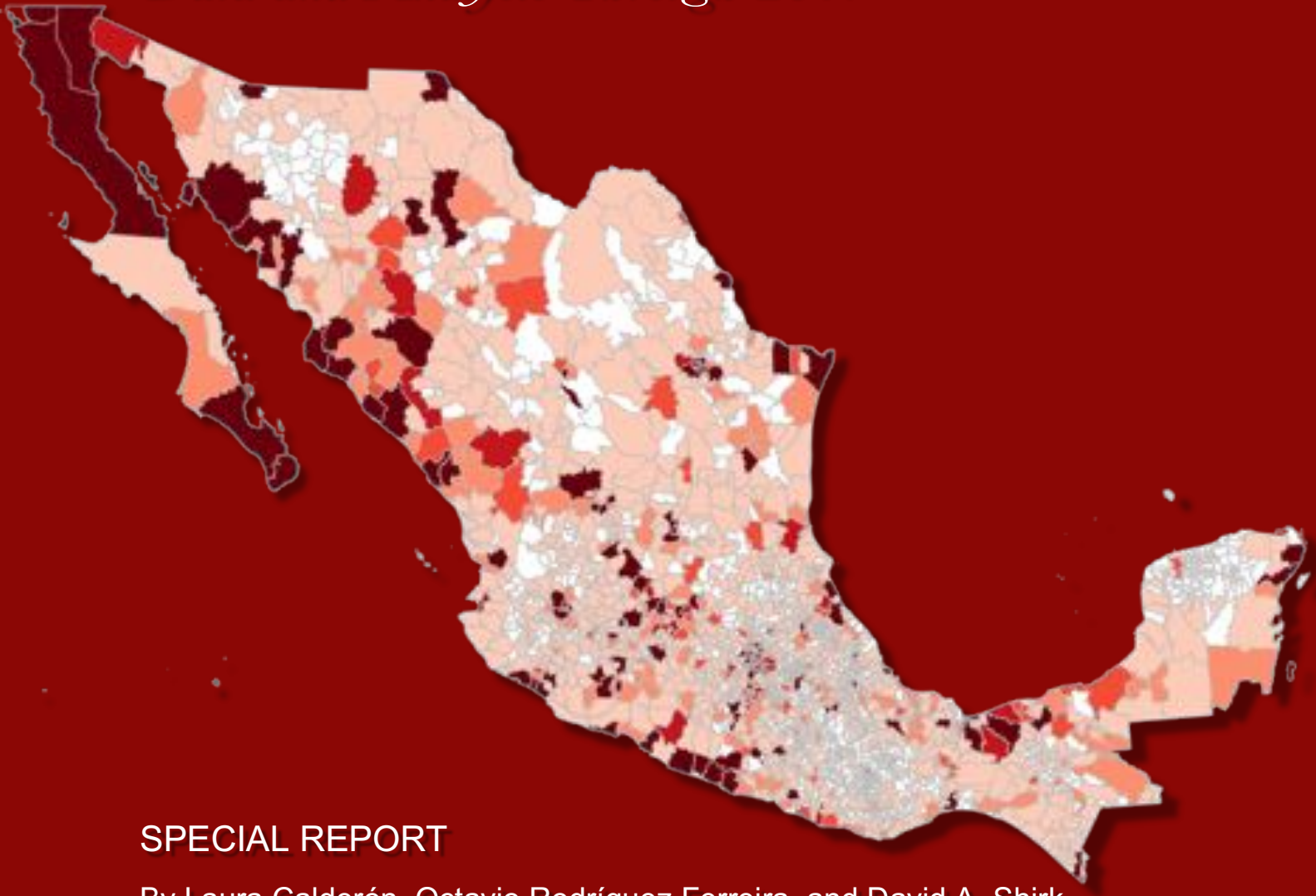


Drug Violence in Mexico

Data and Analysis Through 2017



SPECIAL REPORT

By Laura Calderón, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk



Justice in Mexico

Department of Political Science & International Relations

University of San Diego

APRIL 2018

About Justice in Mexico:

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

About the Report:

This is one of a series of special reports that have been published on a semi-annual by Justice in Mexico since 2010, each of which examines issues related to crime and violence, judicial sector reform, and human rights in Mexico. The *Drug Violence in Mexico* report series examines patterns of crime and violence attributable to organized crime, and particularly drug trafficking organizations in Mexico. This report was authored by Laura Calderón, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, and builds on the work of past reports in this series. This report does not represent the views or opinions of the University of San Diego or Justice in Mexico's sponsoring organizations.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFO	Arellano Felix Organization, an organized crime group from Tijuana
AK-type	Avtomat Kalashnikova, assault rifle used by organized crime groups, e.g., AK-47
AMLO	Andres Manuel López Obrador
AR-type	Assault rifle typically used by organized crime groups, e.g., AR-15
BC Sur	Baja California Sur, a state in western Mexico
BLO	Beltran Leyva Organization, an organized crime group
CDG	Cartel del Golfo (Gulf Cartel), an organized crime group
CENAPI	Centro Nacional de Planeación, Análisis e Información Para el Combate a la Delincuencia (Mexican National Center for Planning, Analysis and Information for Combating Crime)
CIDA	Cartel Independiente de Acapulco (Independent Cartel of Acapulco), an organized crime group
CIDE	Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, a Mexican center for teaching and research in the Social Sciences
CISEN	Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional (Mexican Intelligence Agency)
CJNG	Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, an organized crime group
CNDH	Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (National Human Rights Commission)
CONAPO	Consejo Nacional de Población (National Population Council), a national agency for population estimates
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CPS	Cartel del Pacífico Sur (South Pacific Cartel), an organized crime group
CSN	Consejo de Seguridad Nacional (National Security Council)
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency, an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice
DTO	Drug trafficking organization
ENVIPE	Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (National Victimization and Public Security Perception Survey)
Edomex	Estado de México, a state in central Mexico
FAM	Fuerza Aérea Mexicana (Mexican Air Force), an aerial unit of SEDENA, the Mexican army
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
LSI	Ley de Seguridad Interior (Internal Security Law), passed in 2017 to regulate military intervention in domestic security matters.
MC	Movimiento Ciudadano (Citizen's Movement), political party previously known as Convergencia por la Democracia)
OCG	Organized crime group
MORENA	Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement), Mexican political party.
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party), Mexican political party.
PES	Social Encounter Party (Partido Encuentro Social), 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
PT	Partido de Trabajo (Work Party), Mexican political party
SCJN	Suprema Corte de Justicia Nacional (National Supreme Court of Justice), Mexico's Supreme Court
SEIDO	Subprocuraduría Especializada en Investigación de Delincuencia Organizada, Mexico's Specialized Assistant Attorney General for Investigation of Organized Crime (2003-2012)
SIEDO	Subprocuraduría de Investigación Especializada en Delincuencia Organizada, Mexico's Assistant Attorney General for Special Investigation of Organized Crime (2012-present)
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 2017.** As the ninth 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. Data from official and non-governmental sources on crime statistics are often imperfect, confusing, and even contradictory, so there is a need for careful analysis and comparison of different sources to get a clear and complete picture of the problem of violence, and particularly organized crime.
- **Despite public perceptions, Mexico's violence is "average" for the Western Hemisphere.** While Mexico is often characterized as having extreme levels of violence, homicide rates are actually far worse elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere. With nearly two times Mexico's population, Brazil continues to lead the hemisphere in the total number of homicides, as it has for at least the last decade according to the latest available cross-national data from the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Also, in per capita terms, Mexico's national homicide rate is close to "average" for the region and, due to the magnifying effect of per capita homicide rate calculations, ranks well below those of smaller countries, like Belize, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, and Venezuela.
- **Still, Mexico experienced dramatic increases in crime and violence over the last decade.** 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 after 2007, the first year in office for President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012). 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. Over that period, no other country in the Western Hemisphere had seen such a large increase either in its homicide rate or in the absolute number of homicides.
- **After a three-year decline in 2012-2014, homicides began to increase again in 2015.** Official homicide statistics from Mexico's National Security System (SNSP) registered significant decreases in the number of homicide cases in 2012 (about 5%), in 2013 (about 16%), and in 2014 (about 15%), before climbing upwards again in 2015 (+7%), 2016 (+22%), and 2017 (+23%). After a change in methodology in 2014 to account for individual victims, SNSP reported the number of intentional homicide victims at 17,324 in 2015, 22,571 in 2016, and 27,734 in 2017.
- **Over 116,000 people have been murdered under Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto.** President Enrique Peña Nieto pledged that he would reduce violence dramatically within the first year of his administration. Yet, based on INEGI's official figures from 2013-2016 and the authors' projections for 2017, it appears that approximately 116,000 people have been murdered over the course of the first five years of the Peña Nieto administration. This constitutes an average of 23,293 homicides per year during the first five years of Peña Nieto's term, nearly 4,000 more per year than during Calderón's first five years in office. As such, the annual average number of homicides under the Peña Nieto administration is

now about 20% higher than during the Calderón administration, whose first two years saw much lower levels of homicide.

- **Intentional homicide remains geographically concentrated but is now more dispersed.**
While there is a general perception that Mexico's violence is pervasive and persistent throughout the country, violence has been highly localized, sporadic, and geographically specific (albeit more dispersed) over the years. 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. The latest available data from INEGI suggest that there was a slight resurgence of geographic dispersion, as the number of municipalities with zero homicides dropped from 889 in 2015 to 846 in 2016 (on par with 2014).
- **In 2017, state-level increases in intentional homicide cases were found in all but 6 states.**
The top five states with the largest number of intentional homicide cases in 2017 were Guerrero (2,318), Baja California (2,092), Mexico State (2,041), Veracruz (1,641), and Chihuahua (1,369). In 2017, the state with the largest annual increase in total homicides was Baja California, with most of that increase concentrated in the city of Tijuana, as discussed below. However, the largest percentage increases in homicide cases were found in Nayarit (554% increase) and Baja California Sur (192% increase). At the state level, the largest numerical and percentage decrease in homicides was found in the state of Campeche, which saw 67 homicide cases in 2017, down 17 cases (20% less) compared to the previous year.
- **Journalists and mayors are several times more likely to be killed than ordinary citizens.**
According to a new Justice in Mexico study by Laura Calderón using data from 2016, Mexican journalists were at least three times more likely to be killed (.7 per 1,000) than the general population (.21 per 1,000), and mayors are at least twelve times more likely (2.46 murders per 1,000). Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* dataset includes 152 mayors, candidates, and former mayors killed from 2005 through 2017, with 14 victims in 2015, six in 2016, and 21 in 2017. In total, nine sitting mayors were killed in 2017.
- **Mexico's recent violence is largely attributable to drug trafficking and organized crime.**
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. Based on INEGI's projected tally of 116,468 homicides from 2013 to 2017, at least 29.7% and perhaps as many as 46.9% of these homicides (34,663 according to *Reforma* and as many as 54,631 according to Lantia) appeared to involve organized crime.
- **"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 was extradited to 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 from 2015 through 2017 were related to inter- and intra-organizational conflicts among rival drug traffickers in the wake of Guzmán's re-arrest in 2016.

- **The country's recent violence could be a concern in Mexico's 2018 presidential election.**
 The worsening of security conditions over the past three years has been a major setback for President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), who pledged to reduce violence dramatically during his administration. Peña Nieto has received record low approval ratings during his first five years in office, in part due to perceptions of his handling of issues of crime, violence, and corruption, particularly after the disappearance and murder of dozens of students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero in 2014. Mexico will hold elections in July 2018 and the next president will take office in December 2018. Since there is widespread concern about Mexico's elevated levels of crime and violence, candidates for public office will feel pressure to take a stand on these issues and may even be targeted for violence for violence.
- **U.S.-Mexico security cooperation appears to hit a wall under President Donald Trump.**
 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 and an estimated 60,000 heroin deaths in 2016. In his first year in office, U.S. President Donald Trump pushed the Mexican government to reinvigorate its counter-narcotics efforts, and placed a heavy emphasis on military-to-military cooperation, including new joint operations between the Mexican Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard. Trump also pledged to increase U.S. security measures along the 2,000-mile Southwest border, inspecting eight prototypes for his proposed border "wall" and sending national guard troops to assist the U.S. border patrol, despite the fact that apprehensions at the border reached a 47-year low in 2017. While U.S.-Mexico cooperation continues under the bilateral security cooperation agreement known as the Merida Initiative, tensions between the two countries have appeared to 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 2017

I. INTRODUCTION

Mexico has experienced dramatic surges in crime and violence over the last decade, most visibly exemplified by an increased number of homicides. The number of intentional homicides documented by Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) had declined significantly under both presidents Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) and Vicente Fox (2000-2006), but rose dramatically after 2007, the first year in office for President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012). 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.

While homicides declined from 2011 through 2014, the number began to rebound during the last half of the administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), with levels exceeding those of the Calderón administration. Figures for 2017 appear to have matched or surpassed the record levels set in 2011, a year in which the country saw more than 27,000 homicides. Over the course of Peña Nieto's five years in office, there have been 64 homicides per day, or more than 2.6 murders every hour. All told, since the start of the twenty-first century, more than a quarter of a million people have been murdered in Mexico.

A large portion of Mexico's surge in homicides over the last decade has been attributed to organized crime groups engaged in drug trafficking and other illicit activities. This study is the latest in a series of annual reports produced by Justice in Mexico since 2010 in an attempt to examine trends in violence and organized crime in Mexico using the latest available data. Over the years, these reports have 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 we discuss in more detail in Appendix A: Defining Drug-Related Violence.

As the ninth annual report on *Drug Violence in Mexico*, this study compiles the latest available data and analysis of crime and violence trends in Mexico. According to this and past reports, a major portion—between a third and half—of Mexico's homicides have been attributable to drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and other organized crime groups (OCGs). According to Mexican newspapers *Reforma* and *Milenio*, respectively, the tally amounts to between 82,000 and 100,000 killings attributable to "drugs" and organized criminal violence since 2007.¹ All

¹ More Mexicans have been killed by organized crime-style homicides than the number of U.S. soldiers reported killed in "battle deaths" and "other deaths (in theater)" 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). All figures indicated here are rounded down to the nearest thousand. See: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, "Americas Wars," (May 2015),

told, roughly a third to half of Mexico's murders bore characteristics that are frequently associated with organized crime groups, including execution-style killings, the presence of multiple victims and assailants, the use of high-powered weaponry, messages left by the perpetrators, and other tell-tale signs. This report presents a comprehensive assessment of the publicly available data to help understand Mexico's recent violence, and specifically the role of organized crime in relation to this problem.

