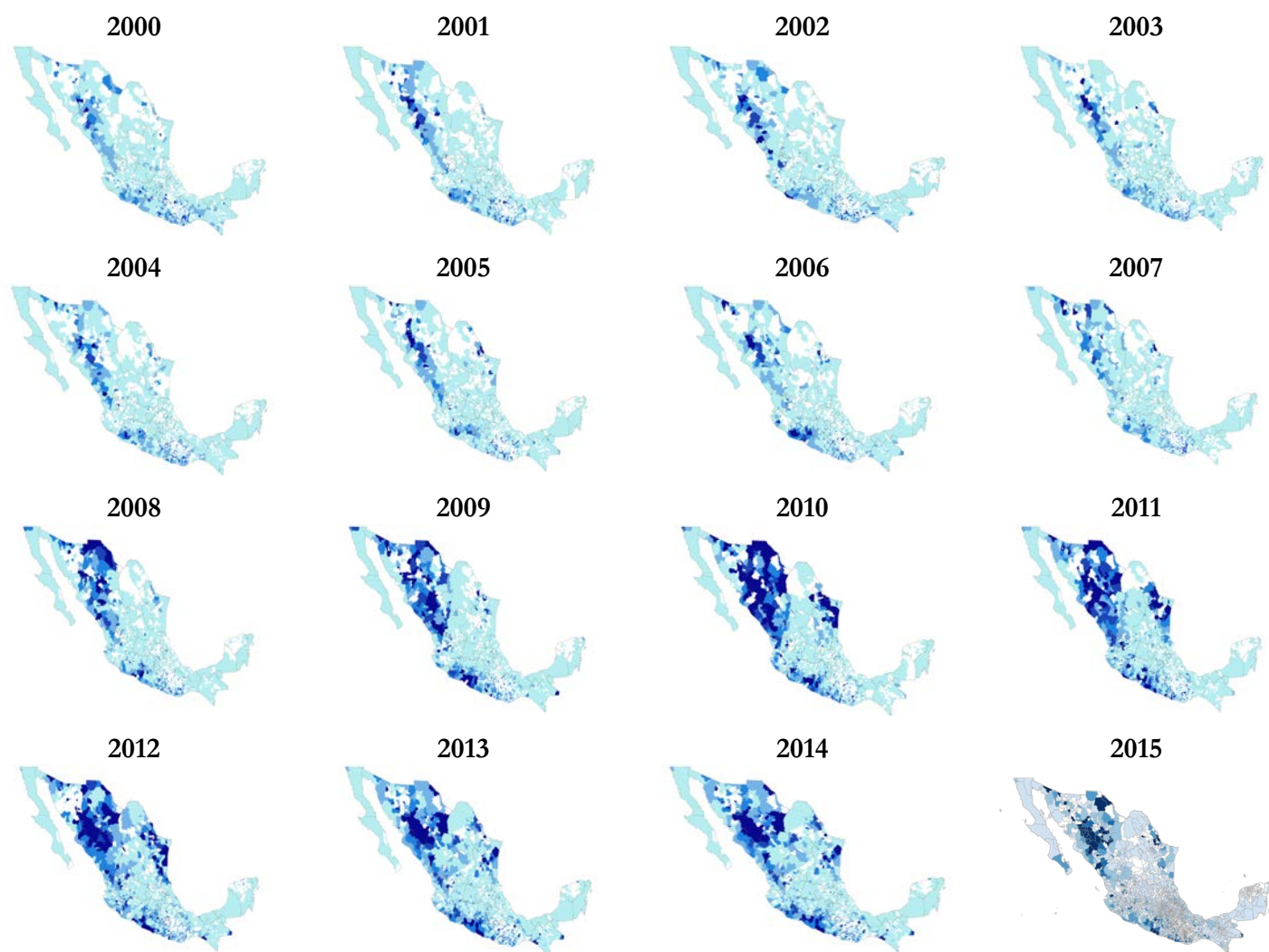
**Figure 8: Distribution of Homicides at the Municipal Level, 1990-2015**



Source: INEGI.

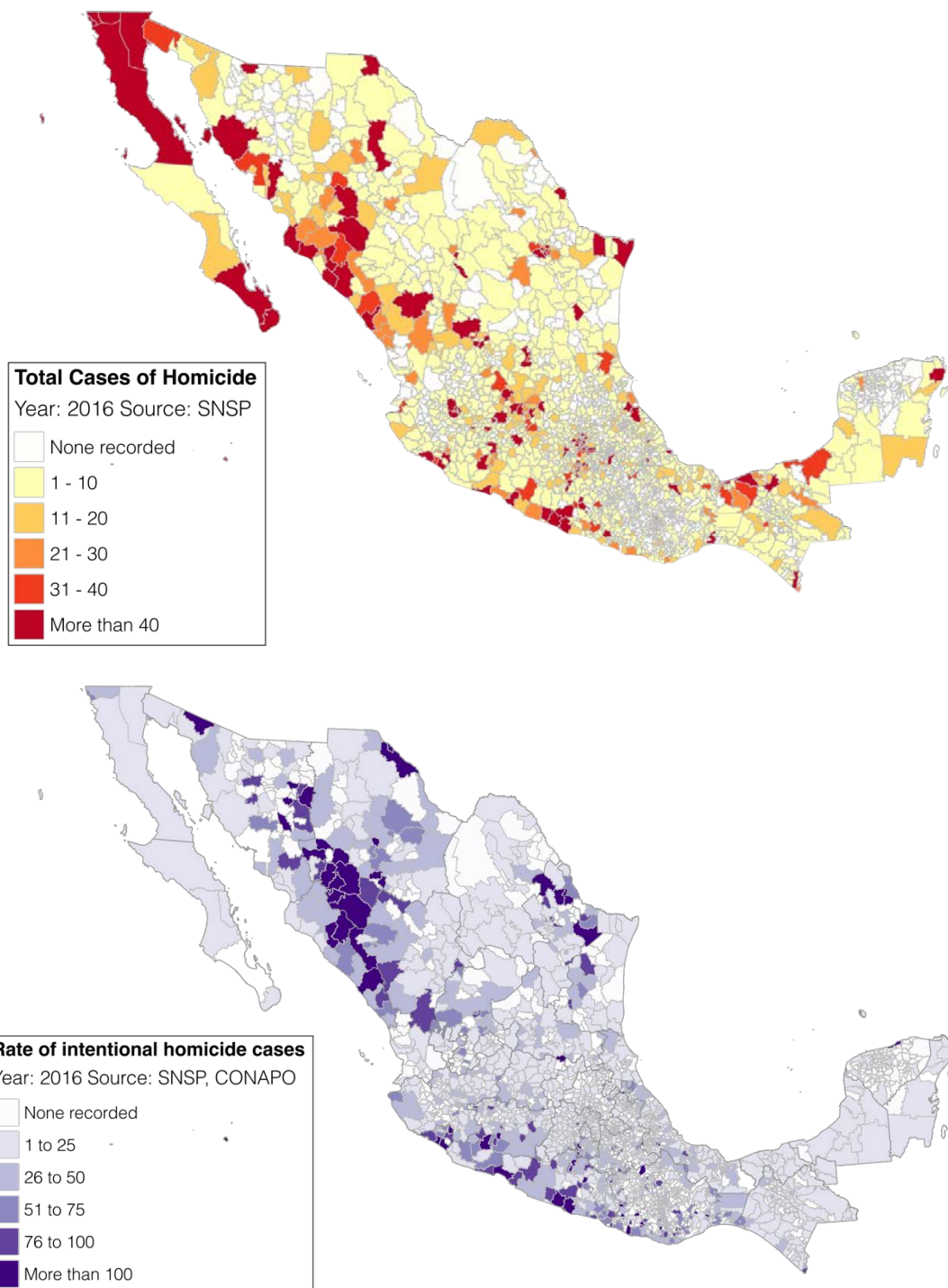


**Figure 9: Maps of Homicides Per 100,000 Inhabitants, by Municipality, 2000-2015**



Source: INEGI. Maps generated by Theresa Firestine and Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira

**Figure 10: Geographic Distribution of Homicides by Total Number (Red) and Homicide Rate (Blue) at the Municipal Level in 2016**



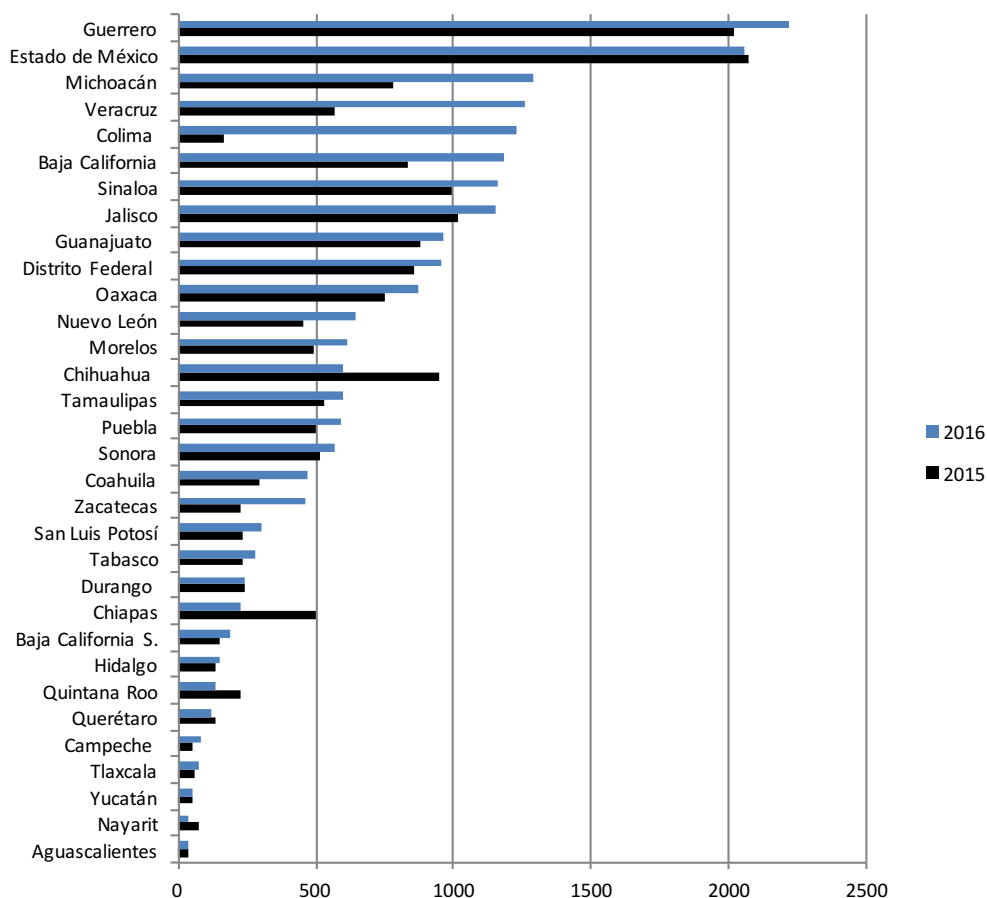
Source: SNSP and CONAPO. Maps generated by Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira.

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).

The maps in Figure 9 above further illustrate the geographic distribution of violence in Mexico, showing municipal homicide levels from 1999 through 2015, as reported by INEGI. Because INEGI data are not yet available for 2016, the maps in Figure 10, also above, show both the number of homicide cases (in red) and the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants (in blue) using data reported by SNSP at the municipal level and using CONAPO population estimates.<sup>28</sup>

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. Unfortunately, as we discuss below, violence surged again in 2016 in these states and several new locations, particularly along Mexico’s Pacific coast.

**Figure 11: Intentional Homicides by State, Comparing 2015 to 2016**



Source: SNSP.

<sup>28</sup> It is necessary to underscore again this year that SNSP data are preliminary. There were several municipalities for which SNSP reported incomplete data at the time that authors downloaded and began working with these data in January 2016, as was the case in our reports for previous years. Also, it is important to note that the municipal level data from SNSP reflect the number of homicide cases (not the number of individual victims) because victim level data has only been reported by SNSP at the state level since it began reporting these figures over the past three years.

In 2016, using the data available from SNSP on homicides illustrated in Figure 11, we see that the top five states with the largest number of intentional homicides were Guerrero (2,213), State of México (2,053), Michoacán (1,287), Veracruz (1,258), and Colima (1,232), followed closely by Baja California (1,179), Sinaloa (1,161), and Jalisco (1,152). Several of those states were also at or near the top in 2015, including Guerrero, State of México, Sinaloa, and Jalisco. It is worth noting Chihuahua's absence from this list, since that state was once Mexico's most violent. In 2016, however, Chihuahua recorded 600 such homicides, the lowest number it has seen since before 2007. Nearly all of these states also saw an increase in the number of murders compared to the previous year, except for the State of México, which saw a 1% decrease. Nationwide, based on SNSP data, the seven states with decreases in homicides in 2016 were Chiapas (-55%), Nayarit (-45%), Quintana Roo (-42%), Chihuahua (-37%), Querétaro (-14%), Yucatán (-6%), and State of México (-1%). Two states, Aguascalientes and Durango, both recorded no change from 2015 to 2016.

