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## The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana

By Jaime Arredondo Sánchez Lira, Zulia Orozco, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira,  
and David A. Shirk

### INTRODUCTION

This policy brief provides an assessment of the recent resurgence of violent crime in the Mexican border city of Tijuana in the state of Baja California. With an estimated 1.8 million inhabitants in 2017, Tijuana is the largest Mexican city on the U.S.-Mexico border. The city is home to roughly 49% of Baja California's population, while comprising only around 2% of the state's territory. Today one of Mexico's fastest growing cities, Tijuana reportedly grows at an annual rate of 35,000 people per year, or nearly 96 new inhabitants per day, drawing large numbers of immigrants from elsewhere in Mexico to join the city's robust economy.<sup>1</sup>

A longtime destination for cross-border tourism, Tijuana has long prided itself as the "world's most visited city." Today, nearly 190,000 people cross the border between Tijuana and neighboring San Diego on a daily basis for work, commerce, schooling, fine dining, family gatherings, and other recreational pursuits. Moreover, an estimated 200,000 U.S. citizens reside in the state of Baja California (roughly one in five of all U.S. citizens estimated to reside in Mexico), with many of them living in Tijuana.

The city's thriving manufacturing sector makes Tijuana a vital part of the vibrant cross-border economic area known as the "Cali-Baja" region, particularly in areas such as electronics and medical devices; one study estimates that this region is responsible for roughly 40% of all audio-visual manufacturing in North America.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Dibble, "What drives Tijuana's next mayor?," San Diego Union Tribune, July 14, 2013, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/sdut-what-drives-tijuanas-next-mayor-2013jul14-story.html>

<sup>2</sup> Alejandro Brugues, Michael Combs, Marney Cox, Alejandro Díaz Bautista, Daniel Flyte, Noe Aron Fuentes, Christina Luhn, Cheryl Mason, David A. Shirk, and Tim Wright, *Jobs Without Borders: Employment, Industry Concentrations, and Comparative Advantage in the CaliBaja Region*, (La Jolla and Tijuana: CaliBaja Mega-Region Initiative; Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UC San Diego; Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2014).

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Yet, dating back to the Prohibition-era of the 1920s, Tijuana also has long suffered a reputation as a city of vice.<sup>3</sup> Over the last decade, that reputation has been further damaged by dramatic surges of violent crime, often attributable to drug-trafficking and organized crime groups. The city also has high levels of drug use that are shaped by its proximity to the United States.<sup>4</sup> While methamphetamine is the main illicit drug used in the State of Baja California, the city has a higher concentration of heroin drug users compared to the national average, resulting in a concentrated epidemic of HIV and Hepatitis C virus among this high-risk population.<sup>5</sup>

In 2017, Tijuana had more homicides than any other city in Mexico, in a record year for national homicide figures.<sup>6</sup> According to information from the Baja California Ministry of Public Safety, from 2016 to 2017 Tijuana saw the number of investigations on homicide cases rise from 872 to 1,618, an increase of roughly 86% in just one year.<sup>7</sup> Preliminary figures from the Baja California State Secretary of Public Security put the total number of homicides in these cases at 1,780 homicide victims in Tijuana.<sup>8</sup> Preliminary data from Mexico's National Public Security system puts the total number of victims of homicide in the country at 29,168, a number that could increase to over 30,000 when final tallies are completed in the coming months.<sup>9</sup> Based on these figures, the authors calculate that in 2017 one out of twenty murders in Mexico took place in Tijuana.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Vanderwood, *Satan's Playground: Mobsters and Movie Stars at America's Greatest Gaming Resort*, Duke University Press, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Bucardo, J., Brouwer, K.C., Magis-Rodríguez, C., Ramos, R., Fraga, M., Perez, S.G., Patterson, T.L. and Strathdee, S.A., 2005. *Historical trends in the production and consumption of illicit drugs in Mexico: implications for the prevention of blood borne infections*. Drug and alcohol dependence, 79(3), pp.281-293.

<sup>5</sup> Instituto Nacional de Psiquiatría Ramón de la Fuente Muñiz; Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública, Comisión Nacional Contra las Adicciones, Secretaría de Salud. *Encuesta Nacional de Consumo de Drogas, Alcohol y Tabaco 2016-2017: Reporte de Drogas*. Villatoro-Velázquez, JA. et al. Ciudad de México, México: INPRFM; 2017.; Robertson, A.M., Garfein, R.S., Wagner, K.D., Mehta, S.R., Magis-Rodriguez, C., Cuevas-Mota, J., Moreno-Zuniga, P.G. and Strathdee, S.A., 2014. *Evaluating the impact of Mexico's drug policy reforms on people who inject drugs in Tijuana, BC, Mexico, and San Diego, CA, United States: a binational mixed methods research agenda*. Harm reduction journal, 11(1), p.4.

<sup>6</sup> As a methodological note, throughout this paper the authors refer primarily to SNSP figures for national and cross-state comparisons, while referring to figures reported by the Baja California State Secretary of Public Security for crimes committed within Tijuana and the state of Baja California. Because SNSP has not yet reported data on the number of crime victims at the municipal or neighborhood level, national figures refer only to homicide investigations.

<sup>7</sup> The figures mentioned here refer only to homicide cases, not victims. Unfortunately, SNSP does not report publicly the number of individual victims of homicide at the municipal level, and refers only to the number of homicide investigations. Also, for the last three years, SNSP has started reporting numbers on homicide investigation cases using a new methodology. Using this new methodology, SNSP reported a total of 1,615 homicide investigations in Tijuana for 2017. However, the authors estimate that Tijuana accounted for around 77% of the total 2,311 victims of homicide SNSP recorded for Baja California in 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Heriberto Reyes. "Cerró 2017 con más de 2 mil 100 homicidios en Baja California". Síntesis TV. February 1, 2018. <https://sintesistv.com.mx/cerro-2017-mas-2-mil-100-homicidios-baja-california/>

<sup>9</sup> "Drug violence blamed for Mexico's record 29,168 murders in 2017," *The Guardian*, January 21, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/21/drug-violence-blamed-mexico-record-murders-2017>

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To shed light on this development, this policy brief provides a comprehensive examination of the recent resurgence of violent crime and related security trends in Tijuana. The authors begin with a general overview of the history of organized crime in Tijuana, with consideration of the role it has played in recent surges in violence. Next, drawing on the latest available information and statistics, the authors examine the varied trends in the major categories of violent crimes in Tijuana: homicide, assault, robbery, extortion, kidnapping, rape, and other sex crimes. Finally, the authors provide a discussion of the public security responses and policy options available to address Tijuana's current security crisis, with some general policy recommendations for addressing the city's recent challenges.

### BACKGROUND: ORGANIZED CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN TIJUANA

Due to its geographical location, Tijuana has been a historically important transit point for illicit drug smuggling and transnational organized crime. Smuggling of alcohol in the Prohibition-era—followed by heroin and marijuana after their prohibition in the 1920s and 30s, respectively—allowed the development of strong local cross-border organized crime networks.

Tijuana's relative importance as a drug-trafficking hub grew significantly in the 1970s, during the era of noted traffickers like Alberto Sicilia Falcón and Rogelio Buelna Reyes. By the 1980s, these organizations were displaced by the Guadalajara cartel, a powerful organized crime group originating from Sinaloa. In addition to dramatically expanding the illicit marijuana trade, the Guadalajara cartel also worked with Colombian organized crime groups to pioneer the wholesale smuggling of Andean cocaine into the United States.

When the operations of the Guadalajara cartel were disrupted by a series of arrests in the late 1980s, some of its affiliates from the Arellano-Felix family went on to form the so-called "Tijuana Cartel." The AFO cultivated ties to law enforcement and government officials — allegedly doling out \$1 million a week in bribes—as well as to the young scions, or "Juniors," of wealthy and powerful families in Tijuana.<sup>10</sup>

However, encroachment from rival criminal organizations led to violent clashes over the course of the 1990s, most notably with the "Sinaloa Cartel" headed by Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán and Isamael "El Mayo" Zambada. In the course of its conflict with the Sinaloa Cartel, the AFO was also publicly blamed for the 1993 assassination of Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo in Guadalajara.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Miró, Ramón, *Organized Crime and Terrorist Activity in Mexico, 1999-2002*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.; Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Official accounts suggested that AFO gunmen seeking to assassinate Guzmán confused the Cardinal's limousine for that of the drug kingpin. There were also allegations that Posadas Ocampo was in fact the actual target of the assassination, which raises controversial questions about possible links between the Church and traffickers.

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Still, despite a rash of murders in the late 1990s—including the massacre of 19 men, women, and children in 1998—absolute levels of homicide in Tijuana were largely stable for most of the early 2000s, averaging around 250 murders per year until 2008 (INEGI, 2017). That year brought an abrupt increase in the number of homicides in Tijuana and other parts of the country, as the Sinaloa Cartel embarked on a violent campaign targeting both its long-standing rivals and former-allies in key drug trafficking areas.