II. UNDERSTANDING MEXICO'S RECENT VIOLENCE

In the analysis of crime and violence, alarm or frustration about a given situation sometimes makes it easy to slip into impassioned claims and hyperbole. In 2008, in the face of Mexico's rapidly mounting security crisis, a worst-case scenario analysis by the U.S. Joint Forces Command contemplated Mexico as one of two countries—along with Pakistan—that could suffer a sudden collapse into a “failed state.”² A decade later, in 2017, a widely-publicized report from the International Institute for Strategic Studies suggested that Mexico was the second most violent country in the world (after Syria), and asserted that all 23,000 homicides in 2016 were attributable to organized crime.³ This claim was seized on by U.S. President Donald Trump as a means to proliferate fear and animosity toward Mexico.

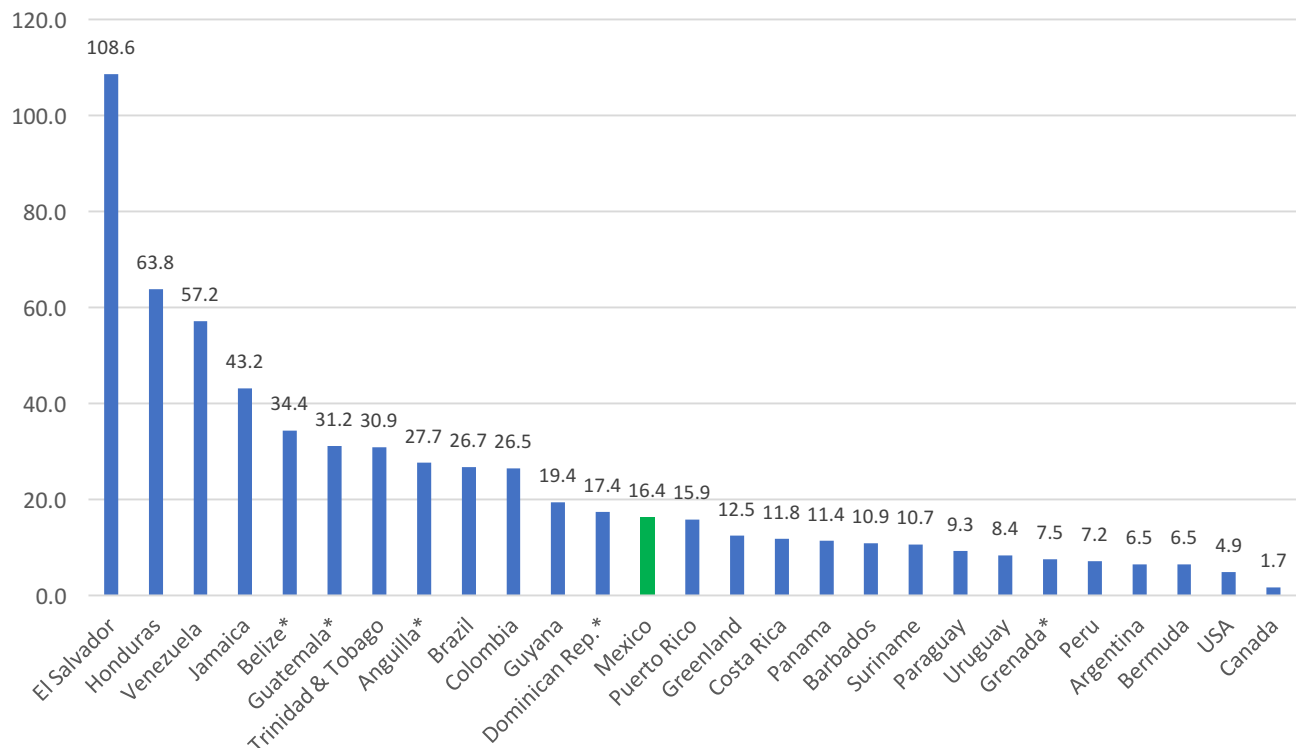
Yet, while Mexico is often characterized as having extreme levels of violence, homicide rates per 100,000 inhabitants are actually far worse elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere. With nearly two times Mexico's population, Brazil continues to lead the hemisphere in the total number of homicides, as it has for at least the last decade according to the latest available cross-national data from the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Also, in per capita terms, Mexico's national homicide rate is close to “average” for the region and, due to the magnifying effect of population-based homicide rate calculations, ranks well below those of smaller countries, like Belize, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, and Venezuela. Meanwhile, by the various measures used to compile the so-called Fragile States Index (formerly known as the Failed State Index), the health of the Mexican state ranks about average for Latin American countries. In short, considering the size of its population and capacity for basic governance, Mexico is far becoming the world's most violent country and does not appear to be on the verge of collapse.

http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs_americas_wars.pdf. See also, the Defense Casualty Analysis System, https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_oif_all.xhtml

² Specifically, the report asserted, “In terms of worst-case scenarios for the Joint Force and indeed the world, two large and important states bear consideration for a rapid and sudden collapse: Pakistan and Mexico...” (United States Joint Forces Command 2008). Placing Mexico on par with Pakistan and using the phrase “failed state” was enormously controversial, sparking condemnations from the Mexican ambassador.

³ Specifically, the report falsely asserts that “Mexico's 2016 intentional homicide total, 23,000, is second only to Syria.” Antônio Sampaio, “Mexico's spiralling murder rate,” <http://www.iiss.org/en/regions/latin-america-and-the-caribbean/mexico-murder-rate-9f41>

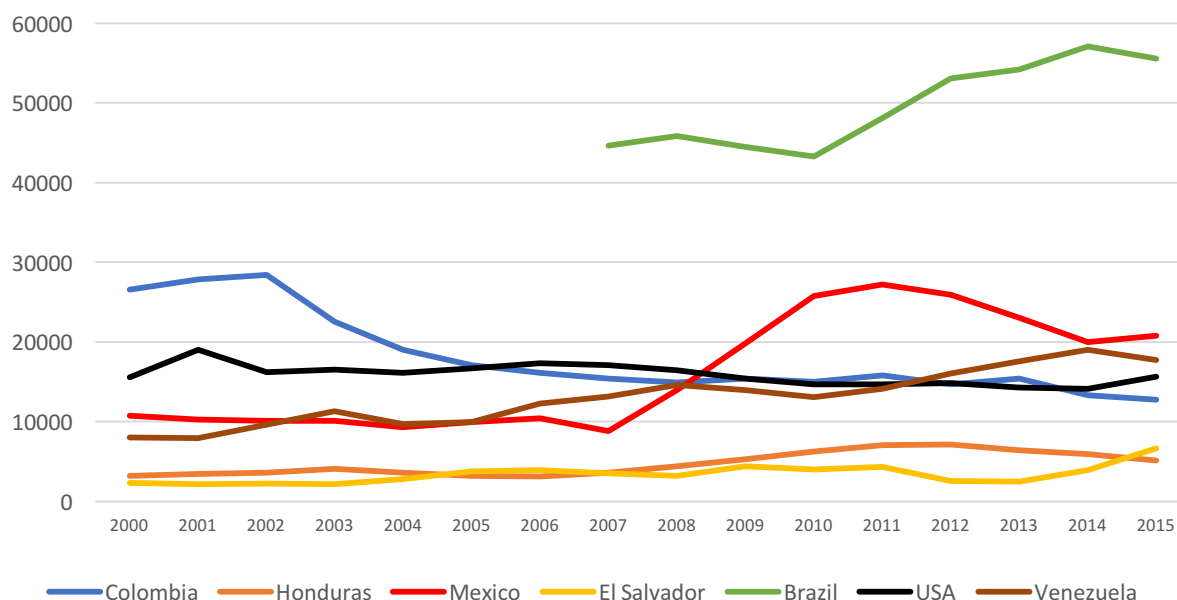
Figure 1: Homicide Rates in the Americas (circa 2015)



Source: UNODC homicide data for 2015 or latest year available (2014 data marked with asterisk). More recent comparative data were not available at the time of release for this report.

Still, while Mexico's levels of violence may be "average," the fact that its population exceeds 110 million means that the overall toll of violence is much greater in Mexico than in smaller countries with higher homicide rates. Indeed, the number of homicides in Mexico from 2000 through 2015 (256,347) amounted to more than the combined total for several countries with much higher homicide rates, including Belize (1,523), Dominican Republic (28,208), El Salvador (54,548), Guatemala (70,012), Honduras (75,679), and Jamaica (20,508). During that same period, the total number of homicides in Mexico was also slightly higher than the total for the United States (254,983), which has nearly three times Mexico's population. Based on available data since 2000, roughly 1 in 8 murders in the Western Hemisphere occurred in Mexico.

Figure 2: Number of Homicides in Selected Latin American Countries, 2000-2015



Mexico also stands out because the problem of violence is relatively new. For many Latin American countries, political violence was a recurring problem during much of the 20th century, due to military interventions, civil wars, and insurgencies that led to mass killing, disappearances, and human rights violations.⁴ In contrast, from the 1930s onward, Mexico experienced a relatively high degree of political stability and low levels of internal conflict for the remainder of the 20th century. In terms of interpersonal violence, historical data show that homicide in Mexico generally declined from the 1930s into the mid-2000s.⁵ Thus, the rise in violence in Mexico over the past decade presents a disconcerting and urgent problem that merits serious consideration from scholars and policy makers.

III. FINDINGS: DRUG VIOLENCE IN MEXICO

To better understand the general trends in homicide in Mexico—and organized-crime-style violence, in particular—the remainder of this report examines the indicators and patterns identified in recent years, with an emphasis on the latest available data for 2017. Previous *Drug Violence in Mexico* reports prepared by Justice in Mexico discuss the general trends in organized crime homicides for years prior to 2017 in considerable detail. 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.

⁴ Tina Rosenberg, *Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America*, (New York: Penguin, 1991).

⁵ See David A. Shirk and Alejandra Ríos Cázares. "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.

A. The Incidence of Homicide Increased to Record Levels in 2017

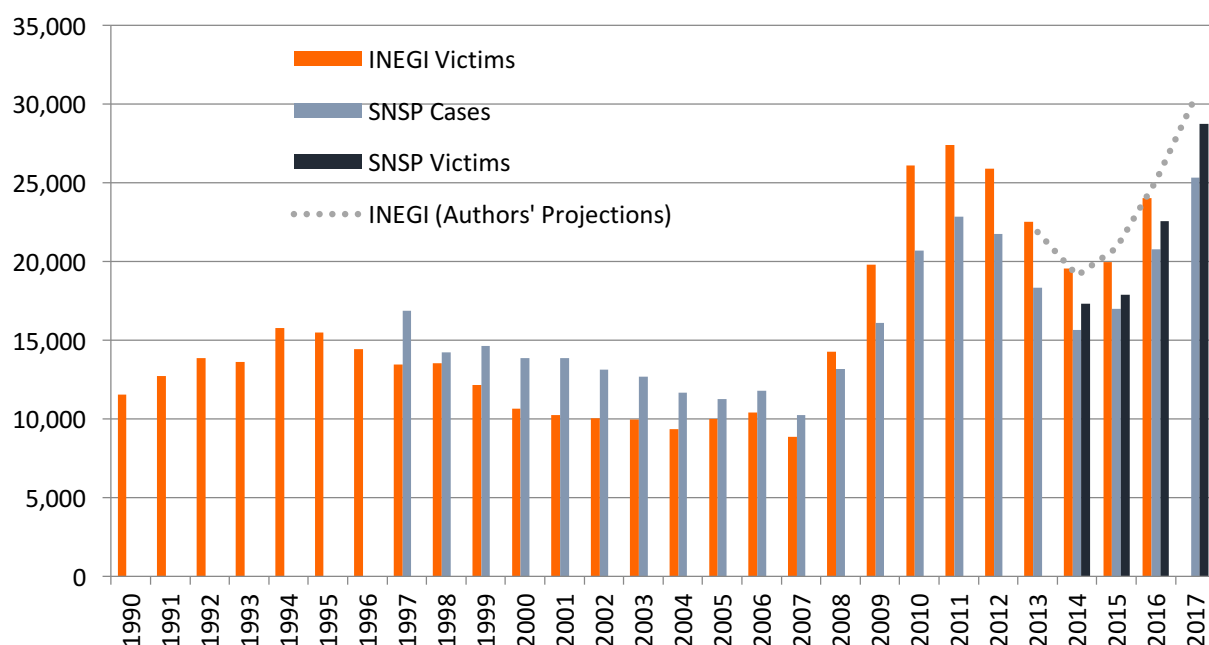
Homicide levels in Mexico spiked dramatically in 2017, continuing a multi-year upward trend that began in 2015 (See Figure 3). Both of Mexico's official data sources on homicides—INEGI and the National Public Security System (SNSP)—have been consistent in documenting these trends, though they have different methodologies and tallies (See Appendix).⁶ It is important to note that INEGI's homicide data for any given year are typically made available in the latter part of the following calendar year. For this reason, the authors estimated the number of homicides INEGI will likely report in 2018, with authors projections for all years since 2012 shown in the grey dotted line in the figure.⁷

SNSP, meanwhile, has reported its figures for intentional homicides in 2017 at 25,339 cases, which reflects an increase of 21.9% from the previous year. However, starting in 2014, SNSP has been using and reporting figures based on a new methodology, which puts the totals for 2017 at 24,906 cases (up 23% from 2016) and 28,734 victims (up 27.3%). Regardless of the figures used, an increase of a ten or twenty percentage points represents thousands of additional individuals killed. Thus, the increase reported by SNSP's new methodology represents an increase from 22,571 homicides in 2016 to 28,734 homicides in 2017, an increase of 6,163 homicide victims in 2017.

⁶ 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 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.

⁷ The authors estimate that in mid-2018 INEGI will report around 30,399 homicides for 2017. We came to this estimate by tabulating the average percentage difference in the number of homicides reported by INEGI and SNSP over the preceding five-year period. This method has typically resulted in a reliable and conservative 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 25,539 in 2016. The actual figure reported by INEGI in mid-2017 was 24,559, a difference of about 980 murders or about 3.9%.