## **2. Significant Increases in Local Centers of Violence**

The increase in violence in 2016 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 Ciudad Juárez, and thereafter the number of homicides in that city declined significantly. In 2015 and 2016, SNSP statistics still placed Ciudad Juárez as the municipality with the fifth and third highest number of homicides, respectively, representing an increase in 201 homicides between the years, a 75% increase. 2016 was also Ciudad Juárez's highest number of homicides since 2012.

For its part, Tijuana, too, saw its third highest number of homicides registered in ten years with 871, falling only behind levels from 2009 (1,094 homicides) and 2010 (1,250 homicides) when violence in the border city peaked. Meanwhile, the number of homicides increased slightly in Acapulco, the city that has registered the most homicides since 2012, declining from 1,271 homicides in 2012 to 590 in 2014 and back up to 918 in 2016. (See Table 2). Thus for the second year in a row, Acapulco had a homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants over 100 homicides (107 in 2015 and 128 in 2016), followed by Chilpancingo that increased from 81 in 2015 to 115 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants).

**Table 2: Total Number and Rate (Per 100,000 Inhabitants) of Overall Homicides by Municipality, 2011-2016**

#	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

#	Name	2016	Rate	Est. Pop.
1	Acapulco de Juarez	918	128	714,738
2	Tijuana	871	62	1,411,843
3	Juárez	470	33	1,422,149
4	Culiacán	439	57	764,696
5	Ecatepec de Morelos	298	17	1,778,082
6	Chihuahua	275	30	907,432
7	Chilpancingo	234	115	203,227
8	Mazatlán	224	53	420,834
9	Iztapalapa (CdMx)	222	12	1,798,074
10	Victoria (TAM)	216	64	336,548

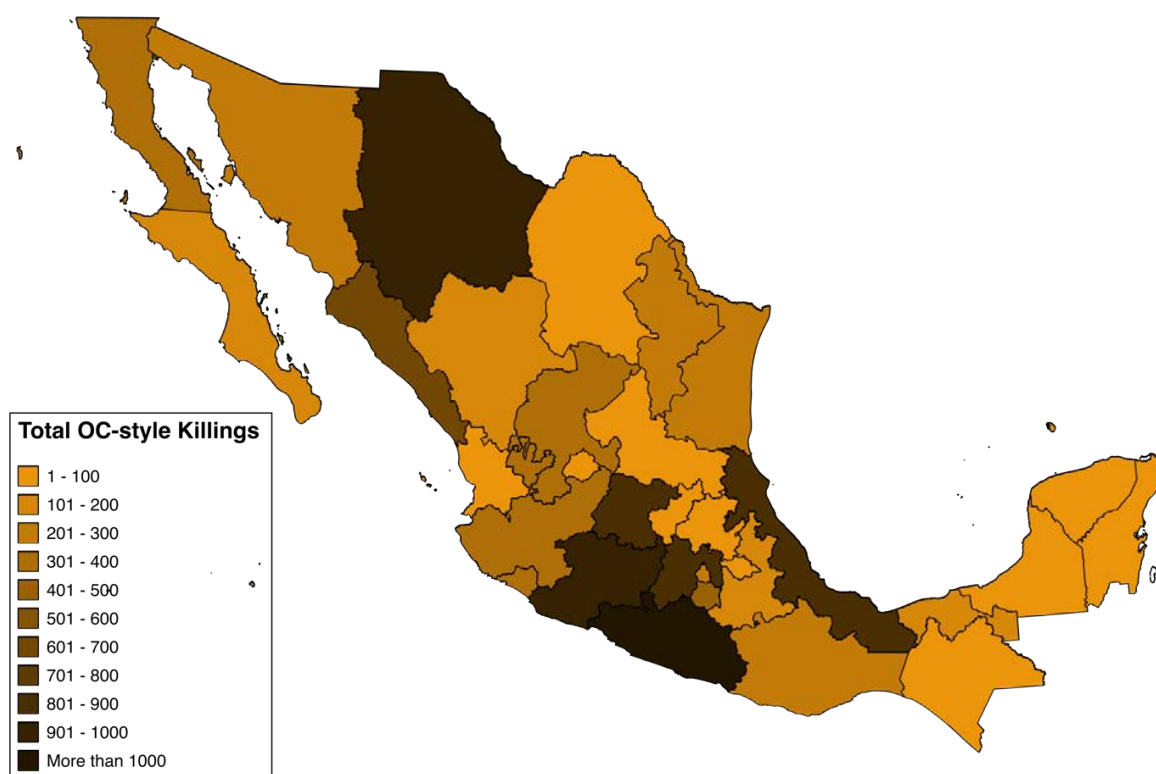
Source: SNSP and CONAPO.

### 3. Distribution of Organized-Crime-Style Homicides

The Mexican government has not reported any official data on the number of organized-crime-style homicides since 2012. Thus, as noted above, the only data available for such homicides in 2016 are those reported at the state level by independent sources, such as the Mexican newspaper *Milenio*,

which reported a total of 10,967 individual homicides that appeared to involve organized crime.<sup>29</sup> According to these figures, almost a half (48.4%) of organized-crime-style homicides were concentrated in the top five states, totaling 5,308 homicides: Guerrero (1,832), Chihuahua (937), Michoacán (922), Guanajuato (810), and the State of México (807). Except Guanajuato, which replaced Veracruz, all other states were among the top five in 2015. The state with the largest increase in the number of organized crime-style homicides was Colima, which saw a jump from 55 such killings to 385 (a six-fold increase), according to *Milenio*. In 2016, the states with the least organized crime-style homicides varied more significantly from previous years to include: Hidalgo (25), Querétaro (21), Tlaxcala (20), Campeche (13), and Yucatán (12). Hidalgo and Querétaro replaced Aguascalientes and Nayarit from 2015. 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 2016**

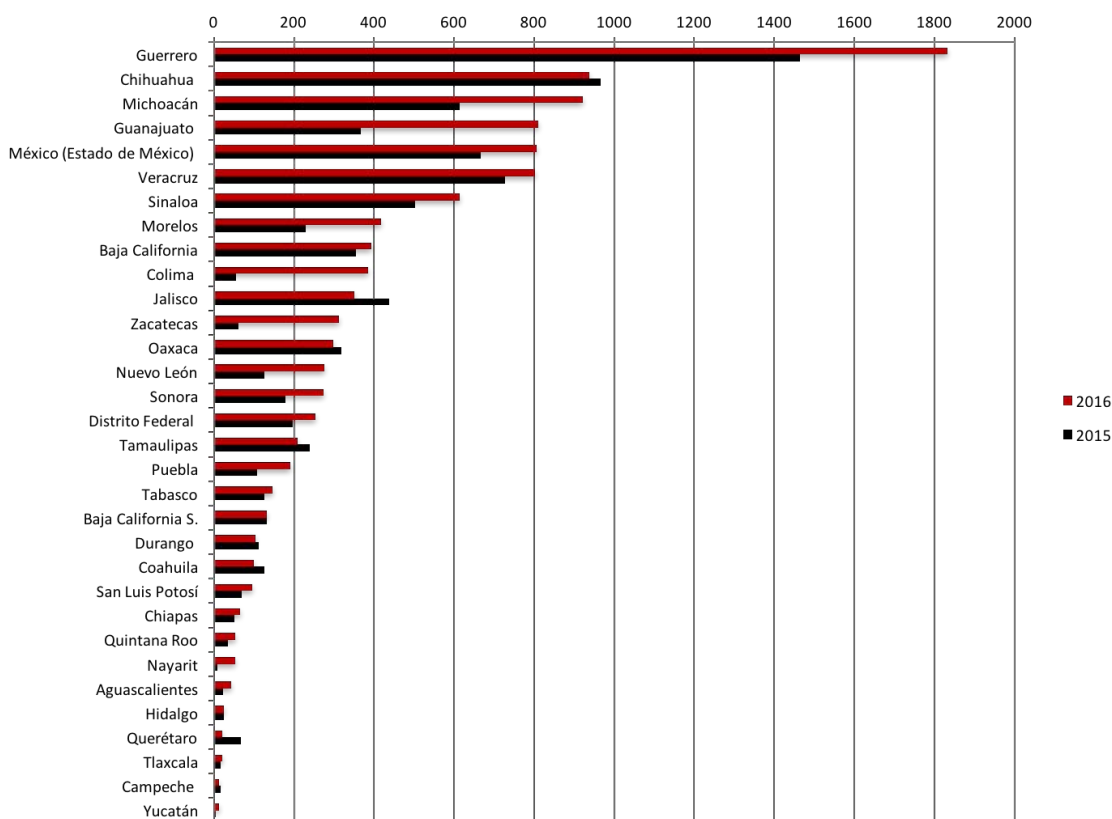


Source: *Milenio*. Map generated by Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira.

<sup>29</sup> In earlier years, the authors of this report relied on *Reforma*'s tallies of organized-crime-style homicides. However, we have given preference to *Milenio* over *Reforma* in recent years, including here, 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 2015 to 2016**



Source: *Milenio*.

The year-to-year comparison of organized-crime-style homicides tracked by *Milenio* shows in Figure 13 that organized-crime-style violence noticeably increased in 2016, according to this source. There were 24 Mexican states that saw an annual increase and eight that saw a decrease. This is up from 2015 when 22 states saw an increase from 2014 numbers, 11 saw a decrease, and one remained the same.

As in previous years, organized-crime-style violence was not randomly distributed, but centered primarily in major drug production and trafficking areas. In 2016, we also see that the top ten states accounted for the lion's share of organized-crime-style homicides—7,918 (or 72%) out of 10,967—reported by *Milenio*. These states are located in the U.S.-Mexico border region, Pacific coast, and central Mexico, which are important areas for drug production and trafficking.

The five states that saw the largest numerical increase in organized-crime-style homicides in 2016 according to *Milenio* were Guanajuato (+444), Guerrero (+368), Colima (+330), Michoacán (+309), and Zacatecas (+251), with a combined total of 1,702, a significant increase from the 1,087 OCG-related homicides recorded in 2015 and the 696 in 2014. Meanwhile, the five states that saw the largest percentage increases in organized-crime-style homicides were Colima (600%), Nayarit (500%), Zacatecas (405%), Yucatán (200%), and Nuevo León (119%).



According to *Milenio*, the five states that saw the largest numerical decrease in organized-crime-style homicides from 2015 to 2016 were Jalisco (86 homicides less in 2016 than 2015), Querétaro (46), Tamaulipas (30), Chihuahua (29), and Coahuila (27), for a combined total of 218, a significant drop from the 886 decrease in 2015, which came on the heels of the 2014 decline of 1,967 organized crime-style homicides. The five states that saw the largest percentage decreases in organized-crime-style homicides from 2015 to 2016 Querétaro (-69%), Campecha (-24%), Coahuila (-21%), Jalisco (-20%), and Tamaulipas (-13%). Tamaulipas was the only state to have one of the top five highest percentage decreases in back-to-back years, with -33% in 2015.

## D. Special Victims: Mayors and Journalists

Over the years, the authors of this report have worked to monitor and analyze patterns of violence targeting certain special populations. In particular, public officials and journalists have been frequently attacked and killed in Mexico, often in the course of performing their respective duties. This is a matter of serious concern that is in many ways revealing of the nature of the problem of violence in Mexico. Very often the use of violence is directed both at representatives of the state and at the “eyes, ears, and voice” of organized civil society. As such, the elevated levels of violence in Mexico raise legitimate concerns about the effect it has on Mexican democratic governance.