In 2008, an important lieutenant of the AFO, Teodoro "El Teo" García Simental split from that organization with the alleged support of the Sinaloa Cartel. That year, the number of homicides in Tijuana increased almost 300%, and elevated levels of violence continued until 2010, reaching a new record of 1,250 homicides that year. As a result, between 2008 and 2010, the annual homicide rate in Tijuana rose from 49 to 80 per 100,000 inhabitants. In early 2010, el "Teo" and his most important lieutenants were captured in the state of Baja California Sur, found in the company of high ranking Tijuana police officials. García Simental's arrest and the subsequent dismantling of his criminal organization through continued law enforcement efforts caused a brief increase of violence in the following months, but homicides rates began to decline significantly briefly thereafter.<sup>12</sup>

As conditions improved, many heralded Tijuana as a model for improving Mexico's security situation. Some explanations for the city's turnaround cited more effective policing, better military-law enforcement collaboration, and greater civic engagement. Others suggested that the reduction in violence was due to the Sinaloa cartel's emergence as the dominant drug trafficking organization in Baja California and a negotiated "pax mafiosa" pact between Sinaloa and the AFO.<sup>13</sup> The arrangement in Tijuana bore similarities to the "pax Sinaloa" that some observers described in Ciudad Juárez around 2011.<sup>14</sup>

Some experts believe that, under this arrangement, other criminal organizations—such as the La Familia Michoacán (LFM) and the Knights Templar Organization (KTO)—began to operate in the state of Baja California, apparently paying tribute to the Sinaloa Cartel in order to move drugs into the United States. The pact ensured a period of peace among major drug trafficking organizations, with most violence resulting from small skirmishes between small scale drug traders, or "narcomenudistas." However, this arrangement appears to have broken down sometime in 2014. After a series of arrests targeting the AFO, including the arrest of its alleged

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<sup>12</sup> Patrick Corcoran, "Mexico's Shifting Criminal Landscape: Changes in Gang operation and structure during the past century," *Trends in Organized Crime*, September 2013, 16 (3).

<sup>13</sup> InSight Crime, *Tijuana Cartel*. InSight Crime, 2014. <http://www.insightcrime.org/groups-mexico/mexican-tijuana-cartel>

<sup>14</sup> The earliest reference to the term "Pax Sinaloa" can be 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 Juarez gang for control over trafficking routes through Ciudad Juarez, 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.

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leader Fernando "El Ingeniero" Sánchez Arellano in June 2014, there was a clash among organized crime groups that resulted in growing levels of violence in Tijuana. In the months that followed, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán was recaptured by Mexican authorities, and inter-cartel violence began to intensify throughout the country in the lead up to and after Guzmán's extradition to the United States in January 2017.<sup>15</sup>

In the aftermath of these events, and as a result of clashes and a general lack of hierarchical control among local organized crime groups in Tijuana, the number of homicides grew to unprecedented levels in 2017. In the vacuum created by the significantly weakened AFO operation after 2014 and the disruption of Sinaloa Cartel leadership in 2015-17, a new violent organized crime group emerged as an important influence in Tijuana: the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG).<sup>16</sup>

According to the DEA, CJNG has formed an illicit methamphetamine trafficking *corridor* along the West coast of the United States, and Tijuana has been key in the distribution. Evidence of CJNG activity in the region was detected at the Tijuana International Airport, where authorities seized illicit substances smuggled by CJNG operatives in shampoo bottles and artisan products. CJNG has reportedly also deployed young women as 'mulitas' (traffickers) who cross the international border several times a week with gourmet products filled with methamphetamines.

The CJNG's entry into Tijuana appears to have contributed to elevated levels of violence in recent years. On the one hand, some violence appears to be related to direct conflicts between the remnants of the Sinaloa Cartel, on the one hand, and the CJNG and its allies, on the other. According to the Tijuana weekly newspaper *Zeta*, CJNG appears to have formed an alliance with the remaining elements of the AFO in order to force out the Sinaloans (*Zeta*, 2017a; Debate; 2017).

Meanwhile, affiliates of the Sinaloa cartel—notably the Arzate Garcia brothers (better known as "Aquiles" and the "Frog") and members of the "Uriarte" criminal cell—fought back against CJNG expansion in Eastern Tijuana. This contributed to a surge in violence in certain areas of the city: La Presa, Zona Norte, Los Pinos, and especially Sánchez Taboada, the alleged headquarters of the CJNG (*Zeta*; 2017a). Other Sinaloa operatives, such as "Los Dámasos" appeared to split from the Sinaloa Cartel after an unsuccessful effort to challenge the sons of "Chapo" Guzman for control of the organization. Thus, these new dynamics of organized

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<sup>15</sup> Kimberly Heinle, Octavio Rodríguez, and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico. Data and Analysis through 2016*. University of San Diego, Justice in Mexico Project. San Diego: Justice in Mexico, March 2017.

[https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2017\\_DrugViolenceinMexico.pdf](https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2017_DrugViolenceinMexico.pdf)

<sup>16</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>; Sandra Dibble, "," San Diego Union Tribune, February 13, 2016.

<http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/sdut-nueva-generacion-cartel-moves-tijuana-2016feb13-story.html>

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crime—and especially clashes between major drug trafficking organizations—is at least part of the story behind Tijuana’s dramatic rise in homicides.

Still, it is also notable that the character of the violence in 2015-17 differs significantly from the highly visible, high impact violence that characterized the city’s previous public security crisis in 2008-10. In the earlier period of violence, there was a far greater frequency of high-profile violence—running gun battles in the streets, mass casualty incidents, bodies hanging from bridges, gangland-style executions—that had a dramatic and chilling effect on life in all parts of the city. Violence in 2015-17 has tended to be geographically concentrated in the city’s poor and marginalized areas, with a lesser impact on the daily life of wealthy and middle class residents. According to human rights activist and security expert Victor Clark Alfaro, ““It’s not the ones at the top that are killing each other... What’s happening is that the one at the top cannot control the ones at the bottom.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, given the CJNG’s relatively new and limited presence in Tijuana, its operatives may lack the capacity or inclination to control the criminal activities of neighborhood level gangs or cells involved in street-level drug dealing, or “narcomenudeo.”<sup>18</sup>

However, whatever the case, it constitutes a worrying trend: rather than a few large, powerful criminal organizations whose differences can be settled by a surreptitious “pax mafiosa,” authorities are now confronting many micro-level criminal organizations battling over neighborhoods and street-corners. In this sense, the surge in small-scale, lower profile homicides represents a very different problem than the spectacular violence that authorities confronted in the past. While the current trend may not generate enormous international attention, it will require that authorities develop a careful strategy and significantly greater law enforcement capacity in the poor and marginalized neighborhoods where these localized conflicts are playing out.

Below, we examine official data on criminal violence in Tijuana and offer some tentative conclusions about the underlying local factors that have contributed to the recent resurgence of violence. In the following section, we discuss the public security responses that authorities have deployed in recent years to address these problems, and offer some tentative recommendations on how to help address Tijuana’s security crisis.

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<sup>17</sup> Sandra Dibble, John Gibbins, and Alejandro Tamayo, “The Deadliest Year,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, August 17, 2017. <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/sd-me-tijuana-killings-20170809-htmlstory.html>

<sup>18</sup> This was the view of Daniel de la Rosa in assessing the situation in 2016: ““As far as a visible head of Grupo Jalisco Nueva Generación, we don’t have one... You don’t see the presence of their operators, their hit men, criminal logistics. The only thing that we’ve detected is smuggling, and the protection of their loads heading to the United States, and the importing of cash and weapons from the United States.” 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>

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### THE RESURGENCE OF VIOLENCE AND RECENT CRIME STATISTICS IN TIJUANA

In this section, the authors examine recently reported local public security statistics to provide an overview of violent crime trends in Tijuana, including homicides, armed robberies, extortion and kidnapping cases, and rape and sex crimes. As noted above, recent violence in Tijuana has consisted of a sustained rise in the number of homicides beginning 2015 and peaking to unprecedented levels in 2017.

According to the Baja California State Secretariat for Public Security, the number of murders in 2008 and 2009 reached 1,094, which at the time constituted record levels of violence for the city (See Figure 1). However, beginning in 2015, the city saw a gradual increase in the number of homicides in 2015 (612 with 674 victims), 2016 (872 cases with 919 victims), and 2017 (1,618 cases with 1,780 victims) that has now placed the city at the forefront of a national surge in homicides, with Tijuana accounting for close to 6% of all homicide victims in Mexico.<sup>19</sup>

In 2017, the number of homicide investigations in Tijuana was double the number reported by Mexico's National Public Security System for Acapulco (834), which had led the nation with 918 homicides in 2016. What is more, Baja California attorney general Perla del Socorro Ibarra Leyva indicated in mid-2017 that the clearance rate for homicide cases in Tijuana—that is, the proportion of cases in which a suspect is identified and brought to justice—is around 10% (compared to 50% in Mexicali), suggesting near total impunity for murders in Tijuana.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, the beginning of 2018 only seems to continue the existing trend for homicides in Tijuana, with more than 120 murders in January.<sup>21</sup>

One crime trend that is notable in relation to Tijuana's rising number of homicides is the relative decrease in the number of assaults reported over the last decade. Reports of non-fatal assaults were relatively high even before the period of intense violence between 2008 and 2010, but gradually subsided in the ensuing years. Even as the number of homicides increased starting in early 2015, the number of assaults has remained well below 2008-2010 levels. Unfortunately, the increasing number of murders relative to assaults appears to reflect an increased lethality in violent confrontations in Tijuana, owing partly to the widespread availability of unlawful firearms. It is also worth noting that there appear to be seasonal patterns, with sizeable mid-year peaks in the number of assaults, and generally fewer reported