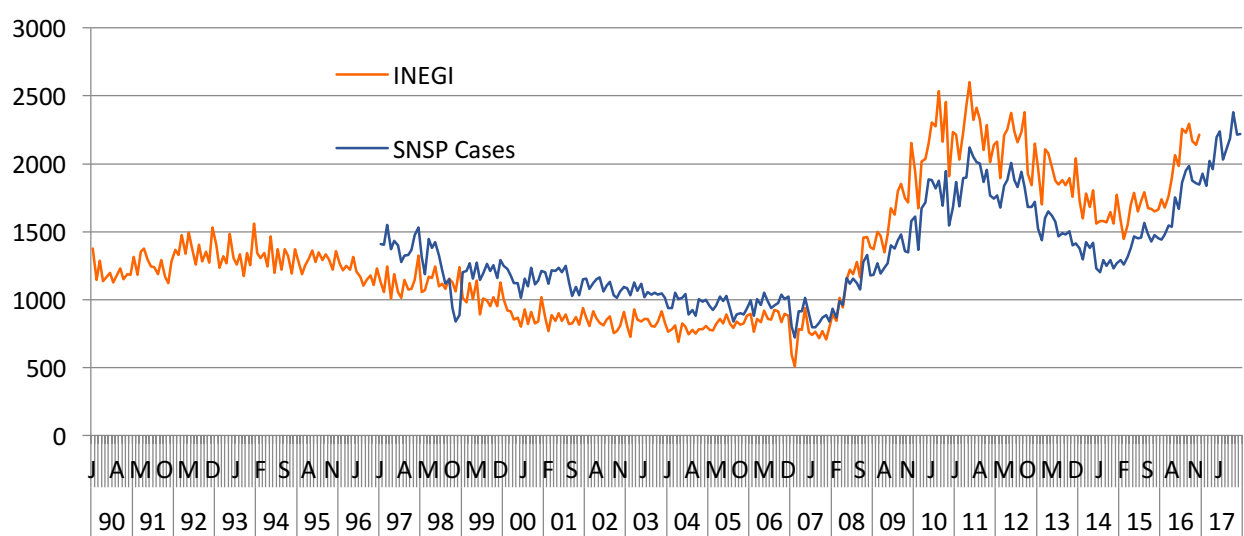
Figure 3: Homicides by Year as Reported by INEGI and SNSP (1990-2016)



Source: INEGI, SNSP.

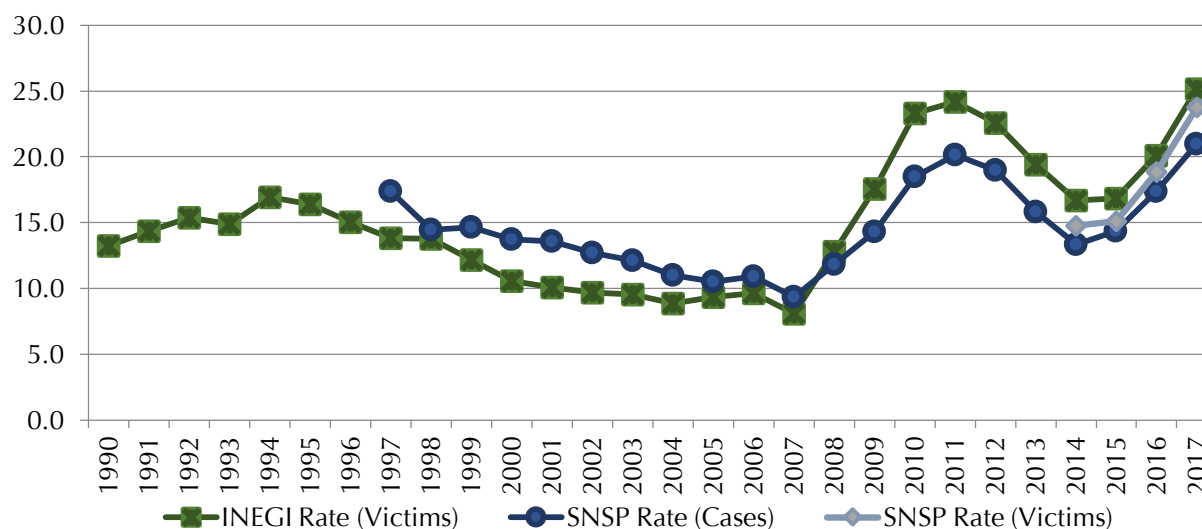
As illustrated in Figure 4, annualized data tend to obscure patterns that can be better identified in data reported on a monthly basis. For example, while the monthly spikes in homicides were higher in 2010, the annual total was higher for 2011, previously the two worst years on record. Still, the monthly totals and the annual total for 2017 surpasses the number of homicides seen in either year. For this reason, many sources have correctly reported that 2017 reached record levels of homicides.

Figure 4: Homicides by Month as Reported by INEGI and SNSP (1990-2016)



Source: INEGI, SNSP.

Figure 5: Homicide Rate, Based on INEGI and SNSP Data (1990-2016)



Source: INEGI, SNSP. Calculation of 2017 INEGI homicide rate based on authors estimates.

However, to properly compare 2017 to other years, it is necessary to account for population growth. CONAPO calculations based on the 2010 census suggest that Mexico's population rose from roughly 112 million people in 2010 to nearly 121 million people, an increase of about 8.2 million people.⁸ Based on CONAPO and SNSP data, the homicide rate did indeed reach a "record" high (see Figure 5). However, SNSP data for all relevant years only include homicide cases (not individual victims) and do not utilize SNSP's new methodology, so the accuracy of this comparison is unclear. The authors projections for INEGI victim data also suggest a record year, but it will be necessary to reference official figures reported by INEGI in mid-2018. If INEGI reports 29,200 or fewer homicides for 2017, the annual homicide rate will be equal to or less than the rate for 2011. In short, the final word on whether 2017 was a "record" year for Mexico's homicide rate hinges on the release of INEGI data in mid-2018.

B. Organized-Crime-Style Killings Constituted a Major Share of Homicides in 2017

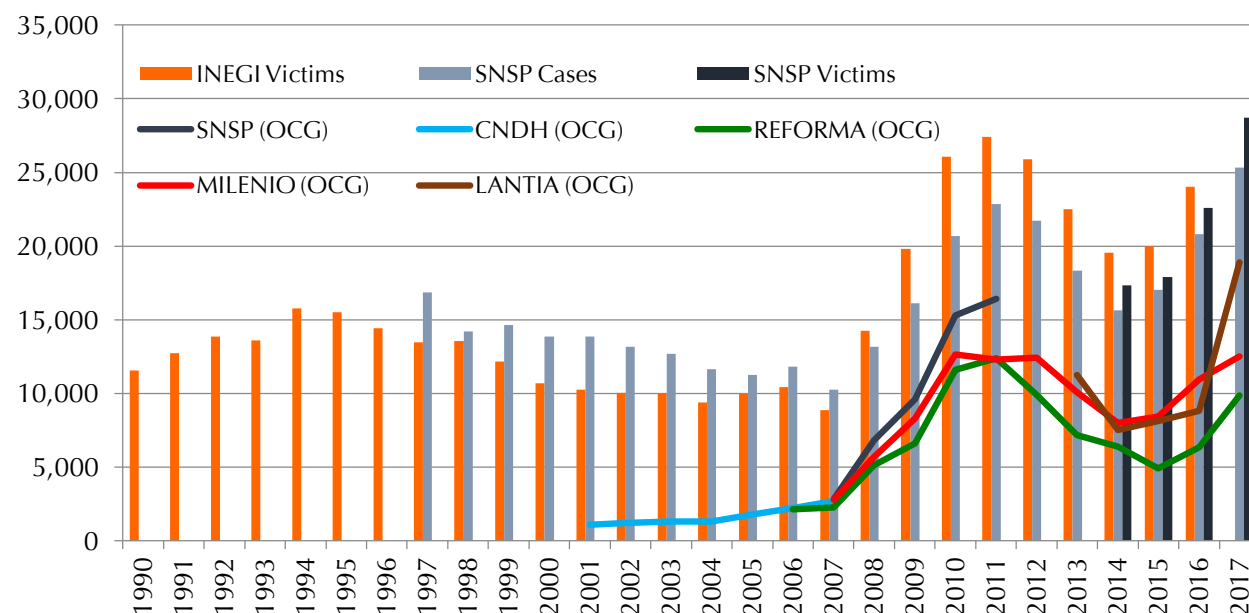
As noted above, a review of available data shows that a many homicides in recent years bore characteristics typically associated with organized crime-style violence: group executions, torture, beheadings, dismemberment, assault weapons, "narco" messages, mass graves, and other methods used by organized crime groups. The bar chart for Figure 6 presents INEGI (1990-2016) and SNSP (1997-2017) homicide data alongside a line graph tracing available data on organized-crime-style homicides from SNSP (2007-2013), *Reforma* (2006-2012 and 2013-2016), and *Milenio* (2007-2016), which are described in more detail in the Appendix.⁹

⁸ Considering that the average homicide rate from 2010-2016 was 20.4 per 100,000 people, the total increase in homicides from 2010 to 2017 would be somewhere around 1,815.

⁹ 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*.

In total, for 2017, *Lantia* reported 18,898 organized-crime-style homicides, *Milenio* reported 12,532, and *Reforma* reported 9,883, showing across-the-board increases in such tallies.

Figure 6: Comparison of Homicide and Organized Crime Homicide Data from Multiple Sources, 1990 through 2017



Sources: INEGI, SNSP, *Reforma*, *Milenio*, *Lantia*, CNDH.

Regarding the proportions underlying the above comparison, Table 1 below identifies the share of homicides attributed to organized crime by various tallies. Given the substantial variation across different sources, there appear to be important differences in methodology and/or data compilation for tallies of organized-crime-style homicides (as is also the case for official tallies of homicide by INEGI and SNSP). Still, regardless which datasets are being compared, there is a very strong statistical relationship between the variables being measured. That is, the various sources of data on both homicides and organized-crime-style homicides are highly correlated, moving in the same direction with a high degree of statistical correlation.

Of course, there is the possibility of false positives or negatives (Type I and Type II errors) in the data. Thus, in estimating the share of organized-crime-style homicides, it is arguably best to consider the range. With this in mind, available sources indicate that as few as a 34% and as many as 57% of all homicides in Mexico from 2006-2017 bore characteristics of organized-crime-style violence. Moreover, limiting the comparison to the years from 2008-2017 raises the proportion of homicides attributable to organized crime by about 2% on average across all sources. For 2017, the most conservative estimate (comparing *Reforma* data with the authors' homicide projections for INEGI) suggests that roughly a third of all homicides in Mexico were attributable to organized crime.

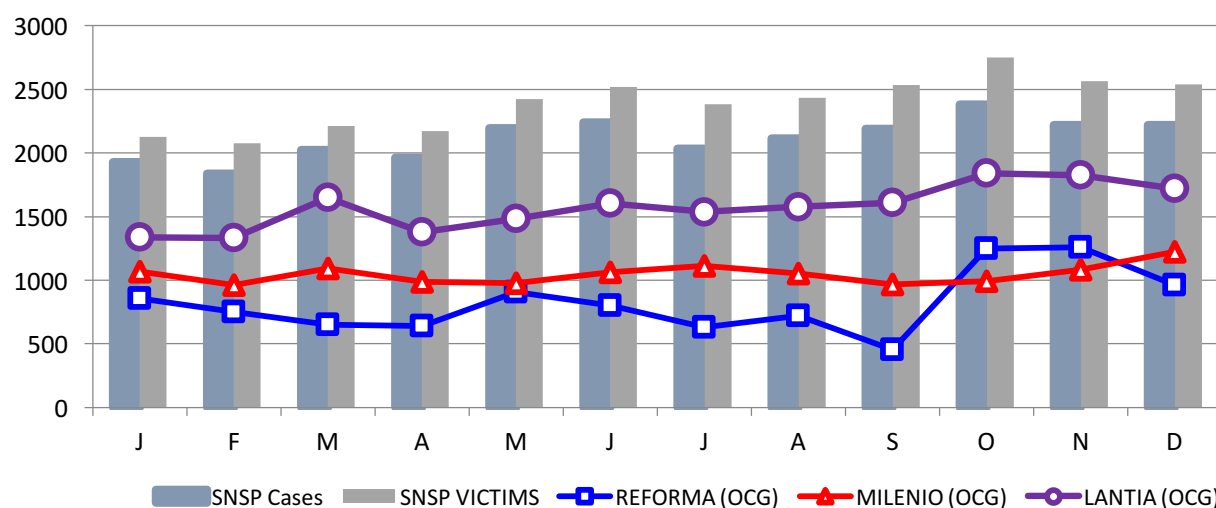
Table 1: Percentage of INEGI and SNSP Homicides Attributed to Organized-Crime-Style Homicide in *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and *Lantia* Tallies, 2006-2016

YEAR	SNSP OCG (% INEGI Victims)	SNSP OCG (% SNSP Cases)	REFORMA OCG (% INEGI Victims)	REFORMA OCG (% SNSP Cases)	MILENIO OCG (% INEGI Victims)	MILENIO OCG (% SNSP Cases)	LANTIA OCG (% INEGI Victims)	LANTIA OCG (% SNSP Cases)
2006	n/d	n/d	20.3%	18.0%	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d
2007	19.8%	27.6%	25.6%	22.1%	31.3%	27.0%	n/d	n/d
2008	34.5%	52.0%	36.0%	39.0%	39.8%	43.2%	n/d	n/d
2009	36.9%	59.6%	33.3%	40.9%	41.8%	51.4%	n/d	n/d
2010	55.7%	73.9%	44.4%	56.0%	48.5%	61.2%	n/d	n/d
2011	63.3%	71.8%	45.1%	54.1%	44.8%	53.8%	n/d	n/d
2012	53.7%	55.6%	38.3%	45.6%	47.9%	57.1%	n/d	n/d
2013	56.2%	60.0%	31.8%	39.1%	44.8%	55.1%	50.1%	61.5%
2014	n/d	n/d	32.7%	40.9%	40.9%	51.1%	37.5%	47.9%
2015	n/d	n/d	24.5%	28.8%	42.2%	49.5%	39.1%	47.7%
2016	n/d	n/d	26.3%	30.4%	45.6%	52.8%	36.0%	42.5%
2017	n/d	n/d	32.5%	39.0%	41.2%	49.5%	62.2%	74.6%
AVE	45.7%	57.2%	34.2%	39.5%	42.5%	50.0%	43.8%	54.7%

Sources: INEGI, SNSP, *Reforma*, *Milenio*, *Lantia*, CNDH, and authors' estimates for the projected number of INEGI victims in 2017 (in red).

Finally, it is worth comparing the monthly data available from 2017 for intentional homicides reported by SNSP and organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and *Lantia*. Over the course of 2017, *Milenio* and *Lantia* recorded higher tallies of organized crime-style homicides. However, it seems that there was a moderate positive correlation between tallies reported by *Reforma* and *Lantia*, while the relationship of either of these tallies to that produced by *Milenio* was weaker, as illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7: 2017 Homicides & OCG-Style Homicides (By Month)



Sources: SNSP, Milenio, Reforma, Lantia.

Justice in Mexico maintains its own database of organized crime-style homicides documented by various media sources. As noted in past reports, 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

As noted in past reports, while there is a general perception that Mexico's violence is pervasive and persistent throughout the country, violence has been highly localized, sporadic, and geographically specific (albeit more dispersed) 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.