### 1. Mayors

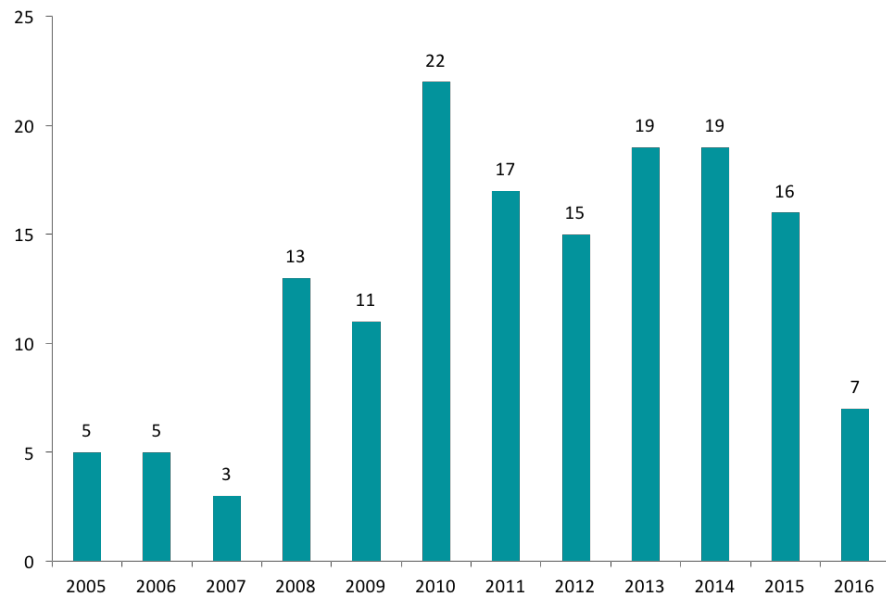
Assassination of current, former, elected, substitute or candidates to the mayoral position in Mexico is a serious concern. The murder of political positions threatens the democratic process and undermines the rule of law. According to a 2016 investigation, entitled “Atentan contra alcaldes,” by Mexico news media source *El Universal*, from 2005 through January 2016, there were 70 former mayors (*ex alcaldes*), 52 mayors in office or elected for office (*alcaldes en funciones*), and five interim mayors (*alcaldes suplentes*). Unlike many tallies, the *El Universal* investigation also reported the number of family members of mayors (*familiares de alcaldes en funciones*) that have been killed, which amounted to 44 victims.<sup>30</sup>

Justice in Mexico’s *Memoria* dataset now includes all of the cases reported by *El Universal*, as well as some additional and more recent cases not captured by that report. In total, the *Memoria* dataset includes 209 cases. These include 147 mayors (including 5 interim mayors), 49 former mayors, and 8 mayoral candidates killed from 2005 through December 2016 (See Figure 15). The *Memoria* dataset does not tally family members as a particular category, though several such individuals are included in the dataset because they bear the characteristics of organized-crime-style homicides.

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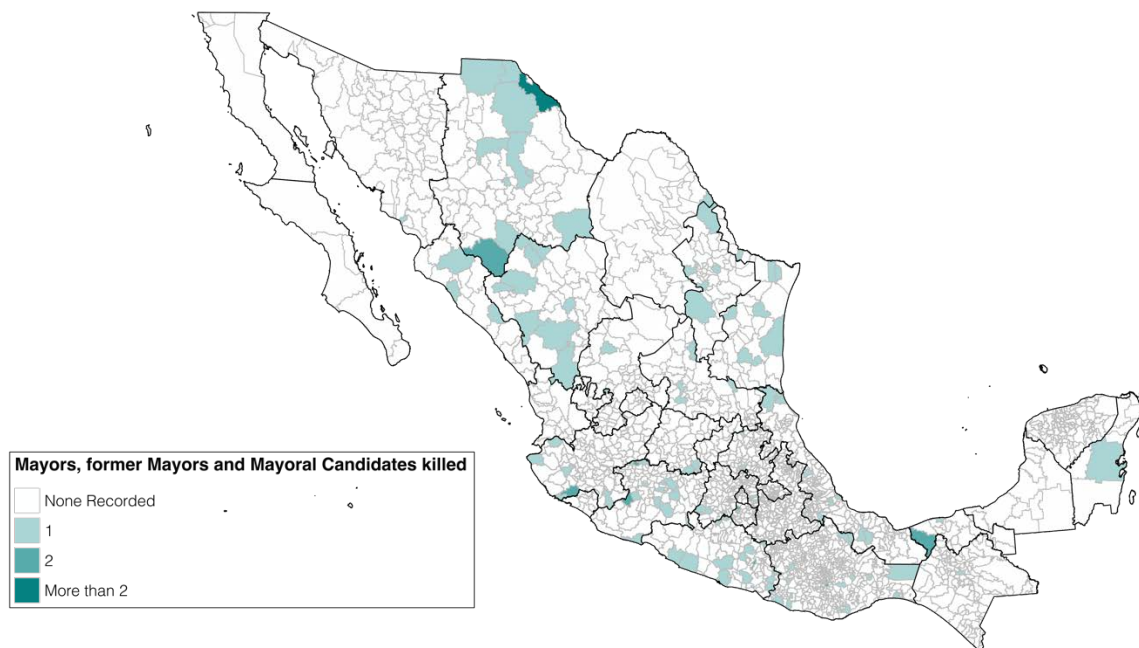
<sup>30</sup> Our review of the data from this *El Universal* study suggests that there are a number of cases that appear to have little to do with the victim’s political office, much less organized crime. One case, for example, was a mayor who was killed by his own son in a dispute over their romantic intentions toward the same woman. To account for such special cases, the *Memoria* dataset distinguishes between “organized crime-style” homicides and “others.” “Atentan contra alcaldes.” *El Universal*. Last referenced February 11, 2017. <http://interactivo.eluniversal.com.mx/2016/alcaldes-asesinados/>

**Figure 14: Mayors & Ex-Mayors Killed in Mexico  
(January 2006-December 2016)**



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset.

**Figure 15: Map of Mayors & Ex-Mayors Killed in Mexico  
(January 2006-December 2016)**



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset. Map generated by Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira.

According to available data, seven individuals were killed in 2016 who were current or former mayors (or mayoral candidates). Specifically, the mayoral killings documented by Justice in Mexico in 2016 included the following: Ambrosio Soto Duarte (PRD, Michoacan); César Ramírez Vargas (PRI,

Estado de México); Domingo López González (PVEM, Chiapas); Gisela Raquel Mota Ocampo (PRD, Morelos); Jose Santamaria Zavala (MC, Puebla); José Villanueva Rodríguez (PRD, Oaxaca); and Juan Antonio Mayen Saucedo (PAN, Estado de México).<sup>31</sup> Each of these incidents involved firearms and six appeared to be organized-crime-style homicides.<sup>32</sup>

These murders occurred in six states, with two mayors killed in the State of México and one each in Chiapas, Michoacán, Morelos, Oaxaca, and Puebla. All of the mayors were killed using firearms of diverse calibers and only one victim showed marks of torture. According to reports gathered by Justice in Mexico, authorities attributed only two of these killings to specific criminal organizations: one (Ambrosio Soto) was allegedly committed by La Familia Michoacana and the other (Gisela Mota) by Los Rojos, an offshoot of the Beltran Leyva Organization (which is opposed to the Guerreros Unidos criminal organization implicated in the 2014 Iguala massacre and disappearances). When it comes to political affiliation, three of the victims in 2016 were from the PRD, two from the PRI, and one each from the PAN, Citizen's Movement (MC), and PVEM.

It is worth noting that no mayoral candidates or former mayors were identified through data gathering efforts in the *Memoria* dataset in 2016. By comparison, there were a total of seven mayors, mayoral candidates, and former-mayors killed in 2011, 12 killed in 2012, 12 killed in 2013, seven killed in 2014, and eight each in 2015 and 2016. To date, the year 2010 had the most killings of such individuals, amounting to a total of 17 cases in the *Memoria* dataset.

### 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 classifying this violence, since motives are often difficult to confirm. For example, 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 2016, CPJ reported that there were 37 such confirmed cases, 49 unconfirmed cases, and four media-support workers killed in Mexico.<sup>33</sup> Approximately 76% 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.<sup>34</sup>

Looking specifically at 2016, Mexico ranked in 7<sup>th</sup> place for the deadliest countries for reporters and media workers killed in 2016 with two confirmed such killings according to CPJ. Of the other more dangerous countries for journalists to work, Syria continued to be the deadliest with 14 journalists killed in 2016, followed by Yemen (6), Iraq (6), Afghanistan (4), Libya (3), Somalia (3), and Turkey,

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<sup>31</sup> While most of the above noted mayors killed in 2016 had characteristics typical of organized crime (such as multiple gunmen, assault-type weapons, etc.), one appeared to have primarily political motivations. PVEM mayor Domingo López González and a city attorney (*síndico*) were killed by citizens outraged because he failed to provide funding for public works.

<sup>32</sup> In 2015, Justice in Mexico identified only two sitting mayors killed, along with five mayoral candidates and one former mayor.

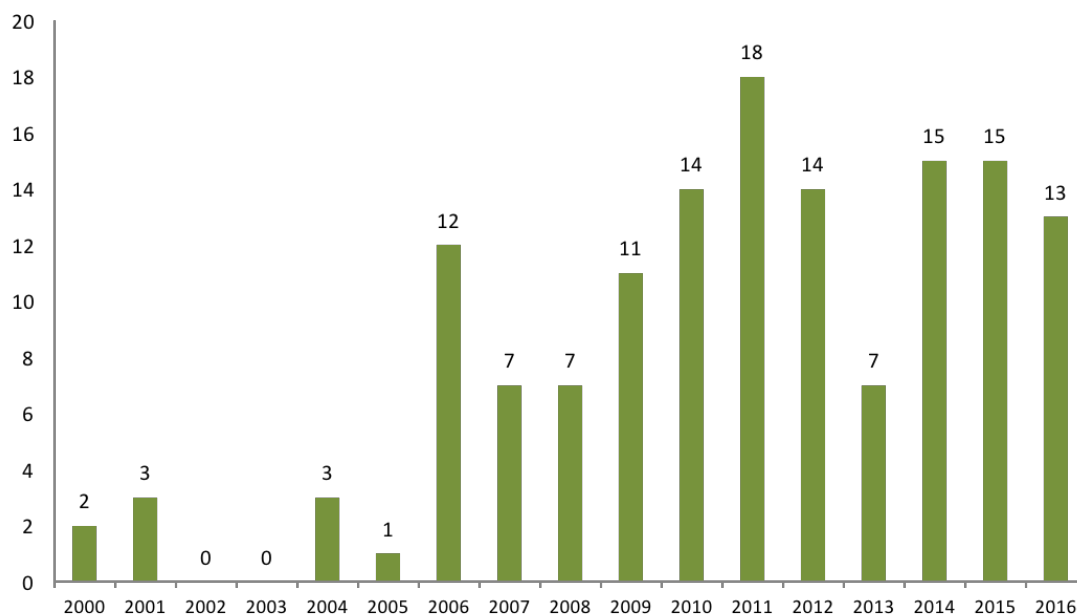
<sup>33</sup> "37 Journalists Killed in Mexico since 1992/Motive confirmed." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed February 5, 2017. <https://www.cpj.org/killed/americas/mexico/>

<sup>34</sup> "37 Journalists Killed in Mexico since 1992/Motive confirmed." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed February 5, 2017. <https://www.cpj.org/killed/americas/mexico/>

India, and Pakistan, each with two.<sup>35</sup> The two CPJ-confirmed cases involved Marcos Hernández Bautista of *Noticias* and *Voz e Imagem de Oaxaca*, who was killed January 21, 2016 in Oaxaca, and Elidio Ramos Zárate of *El Sur*, who was killed June 19 also in Oaxaca.<sup>36</sup>

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 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 2016, Justice in Mexico has identified at least 142 journalists and media-support workers who were murdered, with the vast majority of these deaths (133) 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 2016, Justice in Mexico entered 14 such individuals into the *Memoria* dataset, which is equal to the number CPJ reported for Syria in the same year.

**Figure 16: Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico (January 2000-December 2016)**



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset.

<sup>35</sup> “Deadliest Countries in 2016.” *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed February 5, 2017. <https://cpj.org/killed/2016/>

<sup>36</sup> “Marcos Hernández Bautista.” *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed February 5, 2017. <https://cpj.org/killed/2016/marcos-hernandez-bautista.php> and “Elidio Ramos Zárate.” *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed February 5, 2017. <https://cpj.org/killed/2016/elidio-ramos-zarate.php>

**Figure 17: Map of Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico (January 2000-December 2016)**



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset. Map generated by Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira.

Of the 14 murdered journalists and media workers identified by Justice in Mexico in 2016: ten of them were shot, one was stabbed, one was killed by a moving vehicle, and one was unidentifiable because he was found in an advanced state of decomposition. Only one case exhibited signs of torture in 2016 (compared to three cases in 2015), and there were no cases of decapitation or dismemberment identified in 2016. The most violent states in Mexico for journalists were Oaxaca with five homicides, Veracruz and Puebla each with two, and Chihuahua, Guerrero, Michoacán, Tabasco, and Tamaulipas, each with one homicide.