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<sup>19</sup> Sandra Dibble, "Control for street drug trade pushes Tijuana to grisly new record: 1,744 homicides," *San Diego Union Tribune*, January 14, 2018, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/sd-me-homicides-tijuana-20180102-story.html>

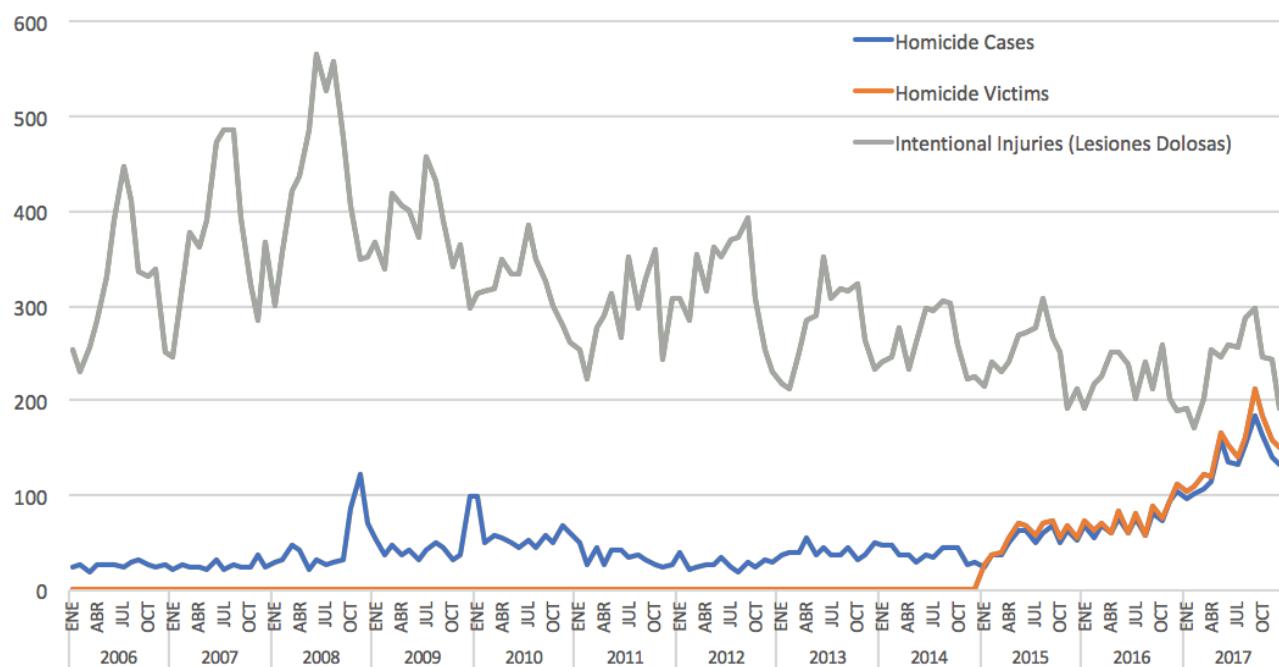
<sup>20</sup> These numbers of impunity are higher than the national average, where 78.6% of homicides don't get solved (Zepeda Lecuona, 2016). "Convocan a reunión de seguimiento a la Cruzada por la Seguridad," *Uniradio Informa*, August 16, 2017, <http://www.uniradioinforma.com/noticias/tijuana/490521/convocan-a-reunion-de-seguimiento-a-la-cruzada-por-la-seguridad.html>; Guillermo Zepeda and Jimenez Paola. *Impunidad Frente Al Homicidio Doloso En México*, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Gabriela Martinez, "En lo que va del año se registran 120 asesinatos en Tijuana". *El Universal*. January 24, 2018. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/en-lo-que-va-del-ano-se-registran-120-asesinatos-en-tijuana>

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cases from October through December. This may reflect decreased outdoor activity and willingness to report such crimes during the shorter daylight hours of winter months, or higher levels of aggression during hot summer months.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 1: Known Intentional Homicides (*Homicidios Dolosos*) and Injuries from Intentional Assault (*Lesiones Dolosas*) in Tijuana, 2006-2017**



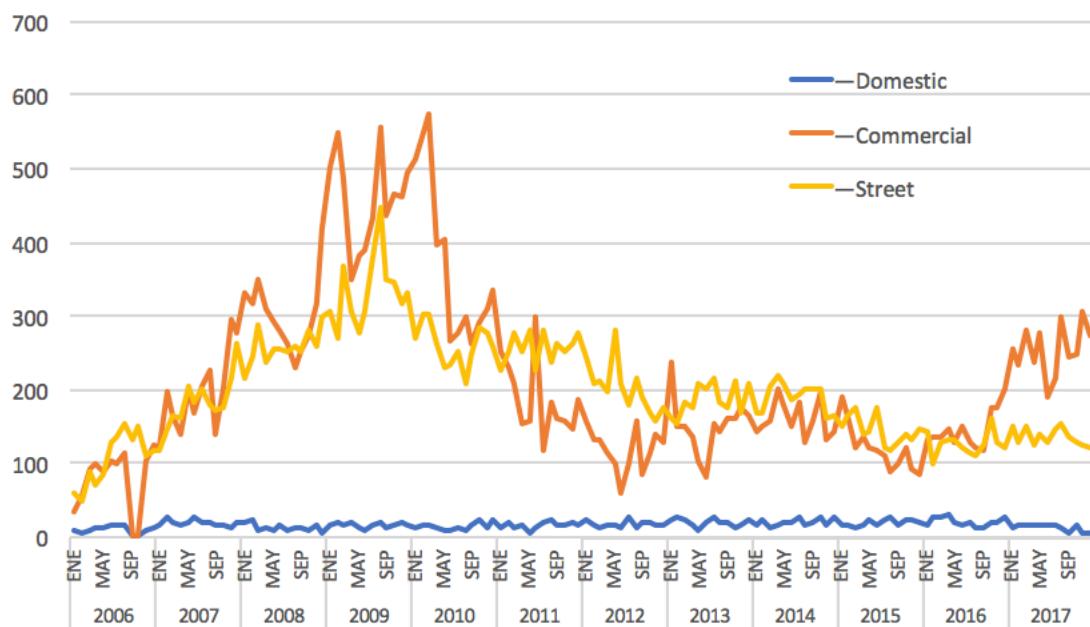
SOURCE: Secretaría de Seguridad Pública de Baja California.

Meanwhile, results have been mixed for other forms of violent crime in Tijuana over the past few years. For example, despite popular fears of attacks during home invasions, reports of armed robberies in households have remained relatively low, occurring at an average rate of around 17 per month since 2006 (See Figure 2). In fact, in 2017, the average number of reported armed robberies in households was only 14 per month. This was a fraction of the reported number of non-violent burglaries, which totaled 2,337 in 2017 (about 1,000 fewer incidents than in 2016). Meanwhile, armed robberies in public spaces have also generally declined since the peak in 2008-10, when was an average of over 300 reported incidents per month: in 2015-17, the average monthly incidence was down to roughly half that amount.

<sup>22</sup> There is some evidence that hot temperatures increase aggression and feelings of hostility. Higher temperatures and longer daylight hours could help explain the summer trends on non-fatal assaults in the city. Anderson, C. A. "Heat and violence," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. February 2001; 10(1):33-8.

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**Figure 2: Reported Armed Robberies in Households, Commercial Establishments, and in Public in Tijuana, 2006-2017**

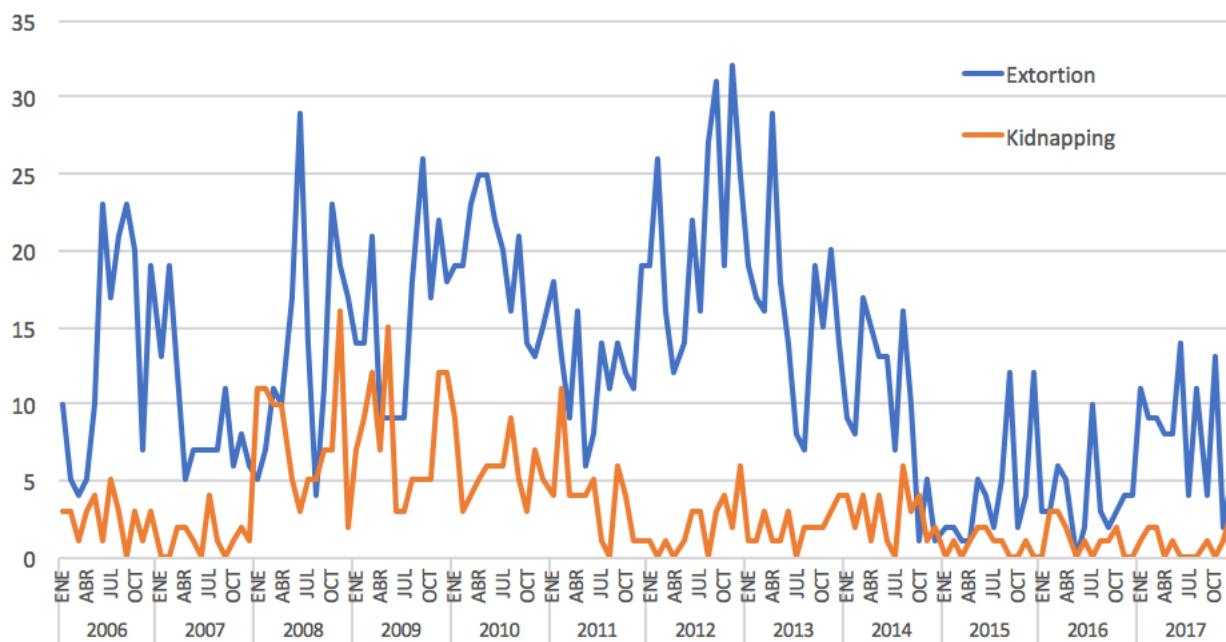


SOURCE: Secretaría de Seguridad Pública de Baja California.