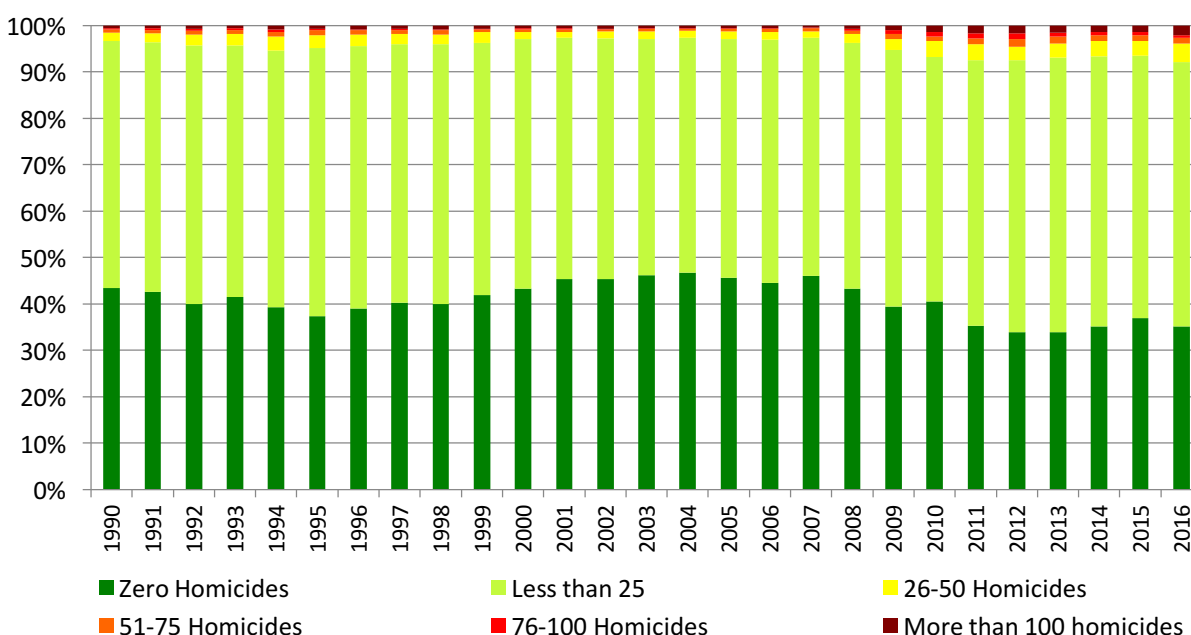
1. Geographic Dispersion Increases Slightly in 2016, After Three Year Decline

Past versions of this report have paid close attention to the geographic dispersion of violence in Mexico at the municipal level. 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 8.¹⁰ 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 no murders at all.¹¹

From 2007-2013, however, Mexico experienced a steady decline in the number of “murder-free” municipalities each year, reaching a low of 817 municipalities (about 33%) in 2013. Moreover, between 2007 and 2012, there was dramatic increase in the number of municipalities (from 65 to 179) registering more than 25 homicides. During that time period, the number of municipalities with more than 100 homicides quadrupled from 10 in 2007 to 41 in 2012. From 2012-2015, 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 2015), and the number of municipalities with more than 100 homicides also dropped (falling to 32 in 2015). While not quite the kind of “positive peace” advocated by the Mexico Peace Index (produced annually by the Institute for Economics and Peace), the absence of violence in more places was a welcome shift.

Figure 8: Concentrations of Violence at the Municipal Level, 1990-2016



Source: INEGI.

¹⁰ 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.

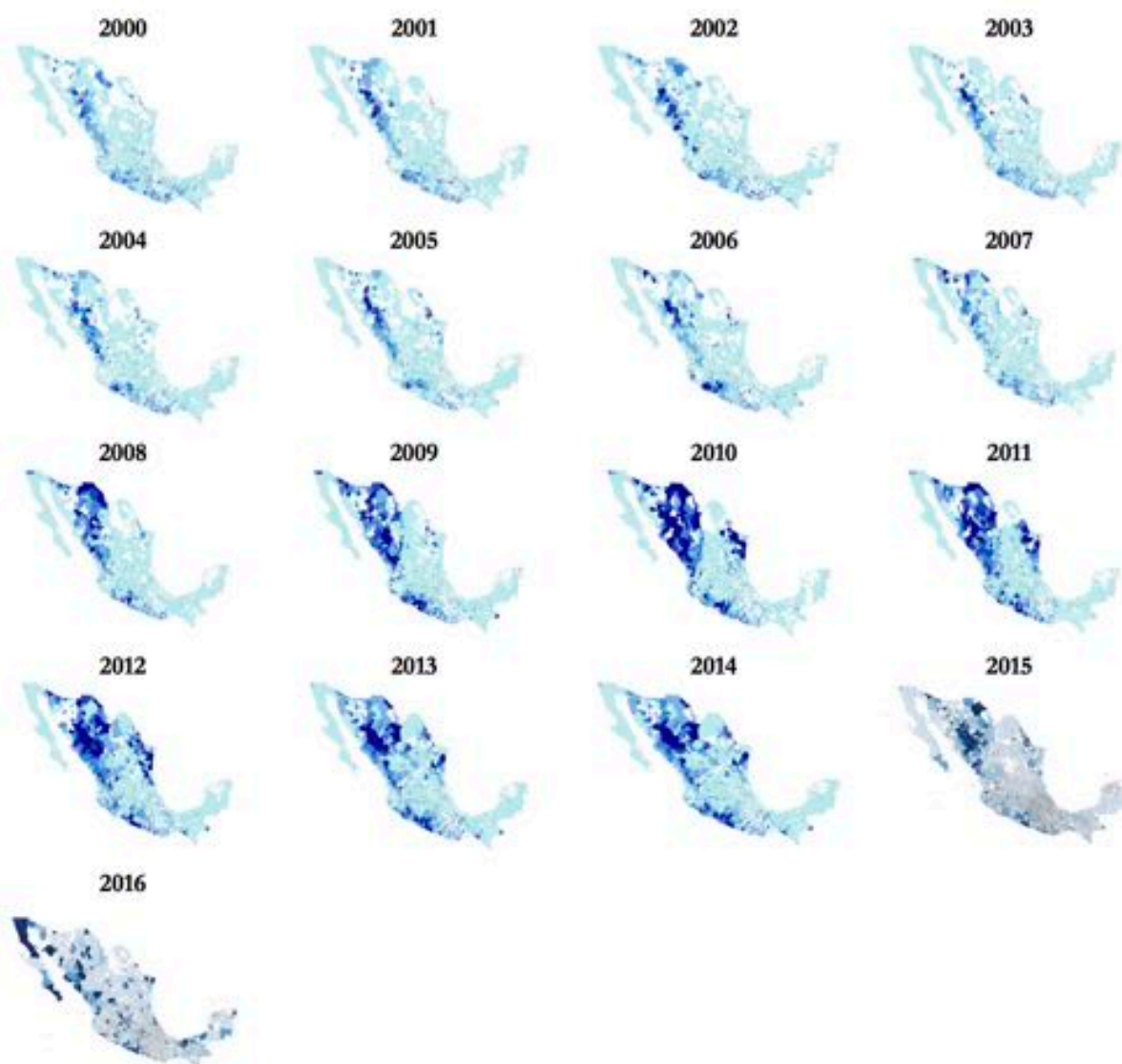
¹¹ The figures we report here, which differ slightly from previous reports, are based on more recent, corrected data from INEGI for the number of homicides that occurred in these years. Adjustments to the INEGI dataset are made each year to differentiate between the number of murders that were “registered” 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.

Unfortunately, the latest available data from INEGI suggest that there was a slight resurgence of geographic dispersion in 2016, reversing the improvements seen the previous year. Indeed, the number of municipalities with zero homicides dropped from 889 in 2015 to 846 in 2016 (on par with 2014). Even more troubling, the number of municipalities with more than 100 homicides increased from 32 to 50, the highest level on record since 1990. Given the roughly 20% increase in homicides estimated for 2017, it seems likely that the number of homicide-free municipalities declined and the number of high-homicide municipalities increased again last year.

The maps in Figure 9 further illustrate the geographic distribution of violence in Mexico, showing municipal homicide levels from 1999 through 2016, as reported by INEGI. Because INEGI data are not yet available for 2017, the maps in Figure 10 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.¹² 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 2017 in these states and several new locations, particularly along Mexico’s Pacific coast.

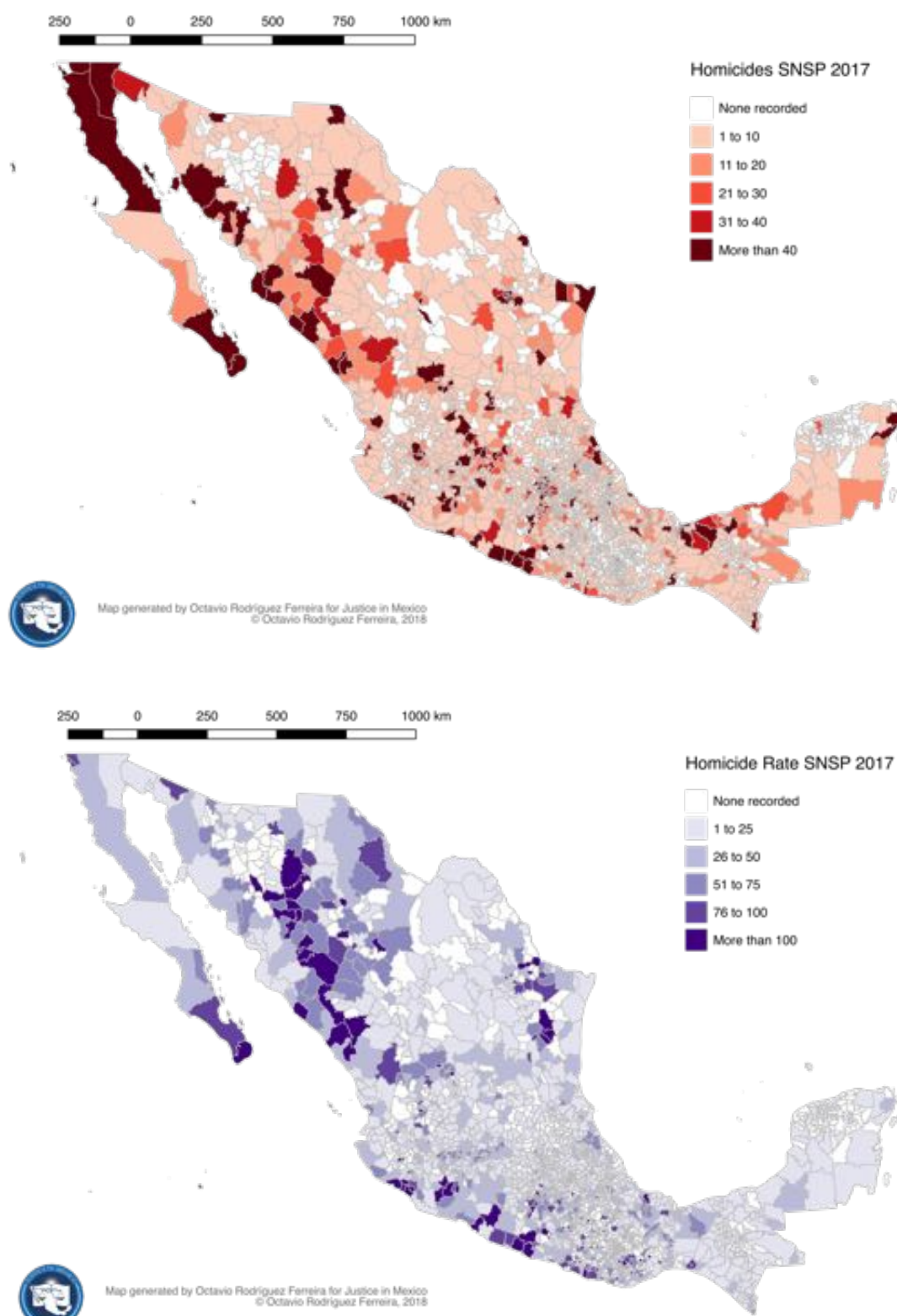
¹² It is necessary to underscore again this year that SNSP data are preliminary. There were several municipalities for which SNSP reported incomplete data at the time that authors downloaded and began working with these data in January 2016, as was the case in our reports for previous years. Also, it 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.

Figure 9: Distribution of Homicide Victims by Municipality, 2000-2016



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

Figure 10: Distribution of Homicide Victims and Rate by Municipality in 2017

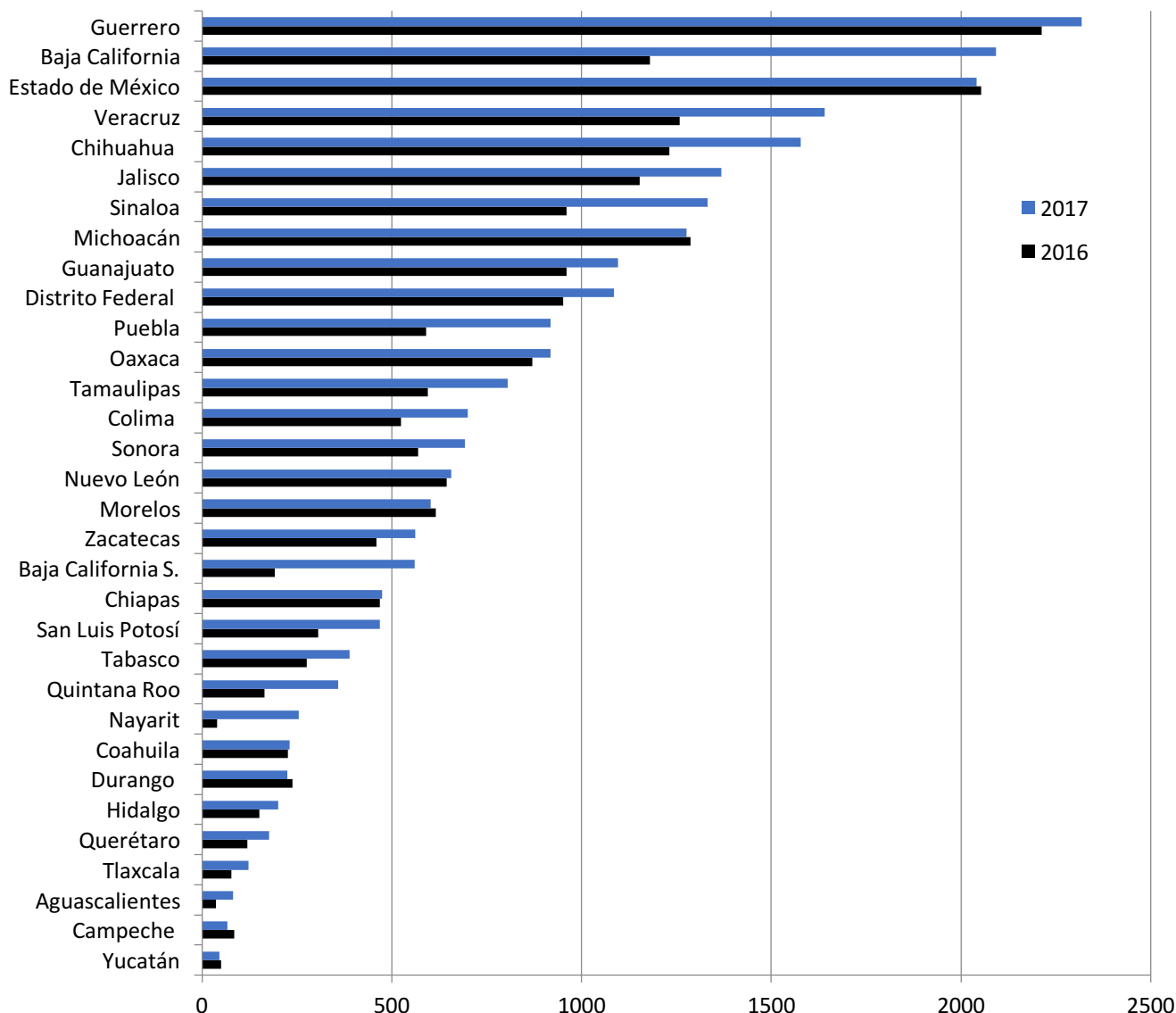


Source: SNSP, CONAPO.