The journalists and media workers identified in 2016 by the *Memoria* project in chronological order are: Marcos Hernández Bautista (Oaxaca), Reinel Martínez Cerqueda (Oaxaca), Anabel Flores Salazar (Puebla), Moisés Dagdug Lutzow (Tabasco), Francisco Pacheco Beltrán (Guerrero), Manuel Santiago Torres González (Veracruz), Elpidio Ramos Zárate (Oaxaca), Salvador Olmos García (Oaxaca), Zamira Esther Bautista Luna (Tamaulipas), Pedro Tamayo Rosas (Veracruz), León Agustín Pavía (Oaxaca), Aurelio Cabrera Campos (Puebla), Jesús Adrián Rodríguez Samaniego, (Chihuahua).

## 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, 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).<sup>37</sup> The average annual decline

<sup>37</sup> 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.

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 (2013-2016)
INEGI Homicides	<b>78,094</b>	<b>80,311</b>	<b>60,162</b>	<b>121,613</b>	<b>89,651**</b>
SNSP Homicides	n.a.	n.a.	74,389	104,794	71,786
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	<b>24,780</b>
Milenio-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	54,087	37,478
LANTIA (OCG)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	26,900
% OCG (INEGI/Milenio)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	42.6%	41.8%
% OCG (SNSP/Milenio)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	48.9%	52.1%

Note: Data for the first year of Salinas' term in 1989 were not available. \*\* Figures in **red** reflect figures are based on the authors' estimates and projections as described in the text. Also, this table corrects a miscalculation of SNSP homicides from 2007 to 2012 in an earlier version 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 121,613 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 2013-2015, and the authors' projections for 2016, it appears that almost 90,000 people have been murdered over the course of the first four years of the Peña Nieto administration. This constitutes an average of just over 22,400 homicides per year during the first two thirds of Peña Nieto's term, roughly 5,000 more per year than during Calderón's first four years in office. As such, the annual average number of homicides under the Peña Nieto administration is now about 10% higher than during the Calderón administration, whose first two years saw much lower rates of homicide. By comparison, there were more than 61 homicides per day during the first four years of the Peña Nieto administration, or about 2.5 murders every hour. Based on INEGI's projected tally of 89,674 homicides from 2013 to 2016, more than a third of these homicides (24,780 according to *Reforma*)—if not more than 40% (37,478 according to *Milenio*)—bore characteristics considered to be typical of organized crime involvement.<sup>38</sup> By *Reforma's* conservative account, during the Peña Nieto administration, nearly 17 Mexicans died in organized crime-style killings, or at least one every ninety minutes (or once every hour, according to *Milenio*).

<sup>38</sup> 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 2016

As noted in the findings above, in 2016 the number of homicides in Mexico increased for the second time in as many years, continuing a troubling upward trend. Among the factors noted in our previous reports as contributors to the recent increases in violence are the escalation of the conflicts among Mexican organized crime groups, as well as Mexico's recent economic difficulties (e.g., stagnant economic growth, a devalued peso, a serious fiscal crisis due to falling oil prices). Yet socio-economic conditions alone are insufficient to understand the surge in violence, since the dynamics of conflict or equilibrium among organized crime groups—particularly those involved in international drug trafficking—tend to have perceptible effects on patterns of violence at both at the national and local level.

Thus, government intervention to disrupt (or sometimes facilitate) organized criminal activities has an important effect. However, the effect and effectiveness of law enforcement efforts is not always positive or predictable. Despite assurances from government officials that Mexico's drop in violence from 2012 through mid-2014 was attributable effective law enforcement at the national and local level, other factors—including the dominance of Mexico's Sinaloa cartel—seem to have played an important role. As made evident by the rise in violence following the recapture and extradition of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, Mexican law enforcement has a long way to go before it can provide a lasting protective effect against organized crime and violence.

This section provides a brief background on these problems and a number of major developments that occurred in 2016, including the implementation of the New Criminal Justice System (NSJP) and important new efforts to combat corruption in Mexico. Despite these supposed successes, there is a worrying level of public discontent with Mexican authorities (e.g., abysmal public opinion ratings, protests over the withdrawal of public gasoline subsidies). What is apparent is that, as in previous years, 2016 brought mixed results, at best. As always, progress toward strengthening the rule of law in Mexico will not be swift or straightforward.

### A. Concerns About General Socio-Economic Conditions

Mexico's economic circumstances are a major contributor to the problem of crime and violence. People on the margins sometimes turn to crime and illicit economic activities to supplement lost income. Others living in deprivation simply lack the opportunities and support systems that help to keep violent behavior in check. Indeed, recent social scientific studies on the socio-economic roots of Mexico's violence point especially to the lack of access to a quality education and decent jobs. Specifically, in an analysis of local homicide data from 2010, Ingram (2014) finds that “education has a meaningful protective effect against violence” at the municipal level, and that municipalities whose neighboring communities are economically strained are prone to higher levels of homicide (suggesting that your neighbors turn to violent crime when destitute).<sup>39</sup> With these factors in mind, Ingram urges policy makers to be mindful of the structural factors (e.g., population pressures, resource deprivation, inequality, education, economic activity, etc.) and the social factors (e.g., social cohesion, social trust, civic participation, family disruption, etc.) that contribute to crime and violence.

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<sup>39</sup> Ingram, Matthew C. “Community Resilience to Violence: Local Schools, Regional Economies, and Homicide in Mexico's Municipalities,” in Eric L. Olson, David A. Shirk, and Duncan Wood (eds.), *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence*, Washington, D.C. and San Diego: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Justice in Mexico, 2014), p. 25-62. Quote taken from p. 25.



Looking more closely at the socio-economic factors that drive violence at the local level, Vilalta and Muggah (2016) draw from criminological theories that emphasize how “human ecology” and “social disorganization” that contribute to violence. They point to such factors as income level, ethnic identity, migration, and social status as having an important impact on the organization and development of communities, particularly since individuals who are socially disadvantaged tend to be concentrated in certain groups and geographic spaces. According to “social disorganization” theory, the authors point out, such factors “weaken social bonding and therefore reduce the capacity of communities to manage and regulate themselves or monitor the behaviour of their members” contribute to crime, conflict, and violence. In empirical tests using data from Mexico City, Vilalta and Muggah find that crime rates are greater in localities suffering from socioeconomic deficits and such disruptive social phenomena as family disruption and migration.<sup>40</sup>

Arguably, Mexico’s macro-economic circumstances in 2016 further aggravated the difficulties faced by many Mexicans. On the one hand, the continued weakness of world oil prices since late 2014 is a partial drag on the Mexican economy, given the energy sector’s importance as a source of domestic production (about 8% of GDP) and government revenue (about 20%).<sup>41</sup> Also, somewhat more so than in other countries, Mexican peso depreciated significantly against the U.S. dollar over the course of 2016 and into the first part of 2017, pushing consumer prices upwards.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, OECD assessments point to the relative resilience of the Mexican economy, and GDP growth in 2016 was relatively stronger in Mexico than in other Latin American countries.<sup>43</sup> It remains to be seen how the macro-economic picture will unfold in 2017, of course, but the economic uncertainty and instability of 2016 did little to alleviate the socioeconomic factors that contribute to crime and violence in Mexico.

## B. Dynamics Among Organized Crime Groups: Building the *Pax Sinaloa*

While socioeconomic factors tell us a great deal about the root causes of violence—and especially what locations and type of individuals are likely to be involved—such factors are not sufficient to explain the roller coaster of violence the country has ridden for the last decade. As is well documented in this report, a substantial portion of Mexico’s recent violence—and, indeed, much of the actual increase in murders since 2008—appears to involve high impact weapons, multiple assailants, and other indications of involvement by organized crime groups, which sometimes explicitly claim responsibility for these killings. Thus, along with socio-economic factors, it is also

<sup>40</sup> Vilalta, Carlos & Muggah, Robert, (2016). “What Explains Criminal Violence in Mexico City? A Test of Two Theories of Crime,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*. 5(1), p.1. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.433>

<sup>41</sup> A sharp post-recession surge in crude oil prices (ranging around \$80-100/barrel) beginning in 2011 took a sharp downturn (ranging around \$30-50/barrel) in late 2014. Fortunately for Mexico, the Mexican government’s dependence on oil as a source of fiscal revenue has diminished by roughly half over the past decade from nearly 40% of government revenues to around 20%, thanks in large part to fiscal and structural reforms introduced by the Peña Nieto administration. Mexico has also benefited from the growth of other industries, notably the automobile sector, tourism, and domestic consumer spending. Eric Martin, “Why Lower Oil Prices Don't Hurt Mexico as Much as They Used To: Reduced Dependence on Crude Makes Impact from Drop Smaller,” *Bloomberg Markets*, February 24, 2016. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-02-24/why-lower-oil-prices-don-t-hurt-mexico-as-much-as-they-used-to>

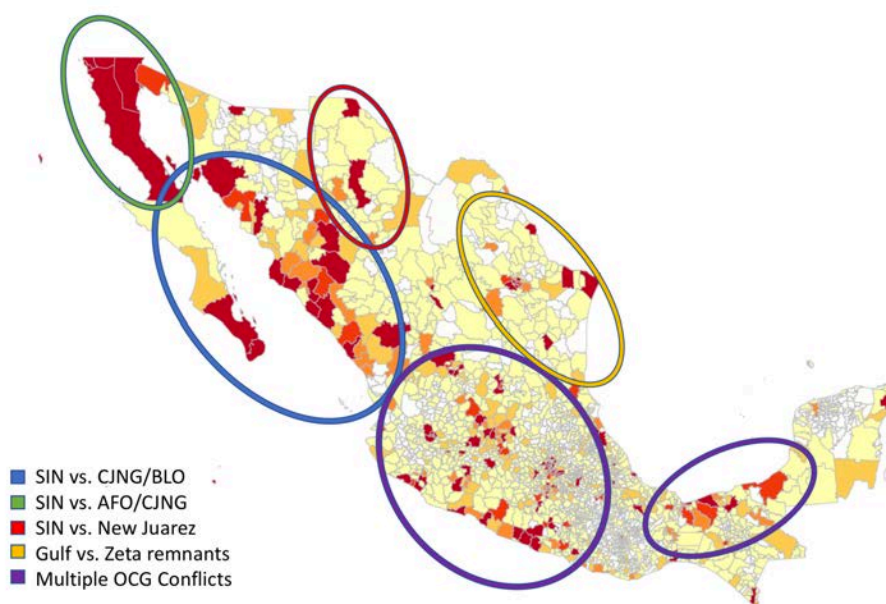
<sup>42</sup> The weakness of the Mexican peso partly reflected currency speculation about the potential implications of a shift in U.S. trade policy toward Mexico, as well as other factors (e.g., the value of the Chinese yuan). Jude Webber and Robin Wigglesworth, “Mexican Peso Hit as Trump takes US Presidency,” *Financial Times*, November 9, 2016. <https://www.ft.com/content/e70025d2-a628-11e6-8898-79a99e2a4de6>

<sup>43</sup> OECD (2016), *OECD Economic Outlook, Volume 2016, Issue 2*. Paris: OECD Publishing, June 2016. p. 205-207. <http://www.oecd.org/eco/outlook/economic-forecast-summary-mexico-oecd-economic-outlook-november-2016.pdf>

necessary to consider the dynamics of the illicit markets and criminal organizations— that is, the decisions, strategies, actions, and reactions of organized crime groups in the course of expanding or defending their business operations—that have been detonators and drivers of violence in many parts of the country.

There are a number of indications of the important role of organized crime groups in driving violence in Mexico. As we have noted, the country’s recent violence is especially concentrated in geographic areas associated with drug production and trafficking, as well as conflicts between specific organizations. (See Figure 19). In particular, these “highly violent clusters” found in areas of the country where major organized crime groups have suffered high level arrests in recent years (e.g., such as the the Zetas, Gulf Cartel, and Beltran Leyva organizations) or faced newfound competition or internal rifts (as in the case of the once-dominant Sinaloa cartel in Mexico’s northwest). Also, Mexico’s violence has been characterized by seemingly random spikes and declines—sometimes in a matter of weeks—that cannot be explained either by long-term structural factors (such as literacy rates, unemployment, or inequality) or by factors associated with social disorganization (such as family disruption or migration).