Amid these positive trends, there also has been a sharp increase in the number of armed robberies in Tijuana's commercial establishments in recent years, reaching as high as 300 incidents per month. That said, the recent surge in robberies of commercial establishments has not yet reached 2008-10 levels, when levels reached as high as 500 incidents in some months. Finally, there has also been a nearly tenfold increase in the number of cars by force since mid-2016. While comparable data on armed cars robberies is not available for earlier periods, the rate rose from 11 vehicles in June 2016 to an average of roughly one hundred armed car robberies per month in 2017. That said, there has been a rash of reported car thefts (without violence), with 7,655 cases reported in 2016 compared to 10,148 in 2017, an increase of 32.6%.

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**Figure 3: Reported Extortion (Extorsión) and Kidnapping (Secuestro) Crimes in Tijuana, 2006-2017**



SOURCE: Secretaría de Seguridad Pública de Baja California.

Meanwhile, although there was a significant increase in the number of extortion cases in Tijuana in 2017, the long-term trend has been a decline in extortion cases over time (Figure 3). Protection rackets constitute one of the primary methods of extortion in Tijuana, consisting of shakedowns for the payment of "dues" (*derecho de piso*) to organized crime groups. In 2017, the local party chairman of the PRI asserted that all businesses are essentially required to pay protection "dues" in Eastern Tijuana, especially along the Casa Blanca and Cucapah boulevards.<sup>23</sup>

According to local sources, many extortion rackets are conducted by telephone from locations far away from Tijuana, with authorities tracking calls to the states of Chihuahua, Jalisco, Mexico City, and Nuevo León. According to Tijuana's Public Security Secretary, out of 4,600 reported extortion calls, the threatened parties actually made a payment (\$1,000-2,000) in about 4% of cases.<sup>24</sup> In addition, numerous criminal organizations have employed "virtual abductions" (*secuestros virtuales*) in which victims receive fraudulent phone

<sup>23</sup> Sonia de Anda, "PRI pide medidas de seguridad urgentes; sigue cobro de piso, denuncia," *Uniradio*, August 29, 2017. <http://www.uniradioinforma.com/noticias/tijuana/492136/pri-pide-medidas-de-seguridad-urgentes-sigue-cobro-de-piso-denuncia.html>

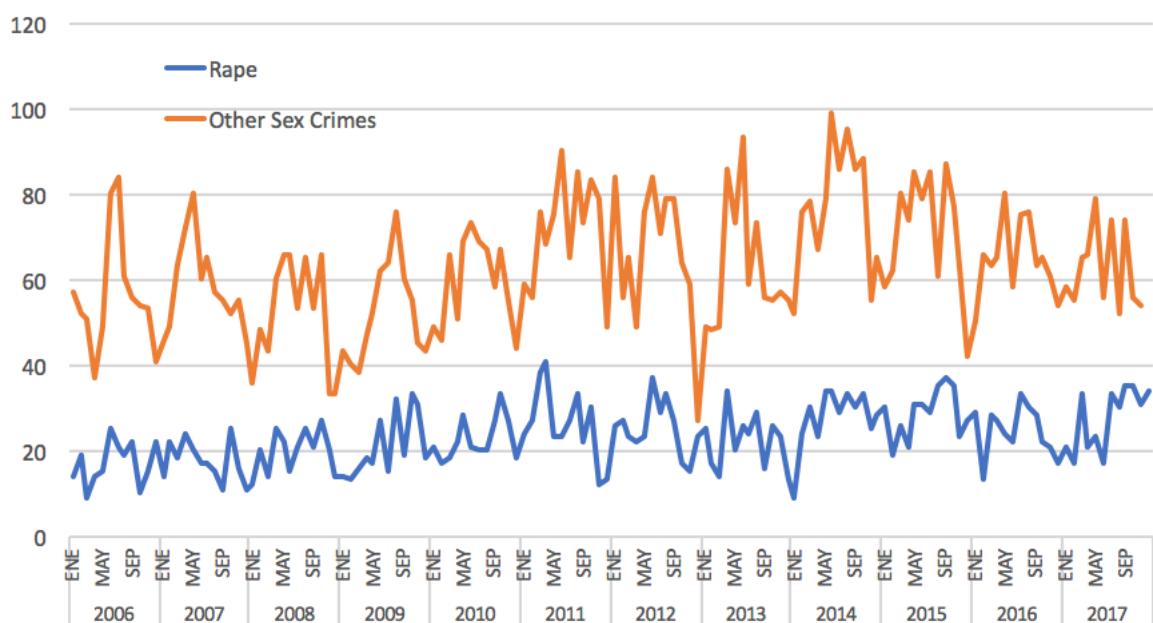
<sup>24</sup> Andrade Luis Gerardo, "Extorsionadores aprovechan clima de inseguridad," *Frontera*, July 15, 2017, <https://frontera.info/Movil/EdicionEnLinea/Noticias/Notas/1236311.html>

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calls indicating that someone they know has been abducted. In 2016, "virtual abductions" constituted the primary form of kidnapping reported to Tijuana's 089 emergency line.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to kidnapping, there has been a general decline in the number of reported cases since the earlier surge of violence in 2008-10. As with other sensitive crimes, lower reporting rates may reflect a decline in the incidence of a crime, the degree to which victims feel comfortable reporting crimes, or both. Many recent kidnappings in Tijuana can be characterized as "express abductions," in which the kidnappers demand small amounts of money—\$300-1,000 USD—that can be obtained relatively quickly, possibly from one or more withdrawals from the victim's ATM card.

**Figure 4: Rape and Other Sex Crimes in Tijuana, 2006-2017**



SOURCE: Secretaría de Seguridad Pública de Baja California.

None of the above crime trends in Tijuana appear to be related to reported rates of rape and other forms of sexual violence, which have remained fairly consistent over the last decade when compared to other crimes (See Figure 4). Reporting of rape and other sex crimes is highly sensitive and such crimes tend to be greatly underreported, but there do appear to be seasonal surges, with the reporting of these crimes appearing to rise mid-year and fall in winter. This suggests that, during the winter months, there is either a decline in sexually motivated criminal activity or a decreased willingness to report such crimes, or both.

<sup>25</sup> "Secuestro virtual, modalidad de engaño telefónico más denunciada al 089," *Frontera*, September 5, 2016, <http://www.frontera.info/EdicionEnLinea/Notas/Policiaca/09052016/1079260-Secuestro-virtual-modalidad-de-engano-telefonico-mas-denunciada-al-089.html>

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It is worth noting that all of the above figures refer to preliminary official data on known crimes, and are subject to change as authorities document incidents (e.g., clandestine graves) and revise the official statistics for 2017 in the coming years. Also, while the available data present a fairly clear picture of overall crime trends to date, we need to remember that up to 92.2% of all crimes do not get reported in the State of Baja California.<sup>26</sup> Still, the available data present a fairly clear picture of overall crime trends to date. Still, what is quite noteworthy about Tijuana's recent crime trends is the very significant increase in the number of homicides between 2015 and 17, and the consistency of the high number of homicides reported from month to month. Meanwhile, increases in other forms of violence have been relatively less severe, particularly when compared to the previous surge of violent crime occurring from 2008-2010.

As discussed above, the number of reported assaults, armed robberies, kidnappings, and extortion cases in 2015-2017 remained significantly lower than the number reported in the period from 2008-2010. Arguably, the relatively lower incidence of such crimes reflects a certain degree of law enforcement success in Tijuana. That is, even as poor street kids kill each other in Tijuana's outlying neighborhoods, law enforcement authorities appear to have managed to maintain lower levels of certain violent crimes—such as extortion, kidnapping, armed robbery—that target wealthy individuals and commercial establishments. This suggests a not only a need to increase Tijuana's public security capacity, but for greater overall efforts to address the needs of its most marginalized communities. Meanwhile, although there has been no significant increase in the number of rape and other sex crimes reported in recent years, this is probably reflective of the lower rates of reporting for such crimes, particularly in winter months.

### NEIGHBORHOOD-LEVEL ANALYSIS

Given the surge in homicides in Tijuana, a deeper exploration is merited to understand the citywide patterns underlying this trend. Using map files provided by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) and data released by the Baja California State Secretary of Public Security on crimes occurring at the neighborhood level (*colonias*), the authors conducted a geospatial mapping of homicide cases in the city of Tijuana in 2017.

The municipality of Tijuana is divided into nine administrative units, called delegations (*delegaciones*), and hundreds of neighborhoods.<sup>27</sup> Examining homicide data using these units

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<sup>26</sup> INEGI. (2017). *Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (ENVIPE) 2017*. Retrieved January 2018, from Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.