2. Significant Increases in State and Local Centers of Violence

SNSP data provided in Figure 11 show that the top five states with the largest number of intentional homicide cases in 2017 were Guerrero (2,318), Baja California (2,092), Mexico State (2,041) Veracruz (1,641), and Chihuahua (1,369). In 2017, the state with the largest annual increase in total homicides was Baja California, with most of that increase concentrated in the city of Tijuana, as discussed below. However, the largest percentage increases in homicide cases were found in Nayarit (554% increase) and Baja California Sur (192% increase). At the state level, the largest numerical and percentage decrease in homicides was found in the state of Campeche, which saw 67 homicide cases in 2017, down 17 cases (20% less) compared to the previous year. The state with the lowest number of homicide cases in 2017 was Yucatán, with 46 cases, down four (8% less) compared to the previous year.

Figure 11: Intentional Homicides by State SNSP, 2016 and 2017



Source: SNSP.

At the local level, the share of homicide cases found in the top ten most violent municipalities in Mexico rose from 20% in 2016 to nearly 27% in 2017. This was the highest proportion of homicide cases concentrated among major centers of violence since 2012, when over 30% of homicide cases nationwide were found in top ten most violent cities. However, the concentration of violence did not reach the record levels seen in 2010, when over 44% of Mexico's homicide cases were concentrated in ten municipalities (and nearly 36% were concentrated in the top five). Again, this information points to the fact that—although the overall number of homicide cases was greater in 2017—the problem of homicide has become more dispersed throughout the country than it was during the last wave of violence in Mexico.

Figure 12: Top Ten Municipalities by Total Number of Homicide Cases, 2007-2017

#	Municipality	2007	Rate
1	Tijuana	207	14
2	Juarez	200	15
3	Acapulco	186	26
4	Itzapalapa	186	10
5	Ecatepec	155	9
6	G. A. Madero	151	13
7	Monterrey	139	12
8	Neshualcoyotl	135	12
9	Cullacan	121	15
10	Guadalajara	118	7
Top 10 total/share		1,598	7.7%
Top 5 total/share		934	4.5%

#	Municipality	2008	Rate
1	Juarez	1,620	11.7
2	Tijuana	782	51
3	Chihuahua	424	53
4	Cullacán	401	49
5	Acapulco	316	30
6	Ecatepec	313	12
7	Guadalajara	174	11
8	Itzapalapa	173	9
9	Durango	160	29
10	G. A. Madero	151	13
Top 10 total/share		4,313	20.7%
Top 5 total/share		1,443	16.6%

#	Municipality	2009	Rate
1	Juarez	2,399	170
2	Tijuana	1,094	69
3	Cullacan	620	76
4	Chihuahua	528	65
5	Acapulco	418	59
6	Ecatepec	316	18
7	Gomez Palacio	278	84
8	Durango	230	42
9	Mexicali	216	23
10	Itzapalapa	206	11
Top 10 total/share		6,305	30.3%
Top 5 total/share		5,059	24.3%

#	Municipality	2010	Rate
1	Juarez	3,746	262
2	Tijuana	1,250	76
3	Chihuahua	1,106	134
4	Cullacan	798	97
5	Acapulco	689	70
6	Ecatepec	424	34
7	Matatlan	418	97
8	Monterrey	319	32
9	Tepec	309	85
10	Torreón	267	47
Top 10 total/share		9,186	44.2%
Top 5 total/share		7,389	35.5%
#	Municipality	2011	Rate
1	Juarez	1,460	100
2	Acapulco	1,008	145
3	Monterrey	720	62
4	Cullacán	649	79
5	Chihuahua	554	66
6	Torreón	455	72
7	Tijuana	418	25
8	Ecatepec	325	19
9	Matatlan	307	71
10	Guadalupe	254	36
Top 10 total/share		6,130	29.5%
Top 5 total/share		4,371	21.6%
#	Municipality	2012	Rate
1	Acapulco	1,271	184
2	Juarez	850	58
3	Monterrey	685	62
4	Cullacan	471	57
5	Torreón	792	126
6	Chihuahua	587	69
7	Tijuana	320	18
8	Nuevo Laredo	344	132
9	Cuernavaca	270	73
10	Ecatepec	513	30
Top 10 total/share		6,323	30.4%
Top 5 total/share		4,069	19.6%
#	Municipality	2013	Rate
1	Acapulco	883	129
2	Tijuana	492	27
3	Cullacan	479	58
4	Juarez	453	30
5	Ecatepec	312	18
6	Monterrey	266	34
7	Chihuahua	251	29
8	Torreón	238	38
9	Zapopan	217	16
10	Morelia	209	27
Top 10 total/share		3,800	18.3%
Top 5 total/share		2,619	12.6%
#	Municipality	2014	Rate
1	Acapulco	590	70
2	Tijuana	462	27
3	Cullacan	399	43
4	Juarez	389	28
5	Ecatepec	349	20
6	Chihuahua	284	20
7	Morelia	282	24
8	León	266	11
9	Chilpancingo	266	64
10	Itzapalapa	260	9
Top 10 total/share		3,047	14.7%
Top 5 total/share		2,189	10.5%
#	Municipality	2015	Rate
1	Acapulco	902	107
2	Tijuana	612	36
3	Cullacan	441	47
4	Ecatepec	355	20
5	Juarez	269	19
6	Chilpancingo	212	82
7	Guadalajara	199	13
8	Itzapalapa	182	10
9	Zapopan	176	13
10	Neshualcoyotl	172	15
Top 10 total/share		3,513	16.9%
Top 5 total/share		2,579	12.4%
#	Name	2016	Rate
1	Acapulco	918	139
2	Tijuana	871	45
3	Juarez	470	30
4	Cullacán	439	53
5	Ecatepec	298	17
6	Chihuahua	275	31
7	Chilpancingo	234	99
8	Matatlan	224	49
9	Itzapalapa	222	12
10	Victoria, Tam	216	63
Top 10 total/share		4,167	20.0%
Top 5 total/share		2,996	14.4%
#	Name	2017	Rate
1	Tijuana	1,618	83
2	Acapulco	834	126
3	Juarez	642	41
4	Cullacán	607	73
5	Chihuahua	363	41
6	León	335	21
7	Ecatepec	318	18
8	Los Cabos	317	111
9	Guadalajara	266	18
10	Chilpancingo	260	110
Top 10 total/share		5,560	26.7%
Top 5 total/share		4,064	19.5%

Source: SNSP Homicide Cases, CONAPO.

Among the major centers of violence, Tijuana stands out. While Tijuana was ranked as Mexico's second most violent municipality (after Acapulco) from 2013 to 2016, it moved into first place in 2017 largely because of an 85% increase in homicide cases over the course of that year. Whereas Tijuana saw 871 homicide cases in 2016, the number rose to 1,618 cases in 2017. Tijuana has not ranked as the most violent municipality since 2007, when violence was considerably lower throughout the country. Since many had lauded the city for regaining control of its security situation after a wave of violence in the municipality between 2008-2010, the resurgence of violence in Tijuana has accordingly become a matter of significant alarm and frustration for local authorities.

In a policy brief published by Justice in Mexico earlier this year, Arredondo, et. al. (2018) point out that one out of twenty murders in Mexico took place in Tijuana, and only 10% of these were cleared by law enforcement investigations.¹³ The authors point out that the increase in homicides in Tijuana reflects the influence of a new violent organized crime group in Tijuana: the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG). Since the fall of Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, the CJNG has battled elements of the Sinaloa Cartel for control over drug trafficking routes in Tijuana and other parts of the country, according to a separate Justice in Mexico policy brief published in March 2018.¹⁴

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 2017 are those reported at the state level by independent sources, such as the Mexican newspaper *Milenio*, which reported a total of 12,145 individual homicides that appeared to involve organized crime.¹⁵ According to these figures, almost a half (49.7%) were concentrated in the five states with the most organized-crime-style homicides, totaling 6,227 homicides: Guerrero (1,654), Chihuahua (1,358), Veracruz (1,326), Guanajuato (1,035), and Michoacán (854). All of these states were among the top five states with the most organized-crime style homicides in 2016. Noticeably absent from the top five is Baja California, where *Milenio* reported only 464 organized crime style homicides.

¹³ Jaime Arredondo Sánchez Lira, Zulia Orozco, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, "The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana," *Justice in Mexico Policy Brief*, February 5, 2018. https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/180205_TJViolence.pdf

¹⁴ Lucy La Rosa and David A. Shirk, "The New Generation: Mexico's Emerging Organized Crime Threat," *Justice in Mexico Policy Brief*, February 5, 2018. https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/180319-Policy_Brief-CJNG.pdf

¹⁵ 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 SNSP 2017

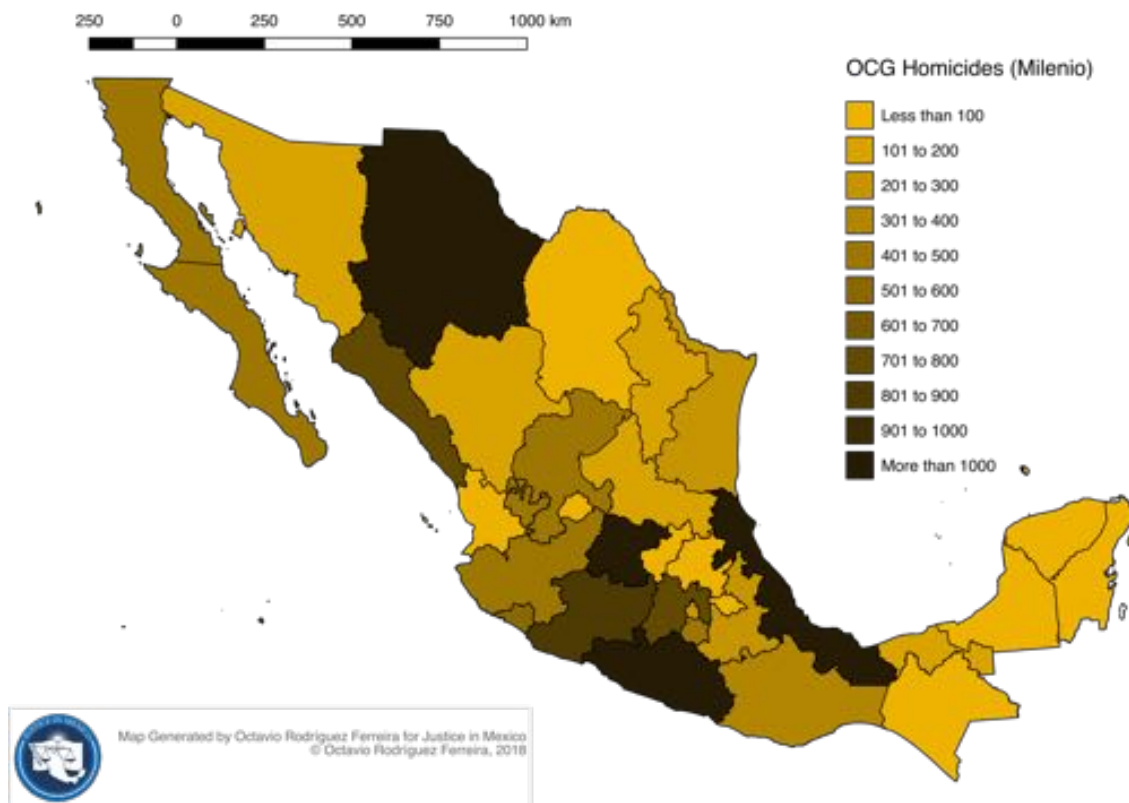
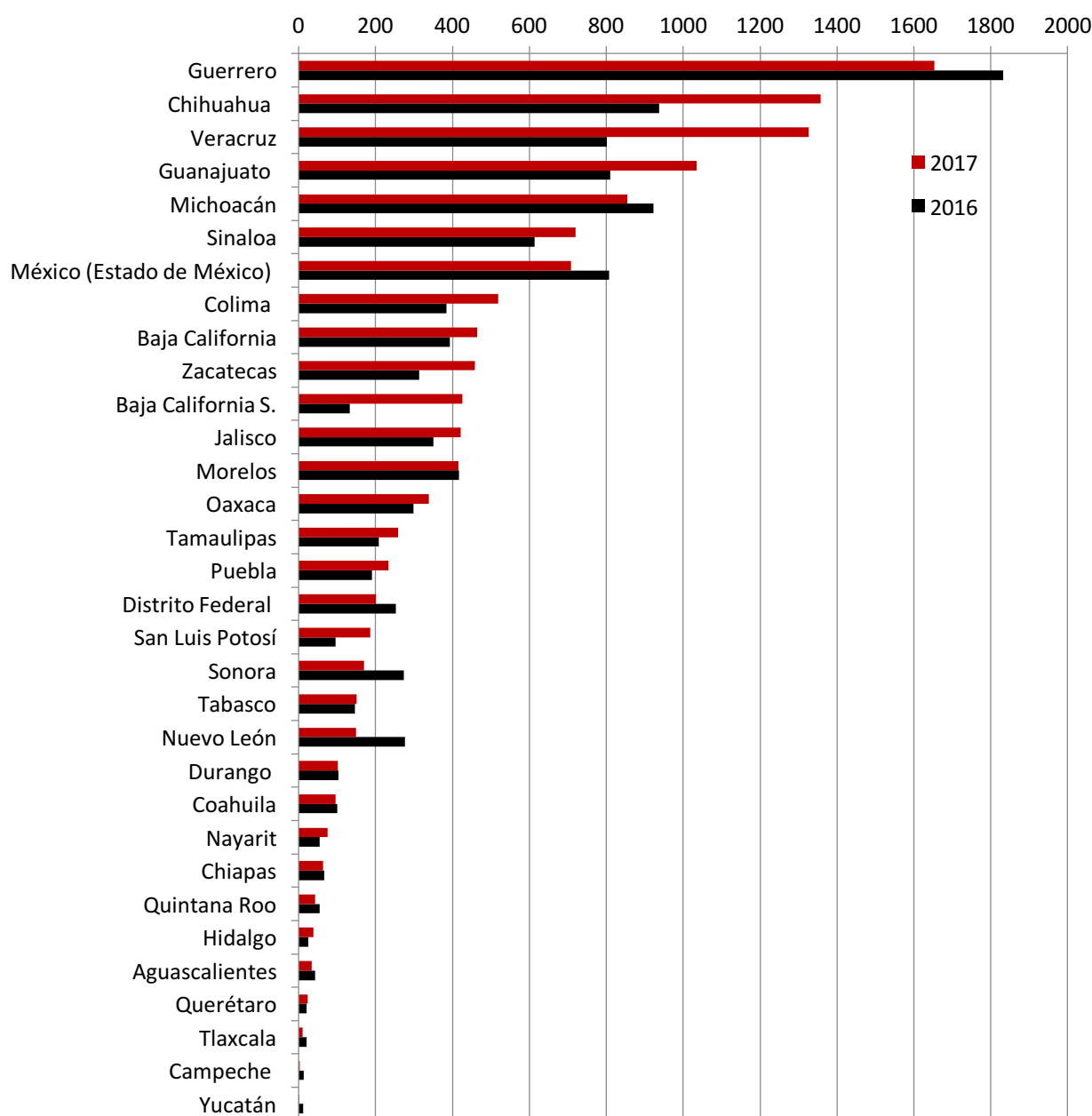