**Figure 18: Concentrations of Violence in 2016 and Conflicts Among Major Criminal Organizations in Mexico**



In addition, the timing and direction of shifts in Mexico’s violence also appears to be a function of the dynamics between major criminal organizations, as well as the government policies and law enforcement actions that disrupt (or even informally regulate) their activities. This is perhaps most clearly visible in the example of the Sinaloa Cartel, which began to actively challenge its rivals in the Arellano Felix Organization and the Gulf Cartel in the 1990s. Later, in early 2008, the Sinaloa Cartel launched a surprising attack against the criminal organizations headed by its longtime allies from the Beltran Leyva and Carrillo Fuentes families. These two organizations were based, respectively, in the state of Morelos in central Mexico and the state Chihuahua (one Mexico’s northern border with Texas), which became important centers of violent conflict from 2008 through 2011.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> The worst of that violence was concentrated in Chihuahua, where the Sinaloa cartel was fighting the Carrillo Fuentes organization to take control over one of the most lucrative drug trafficking routes into the United States. The state alone

Thereafter, the Sinaloa Cartel appeared to consolidate its position relative to other criminal organizations, as leaders of nearly all of its rival organizations were arrested, killed, or extradited, including Benjamín Arellano Félix (arrested in 2002 and extradited in 2011), Osiel Cárdenas (arrested in 2003 and extradited in 2007), Arturo Beltrán Leyva (killed in 2010), Vicente Carrillo Fuentes (arrested in 2014), and various key figures in the Zeta, La Familia Michoacán, and Knights Templar organizations. As early as 2010, it appeared that the Sinaloa Cartel was becoming the primary beneficiary of the numerous blows being dealt to other criminal organizations. With the Sinaloa Cartel facing fewer challengers and gaining greater control of major drug operations, violence gradually decreased and various experts and news outlets heralded what appeared to be an emerging *Pax Sinaloa* or “Sinaloa peace.”<sup>45</sup>

The possibility of a *pax mafiosa* involving Sinaloa was initially used to explain the reduction of violence in key centers of violence, like Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez.<sup>46</sup> However, with the gradual, nationwide decline in homicide rates from early 2011 through early 2014, observers increasingly attributed the downward trend in violence to the Sinaloa cartel’s relatively unified and unchallenged position relative to other major criminal organizations, made possible through explicit or implicit pacts with Mexican government officials. According to this view, the Sinaloa Cartel was able to gain favor either because it was the more powerful criminal organization and/or because it was better able to provide with valuable information and intelligence to help target its rivals. Also, authorities may have either explicitly or implicitly favored Sinaloa because they saw it as the lesser of evils, compared to more violent organizations like the Zetas, the La Familia Organization, and the Knights Templar. Moreover, the Sinaloa Cartel reportedly provided authorities intelligence information to aid the and arrests of rival organized crime leaders. Whatever the case, as Sinaloa settled into its advantageous position as Mexico’s dominant criminal organization, the number of homicides nationwide plateaued at the lowest level in years from early 2013 through early 2015. By November 2015, U.S. intelligence assessments suggested the Sinaloa Cartel now had monopoly control of the U.S. drug market and was a primary contributor to the U.S. heroin epidemic, particularly on the East Coast and in the Midwest.<sup>47</sup> The cost of “peace,” of course, was thousands of lost lives on both sides of the border. Sadly, that costly peace would not last.

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accounted for nearly one in five homicides nationwide, with over 3,900 homicides documented in 2010 and more than six times the number registered in that state in 2007. Chihuahua’s shockingly high figures tend to overshadow the major upswing in violence that was occurring simultaneously in the much smaller state of Morelos, where the Sinaloa cartel was battling the Beltrán Leyva organization. In 2010, Morelos registered “only” 559 homicides, but this represented a four-fold increase in murders compared to four years prior and the second largest increase nationwide (after Chihuahua).

<sup>45</sup> The earliest reference to the term “Pax Sinaloa” that the authors were able to identify was found in O’Rourke and Byrd’s 2011 book, which speculates about the relationship of Sinaloa’s growing dominance of the Mexican drug trade to trends in violence in Ciudad Juárez. O’Rourke and Byrd cite an Associated Press report on April 9, 2010 that intelligence from confidential informants had “led U.S. authorities to believe that the Sinaloa cartel has edged out the rival Juárez gang for control over trafficking routes through Ciudad Juárez, ground zero in the drug war.” See: Beto O’Rourke and Susie Byrd, *Dealing Death With Drugs: The Big Business of Dope in the U.S. and Mexico*, El Paso, Texas: Cinco Puntos Press, 2011, p. 27.

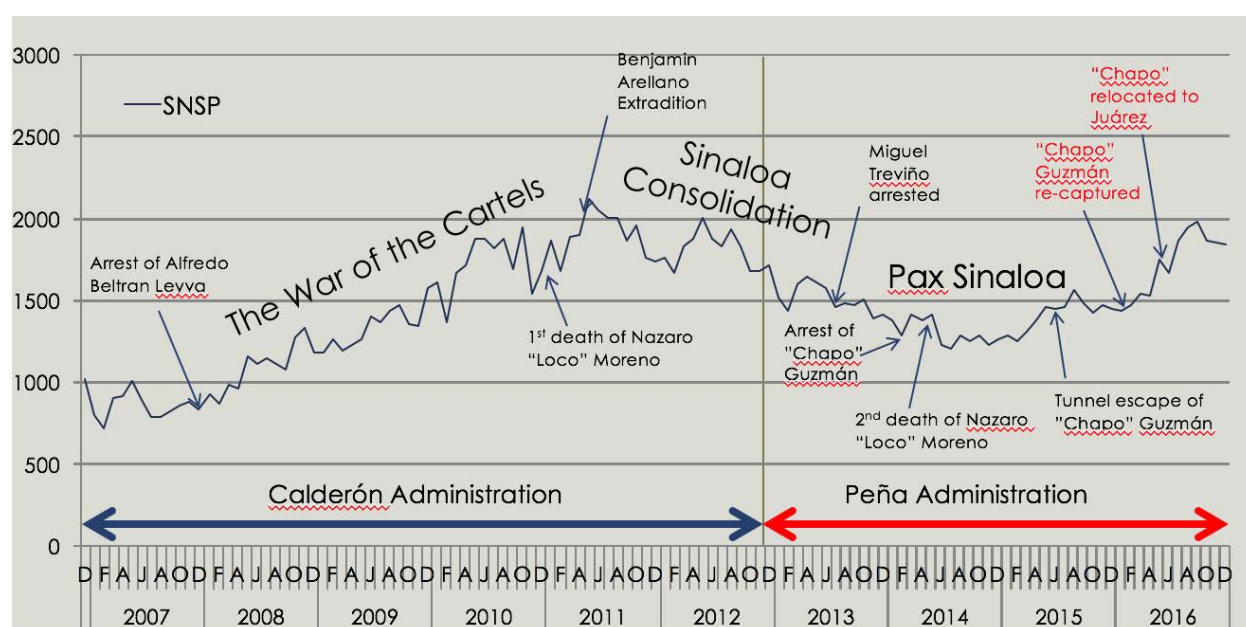
<sup>46</sup> For example, Shirk (2014) contends that the reduction of violence in Ciudad Juárez can be attributed to the gradual monopolization of control over organized criminal activities by the Sinaloa cartel. See: David A. Shirk, “A Tale of Two Mexican Border Cities: The Rise and Decline of Drug Violence in Juárez and Tijuana,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, Volume 29, Issue 4. December 16, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Dolia Estevez, “DEA Maps Show Kingpin ‘El Chapo’ Guzmán’s Cartel Controls Nearly The Entire U.S. Drug Market,” *Forbes*, November 10, 2015, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/doliaestevez/2015/11/10/dea-maps-show-kingpin-el-chapo-guzmans-cartel-controls-nearly-the-entire-u-s-drug-market/#741d46f52441>

## C. The Fall of Chapo Guzmán and the Unmaking of the *Pax Sinaloa*

It is notable that the period of the ostensible *Pax Sinaloa* overlapped with the capture and incarceration of Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán from February 2014 until he escaped from the Altiplano maximum security prison via a sophisticated mile-long tunnel in July 2015.<sup>48</sup> Guzmán’s escape provoked domestic and international ridicule of the Peña Nieto administration, in part due to its failure to move swiftly to extradite him to the United States but also because of perceptions that authorities allowed him to escape.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, since levels of violence had begun to creep up nationally during the first half of 2015, some observers speculated that his escape was intended to re-consolidate the *Pax Sinaloa*.<sup>50</sup> However, Guzmán’s time as a fugitive was relatively short-lived and he was recaptured on January 8, 2016.

**Figure 19: Timeline of Monthly Homicide Totals and Major Developments Among Key Mexican Organized Crime Groups**



Thereafter, the “Sinaloa peace” clearly began to deteriorate, as illustrated in Figure 20, possibly because it was increasingly clear that Guzmán was no longer in control of his organization. After his re-capture in January 2016, the Mexican government signaled that it would move to extradite him, largely to quell concerns that he might escape yet again.<sup>51</sup> Just months later, on May 7, 2016,

<sup>48</sup> Mexican authorities had first arrested Guzmán in 1993, when he was sentenced to twenty years in prison on charges of drug trafficking and murder. Archibald, Randal C. and Ginger Thompson. “El Chapo, Most-Wanted Drug Lord, Is Captured in Mexico,” *The New York Times*, February 22, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> In a 2014 interview with *The Associated Press*, then-Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam asserted his unwillingness to extradite Guzmán in the near future: “I could accept extradition but at the time that I choose. El Chapo must stay here to complete his sentence and then I will extradite him.” He continued, “So about 300 or 400 years later,” he said referring to the length of Guzmán’s sentence. “It will be a while.” Associated Press. “Mexico rules out ‘El Chapo’ extradition.” *The Guardian*. January 28, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/28/mexico-rules-out-el-chapo-extradition>

<sup>50</sup> Don Winslow, “‘El Chapo’s’ capture: Is the mission really accomplished?” *CNN Opinion*, January 8, 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/08/opinions/winslow-el-chapo-capture/>

<sup>51</sup> “The legal battle over El Chapo’s potential extradition.” *Justice in Mexico*. January 23, 2016. <https://justiceinmexico.org/the-legal-battle-over-el-chapos-potential-extradition/>. Press Release: Comunicado 020/16.



Guzmán was relocated to a prison facility in Ciudad Juárez, reportedly to facilitate his subsequent extradition.<sup>52</sup> Less than a year later, on January 19, 2017, President Barack Obama's last day in office, Mexico extradited Guzmán to the United States in order to face charges in New York.<sup>53</sup> This move was a surprise for many, given the swiftness with which his extradition moved forward, and appeared to take into account pending political changes in Washington.<sup>54</sup>

After Guzmán's extradition, some analysts suggested that the Mexican government authorized the transfer as a good will gesture to the incoming administration of Donald Trump, while others suggested that it was a tribute to U.S.-Mexico cooperation under the Obama administration; yet, the Mexican government denied any political motivations.<sup>55</sup> Whatever the case, as this report was headed to press, Guzmán was being prosecuted in Brooklyn in the state's Eastern District Court on a 17-count indictment, marking a significant milestone in the war on drugs in Mexico.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, in Mexico, the once-dominant Sinaloa organization was beset by internal divisions and encroachment from rival criminal organizations over the course of 2016. During the height of Guzmán's power, his family—including siblings and offspring—had a major role in leading Sinaloa's criminal enterprises, while potential internal challengers, like Isidro "El Chapito" Meza Flores, were kept at bay. Once Guzmán was re-captured, however, official and media sources began to report on indications of a growing schism within his organization.<sup>57</sup>

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"Como parte del procedimiento de extradición de Joaquín Guzmán Loera, la Procuraduría General de la República informa." *Procuraduría General de la República*. January 11, 2016. <http://www.gob.mx/pgr/prensa/como-parte-del-procedimiento-de-extradicion-de-joaquin-guzman-loera-la-procuraduria-general-de-la-republica-informa-comunicado-020-16>

<sup>52</sup> Joshua Partlow, "El Chapo' Guzmán is Moved to a Prison along Texas Border," *Washington Post*, May 7, 2016. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the\\_americas/el-chapo-guzman-moved-to-a-prison-along-texas-border/2016/05/07/043599a8-147e-11e6-a9b5-bf703a5a7191\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.f80ce061b73f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/el-chapo-guzman-moved-to-a-prison-along-texas-border/2016/05/07/043599a8-147e-11e6-a9b5-bf703a5a7191_story.html?utm_term=.f80ce061b73f)

<sup>53</sup> Guzmán was wanted in at least seven U.S. federal court districts where prosecutors had levied various criminal charges against him. Bennett, Brian and Deborah Bonello. "Prosecutors in these seven courtrooms want 'El Chapo.'" *Los Angeles Times*. January 11, 2016. <http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-mexico-guzman-extradition-20160112-story.html>

<sup>54</sup> In an early January 2017 interview with the *Dallas Morning Times*, Justice in Mexico Director David Shirk suggested that "Mexico's willingness to extradite Chapo Guzmán is going to diminish on January 21," once Trump was in the Oval Office, though this was by no means a prediction of his imminent transfer to the United States. See: Levinson, Jonathan. "NAFTA benefits more than just trade, but it needs to be changed," *Dallas Morning News*, January 10, 2017, <http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2017/01/10/nafta-benefits-just-trade-needs-changed>; Orsi, Peter. "Timing of Mexico Drug Lord's Extradition seen as Political," *Washington Post*, January 20, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the\\_americas/timing-of-mexico-drug-lords-extradition-seen-as-political/2017/01/20/e5df6a44-dece-11e6-8902-610fe486791c\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.62d356d6e267](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/timing-of-mexico-drug-lords-extradition-seen-as-political/2017/01/20/e5df6a44-dece-11e6-8902-610fe486791c_story.html?utm_term=.62d356d6e267); Agren, David and Rory Carroll, "Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán, Mexican drug lord, has been extradited to the US," *The Guardian*, January 19, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/19/el-chapo-extradited-to-the-us>; "Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán es extraditado a Estados Unidos." *Univisión*. January 19, 2017. <http://www.univision.com/noticias/extradiciones/el-narcotraficante-mexicano-joaquin-el-chapo-guzman-es-extraditado-a-nueva-york>

<sup>55</sup> See: Ahmed, Azam. "El Chapo, Mexcan Drug Kingpin, Is Extradited to U.S." *The New York Times*. January 19, 2017. [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/world/el-chapo-extradited-mexico.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/world/el-chapo-extradited-mexico.html?_r=0); Agren, David and Rory Carroll, "Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán, Mexican drug lord, has been extradited to the US," *The Guardian*, January 19, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/19/el-chapo-extradited-to-the-us>

<sup>56</sup> Office of Public Affairs. "Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán Loera Faces Charges in New York for Leading a Continuing Criminal Enterprise and other Drug-Related Charges." *U.S. Department of Justice*. January 20, 2017. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/joaquin-el-chapo-guzman-loera-faces-charges-new-york-leading-continuing-criminal-enterprise>; U.S. District Court, Eastern District of New York. "Memorandum of Law in Support of Pretrial Detention." *U.S. Department of Justice*. January 20, 2017. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/929896/download>.