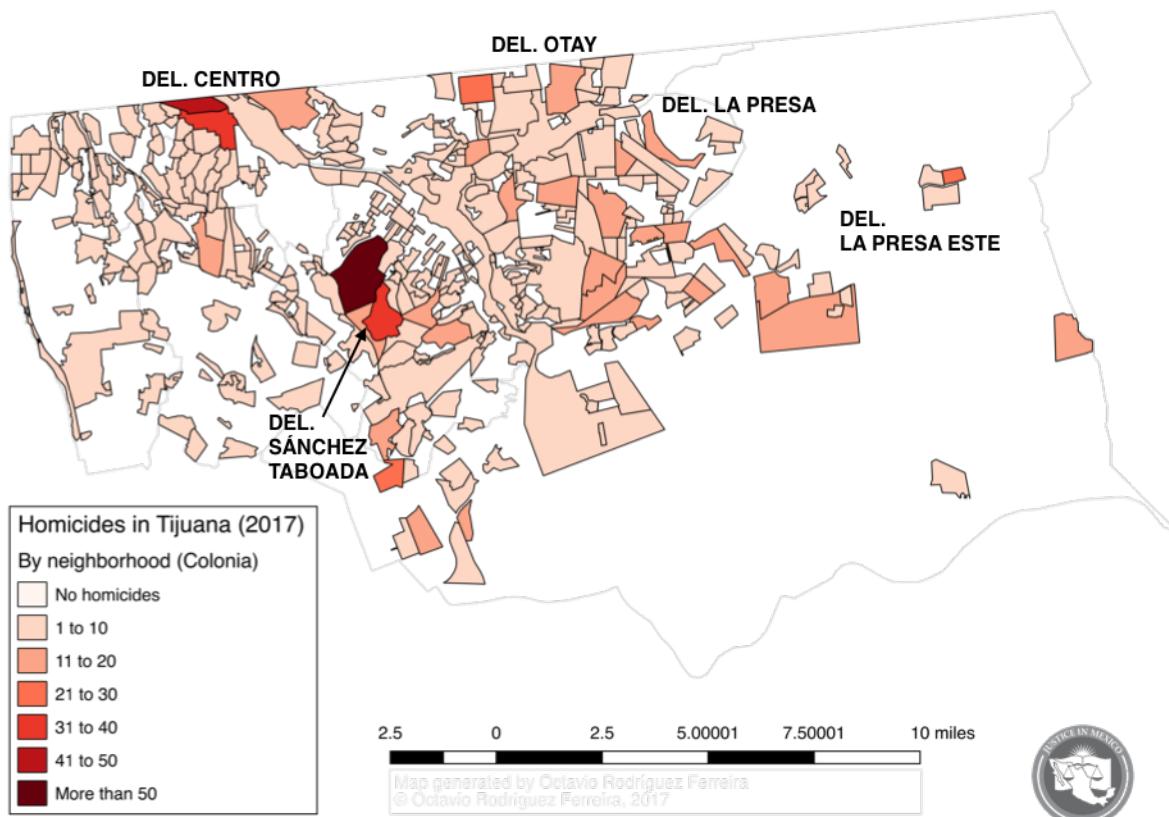
<http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/proyectos/enchogares/regulares/envipe/2017/>

<sup>27</sup> The Tijuana police department divides the city into 11 policing districts, that roughly coincide with the city's delegations. Available street officers are roughly equally divided among these sections, with typical work shifts of eight hours per day. To avoid corruption and collusion, officers are regularly rotated to different geographical

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of analysis, the authors identified three clusters of violence that correspond to specific zones within the city: Eastern Tijuana (comprising the delegations of La Presa, La Presa Este, and Otay), the Sanchez Taboada delegation, and the Centro delegation.

**Figure 5: Homicides in Tijuana by Delegation and Neighborhood in 2017**



SOURCE: Secretaría de Seguridad Pública de Baja California. Colonia-level shape files provided by SANDAG.

Analyzing the geospatial distribution of violence in Tijuana, it is clear that there is a high concentration of homicides in a relatively small number of neighborhoods. Indeed, 20% of all homicides were concentrated in only 10 out of the roughly 850 neighborhoods in Tijuana. Of those, the three most violent neighborhoods accounted for 10% of all homicides in the municipality: Camino Verde (75), Zona Norte (49), Zona Centro (32). The most violent neighborhood, Camino Verde by itself accounted for one out of twenty homicides in 2017.

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areas. Police commanders identify areas of high crime prevalence using local COMPSTAT information and work to develop special programs to reduce high-impact crimes.

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**Table 1: Number of Homicides by Delegation and in the Top 10 Most Violent Neighborhoods (*Colonias*) in Tijuana in 2017**

DELEGATION	HOMICIDES REGISTERED	% OF ALL HOMICIDES	TOP 10 COLONIAS	HOMICIDES REGISTERED	% OF ALL HOMICIDES
La Presa Este	328	21.4%	Camino Verde	75	5%
Sanchez Taboada	262	17.1%	Zona Norte	49	3%
La Presa	206	13.4%	Zona Centro	32	2%
Mesa de Otay Centenario	146	9.5%	Sanchez Taboada (PRODUTSA)	31	2%
San Antonio de los Buenos	140	9.1%	Urbivilia Del Prado	29	2%
Centro	134	8.7%	Villa del Campo	26	2%
La Mesa	121	7.9%	Nueva Tijuana	24	1%
Playas de Tijuana	102	6.7%	Fideicomiso El Florido	21	1%
Cerro Colorado	93	6.1%	Altiplano	20	1%
			Terrazas del Valle	18	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1532</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>20%</b>

Source: Secretaría de Seguridad Pública de Baja California. Note: Data at the delegation and neighborhood level do not add up to the total number of homicides reported for the year.

Most of the high violence neighborhoods noted above are located in delegations of the city where there are clusters of homicides within the same area. The largest number of homicides can be found in **Eastern Tijuana**, including neighborhoods in the La Presa, La Presa Este, and Otay delegations. Eastern Tijuana includes a mixture of industrial parks, newly developed residential areas, and shanty areas where poor and newly arrived families from other parts of Mexico set up makeshift homes. These areas suffer from a variety of factors—from problems with social integration to severe economic marginalization—that weaken the societal fabric and contribute to moderately high levels of violence. Bordering the municipality of Tecate, La Presa Este accounts for the largest number of homicides (328) out of all delegations in Tijuana.

In 2017, the highest rates of homicides in a neighborhood could be found in the delegation of **Sánchez Taboada**, a middle and low income area located in the center of the city. This delegation is surrounded by ravines and close to one of the main manufacturing zones in Tijuana (Parque Industrial Pacífico). The neighborhoods located just north of this area are also

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some of the most exclusive of the City (i.e. Colinas de Agua Caliente) only divided by one of the main highways in the city (libramiento Sur). The Sánchez Taboada delegation has been identified as a hot-spot for homicides in previous years, and is believed to be the central base of operations of the CJNG criminal organization in Tijuana.<sup>28</sup> Camino Verde, the most violent neighborhood in the city, forms part of the delegation, along with other neighboring *colonias* that experienced relatively high numbers of homicides in 2017: Sánchez Taboada-PRODUTSA (31), Reforma (17), Tres de Octubre (13), and Sánchez Taboada Anexa (12). The nearby neighborhood of Urbivilia Del Prado, had 29 homicides and ranked among the top ten most violent neighborhoods in 2017.

A third cluster of homicides in 2017 could be found in the **Centro** delegation, in the northwest area of the city, immediately adjacent to the U.S.-Mexico border. In the northern portion of this delegation, the Tijuana river canal (known as “El Bordo”) divides both countries and is a common place for open air drug markets. In 2014, it was calculated that almost 1,000 people lived in this area, mostly deportees from the United States.<sup>29</sup> This part of the city has experienced frequent police raids to clean the public space.<sup>30</sup>

Within the Centro delegation the neighborhood of Zona Norte, next to the border wall, had the highest number of homicides with 49 the second highest of all neighborhoods in Tijuana. The Zona Norte neighborhood also has a prominent sex industry, including brothels, street prostitutes, and nude dancing establishments. The adjacent neighborhood of Zona Centro had 32 homicides in 2017, where there are a large number of bars and commercial establishments, including the tourist zone of Revolution Avenue. There are also several drug-dealing sites (*narcotiendas*) in this zone, and previous crime level analysis have showed a consistent pattern of hot-spots with other crimes such as drug possession arrests.<sup>31</sup>

## PUBLIC SECURITY CONCERNS, POLICY RESPONSES, AND CHALLENGES

Tijuana's security crisis that has caused considerable consternation among local residents (*tijuianenses*). According to the Citizen Perception Survey conducted in 2017, 92% of Tijuana

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<sup>28</sup> Tijunapress.com, resiliencia en la delegación más peligrosa. June 4<sup>th</sup> 2015.

<https://tijunapress.com/2015/06/04/resiliencia-en-la-delegacion-mas-peligrosa-de-tijuana/>; Zetatijuana.com. Las zonas del crimen en BC. February 6, 2017. <http://zetatijuana.com/2017/02/las-zonas-del-crimen-en-bc/>

<sup>29</sup> Velasco, L., Albicker S.L. Estimacion y caracterizacion de la poblacion residente en el Bordo del canal del rio Tijuana. COLEF. 2013. <http://www.colef.mx/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Reporte-ejecutivo-El-Bordo-FINAL.pdf> Accessed: June 2014

<sup>30</sup> Frontera.info. Buscan desalojar a 150 indigentes de canalización. August 13, 2017. <http://www.frontera.info/EdicionEnLinea/Notas/Noticias/13082017/1245621-Buscan-desalojar-a-150-indigentes-de-canalizacion.html>

<sup>31</sup> “Five Dead in Tijuana's Zona Norte Linked to Drug Trade,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, March 12, 2017. <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/sd-me-tijuana-dead-20170312-story.html>

Gaines TL, Werb D, Arredondo J, Alaniz VM, Vilalta C, Beletsky L. “The spatial-temporal pattern of policing following a drug policy reform: triangulating self-reported arrests with official crime statistics,” *Substance Use & Misuse*. January 28, 2017; 52(2):214-22.