Figure 14: Organized-Crime-Style Homicides SNSP 2016-2017



Source: Milenio.

D. Special Victims: Gender, Politics, and the Press

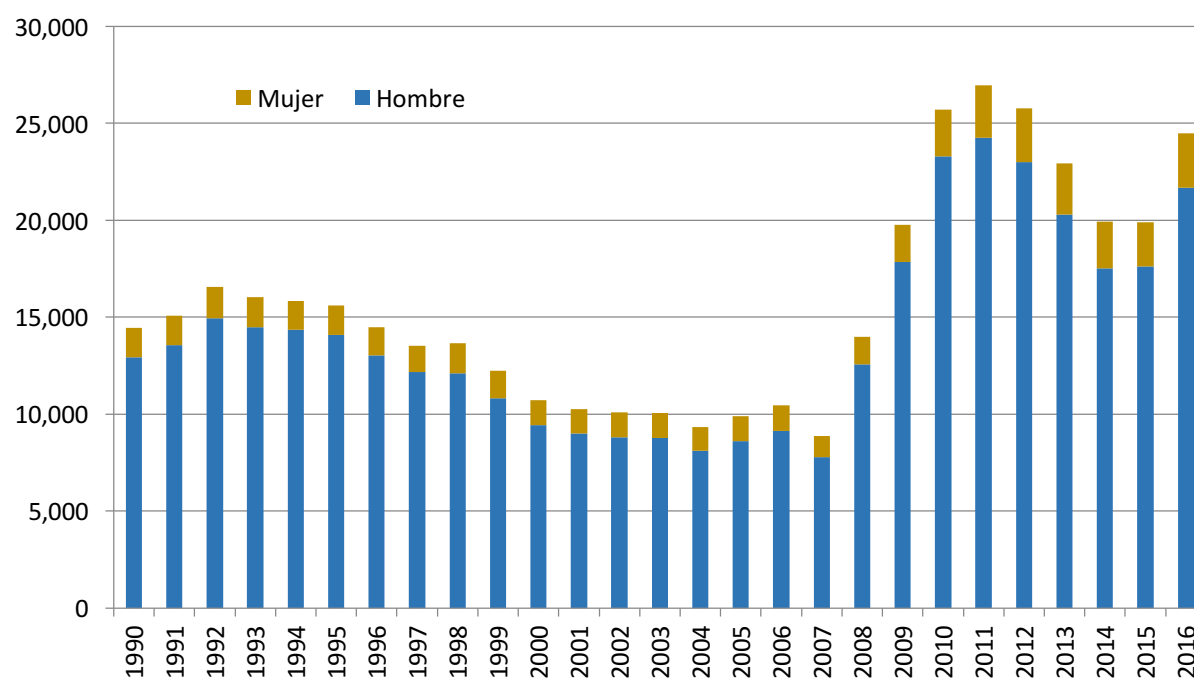
Over the years, the authors of this report have worked to monitor and analyze patterns of violence targeting certain special populations, including especially men, public officials, and journalists. On the one hand, in Mexico and all around the world, homicides are committed primarily by men and against men. On the other hand, as high profile targets of violence,

numerous public officials and journalists have been killed performing their respective duties as representatives of the state and as the “eyes, ears, and voice” of organized civil society. As such, there are legitimate concerns about the effect that elevated levels of violence have on society at large and democratic governance in Mexico.

1. Males

What stands out about gender as a special category of victimization is that male victims of violence are all too common. Gender-specific crimes targeting women —known as “femicides”—have been of special concern in Mexico, and there are specific laws and initiatives to address the problem of femicide. However, Mexican men are about eight times more likely to be homicide victims than women, according to the latest available data from INEGI through 2016.¹⁶ In 2016, INEGI reported the murders of 21,673 males (88.2%), 2,813 females (11.5%), and 73 unspecified persons (.2%). These numbers are fairly consistent with the average distribution of violence by gender in Mexico since 1990. These data suggest that special consideration is needed to identify the factors that contribute to violence among men, and how gender intersects with other social and economic variables.

Proportion of Woman and Male Victims of Violence in Mexico, 1990-2016



Source: INEGI.

¹⁶ 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.

Nationwide, interpersonal violence jumped from the eighth leading cause of death in Mexico in 2005 to the fourth leading cause of death in 2016, behind heart disease, kidney disease, and diabetes.¹⁷ Yet, controlling for income, interpersonal violence has been the leading cause of death for young men of modest means in Mexico in recent years.¹⁸ A major contributing factor is the lack of educational and employment opportunities for those males at the bottom of the economic spectrum, which often leads to their involvement in violent criminal activities. Indeed, the OECD estimates that 1 in 4 of young men in Mexico are “ninis”—youths who neither study nor work (ni estudian, ni trabajan)—and their number has been on the rise in recent years.¹⁹

2. Mayors

Assassination of current, former, elected, or substitute candidates to the mayoral position in Mexico is a serious concern. The murder of elected authorities threatens the democratic process and undermines the rule of law. According to newspaper *El País*, nine mayors were assassinated in Mexico in 2017, making it the most violent year for sitting mayors in the last two decades, reaching a total of over 50 victims, with 23 murdered during the current administration.²⁰

Justice in Mexico’s *Memoria* dataset includes 152 mayors, candidates and former mayors killed from 2005 through 2017. While the peak of violence in Mexico occurred during 2011, the year with the most killings of mayors, as documented in *Memoria*, was actually 2010, with 20 cases reported. With the increase of the total number of homicides in Mexico since 2015 until 2017, there have been a total of 41 current, former, and aspiring mayors killed, with 14 victims in 2015, six in 2016, and 21 in 2017.

Of the 21 murdered the past year, Justice in Mexico found eleven mayors (11) and ten former mayors (10). According to Justice in Mexico’s data, the party affiliation of the victims in 2017 was diverse, including ties with the PRI (8), PRD (5), PES (2), PAN (1), PANAL (1), MORENA (1), and PVEM (1). One of the remaining two victims was aligned with “Usos y costumbres” and for the other there was no party affiliation publicly found. In 2017 the cases took place in the Southern half of Mexico affecting the states of Guerrero (4), Oaxaca (4), Chiapas (2), Estado de México (2), Michoacán (2), Puebla (2), Veracruz (2), Colima (1), Guanajuato (1), and Hidalgo (1). In 100% of the homicides, the victim was male, and the use of torture was not reported. For 20 cases the use of guns was reported. For the remaining 21st case, the victim was found with his throat slit. Most of the cases (5) occurred in October, followed by April and December (3 each). In 15 cases, the mayor or former mayor was the only victim. For

¹⁷ “Mexico,” Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, <http://www.healthdata.org/mexico>

¹⁸ Diaz-Cayeros, Alberto, A. Egan, M. Floca, J. Furszyfer, M. Gell-Redman, L. Gomez Morin, Z. Razu. “Atlas of Epidemiological Transition in Mexico.” Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 2017.

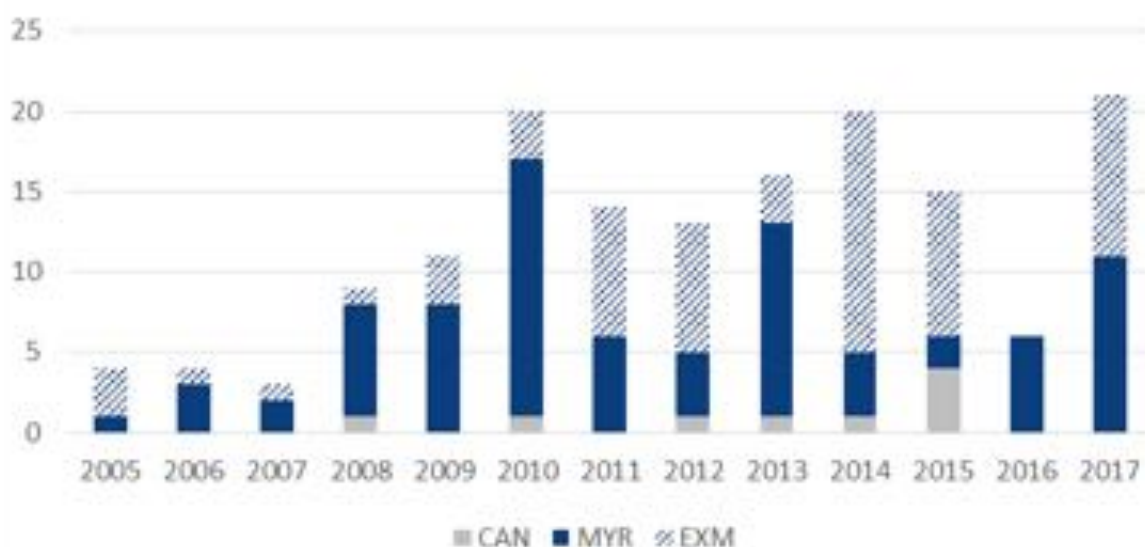
¹⁹ Pierre-Marc René, “OCDE: crece número de ‘ninis’ en México,” *El Universal*, November 24, 2015, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/sociedad/2015/11/24/ocde-crece-numero-de-ninis-en-mexico>

²⁰ “El año más negro para los alcaldes en México: nueve asesinados en 2017.” *El País*. México. 2 January 2018.

three cases, the total number of victims was two and for the other three cases the total number of fatal casualties was five. The age of the victims ranged between 35 and 67 years old with an average of 50 years old.

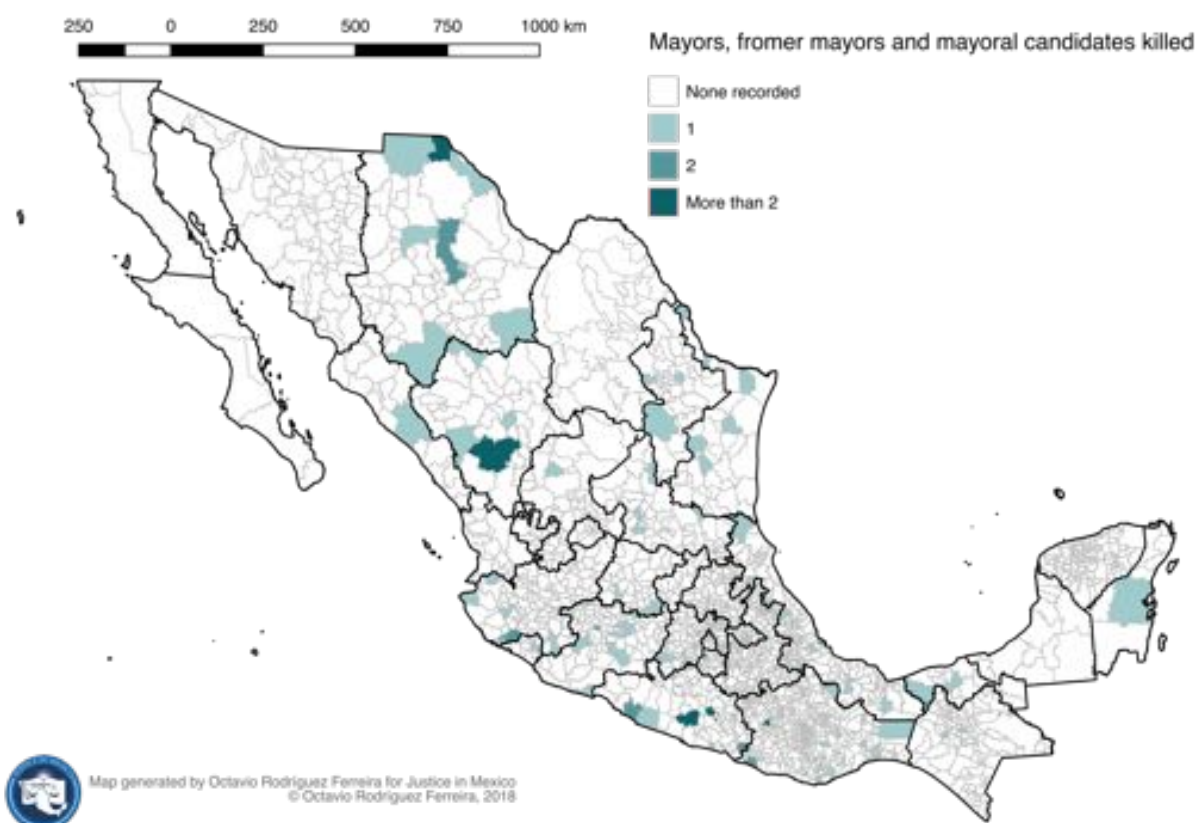
In 2017, the twenty-one mayors and former mayors whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico include: Julio Filogonio López Quiroz (MORENA former mayor of San Andrés Huaxpaltepec, Oaxaca), Antolín Vital Martínez (PRI mayor of Tepexco, Puebla), Amado Islas Espejel (PES former mayor of Tepetlaoxtoc, Estado de México), Roger Arellano Sotelo (PRD former mayor of Acapulahuaya, Guerrero), Ubaldo López Reyes (former mayor of Santa María Ozolotepec, Oaxaca), Alejandro Hernández Santos (Usos y Costumbres mayor of San Bartolomé Loxicha, Oaxaca), José Durán González (PAN former mayor of Pueblo Nuevo, Estado de México), Elí Camacho Goicochea (PRD former mayor of Coyuca de Catalán, Guerrero), Stalin Sánchez González (PRD mayor of Paracho, Michoacán), Domingo López González (PVEM mayor of San Juan Chamula, Chiapas), Rafael Ramírez Sánchez (PRI former mayor of Sahuayo, Michoacán), Raúl Fernando Sánchez Reyes (PES former mayor of Tlalmanalco, Estado de México), Manuel Hernández Pasi6n (PRI mayor of Huitzilán de Serdán, Puebla), Crispín Guti6rrez Moreno (PRI mayor of Ixtlahuacán, Colima), Hermilio Bravo Leal (PRI former mayor of Nopala de Villagrán, Hidalgo), Santana Cruz Bahena (PANAL mayor of Hidalgotitlán, Veracruz), V6ctor Manuel Espinoza Tolentino (PRI mayor of Ixhuatlán de Madero, Veracruz), Jos6 Santos Hern6ndez (PRI mayor of San Pedro El Alto, Oaxaca), Arturo G6mez P6rez (PRD mayor of Petatlán, Guerrero), Sergio Antonio Zenteno Albores (PRI mayor of Bochil, Chiapas), and Francisco Tecuchillo Neri (PRD former mayor for Zitlala, Guerrero).