<sup>57</sup> "Cartel power struggle fueling rising violence in Mexico: official," *Reuters*, February 11, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-violence-idUSKBN15R01A>

One indication of internal divisions in the Sinaloa Cartel reportedly involved an incursion by dozens of armed men in the highlands of Badiraguato, which was accompanied by the kidnapping, murder, and decapitation of seven local men in the small town of Rosario on June 16, 2016 (the same day Mexico's new justice system came into effect).<sup>58</sup> This conflict suggests that the Sinaloa Cartel has splintered between supporters of "El Chapo" Guzmán led by one of his ten brothers, Aureliano "El Guano" Guzmán Loera, and those defectors—possibly including Meza Flores—that have transferred their loyalties to rival organizations, including the Beltrán Leyva organization and the CJNG. Some even speculated that Chapo's downfall could be attributable to a betrayal by his long-time partner within the Sinaloa Cartel, Ismael Zambada García, whose son Vicente was arrested by the Mexican army in 2009 and extradited in 2010. Zambada's arrest presented an obvious liability for the Sinaloa organization, and a possible source of intelligence that could help to bring down Joaquín Guzmán..<sup>59</sup>

#### D. The Rising Star of Jalisco's New Generation Cartel

With so many long-time rival organizations hobbled and splintered after a decade of conflict and arrests, the primary external rival to the Sinaloa Cartel by 2016 appeared to be the New Generation Cartel of Jalisco (CJNG). An up and coming criminal organization with a complex history, the CJNG is based in the state of Jalisco, with reported presence in Baja California, Colima, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Nayarit, Guerrero, Morelos, Veracruz and the Federal District. The group is allegedly led by Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, "El Mencho," who reportedly once served as a police officer in Cabo Corrientes and Tomatlán, two small coastal municipalities in western Jalisco, and also served three years in jail in the United States on heroin trafficking charges. After his release from U.S. incarceration, Oseguera continued to work closely with the Milenio Cartel's purported leader, Armando Valencia Cornelio. After Valencia's arrest in 2003, the Milenio Cartel was taken over by new leadership which then reportedly formed an alliance with the Sinaloa Cartel (in opposition to the Zetas).<sup>60</sup>

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—and 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 in September 2012 and subsequent blows to the La Familia organization and its successor, the Knights Templar Organization, paved the way for CJNG's ascendance. The CJNG may have also benefited from a certain degree of tolerance on the part of the Mexican government, which was much more focused on taking down the LFM and KTO.

That said, 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 "El

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<sup>58</sup> The tensions in Badiraguato also reportedly led Guzmán's mother to abandon her residence in La Tuna, another indication that the drug lord was no longer able to protect his family members. Benito Jiménez y Abel Barajas, "Disputan carteles control de Sinaloa," *El Norte*, June 18, 2016; Edgar Sánchez, "Despertaron a todos; que nos iban a matar," *Reforma*, June 18, 2016. <https://www.pressreader.com/mexico/periódico-am-león/20160618/282183650340461>

<sup>59</sup> Jason McGahan, "Mexican drug lord's insider notes may set him free after 10 years," *The Guardian*, April 11, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/11/mexican-drug-lord-10-years-sinaloa-cartel>

<sup>60</sup> Christopher Woody, "2 of Mexico's Most Powerful Cartels are Clashing Just Across the US Border," *Business Insider*, February 28, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/cjng-and-sinaloa-cartel-violence-in-tijuana-2016-2>



Cuini” González arrested in February and alleged to have been the group’s head of finances. Nonetheless, a federal district court judge ordered El Menchito to be released from prison in January 2015 due to insufficient evidence. Nemesio Oseguera 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 in Mexico.

The CJNG has reportedly attempted to forge a complex web of alliances with a new cohort of young traffickers. For example, in 2016, CJNG allegedly partnered with Jesus Alfredo "El Mochomito" Beltrán Guzmán to conduct the kidnapping of Joaquín Guzmán’s 29 year old son, Jesus Alfredo Guzmán Salazar, and five other men from the “La Leche” restaurant in Puerto Vallarta about an hour after midnight on August 15, 2016.<sup>61</sup> CJNG allegedly also developed ties to remnants of the Arellano Felix organization in an effort to assert itself against the Sinaloa Cartel in Baja California.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, the CJNG has reportedly aligned itself to a group known as *Cártel de Los Cuinis* to make inroads in the state of Chihuahua.<sup>63</sup> CJNG is also apparently combatting elements of the Sinaloa cartel in Colima.

It seems plausible that the CJNG’s clashes with the Sinaloa Cartel actually are more targeted attempts to gain control over Guzmán’s former territories (perhaps even with the blessing of elements of the Sinaloa Cartel). The coming year will likely bring important new developments as the CJNG continues to assert itself. However, what is clear is that the landscape of Mexican drug trafficking is rapidly changing and this has had enormous implications for the overall toll of violence over the last year or so.

## E. New Criminal Justice System Comes Into Effect

The increase in homicides in Mexico in 2016 for the second straight year is particularly intriguing given its overlap with the final phase of implementation and the official launch of the New Criminal

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<sup>61</sup> Others reportedly kidnapped with Jesus Alfredo Guzmán were three men identified as Juan Daniel Calva Tapia, Josias Nahujali Rabago Borbolla, and Víctor Galvan Ureña. Emanuella Grinberg and Rafael Romo, “Official: Son of 'El Chapo' Has Been Kidnapped,” *CNN*, August 17, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/16/americas/el-chapo-son-kidnapped-official-says/>; “Con secuestro de hijo de 'El Chapo', el CJNG busca ganar territorio: Especialista,” *Excelsior*, August 19, 2016, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2016/08/19/1112077>

<sup>62</sup> For example, the CJNG reportedly forged ties to Jesus Alfredo "El Mochomito" Beltrán Guzmán, son of Alfredo Beltrán Leyva, whose arrest in 2008 is believed to have sparked the bloody feud between the Sinaloa, Juárez, and Beltrán Leyva organized crime groups. Jesus Alfredo (reportedly related to Joaquín Guzmán and his sons), supposedly masterminded the La Leche kidnapping in 2016. Meanwhile, in Ciudad Juárez, the CJNG has reportedly aligned itself to a local group known as the *Cártel de Los Cuinis*. “El Mochomito”, sobrino de “El Chapo”, y el CJNG, estarían detrás del robo de gasolina en Puebla,” *Vanguardia.mx*, January 30, 2017. <http://www.vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/el-mochomito-sobrino-de-el-chapo-y-el-cjng-estarian-detras-del-robo-de-gasolina-en-puebla>. See also: J. Jesús Esquivel, “El *Cártel de Jalisco* se cierne sobre Ciudad Juárez,” *Proceso*, <http://www.proceso.com.mx/474104/cartel-jalisco-se-cierne-ciudad-juarez>; Sandra Dibble, “New Group Fuels Tijuana's Increased Drug Violence,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, February 13, 2016, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/sdut-nueva-generacion-cartel-moves-tijuana-2016feb13-story.html>

<sup>63</sup> Gerardo Gonzalez Valencia, currently in prison in Uruguay, reportedly heads the *Los Cuinis* organization, whose links to the CJNG stretch back to the Milenio Cartel. See: “Cartel de “*Los Cuinis*” usa al periódico *Unomasuno* para sus actividades de narcotráfico: EU,” *La Jornada de Oriente*, December 16, 2015, <http://www.lajornadadeoriente.com.mx/2015/12/16/cartel-de-los-cuinis-usa-al-periodico-unomasuno-para-sus-actividades-de-narcotrafico-eu/>; “Los Cuinis, el cartel mexicano más rico del mundo... y el más desconocido,” *Univisión*, May 4, 2015, <http://www.univision.com/noticias/noticias-de-mexico/los-cuinis-el-cartel-mexicano-mas-rico-del-mundo-y-el-mas-desconocido>

Justice System (Sistema Nueva de Justicia Penal, NSJP). The 2008 constitutional deadline for all 32 Mexican states to implement and operate the NSJP passed on June 18, 2016. The NSJP's purpose is not explicitly to decrease crime and violence; however, it is intended to strengthen the judiciary and rule of law in Mexico, which would be expected to have a positive influence on the overall security.

In effect, the NSJP shifts Mexico's criminal procedure from the traditional 'mixed inquisitorial' model of criminal procedure to an 'adversarial' model, offering three principal advantages that improve Mexico's judiciary. First, the NSJP introduces **greater transparency**, which is largely thanks to the inclusion of oral trials, or public court proceedings, into hearings. Second, the new system is far more efficient than the traditional model. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) methods and plea-bargains have helped relieve the courts' once overloaded dockets that clogged up the court system. Lastly, the NSJP focuses heavily on respecting **due process**, which lends greater fairness to the administration of justice.<sup>64</sup> The closing of the eight-year phase for NSJP implementation was a significant milestone for Mexico.

Justice in Mexico did an in depth look at Mexico's justice system given the new model. Its latest report, "*Justiciabarómetro* (JABO) 2016: Survey of Judges, Prosecutors, and Public Defenders," provided a unique comparative analysis of the demographics and perspectives of the operators of the judicial system in Mexico comparing survey data from 2010 and 2016.<sup>65</sup> The findings of the most recent JABO survey of more than 700 Mexican judges, prosecutors, and public defenders in 11 states provides insight into the current state of the justice system, as well as the operators' opinions, praise, and critiques.

On the bright side, the majority of the 2016 *Justiciabarómetro* respondents (89%) acknowledged that the justice system needed to be reformed, and that the NSJP has had positive effects since it began in 2008. Moreover, 90% think the NSJP promotes greater trust in authorities, and 93% more argue it will accelerate judicial proceedings. Features of the NSJP were also overwhelmingly well received, with roughly 95% of respondents preferring oral proceedings over the traditional system, a significant increase from 2010 survey results. Additionally, 98% prefer the use of alternative dispute resolution methods to resolve disputes. A majority of respondents also believe the NSJP has increased respect for the right to presumption of innocence (84% of judges, 76% of prosecutors, and 91% of public defenders) and has helped to reduce corruption (80% of all operators). On the other hand, respondents' results showed that there is room for improvement to strengthen the judicial system. For example, between 13% and 29% reported having never been trained in oral litigation or alternative methods to resolve cases. A concerning 48% of prosecutors, 29% of public defenders, and 13% of judges also expressed their view that authorities can operate above the law in order to investigate and punish criminals. The study also highlighted the frequently unreliable use of eyewitness testimony in court, despite the fact that it continues to be the most frequently used form of evidence (68% of the time), followed by physical evidence (53%), and confessions (13%).