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residents think that they live in an unsafe city, and overwhelming numbers of *tijuanenses* indicated that they personally witnessed various forms of crime, including vandalism (81.2%), drugs sale or consumption (77.4%), robberies or assaults (72%), and gunshots (31.4%).<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, according to the same survey, roughly 70% of *tijuanenses* distrust the Municipal Police, 68% distrust the State Police, 53% distrust the Federal Police, and 41% distrust the Armed Forces. Roughly half of *tijuanenses* (48%) do not feel safe walking alone at night, and 80% feel that it is unsafe to use automatic teller machines (ATMs). The net result is an enormous lack of social trust in the city: 87% of Tijuana residents say that they do not trust the majority of other people.

These cynical assessments of the public security situation and official responses is perhaps understandable. Over the years, Tijuana officials have employed a number of different public policy measures to address public concerns and frustrations, with mixed results at best. The fact that no public security secretary has yet completed a full three-year term since 2004 illustrates the administrative challenges and public pressure faced by local police commanders in Tijuana (See Table 2).

During his term, PRI Mayor Jorge Hank Rhon (2004-2007) hired hundreds of new officers to address the surge in violent crime associated with the conflict between the Sinaloa-AFO cartels. However, this action reportedly enabled large numbers of corrupt officers to join the city's roughly 2,000-member police force. The Hank administration also made a substantial investment on video surveillance cameras, though conflicts over the maintenance contracts led to its abandonment in the next administration.<sup>33</sup> Also, during the Hank administration, there was reportedly a lack of coordination—and several violent clashes—between municipal and state law enforcement authorities.

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<sup>32</sup> Hernandez, Esther, "Se siente inseguro el 92% en Tijuana," *Frontera*, December 27, 2017, <http://www.frontera.info/EdicionEnLinea/Notas/Noticias/22062017/1227869-Se-siente-inseguro-el-92-en-Tijuana.html>

<sup>33</sup> Sabet Daniel. "Police reform in Mexico: Advances and persistent obstacles," Andrew Selee, Eric Olson, and David A. Shirk, *Shared Responsibility: U.S.- Mexico Policy Options for Confronting Organized Crime*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2010.

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/shared-responsibility-us-mexico-policy-options-for-confronting-organized-crime>

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**Table 2: Municipal Secretaries of Public Security by Mayoral Administration, 2004-2017**

Mayor	Mayoral Term	Secretary of Public Security	Public Security Secretary Term
Jorge Hank Rhon (PRI)*	2004 - 2007	Ernesto Santillana Santillana	12/2004 – 03/2006
		Luis Javier Algorri Franco	03/2006 – 11/2007
Jorge Ramos Hernández (PAN)	2007 - 2010	Alberto Capella	12/2007 – 12/2008
		Julián Leyzaola	12/2008 – 11/2010
Carlos Bustamante Anchondo (PRI)	2010 - 2013	Gustavo Huerta Martínez	12/2010 - 10/2011
		Alberto Capella	10/2011 – 12/2013
Jorge Astiazarán Orcí (PRI)	2013 - 2016	Alejandro Lares Valladares	12/2013 – 02/2016
		José Luis López Medina	02/2016 – 11/2016
Juan Manuel Gastelum Buenrostro (PAN)	2016 - 2019	Marco Antonio Sotomayor	12/2016 – To date

\* Note: Kurt Honold Morales served as interim mayor from 2006-07.

In July 2006, Tijuana elected PAN candidate Jorge Ramos to take office as mayor on December 1, 2007 for a three-year term (2007-2010). In the days before he took office, Ramos' pick as the incoming head of Public Security—the anti-crime and corruption activist Alberto Capella Ibarra—was allegedly attacked at his home by an armed commando of roughly 20 men who shot 250 rounds. Capella reportedly fended off his attackers with an R-15 automatic rifle in a gun battle that took place around 2:30am just 100 meters from a local police station, with no immediate response from authorities.<sup>34</sup>

As noted above, during the Ramos administration there was a substantial decline in the number of violent crimes in the city, particularly in 2010. Many portrayed this rapid drop in violence to successful coordination among Mexican military forces and law enforcement agencies. Authorities especially cited the leadership of General Alfonso Duarte and Tijuana Police Chief Julian Leyzaola, who replaced Capella as Public Security Secretary after he was dismissed in December 2008.<sup>35</sup>

Leyzaola worked closely with General Duarte, and—as a former military officer—maintained his personal residence on the Tijuana military base. Leyzaola is credited with lowering levels of corruption within municipal police—purging 600 departmental

<sup>34</sup> Marc Lacy, "Tijuana's New Police Chief Touts an Achievement: Survival," *The New York Times*, August 22, 2008.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/23/world/americas/23capella.html?n=Top/News/World/Countries%20and%20Territories/Mexico>

<sup>35</sup> Richard Marosi, "General battles Tijuana drug traffickers," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 2009. Sandra Dibble, "Tijuana Violence Slows, Drops From Spotlight," *San Diego Union Tribune*, April 26, 2010.

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personnel—and dismantling the city’s criminal organizations. Most notably, the feud between Teodoro “El Teo” García Simentel and the AFO came to an end during this period after García was arrested in early 2010.<sup>36</sup> The Ramos administration also received a block grant of more than 200 million pesos from the federal security fund (SUBSEMUN) for investments in better equipment (e.g., guns, bulletproof vests, police cars, etc.), personnel time (e.g., more police deployments greater presence in neighborhoods), and infrastructure (e.g., new offices and police academy) for the police. However, Leyzaola was also accused of serious human rights violations, including torture and extrajudicial executions, and after his term departed to take command of local security operations in Ciudad Juárez.<sup>37</sup>

The incidence of violent crimes continued to decline after the election of PRI Mayor Carlos Bustamante, who took office in December 2010. Initially, Bustamante appointed one of Leyzaola’s top police captains, a former military officer and Rosarito police chief named Gustavo Huerta, as Tijuana’s Secretary of Public Security. However, Huerta was dismissed from the position in 2012, and later transferred to serve with Leyzaola in Ciudad Juárez.<sup>38</sup> After Huerta’s dismissal, Mayor Bustamante re-appointed Alberto Capella to serve as police chief for the remainder of his term through December 2012.<sup>39</sup>

During this period of reduced criminal activity, local authorities and civic leaders worked to recover from the negative effects of previous surges of violence. In particular, an effort to

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<sup>36</sup> Without firing a shot, Mexican authorities arrested “El Teo” García on January 12, 2010 in an upscale neighborhood in Baja California Sur. The fact that high ranking members of the Tijuana police department—including two top officers handpicked by Leyzaola—were found in García’s company raises questions about the extent to which local authorities were actually in leagues with organized crime, and more specifically with the Sinaloa organization. It is also plausible, that a pact or agreement had been negotiated between the Tijuana and Sinaloa that enabled (or even instructed) authorities to arrest García as part of the deal. Thereafter, the Sinaloa organization is widely believed to have gained the upper hand in Tijuana and most of Baja California, and the level of violence in the state diminished dramatically. María de la Luz González. “Cae ‘El Teo’, sin un solo disparo.” *El Universal*, January 13, 2010. <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/174731.html>

<sup>37</sup> Human rights abuses spiked dramatically in Mexico in the 2008-10 period, particularly because of the increased role played by the Mexican military and military personnel in domestic law enforcement. Catherine Daly, Kimberly Heinle, and David A. Shirk. *Armed with Impunity. Curbing Military Human Rights Abuses in Mexico*. Justice in Mexico. San Diego: University of San Diego, 2012. <https://justiceinmexico.org/armed-with-impru...>

<sup>38</sup> In 2013, Leyzaola and Huerta were sanctioned by the city government for alleged human rights violations when the city attorney (*síndico*) attempted to ban both from serving in municipal public office for a period of eight years, a decision that was reportedly overturned. Huerta was also later arrested and convicted in January 2015 for abuse of authority in a dispute with a gas station attendant. “Inhabilitan a Leyzaola y Huerta por 8 años en BC,” Lindero Norte, August 29, 2013. <https://linderonorte.com/tag/gustavo-huerta/>; Vicente Calderón, “Regresa El Capitán Gustavo Huerta,” *TijuanaPress.com*, <https://tijuanaPress.com/2015/04/14/regresa-el-capitan-gustavo-huerta/>; “Dictan sentencia contra el capitán Huerta,” Agencia Fronteriza de Noticias, January 20, 2015. [http://www.afntijuana.info/seguridad/36301\\_dictan\\_sentencia\\_contra\\_el\\_capitan\\_huerta](http://www.afntijuana.info/seguridad/36301_dictan_sentencia_contra_el_capitan_huerta)

<sup>39</sup> Reportedly the godson of Bustamante, Capella was credited with continued decreases in crime and violence in Tijuana, and subsequently moved on to serve as head of the Morelos State Public Security Commission from January 2014 until his resignation in December 2016. Jaime Luis Brito, “Renuncia secretario de Seguridad Pública de Morelos,” *Proceso*, <http://www.proceso.com.mx/466093/renuncia-secretario-seguridad-publica-morelos>

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change the narrative for the city of Tijuana, authorities and civic leaders in Baja California worked to attract business and rebuild the city's reputation. Tijuana's local business community has collaborated to raise the city's profile and celebrate its achievements through an annual convention known as "Innovative Tijuana" (*Tijuana Innovadora*). In response to these promotional efforts, various international media outlets—the New York Times and the L.A. Times, for example—featured glowing articles about the resurgence of Tijuana.