Figure 15: Mayoral Candidates, Mayors & Ex-Mayors Killed in Mexico (January 2005 – December 2017)



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset.

Figure 16: Map of Mayors & Ex-Mayors Killed in Mexico, January 2006-December 2017



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset.

Justice in Mexico acknowledges that, while the *Memoria* database includes information on mayors, former mayors, and mayoral candidates, it currently does not account for all relevant cases of local political assassinations. For example, in 2017, Jorge Hernández Jiménez, a PRI municipality council (*regidor*) of Quecholac, Puebla was murdered. Likewise, Saúl Galindo, a PRD Local Deputy (*diputado local*) and aspiring candidate seeking his party's nomination for mayor in Tomatlán, Jalisco was also killed in 2017.

3. Journalists

As reported in previous years, dozens of reporters and media workers have been killed or disappeared in Mexico, making it one of the world's most dangerous places for journalists. The various organizations tallying homicides involving reporters in Mexico use different criteria for tallying and classifying this violence, since motives are often difficult to confirm. For example, one of the most respected sources, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), focuses primarily on cases where a murder was confirmed to have been committed in relation to the journalist's profession. From 1992 through 2017, CPJ reported that there were 40 such confirmed cases, 52 unconfirmed cases, and four media-support workers killed in Mexico. Nearly 78% of those confirmed cases involved reporters working the crime beat, approximately 38% involved reporters working on issues related to corruption, and almost

one-third involved reporters working on political issues. CPJ considers Mexico the third deadliest country worldwide, placing in 2017 only behind Iraq (at least 8 journalists killed) and Syria (7).²¹

In 2017, CPJ reported that there were 74 reporters murdered in the world that matched their criteria, with six confirmed cases and three unconfirmed cases in Mexico. The six CPJ-confirmed cases include:

- Cecilio Pineda Birto, founder of *La Voz de Tierra Caliente* newspaper and collaborator for *El Universal* and *La Jornada de Guerrero* newspapers, was killed on March 2ⁿ in Ciudad Altamirano, Pubgarabato, Guerrero.²²
- Edgar Daniel Esqueda Castro, freelance photographer was found dead near the San Luis Potosí airport with signs of torture on October 6.²³
- Javier Valdez Cárdenas, investigative reporter and editor at *Riodoce*, was fatally shot on May 15^a in his hometown Culiacán, Sinaloa. He received at least 12 gunshot wounds.²⁴
- Maximino Rodríguez Palacios, freelance columnist, commentator and internet reporter on crime and police; he was shot in La Paz, Baja California Sur on April 14.²⁵
- Miroslava Breach Velducea, correspondent for *La Jornada* national newspaper was the victim of 8 fatal gunshots in Chihuahua, Chihuahua on March 23.²⁶
- Salvador Adame Pardo was the director of 6TV and broadcast reporter. His remains were found burned in Gabriel Zamora, Michoacán on June 14.²⁷

CPJ's criteria for identifying the murders of reporters and media workers are fairly conservative, since they focus only on cases where there is a confirmed motive associated with the journalist's profession. The organization known as Article 19, meanwhile, documented 11 murders of media workers in 2017, almost double CPJ's count. Taking into account all attacks on media and journalists, including homicides and non-lethal attacks, Article 19 reports that 2017 was the most violent year on record in Mexico, which has been experiencing an increasing trend since 2015, where there were 397 attacks against journalists registered. In 2017, Article 19 recorded 507 attacks, an increase of 19% from 2016's 426

²¹ "In absence of fresh military conflict, journalist killings decline again." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 23, 2018. <https://cpj.org/reports/2017/12/journalists-killed-iraq-crossfire-murder-mexico.php>

²² "Cecilio Pineda Birto." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 16, 2018. <https://cpj.org/data/people/cecilio-pineda-birto/index.php>

²³ "Edgar Daniel Esqueda Castro." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 16, 2018. <https://cpj.org/data/people/edgar-daniel-esqueda-castro/index.php>

²⁴ "Javier Valdez Cárdenas." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 16, 2018. <https://cpj.org/data/people/javier-valdez-cardenas/index.php>

²⁵ "Maximino Rodríguez." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 16, 2018. <https://cpj.org/data/people/maximino-rodriguez/index.php>

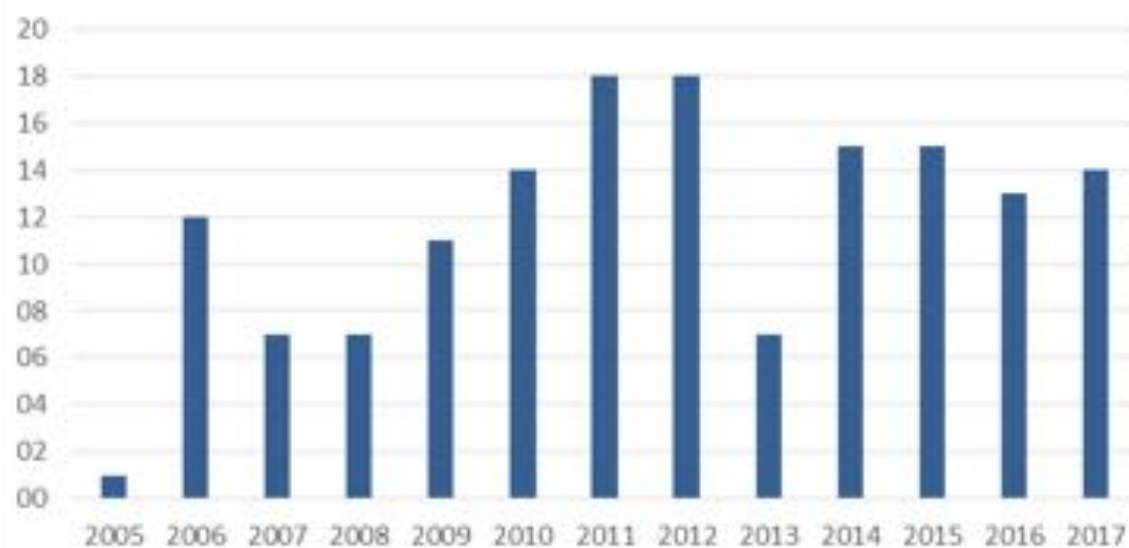
²⁶ "Miroslava Breach Velducea." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 16, 2018. <https://cpj.org/data/people/miroslava-breach-velducea/index.php>

²⁷ "Salvador Adame Pardo." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 16, 2018. <https://cpj.org/data/people/salvador-adame-pardo/index.php>

attacks. To put this increase into perspective, according to Article 19's *Violencia Contra la Prensa en México* report, during the first half of 2017 a journalist was attacked every 15.7 hours, totaling 1.5 aggressions every day.²⁸

However, the fact that members of the press are more prone to violence than the average person—whether or not this can be directly linked to reporting—is the point of interest for this analysis. Hence, the Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset adopts a less conservative measure than CJP, taking 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 2017, Justice in Mexico has identified at least 161 journalists and media-support workers who were murdered, with the vast majority of these deaths (151) occurring from 2006 onwards. 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 2017, Justice in Mexico entered 14 such individuals into the *Memoria* dataset, and 4 as of publishing day of this report in 2018.

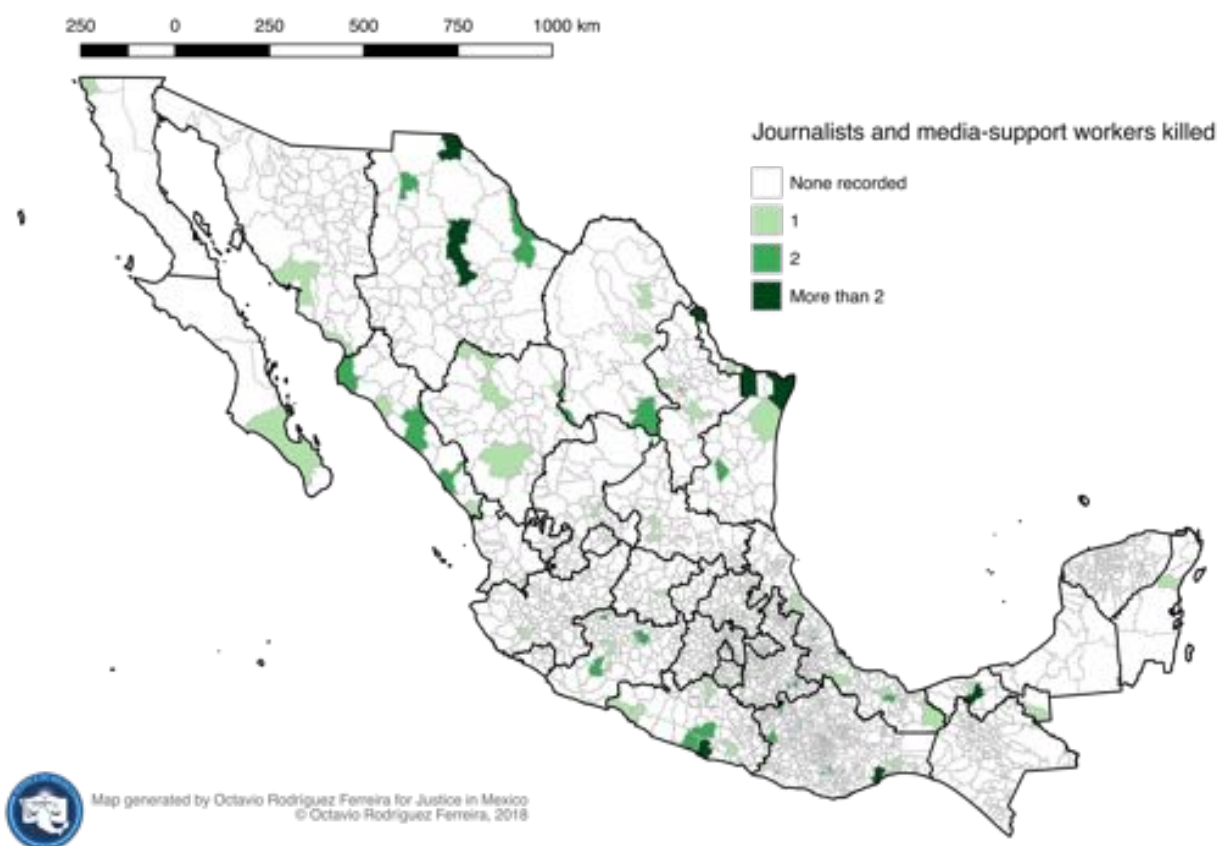
Figure 17: Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico (January 2000-December 2015)



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset.

²⁸ "Primer semestre de 2017: 105 agresiones diarias contra periodistas en México." *Article 19*. Last accessed March 16, 2018.
<https://articulo19.org/informesemestral2017/>

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



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset.

The Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset includes 14 journalists and media workers killed in the year 2017, one more than the total reported for 2016. From the total number of victims, 12 were male and two were women, with all victims but one being Mexican. The average age of victims recorded by Justice in Mexico was 42 years old.²⁹ The weapons used in the homicides were identified as firearms in all cases except one, where the cause of death could not be determined since the human remains were burned and with several days of decomposition. One of the victims was reported with having signs of torture, arguably to get a forced confession out of him.³⁰ From the total of 14 cases, there was also one where the assailants left a *narcomensaje* next to the body, accusing her of “having a long tongue” (speaking too much). According to Justice in Mexico’s findings, the assassinations took place in the states of Veracruz (4), Baja California (1), Baja California Sur (1), Chihuahua (1), Guerrero (1), Jalisco (1), Michoacán (1), Morelos (1), Oaxaca (1), San Luis Potosí (1) and Sinaloa (1). The media

²⁹ Age was only recorded in 138 of the 161 cases on file.

³⁰ Redacción. “Confesión bajo tortura: Los últimos momentos de vida del fotoperiodista Daniel Esqueda (Video).” *Proceso*. San Luis Potosí, México. 13 October 2017. Last accessed 19 March 2018. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/507383/confesion-bajo-tortura-los-ultimos-momentos-vida-del-fotoperiodista-daniel-esqueda-video>

workers killed included journalists, reporters, photojournalists, correspondents, photographers, station directors, and activists. In 93% of the cases, the media workers were the only victims.

In 2017, the reporters and media workers whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico include (chronologically oldest to most recent): Miroslava Breach Velducea (*El Norte de Ciudad Juárez*); Ricardo Monlui Cabrera (*El Político*); Cecilio Pineda Birto (*La Voz de la Tierra Caliente*); Maximino Rodríguez Palacios (*Colectivo Perincú*); Javier Valdez Cárdenas (*Riodoce*); Jonathan Rodríguez Córdova (*El Costeño*); Judith Paula Santiago Ramírez (Mitla local radio station); Filiberto Alvarez Landeros (*La Señal de Jojutla*); Salvador Adame Pardo (6TV); Luciano Rivera (CNR TV); Edwin Rivera Paz (Freelance photojournalist); Cándido Ríos Vázquez (*La Voz de Hueyapan*); Edgar Daniel Esqueda Castro (*Vox Populi*); Gumaro Pérez Aguilando (Acayucan municipality).