In the long run, proponents believe that these beliefs and practices that continue to undermine rule of law (e.g., operating outside the margin of the law) will change. The new system will help to protect against serious problems that are presently pervasive in Mexico, including arbitrary arrest, prolonged pretrial detention, forced confessions, falsification of evidence, wrongful conviction,

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<sup>64</sup> Cortés, Nancy et al. "Policy Brief: The State of Judicial Sector Reform in Mexico." *Justice in Mexico*. July 25, 2016. <https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/State-of-Judicial-Reform-Policy-Brief.pdf>

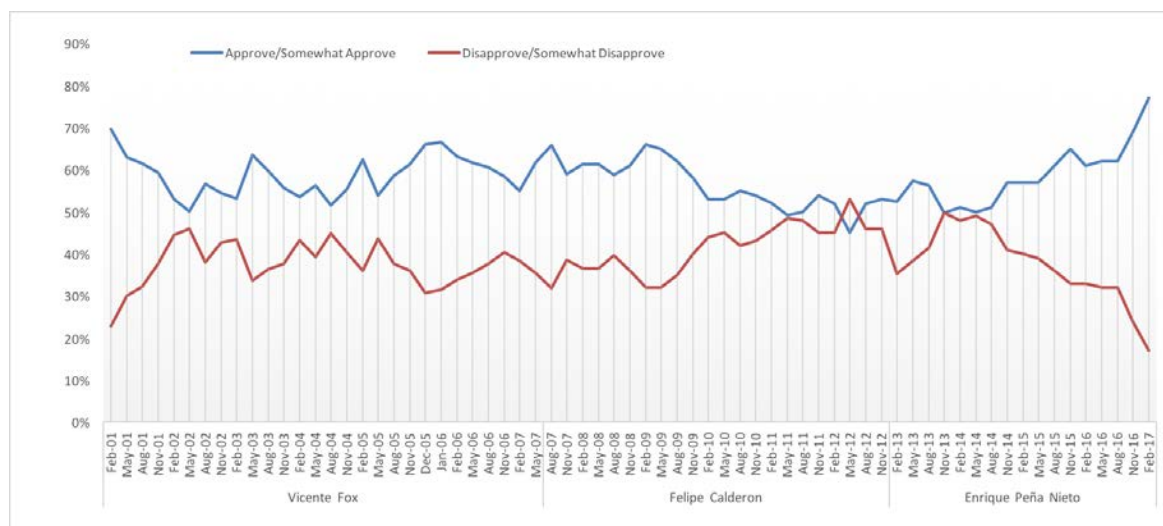
<sup>65</sup> Cortés, Nancy et al. "Justiciabarómetro 2016: Perspectivas del sistema de justicia penal en México: ¿Qué piensan sus operadores?" *Justice in Mexico*. November 9, 2016. <https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Justiciabarometro-2016.pdf>

systemic corruption, and even torture and other human rights abuses by police, prosecutors, and prison officials. Of course, no reform is a cure-all, and substantial further efforts will be needed to achieve these potential benefits. Moreover, in the long run, the transition to Mexico's New Criminal Justice System will undoubtedly bring unexpected challenges and failures. Mexico is one step closer to reaching a more just society, but its path will no doubt remain long, steep, and sometimes rocky.

## F. Continued Criticisms of the Peña Nieto Administration

In 2016, as many of the above noted developments have continued to unfold, President Peña Nieto saw historic lows in public assessments of his efforts to improve the country's security situation.<sup>66</sup> 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 two-year reversal in the public security situation. Yet, as noted in Figure 21 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 four 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 back and forth handling of drug kingpin Joaquín Guzmán.

**Figure 20: Public Approval and Disapproval Ratings for Presidents Vicente Fox, Felipe Calderón, and Enrique Peña Nieto, 2000-2016**



Source: Consulta Mitofsky.

A major part of President Peña Nieto's public opinion problem in 2016 had to do with public perceptions of corruption. Despite important steps forward in the creation of a new National Anticorruption System and reform to the Attorney General's Office, ongoing corruption scandals continued to undermine the presidency. We discuss these further in some detail below.

<sup>66</sup> Ackerman, John C. "In English or Spanish the answer is 'no': Why there's zero chance Mexico will pay for Donald Trump's beloved border wall." *New York Daily News*. January 28, 2017. <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/zero-chance-mexico-pay-trump-beloved-wall-article-1.2957726>

## G. Mexico's Efforts to Combat Corruption

Corruption has long been a serious challenge that undermines Mexico's rule of law, and 2016 was no exception. According to *Transparency International's* annual report, "[Corruption Perceptions Index 2016](#)," Mexico ranked 123 of 176 countries worldwide for levels of corruption, tied with Azerbaijan, Djibouti, Honduras, Laos, Moldova, Paraguay, and Sierra Leon. The rankings were based on a scale of 0 ('highly corrupt') to 100 ('very clean'), on which Mexico scored a 30, down five points from *Transparency International's* 2015 score.<sup>67</sup> Thus, Mexico's 2016 rating was a significant decline from its ranking of 95 of 168 countries in 2015.<sup>68</sup> Mexico also ranked 27<sup>th</sup> of 32 countries in the Americas, ahead of only Guatemala, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Venezuela, and tied with Honduras and Paraguay.

Several incidences of corruption have plagued the president during his first four years in office. For one, President Peña Nieto has been criticized for not holding accountable government officials allegedly tied up in acts of corruption. Perhaps the most notorious such case is of former Coahuila State Governor (2005-2011) and PRI President (2011) Humberto Moreira Valdés, who was arrested in January 2016 in Spain where he lived at the time. Moreira faced charges of ties with criminal organization, money laundering, bribery, and embezzlement of public funds. Specifically, he had allegedly received over US\$215,000 from Mexican companies in 2013, ballooned the Coahuila state debt to \$36 billion pesos (US\$1.95 billion) while serving as governor, and had an irregular transfer of a large sum of money while living in Spain that caught the Spanish government's attention.<sup>69</sup> Although his arrest was first viewed favorably, the situation changed quickly when Spanish authorities released Moreira after one week citing a lack of evidence.

To further muddy matters, Moreira then sued Mexican journalist Sergio Aguayo six months later in July 2016 for alleged moral damage to his reputation from an opinion piece Aguayo published while Moreira was imprisoned. In a more recent article released in *Reforma* in February 2017, Aguayo then criticized the Peña Nieto administration and the judge presiding over their case for providing protection to Moreira and for having "placed at his disposal the entire diplomatic and legal machinery of its embassy in Spain in order to [...] establish his legal situation, [...] support his family, and get him out of jail," writes *El País*.<sup>70</sup> That case is still ongoing.

A second incident that has undermined President Peña Nieto was the investigation and story that broke in 2014 tying his personal and professional affairs through lucrative contracts. In November 2014, the online news outlet *Aristegui Noticias* reported that the home into which President Peña Nieto and his family plan to move after his term ends in December 2018 is registered to a corporation that was part of a consortium led by China Railway Construction Corporation that had won a bid to build a high-speed railway from Mexico City to Querétaro. The company, Constructora Teya, is a subsidiary of Toluca-based Grupo Higa, with which Peña Nieto has maintained close ties since he served as governor of the State of México. The high-speed rail contract, valued at more than \$50 billion pesos (nearly US\$3.6 billion) has been revoked.<sup>71</sup> However, Peña Nieto's reputation

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<sup>67</sup> "Corruption Perceptions Index 2016." *Transparency International*. January 25, 2017.

[http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2016#regional](http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016#regional)

<sup>68</sup> "Corruption Perceptions Index 2016." *Transparency International*. January 25, 2017.

[http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2016#regional](http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016#regional)

<sup>69</sup> Aguayo, Sergio. "Hay que esperar." *Reforma*. January 20, 2016.

<http://www.reforma.com/aplicaciones/editoriales/editorial.aspx?id=80298>

<sup>70</sup> Aguayo, Sergio. "Ruleta judicial." *Reforma*. February 15, 2017.

<http://www.reforma.com/aplicaciones/editoriales/editorial.aspx?id=107155>

<sup>71</sup> Redacción. "La casa blanca de Enrique Peña Nieto (investigación especial)." *Aristegui Noticias*. November 9, 2014.

was nevertheless tarnished due to the fact that a residence valued at US\$7 million, belonging to a company that benefitted from contracts awarded under Peña Nieto-led governments, was being acquired by the presidential family.<sup>72</sup> Between Moreira, Peña Nieto's questionable personal contracts, and a number of other incidences (e.g., Ayotzinapa, corrupt prison systems, etc.), corruption has continued to pose a serious challenge to the presidency.

In light of these issues, the Peña Nieto administration was compelled to take significant steps in 2016 to combat corruption. In July 2016, Congress passed "Ley 3 de 3" ("Law 3 out of 3"), a package of legislation that serves as secondary laws rounding out Mexico's National Anticorruption System (*Sistema Nacional Anticorrupción, SNA*). Ley 3 de 3 requires recipients of government funding to publicly or privately disclose their assets. With the approval of the supporting legislation, Mexico officially approved the SNA on July 18, 2016, just over a year after Peña Nieto signed it into law as an overarching means to address corruption, transparency, and accountability in Mexico.<sup>73</sup> As summarized by Viridiana Rios, a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, with the SNA's full passage, Mexico now has "a system composed of (1) independent and effective authorities coordinated around a common mission to prevent and combat corruption; (2) a new comprehensive and integrated system of administrative responsibilities; (3) a new criminal regime to fight corruption; and (4) a new control and oversight system to coordinate state and local authorities."<sup>74</sup>

It is important to note that President Peña Nieto initially vetoed Ley 3 de 3, largely because it originally required all assets to be disclosed publicly, not privately as the remanded bill allows.<sup>75</sup> The bill also grabbed headlines because the law originated at the grassroots level, something that, several years prior, would not have been allowed. A law passed in 2014 now allows community members who collect more than 120,000 validated signatures to propose legislation. With more than 630,000 signatures on the Ley 3 de 3 petition, it was presented to the Peña Nieto administration in spring 2016 by Denise Dresser, a political analyst and well-known figure in Mexico, who launched the online petition.<sup>76</sup> Despite the bill's setbacks, the Ley 3 de 3's and SNA's eventual approvals were, however, historic. As Viridiana Rios writes, "The reform is, by far, the most encompassing system to identify and sanction corruption that the country has ever had and its effects will be felt quite soon."<sup>77</sup>

The Peña Nieto administration has also sought to combat corruption by reforming the federal Attorney General's Office (*Procuraduría General de la República, PGR*). The Attorney General will now serve a

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<http://aristeginoticias.com/0911/mexico/la-casa-blanca-de-enrique-pena-nieto/>

<sup>72</sup> "News report draws scrutiny to planned home of Enrique Peña Nieto and family." *Justice in Mexico*. November 12, 2014. <https://justiceinmexico.org/news-report-draws-scrutiny-to-planned-home-of-enrique-pena-nieto-and-family/>

<sup>73</sup> Diario Oficial de la Federación. "Ley General del Sistema Nacional Anticorrupción." *Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión; Secretaría General; y Secretaría de Servicio Parlamentarios*. July 18, 2016.

<http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LGSNA.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> Rios, Viridiana. "Mexico Wins: Anti-Corruption Reform Approved." *Forbes*. July 18, 2016.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/themexicoinstitute/2016/07/18/mexico-wins-anti-corruption-reform-approved/2/#2ca49cfe7e30>

<sup>75</sup> "Mexican president vetoes package of anti-corruption bills." *Reuters*. June 23, 2016.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-corruption-idUSKCN0ZA05E>

<sup>76</sup> Semple, Kirk. "Grass-Roots Anticorruption Drive Puts Heat on Mexican Lawmakers." *New York Times*. May 28, 2016.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/world/americas/grass-roots-anticorruption-drive-puts-heat-on-mexican-lawmakers.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/world/americas/grass-roots-anticorruption-drive-puts-heat-on-mexican-lawmakers.html?_r=0)

<sup>77</sup> Rios, Viridiana. "Mexico Wins: Anti-Corruption Reform Approved." *Forbes*. July 18, 2016.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/themexicoinstitute/2016/07/18/mexico-wins-anti-corruption-reform-approved/2/#2ca49cfe7e30>



nine-year appointment instead of a six-year appointment, meaning the appointee will transcend multiple presidential terms. As *Mexico Voices* explains, “A constitutional amendment passed in 2013 replaces the Attorney General’s Office with a Prosecutor General’s Office, whose head will have a term of nine years, crossing more than one six-year presidential term, ostensibly to make the prosecutor independent of presidential influence.”<sup>78</sup> By spanning multiple presidencies, the Attorney General’s position will be blocked, in theory, from being impartial to a president and political party.