Lower levels of crime and violence continued under Bustamante's successor, PRI Mayor Jorge Astiazarán Orcí, a medical doctor and the U.S.-born grandson of a Mexican diplomat.<sup>40</sup> Mayor Astiazarán initially appointed Alejandro "Alex" Lares Valladares as Secretary of Public Security. Lares was the long-time head of the international liaison unit for the Tijuana police department, who worked with the USD Justice in Mexico program to implement a major diagnostic survey of the department in 2014-15. Following on the heels of that study, Lares implemented a major effort to modernize the Tijuana police department, providing officers new uniforms, equipment, and body cameras.<sup>41</sup> The widely-hailed use of body cameras was a first in Mexico and part of an effort not only to ensure officer accountability, but also to document misconduct and attempted bribes by crime suspects.

Despite these measures and even as other forms of violent crime continued to decline, Tijuana's homicides began to rise again in 2015 and early 2016, as noted above. In response to this worrying trend, Lares' resigned from his position in February 2016, along with police chief Omar Green de la Cerda. Lares was replaced by José Luis López Medina, who had previously served as the director of the Tijuana police department's commercial division, charged with protecting local businesses. At the time that López assumed his position, the city had already experienced more than 100 homicides, a 30% increase over the first two months of the previous year.<sup>42</sup> As noted above, the situation continued to deteriorate over the remainder of López's term.

Tijuana's current mayor, Juan Manuel Gastélum Buenrostro (2016-19), was a PAN candidate elected in July 2016.<sup>43</sup> On taking office as mayor in late 2016, Gastélum appointed Marco Antonio Sotomayor as the new Tijuana Secretary of Public Security. Sotomayor was a former undersecretary at the State Ministry of Public Safety in charge of the *Centro de Control, Comando, Comunicaciones y Cómputo - C4* (Control, Command, Communications and

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<sup>40</sup> Mayor Astiazarán had ties to former-Mayor Jorge Hank Rhon, who was also his patient, as well as ample support from the Tijuana business community. Sandra Dibble, "What drives Tijuana's next mayor?," *San Diego Union Tribune*, July 14, 2013, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/sdut-what-drives-tijuanas-next-mayor-2013jul14-story.html>

<sup>41</sup> Sandra Dibble, "Tijuana police to use body cameras," *San Diego Union Tribune*, March 1, 2015, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/sdut-tijuana-police-use-body-cameras-2015mar01-story.html>

<sup>42</sup> Gabriela Martínez, "Seguridad en Tijuana, en manos de José Luis López Medina," *La Jornada de Baja California*, February 29, 2016, <http://jornadabc.mx/tijuana/29-02-2016/seguridad-en-tijuana-en-manos-de-jose-luis-lopez-medina>

<sup>43</sup> Gastélum had previously served as interim-mayor in 2000-01 and federal deputy from 2012-15.

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Computing Center). The C4 is a command center dedicated to the coordination of emergency services, video surveillance, and COMPSTAT information.

By mid-2017, the continued deterioration of the security situation in Tijuana led Gastélum to sign on to the Baja California state security strategy entitled the “Security Crusade” (*Cruzada Estatal por la Seguridad*) in collaboration with the Baja California Public Security Citizens’ Council (*Consejo Ciudadano de Seguridad Pública de Baja California*) and the Citizen’s Public Security Observatory (*Observatorio Ciudadano de Seguridad Pública de Baja California*). The “Security Crusade” focuses on security cooperation between civilian, military, and law enforcement authorities to improve responses and prosecutions for homicides, vehicular thefts, and robberies of commercial establishments.<sup>44</sup> This strategy has draws on stop-and-frisk and zero-tolerance models found elsewhere, under the controversial assumption that these measures will allow to detect arms and drugs, as well as arresting any potential criminals.<sup>45</sup>

In defending his department’s performance, Sotomayor has blamed the nationwide shift to oral, adversarial trial procedures.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, many faulted the local police department for failing to develop a clear and deliberate strategy for reducing violent crime. By late 2017, local government officials strongly urged the Gastélum administration to take additional measures to address the city’s crime problems, and some critics began to call for Secretary Sotomayor’s resignation.<sup>47</sup> In response to these pressures, in November 2017, Sotomayor announced that the department would hire 200 new officers in early 2018, with an additional 300 new officers in 2018.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “Convocan a reunión de seguimiento a la Cruzada por la Seguridad,” *Uniradio Informa*, August 16, 2017, <http://www.uniradioinforma.com/noticias/tijuana/490521/convocan-a-reunion-de-seguimiento-a-la-cruzada-por-la-seguridad.html>

<sup>45</sup> Kyle Smith. “We Were Wrong about Stop-and-Frisk”. *National Review*. January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/455035/new-york-city-stop-and-frisk-crime-decline-shows-conservatives-were/>

<sup>46</sup> In May 2017, Sotomayor had publicly indicated that the city’s crime problems were the result of the poor performance of local law enforcement authorities, but by 2017 he began to blame the new criminal justice system. These new procedures were approved in Baja California in 2007 and implemented in 2010, and introduced higher due process expectations of police and prosecutors, thereby strengthening the rights of individuals accused of a crime. A federal reform in 2008 mandated nationwide implementation in June 2016, which several Mexican governors and other officials have tried to scapegoat for the declining security situation in many areas of the country. “Insatisfecho Marco Antonio Sotomayor ante resultados de la SSPM,” *La Jornada de Baja California*, May 24, 2017. <http://jornadabc.mx/tijuana/24-05-2017/insatisfecho-marco-antonio-sotomayor-ante-resultados-de-la-sspm>; Camarillo, José Luis, “Año más violento, culpa del NSJP: Marco Antonio Sotomayor,” *UniRadio Informa*, November 21, 2017, <http://www.uniradioinforma.com/noticias/bajacalifornia/502507/ano-mas-violento-culpa-del-nsjp-marco-antonio-sotomayor.html>

<sup>47</sup> “Piden cambiar a Sotomayor,” *Agencia Fronteriza de Noticias*, November 15, 2017, [http://www.afntijuana.info/informacion\\_general/76458\\_piden\\_cambiar\\_a\\_sotomayor](http://www.afntijuana.info/informacion_general/76458_piden_cambiar_a_sotomayor)

<sup>48</sup> “Urgen a SSPM plan sectorial en Tijuana,” *Agencia Fronteriza de Noticias*, December 3, 2017. [http://www.afntijuana.info/informacion\\_general/77102\\_urgen\\_a\\_sppm\\_plan\\_sectorial\\_en\\_tijuana](http://www.afntijuana.info/informacion_general/77102_urgen_a_sppm_plan_sectorial_en_tijuana)

## The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana

### FINAL OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After a careful review of recent crime trends, there are a number of observations and general recommendations that can be made about Tijuana's public security crisis and the policy measures that can help to address it. The authors present these tentative conclusions and policy recommendations:

#### 1) **Addressing Social and Economic Marginalization:** Recent violence in Tijuana in 2015-17 has included an unprecedented surge of homicides that has disproportionately affected poor young males from middle and low income areas of the city, who are both the primary perpetrators and targets of these killings, and who are often the product of what sociologists and criminologists refer to as "social disorganization" (e.g., domestic abuse, substance abuse, lack of educational opportunities, etc.).

##### Recommendations:

- a. *Invest in social and economic development programs in Tijuana:* International foundations, civic organizations, church groups, and the local business community should play a key role in working with state and local authorities (such as DIF) to develop a deliberate, multi-prong strategy to assist neighborhoods and communities that are severely impaired by economic scarcity, dysfunctional families and domestic abuse, limited educational opportunities, and other social maladies.
- b. *Implement community policing in highly violent areas:* Tijuana authorities should direct more law enforcement capacity and attention to highly violent and marginalized areas, such as the delegation of Sánchez Taboada, working closely with local communities to address specific neighborhood-level problems (e.g., identifying and monitoring disaffected youth, intervening in disputes before they become lethal, etc.). As part of this community policing effort, authorities should abandon zero-tolerance and indiscriminately frisking in these areas, which erodes trust between police and the community and increases the probability of corruption and police abuse.
- c. *Improve public transportation and neighborhood accessibility:* Given the rapid growth of the city and the 24-hour industrial rhythm of Tijuana's maquiladora sector, there is a need for a highly functional, affordable, and secure public transportation system to reduce citizen vulnerability to crime and ensure that crimes can be reported in all seasons and at all times of day. Efforts such as the new Sistema Integral de Transporte de Tijuana, or SITT (Integral Transportation System) must continue from one administration to another, and be expanded to other areas of the city. The local bus drivers need to be incorporated better into the design and implementation of future routes of the rapid transit system to allow a winning strategy for all actors involved.
- d. *Youth outreach and social development programs:* Authorities should also direct greater resources and attention to the problem of social and economic marginalization that leads young, disaffected males to become involved in illicit activities and violent behavior. Such individuals need adult guidance and peer

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socialization through strong family networks, formalized education, gainful employment, social groups (e.g., church youth groups, young men's associations, etc.) and opportunities for recreation (e.g., YMCA centers, public parks, etc.).

- e. *Recovery and creation of public spaces:* The city must put a strong emphasis on urban modification of areas that are now prone to chronic crime and drug use. Other cities in Latin America have constructed new public spaces, such as libraries, parks and bicycle roads, using eminent domain powers. Through the design of safer environments, local authorities could transform the situational factors that impact crime in some of the most violent neighborhoods in Tijuana. This effort has to be complemented with alliances between the community and the government to foster sports and cultural activities in the recovered spaces.

- 2) **Combatting Organized Crime:** Removing top leaders and deliberately disrupting powerful criminal organizations has the unintended effect of instigating internal competition for top leadership positions, as well as territorial challenges from rival organizations, contributing to a series of violent conflicts resulting from the splintering of major criminal organizations (e.g., the Arellano Felix cartel) as well as encroachment by new criminal organizations (e.g., the Sinaloa Cartel).

Recommendations:

- a. *Reduce dependence on the Kingpin Strategy:* Policy makers should carefully evaluate the cost-benefit ratios of the using of the kingpin strategy, since the net reduction in the capacity of criminal organizations does not appear to be worth the thousands of intentional homicides and injuries that follows as a result.
- b. *Re-enforce local law enforcement capacity amid shifting crime dynamics:* If and when policy makers choose to deploy the kingpin strategy, authorities must reinforce local law enforcement efforts in zones that are controlled by the affected criminal organization, or risk a dramatic increase in violent competition in these areas.
- c. *Focused deterrence of violence:* In a context of high violence among members of the organized crime, the authorities should prioritize the prosecution of those individuals that engage in high impact actions such as the assassination of police officers, mass shootings, or beheadings as forms of intimidation. The selected targeting would allow authorities to maximize the law enforcement resources and signal that those actions would be prosecuted independently of the organization responsible of committing them.

- 3) **Attending to Special Populations:** While young men constitute the large majority of crime victims and perpetrators in general, the recent increase in homicides in Tijuana has begun to produce greater numbers of femicides" (*femicidios*) and pre-adolescent victims, which are often the tragic result of long-standing patterns of domestic turmoil and abuse. *Recommendations:*

- a. *Focus on preventing and stopping domestic violence:* To address these concerns, local law enforcement authorities should increase efforts to monitor and address domestic violence and disputes, which reportedly affect as many as

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two-thirds of Tijuana's female residents. Safe houses and easier reporting need to be incorporated into a city-wide strategy.

- b. *Increase sensitivity to special victims in local policing:* As it recruits a reported 500 new officers in 2018, the Tijuana police department should also work to hire and deploy more female officers for field duty, and sensitize all officers to the best practices for dealing with special populations, like female and child victims.
  - c. *Seasonal adjustments in force deployment and victim response efforts:* To address vacillating seasonal rates of reported crime, authorities should be prepared to deploy additional personnel and handle a greater number of crime reports in warmer summer months with longer days, and take special measures to facilitate crime reporting in colder winter months (e.g., specially timed public information campaigns, dedicated winter sex crime reporting hotlines, seasonal increases in personnel, etc.). The use of mobile police booths can help bring police forces closer to the community.
- 4) Getting Smart on Drugs:** A substantial portion of the violence in Tijuana is related to illicit drugs that are a major source of revenue for criminal organizations and contribute to problems of substance abuse, unintentional injuries, and death among users, making the city an important testing ground for policies regulating psychotropic substances. Recommendations:
- a. *Drug rehabilitation:* Because of growing rates of substance abuse and because many Tijuana residents are unable to afford medical treatment in addressing this problem, there is a need for social services to assist in reducing substance abuse. Municipal authorities should partner with local and international aid organizations, medical professionals, and civic groups to expand outreach and support for substance abusers and their families, with an emphasis on increasing the number and quality of free community centers for drug rehabilitation. No one should be denied treatment and authorities need to understand that relapse is a natural condition towards recovery.
  - b. *Drug prevention programs:* The municipality has had mixed success in using the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program as a tool to educate students, through police officers, on the negative consequences of drug use. The inclusion of former and current drug users' testimonials into these programs could be an effective way to disseminate the negative consequences of drug use.
  - c. *Binational collaboration on new marijuana regulations in California:* To address the fact that California law now allows marijuana to be sold and consumed for recreational purposes, state and local authorities in the Cali-Baja cross-border region will need to work closely to evaluate how to manage the effect of south-bound flows of marijuana into Mexico, which could produce a growing criminal market for small-time drug dealers in Tijuana.
  - d. *Develop an evidence-based public health approach to drug abuse:* Authorities and civic organizations in Tijuana should carefully monitor and objectively evaluate the short and long term effects of recent changes in drug policy in

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Mexico and the United States to evaluate their implications and the possibility of future changes in the regulation of psychotropic substances.

- 5) **Improving the Analysis of Crime and Violence:** For effective policy responses to crime and violence, there is a need for timely and accurate information and analysis of current trends and the underlying factors contributing to these problems.

Recommendations:

- a. *Report precise geospatial coordinates of crimes:* State and local public security agencies should record and report the precise geospatial coordinates of crime incidents in order to facilitate more accurate mapping and analysis by law enforcement, civic monitoring organizations, and crime observatories.
- b. *Professionalize crime monitoring and analysis:* Baja California and Tijuana law enforcement agencies should work to ensure that civil service protections ensuring long-term continuity and career protections are maintained especially in the criminal analysis and intelligence divisions relevant agencies.
- c. *Strengthen criminological studies programs:* Authorities should work with local universities—including the new branch of the Institute for Juridical Studies to be opened by Mexico's National Autonomous University in 2018—to develop programs for training future criminologists and analysts, and provide regular training and workshops to advance both practical and technical knowledge of crime trends in the region.
- d. *Dissemination of public information:* While the creating of data is important, the sharing of these statistics to independent groups such as universities and NGO's could help create more analytical studies to help understand the complexity of crime and violence in the city. The public reporting of crime statistics could also foster better accountability for the police and the municipal authorities, allowing citizens to demand specific actions in their neighborhoods.

Overall, the security situation in Tijuana poses serious challenges. Organized crime groups have had a long-standing influence in the city, and new dynamics among criminal organizations have contributed to increased patterns of homicide in recent years. At the same time, it is clear that the distribution of violence in Tijuana is uneven and reflects geographic, economic, and social divisions in the city. In this sense, over the last decade, the conflicts among major organized crime groups operating in Tijuana appear to be the spark that has ignited violence in the city's poor and marginalized communities, which are highly susceptible to eruptions because of conditions of social disorganization and marginalization. Local authorities and community leaders must work urgently to address these problems to ensure that 2018 does not set a new record for violent crime in Tijuana.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

**Jaime Arredondo Sánchez Lira** completed his PhD in Global Public Health at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and San Diego State University (SDSU). He studied political science and economics at the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de Mexico (ITAM). He worked four years as Chief of Staff for the Ministry of Public Security in the State Government of Quintana Roo, where he gained extensive experience in coordinating federal programs and establishing partnerships with universities. His research focuses on adapting and implementing interventions based on empirical evidence, in order to modify the effects of police practices and the judicial system as risk factors in the spread of diseases (HIV, HCV), particularly among injecting drug users in the U.S.-Mexico border region.

**Zulia Orozco** is a Ph.D. candidate at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), as well as a research associate with Justice in Mexico and member of The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. She specializes in urban studies, anti-money laundering, accountability, and citizen security in Mexico. Ms. Orozco has taught classes at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California (UABC-Tijuana) and has been fellow for the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy Fellow (2014) and the Fulbright-García Robles program (2016-2017). She is currently working on a book manuscript entitled *Criminal Economy and Violence: Analyzing Geography of Criminal Power Through the Real Estate Market*.

**Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira** is the program coordinator for Justice in Mexico at the Department of Political Science & International Relations at the University of San Diego. He received his J.D. and Master in Legal Science from the School of Law at *Universidad Panamericana* in Aguascalientes, Mexico, and has graduate diplomas in Human Rights at Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha in Spain and in Procedural Law at *Universidad Panamericana*. Mr. Rodriguez is currently a candidate for Doctor of Laws at *Universidad Panamericana*. He has worked as chief of the Public Law Academy and full-time professor at Universidad Panamericana in Aguascalientes, as a visiting professor at the University of San Diego, and as a legal adviser for governmental offices in Mexico regarding human rights and agrarian law.

**David A. Shirk** is the director of Justice in Mexico and associate professor of Political Science & International Relations at the University of San Diego. Dr. Shirk received his B.A. in International Studies thanks to the Matthew David Klee Minority Scholarship at Lock Haven University and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science thanks to a UC Presidential Fellowship at the University of California, San Diego. He was a Ralph Bunche Minority Scholar in 1992, a fellow at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies in 1998-99 and 2001-2003, and both a fellow in 2009-10 and a global fellow in 2013-17 at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, D.C. His research focuses on rule of law and security issues in Mexico and U.S.-Mexico relations.

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