The first appointee to this new position, Dr. Raúl Cervantes Andrade (53), was named head of the PGR in October 2016. Cervantes is a member of the PRI, and served as a PRI Senator and legal counsel in years prior to being appointed. He becomes the third head of the Attorney General’s Office under Peña Nieto in four years, replacing outgoing *Mtra. Arely Gómez González* (March 2015 – October 2016), as she transitioned to her new role as Secretary of Public Function (Secretaría de la Función Pública, SFP).<sup>79</sup> Despite the Peña Nieto administration’s steps toward combating corruption with the PGR’s reshuffling, Cervantes’ appointment has nevertheless raised concern. He is the first cousin of Peña Nieto’s personal lawyer, a senior confidant, and a longtime PRI loyalist, writes *The Wall Street Journal*. Critics have questioned whether Cervantes, a personal friend of Peña Nieto, will thus dare to challenge the president on issues that other Attorney General’s may once have done.<sup>80</sup>

## H. U.S.-MEXICO SECURITY COOPERATION

Finally, one of the most notable events in 2016 was the election of Republican candidate Donald Trump as president of the United States. Trump’s election had particular significance for Mexico because of the degree to which Mr. Trump made Mexico a centerpiece of his campaign rhetoric, which many described as “populist,” “xenophobic,” and even “racist.” Over the course of 2015 and 2016, Trump alternated between bashing NAFTA (which he described as the worst deal ever made), excoriating Mexican immigrants, and decrying the “bad hambres” (*sic*) involved in the Mexican drug trade. Many Mexicans were particularly insulted by his assertion about immigrants: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re sending people that have lots of problems. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists...”<sup>81</sup> Another controversial statement, often repeated by Trump throughout his campaign and since assuming the presidency, focused on his proposed solution to the immigration problem: “I will build a great wall — and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me — and I’ll build them very inexpensively. I will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words.”<sup>82</sup>

Such statements have led many in Mexico to criticize President Peña Nieto’s decision to meet with

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<sup>78</sup> Coe, Amanda. “Mexico Government: Raúl Cervantes, Loyal Party Member, Now Attorney General.” *Mexico Voices*. October 25, 2016. <http://mexicovoices.blogspot.mx/2016/10/mexico-government-raul-cervantes-loyal.html>

<sup>79</sup> “Perfil. Arely Gómez González.” *El Universal*. October 25, 2016. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/politica/2016/10/25/perfil-arely-gomez-gonzalez> and Secretaría de la Función Pública. “Mtra. Arely Gómez González.” *Gobierno de México*. October 27, 2016. <https://www.gob.mx/sfp/estructuras/mtra-arely-gomez-gonzalez>

<sup>80</sup> Montes, Juan and Dudley Althaus. “Ally of Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto Is Set to Get Anticorruption Post.” *The Wall Street Journal*. November 1, 2016. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/ally-of-mexican-president-enrique-pena-nietos-set-to-get-anticorruption-post-1478039647>

<sup>81</sup> Tal Kopan, “What Donald Trump has said about Mexico and vice versa,” *CNN*, August 31, 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/31/politics/donald-trump-mexico-statements/>

<sup>82</sup> Dan Gundersman, “President-Elect Donald Trump’s ‘Big, Beautiful Wall’ May End Up Just Being A Modest, Double-Layered Fence,” *New York Daily News*, November 10, 2016, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/donald-trump-big-beautiful-wall-fence-article-1.2867648>



candidate Trump in August 2016, which some claimed gave Trump's campaign a boost while seriously reducing support for Peña Nieto in public opinion polls.<sup>83</sup> This, in turn, has made President Peña Nieto reluctant to more fully engage his U.S. counterpart. While a meeting between the Mexican and U.S. presidents has traditionally been at the top of the agenda for a new administration in either country, at the time of this report (three months into Trump's term) the two presidents had not yet met since Trump took office. This has been attributed to an unusual display of internet-based diplomacy, as a series of statements by Trump about his proposed wall on the Twitter (a social media platform) led President Peña Nieto to "tweet" back his decision to cancel a planned visit to Washington, D.C.<sup>84</sup> Later, in a twenty minute phone conversation between Peña Nieto and Trump, press accounts alleged that the U.S. president "humiliated" his Mexican counterpart, saying "I don't need Mexicans, I don't need Mexico... we're going to build the wall and you are going to pay for it, like it or not."<sup>85</sup> In an excerpted transcript of that call, Trump reportedly even appeared to intimate that Mexico needed to take more aggressive action to combat the drug trafficking problem or the United States would unilaterally deploy its troops to Mexico to go after the "bad hombres down there."<sup>86</sup>

Such tensions have led to serious questions about the future of the U.S.-Mexico security relationship. Since 2009, the centerpiece of binational security cooperation has been the Mérida Initiative, a multi-year agreement that has channeled over \$2.6 billion in U.S. assistance to efforts to help address Mexico's security challenges and help strengthen the rule of law.<sup>87</sup> In 2016 and 2017, the U.S. government appropriated over \$130 million annually to support the Mérida Initiative. Prominent former officials have encouraged the Trump administration to continue to collaborate with Mexico, noting the important role that Mexican suppliers have played in the unprecedented U.S. heroin epidemic.<sup>88</sup> All told, an estimated 591,000 people over the age of 12 in the United States had a substance abuse disorder involving heroin in 2015, during which heroin overdoses accounted for 12,990 out of more than 52,000 lethal drug overdoses.<sup>89</sup> This represents a dramatic and rapid increase in heroin deaths that has been attributed to both the excessive prescription opioid pain relievers (which leads to increased addiction and demand for heroin) and to the rise of Mexican heroin trafficking organizations.<sup>90</sup> A February 2017 report from the

<sup>83</sup> Reuters, "Mexican President Peña Nieto's Suffering in Polls Traced to Trump Visit," *Newsweek*, November 20, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/mexico-pena-nieto-suffering-polls-trump-visit-523137>

<sup>84</sup> Azam Ahmed, "Mexico's President Cancels Meeting With Trump Over Wall," *The New York Times*, January 26, 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/26/world/mexico-president-cancels-meeting-with-trump-over-wall.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/26/world/mexico-president-cancels-meeting-with-trump-over-wall.html?_r=0)

<sup>85</sup> Both Trump and Peña Nieto administration officials denied these reports by *Forbes'* acclaimed journalist Dolia Estevez. "Trump humilló a Peña y lo amagó con enviar sus tropas a México, revela Dolia Estévez," *Proceso*, February 1, 2017, <http://www.proceso.com.mx/472688/trump-humillo-a-pena-lo-amago-enviar-sus-tropas-a-mexico-revela-dolia-estevez>

<sup>86</sup> The Mexican government denied claims that Trump threatened to send troops. Associated Press, "Trump reportedly threatens to send U.S. military to Mexico in call with Mexican president," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-pol-trump-mexico-call-20170201-story.html>

<sup>87</sup> In full disclosure, as part of the Mérida Initiative, Justice in Mexico program is the recipient of a grant from the U.S. State Department to provide a training and educational exchange program for faculty members and students from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). More information about this program can be obtained at: [www.justiceinmexico.org/oasis](http://www.justiceinmexico.org/oasis).

<sup>88</sup> Antonio Garza and Stephanie Leutert, "Slowing Mexico's Violence Requires International Cooperation," *Houston Chronicle*, January 1, 2017.

<sup>89</sup> More than 20,000 of all overdoses were attributed to prescription pain relievers. American Society of Addiction Medicine, *Opioid Addiction: 2016 Facts and Figures*, ASAM Factsheet, <http://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/opioid-addiction-disease-facts-figures.pdf>

<sup>90</sup> Sam Quinones, *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*, London: Bloomsbury Press, 2015. For discussion of the specific linkages to the fracturing of Mexican drug trafficking organizations, see Nancy Cortes, "The Drug War and the Resurgence of Mexico's Heroin Trade," Justice in Mexico Working Paper Series, Volume 14, Number 2, May 2015. [https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/151206\\_CORTES\\_NANCY\\_DrugeWarMexicosHeroinTrade\\_FINAL.pdf](https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/151206_CORTES_NANCY_DrugeWarMexicosHeroinTrade_FINAL.pdf)

Center for Disease Control states that the death rate from drug overdoses rose from 6.1 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1999 to 16.3 per 100,000 in 2015, with the share of deaths from heroin tripling from 8% in 2010 to 25% in 2013.<sup>91</sup>

## 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 2016, 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. **Better Monitoring of Organized Crime-Related Violence:** There are several organizations that are working actively to try to trace and analyze the problem of organized crime, often with little or no coordination across efforts. As a result, there is a high degree of duplication of effort and there are lost opportunities for sharing of information. Financial assistance from the U.S. and Mexican governments, as well as private foundations and non-profit organizations, could help to support these efforts and bolster greater coordination to allow for more robust monitoring and analysis of violence in Mexico, particularly that which is associated with organized crime.
2. **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

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<sup>91</sup> Holly Hedegaard, Margaret Warner, and Arialdi M. Miniño, "Drug Overdose Deaths in the United States, 1999–2015," NCHS Data Brief, No. 273, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 2017, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db273.pdf>

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.

3. **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 more prominent role in addressing human rights abuses, possibly by giving the CNDH a role either in the initiation of formal proceedings or the ultimate prosecution of abusers. Also, in order to demonstrate its disposition to resolve these problems and gain greater international legitimacy, the Mexican government make a more concerted effort work cooperatively with intergovernmental agencies and outside experts to help address its domestic human rights abuses.
4. **Renewed Security Cooperation Efforts:** The Trump administration has less than two more years to work with his Mexican counterpart, Enrique Peña Nieto, and one way to smooth over tensions on trade is to make a firm commitment to work together to embrace the United States' shared responsibility to combat Mexico's problems of crime and violence. In order to be successful, the Trump administration will need to resist its self-professed preference to rely primarily on heavy handed security measures—like a renewed focus on targeting Mexico's kingpins or "bad hombres"—as this will likely have highly unpredictable but negative consequences. Rule of law building measures, including continued efforts to promote police and judicial sector reform, are key to the long term improvement of Mexico's security situation.
5. **Broadening the Debate on Drug Legalization:** The legalization of drugs has begun to have unintended consequences in Mexico, in that drug trafficking organizations are diversifying their activities and attempting to cover their losses by ramping up exports of heroin, cocaine, and other "hard" drugs. This is, in some ways, a worse scenario than full criminalization of all psychotropic substances, as it has contributed significantly to the drug overdose epidemic in the United States. What may help to eliminate illicit drug trafficking altogether and facilitate a more effective public health approach to abuse and addiction to legalize all such drugs. However, to consider the costs and benefits, policy makers in the United States need to begin evaluating the implications of the possible future legalization of drugs for which there is presently virtually no public support.

As we have noted repeatedly over the years, the fight against organized crime in Mexico is very likely far from over. Recent reports suggest that, in the aftermath of a historic peace accord signed in 2016, Colombian cocaine output has begun to ramp up after years of diminished production.<sup>92</sup> Meanwhile, the ongoing heroin epidemic will keep counter-drug efforts at the top of the U.S.-Mexico security agenda. Also, due to growing losses in profits from the U.S. marijuana market, major drug trafficking organizations will likely continue to expand production and distribution of cocaine, methamphetamine, and other banned substances. At the same time, regional organized crime groups with limited drug trafficking capabilities will continue to diversify into predatory criminal activities, such as kidnapping, extortion, and grand theft. Sustained efforts to evaluate the problem of organized crime and, above all, a sincere commitment on the part of the U.S. and Mexican government will be essential to reduce its impact.

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<sup>92</sup> Nicholas Casey, "Colombia's Congress Approves Peace Accord With FARC," *The New York Times*, November 30, 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/30/world/americas/colombia-farc-accord-juan-manuel-santos.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/30/world/americas/colombia-farc-accord-juan-manuel-santos.html?_r=0)

## 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 are 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.<sup>93</sup> 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.”<sup>94</sup> 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.<sup>95</sup> 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”).

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<sup>93</sup> 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.

<sup>94</sup> 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?

<sup>95</sup> 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*).<sup>96</sup> 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 as cases of gunshot wounds, stabbings, lacerations, asphyxiation, etc. While all datasets have

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<sup>96</sup> 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>



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.<sup>97</sup> 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 been abducted, was killed in a particular fashion, or was under investigation for organized crime

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<sup>97</sup> 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.



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).<sup>98</sup>

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).<sup>99</sup> 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.<sup>100</sup> 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.<sup>101</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> 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.

<sup>99</sup> 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.

<sup>100</sup> 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).

<sup>101</sup> 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 *Exélsior* in Leo Zuckermann's column "Juegos de Poder."

<sup>102</sup> 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 identified more than 10,000 cases of homicide in the state of Guerrero that have been coded for various characteristics,

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 20,000 victims, and where ever possible provides specific individual characteristics (e.g., name, gender, age, narco-messages, etc.).<sup>103</sup> 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.<sup>104</sup>

### 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 2016, including monthly figures for all of 2016.<sup>105</sup> 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.

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

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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.

<sup>103</sup> 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.

<sup>104</sup> 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.

<sup>105</sup> SNSP data at the municipal level are available from 2011 to 2013.

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.<sup>106</sup> In addition, there is also a large number of missing persons whose fate remains a mystery.<sup>107</sup> 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.<sup>108</sup> 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.

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<sup>106</sup> 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>

<sup>107</sup> 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](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/](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>

<sup>108</sup> 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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