Ultimately, while it is clear violence is a significant threat for journalists, until recently it has been difficult to assess how severely journalists are threatened compared to other specific groups or the general population. However, based on the tally of journalist deaths in the *Memoria* dataset, a January 2018 Justice in Mexico working paper presented new data demonstrating that Mexican journalists were actually at least three times more likely to be murdered than the general population.³¹ Using comparable data from 2016, Calderón (2018) found that the homicide rate for journalists was .7 per 1,000, compared to the homicide rate for the general population of approximately .21 per 1,000 (or 21 per 100,000) that year.³²

That said, using this same comparison to analyze mayoral assassinations, Calderón also found that the homicide rate for sitting mayors in 2016 was 2.46 murders per 1,000, or about twelve times the rate of the general population and more than three times the rate of journalists. In 2010, the worst year for mayoral killings, the rate was as high as 6 per 1,000 (more than 28 times the rate for the general population and more than eight times the rate for journalists). Future studies on the killings of special populations in Mexico should examine such rate comparisons in more detail to consider other groups, such as police and military personnel. However, these findings raise serious concerns about the dangers facing both Mexican journalists and local politicians, particularly as Mexico looks to an important election year in 2018.

³¹ Laura Y. Calderón, "An Analysis of Mayoral Assassinations in Mexico, 2000-17," Justice in Mexico Working Paper, Volume 15, Number 2, February 2018, https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/180216_CALDERON-WP-BCS_v1.1.pdf

³² The homicide rate for the general population in 2016 was calculated using estimates from the Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) and homicide figures from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI). The homicide rate for journalists is based on the number of murdered journalists identified in the *Memoria* dataset (13) in 2016 and an estimate of 18,534 total journalists in Mexico, which was calculated by Mireya Marquez-Ramírez and Sallie Hughes in an article entitled "Panorama de los perfiles demográficos, laborales y profesionales de los periodistas en México: Reporte de Investigación," *Global Media Journal Mexico*, Volumen 14, Número 26, p. 107. https://journals.tdl.org/gmjei/index.php/GMJ_EI/article/view/281/281

E. Comparing Presidential 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, as illustrated in Table 2: Homicides and OCG-Style Homicides by Presidential Term. 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).³³ The average annual decline in homicides over the course of the Zedillo administration was 6.2%. Under Fox, the number documented by INEGI was 60,162 homicides, with an average of 10,027 people killed per year, more than 27 people per day, or roughly 1.1 per hour, from 2001 to 2006. That represented an average annual decline of 0.3% in homicides during the Fox administration.

Table 2: Homicides and OCG-Style Homicides by Presidential Term

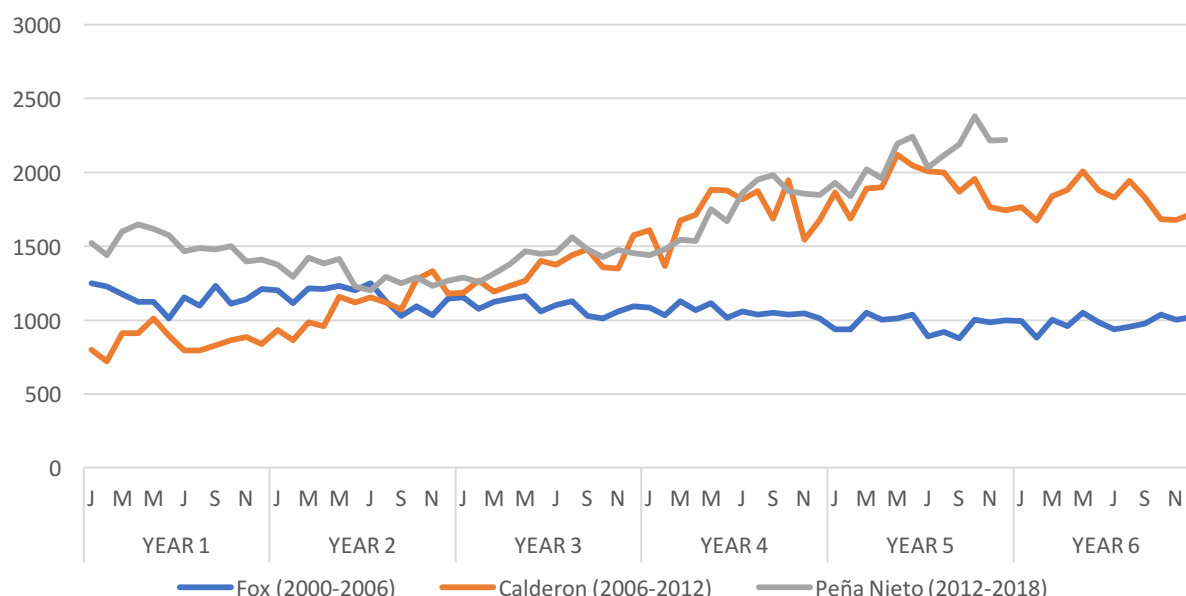
Source	Salinas (1990- 1994)*	Zedillo (1995- 2000)	Fox (2001- 2006)	Calderón (2007- 2012)	Peña Nieto (2013- 2017)
INEGI Homicides	67,525	79,759	60,073	122,319	116,468
SNSP Homicides	n.a.	n.a.	74,389	104,794	97,125
CNDH-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	8,901	n.a.	n.a
SNSP-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	50,950	n.a
Reforma-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	47,845	34,663
Milenio-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	54,087	50,010
LANTIA (OCG)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	54,631
% OCG (SNSP/Milenio)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	44%	43%
% OCG (SNSP/Milenio)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	52%	51%

Sources: INEGI, SNSP, CNDH, Reforma, Milenio, and Lantia. Note: Figures in *red* reflect figures are based on the authors' estimates and projections as described in the text. * Data for the first year of Salinas' term in 1989 were not available. **Data for CNDH were not available for ssall years of the Calderón administration.

Under President Calderón (2006-2012), the number of intentional homicides annually nearly tripled 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 by about 4% to 26,037. Despite this decline, by the end of the Calderón administration, the number of homicides was more than double that of the previous administration. 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.

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

Figure 19: Total Monthly Homicide Cases by Presidential Administration in Mexico



Source: SNSP.

Based on INEGI's official figures from 2013-2016 and the authors' projections for 2017, it appears that approximately 116,000 people have been murdered over the course of the first five years of the Peña Nieto administration. This constitutes an average of 23,293 homicides per year during the first five years of Peña Nieto's term, nearly 4,000 more per year than during Calderón's first five years in office. As such, the annual average number of homicides under the Peña Nieto administration is now about 20% higher than during the Calderón administration, whose first two years saw much lower levels of homicide, as illustrated using SNSP data on homicide cases in Figure 19.

By comparison, there were nearly 64 homicides per day during the first five years of the Peña Nieto administration, or more than 2.6 murders every hour. Based on INEGI's projected tally of 116,468 homicides from 2013 to 2017, at least 29.7% and perhaps as many as 46.9% of these homicides (34,663 according to *Reforma* and as many as 54,631 according to Lantia) appeared to involve organized crime.³⁴ By *Reforma's* more conservative account, during the Peña Nieto administration, nearly 19 Mexicans died each day in organized crime-style killings, or at least one every ninety minutes (one every hour, according to *Milenio* and Lantia).

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

IV. ANALYZING RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN 2017

As noted in the findings above, in 2017 the number of homicides in Mexico increased for the third time in three years, continuing a troubling upward trend at a 20% rate of increase. Among the factors noted in our previous reports, Mexico's recent economic difficulties (e.g., stagnant economic growth, a devalued peso, a serious fiscal crisis due to falling oil prices) are often cited as major contributors to the recent increases in violence.³⁵ 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.

What is clear is that government intervention to disrupt (or sometimes facilitate) organized crime activities has an important effect, and one that is not always positive or predictable. Despite assurances from government officials that Mexico's drop in violence from 2012 through mid-2014 was attributable to 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. In Guzmán's place, a new violent criminal organization known as the Jalisco New Generation Cartel has emerged, and its efforts to establish itself as Mexico's dominant criminal organization has contributed to the dramatic increase in violence throughout the country.

This section provides a brief background on several problems and a number of major developments that occurred in 2017, including the adoption of new military security protocols and challenges in combating corruption in Mexico. As Mexico approaches its 2018 federal and state elections, there is a high level of public discontent with Mexican authorities (e.g., abysmal public opinion ratings). What is clear is that the large increase in violence in 2017 set the stage for what will be a highly consequential year in Mexico.

A. The Rise of Mexico's New Generation Cartel

A major portion of the increase in violence in Mexico over the last few years is attributable to competition between organized crime groups, particularly those battling for control of the drug trade. For this reason, the Mexican government has focused heavily on counter-drug efforts targeting major drug trafficking organizations, including efforts to eradicate production, interdict illicit goods in transit, and disrupt organized crime leadership structures. In a major milestone for counter-drug efforts, the Mexican government extradited famed drug trafficker Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán to the United States in January 2017 to stand trial for various drug-related crimes in New York. A March 2018 Justice in Mexico policy brief entitled "The New Generation: Mexico's Emerging Organized Crime Threat" identifies Guzmán's downfall

³⁵ 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>

as a major contributor to the dramatic increase in violence over the past three years.³⁶ In their report, La Rosa and Shirk (2018) argue that Guzmán’s removal as the purported head of the Sinaloa Cartel, gave rise to conflicts involving splinter groups and rival organizations competing to take over the drug’s lord lucrative drug trafficking routes. A relatively new organized crime syndicate, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG), has been behind much of this violence. An offshoot of the Sinaloa Cartel, the CJNG is based in Guadalajara, Jalisco, and has a growing presence throughout the country.

The CJNG’s emerged from the drug trafficking syndicate founded by the Valencia in Michoacán in the 1970s, which relocated to the state of Jalisco in the late 1990s and became known as the Milenio Cartel. In the early 2000s, the Milenio Cartel operated under the umbrella of the Sinaloa Cartel, reporting to regional organized crime boss, Ignacio “Nacho” Coronel. Coronel helped connect Milenio’s leaders to Taiwanese immigrant Ye Gon, who provided the chemical precursors that helped their organization become one of the world’s leading sources of methamphetamine. In this sense, the CJNG demonstrates the manner in which Mexican drug trafficking organizations have diversified their operations into new product areas, including heroin, methamphetamines, and other synthetic drugs in the face of more intensive counter-drug efforts and the partial legalization of marijuana.

Figure 20: The Evolution of the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación



Source: La Rosa and Shirk (2018).

After Coronel was killed in 2010, the Milenio Cartel suffered internal schisms that ultimately led to the eventual emergence of the CJNG. The organization was initially led by Erick Valencia Salazar, a descendant of the founders of the Milenio Cartel. However, after Valencia Salazar’s arrest in 2012, a U.S. deportee and longtime cartel operative named Ruben

³⁶ Lucy La Rosa and David A. Shirk, “The New Generation: Mexico’s Emerging Organized Crime Threat,” *Justice in Mexico Policy Brief*, February 5, 2018. https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/180319-Policy_Brief-CJNG.pdf

Oseguera Cervantes rose to become the leader of the CJNG. Oseguera has proved to be an effective and assertive leader of the CJNG. Following Valencia Salazar's arrest in 2012, Oseguera responded by deploying blockades and a series of explosions throughout the state of Jalisco. Under his leadership, the CJNG also directly challenged Mexican law enforcement and military forces, killing dozens of police and shooting down a Cougar EC 725 helicopter from the Mexican Air Force.

In this sense, the rise of the CJNG also illustrates how organized crime groups fragment and adapt following the disruption of leadership structures. Indeed, while numerous factors have contributed to the rise and resurgence of violence in Mexico, the reliance of U.S. and Mexican law enforcement on leadership disruption, or "kingpin" removal, stands out as a particularly counter-productive strategy. The CJNG is just the latest of a series of Mexican organized crime groups to emerge from the power vacuums that result when major drug traffickers like Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán are arrested. This process of leadership removal and regeneration is so well understood by researchers that it is frequently described as the "hydra-effect." Like the mythological beast of ancient times, cutting off the head of a drug cartel almost always results in the emergence of a new one that is just as dangerous, if not more so.

That said, Justice in Mexico has long pointed out that in addition to the hydra effect, the kingpin strategy has another unintended consequence, organized crime group splintering. When an organized crime group loses top leaders, lower level cells and individual operatives are more likely to splinter away to form their own criminal enterprises. In this sense, the Mexican government's efforts are akin to those of the fabled sorcerer's apprentice, a Germanic fairy tale that was made famous by the Disney film *Fantasia*. When magical spells go awry, the apprentice tries to break an enchanted broom into smaller and smaller pieces, causing his problems to multiply. Unlike the *Fantasia* example, however, no magical wizard will be able to come to Mexico's rescue, perhaps not even the Mexican military.

B. National Security Law Expands Military Role

On December 15th, the Mexican Congress approved a controversial initiative to create the Internal Security Law (Ley de Seguridad Interior, LSI). Despite being introduced and backed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI), the LSI had broad support from other parties. In fact, similar law initiatives were introduced by the National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN) in 2016 and by the Democratic Revolution's Party (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD) in 2017.

The LSI gives Mexico's president the power to order Mexico's federal security forces, including the two branches of the Armed Forces (Army and Navy), to intervene to address internal security threats when other authorities are deemed incapable of doing so. The law requires that such interventions be ordered by the President through an Internal Security Declaration of Protection, which circumscribes the intervention to a limited time frame and specific geographical zones. The Internal Security Declaration of Protection must be communicated to the National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, CNDH), and has to be approved by the National Security Council. However, the LSI gives the President the exclusive power of decreeing an Internal Security Declaration of

Protection and ordering the armed forces to intervene immediately, without notifying the CNDH and without the prior approval of the Council, if the President deems it necessary to address a threat.

Supporters of LSI, including the heads of the Army, the Navy, the President, and a large number of federal and local legislators and authorities, argue that the LSI only regulates pre-existing presidential powers, and that it gives clarity to functions the armed forces already perform in public security matters. They also argue that human rights will not be affected by this law because the LSI has specific provisions intended to protect them. However, national and international organizations, activists, experts and authorities have expressed concerns because the LSI treats internal security threats as a matter of national security, and allows the “legitimate use of force” to “control, repel or neutralize acts of resistance.”

This permits the full intervention of the Armed Forces in so-called “internal security actions,” giving them powers to carry out regular public security tasks, such as the investigation of crimes and the detention and interrogation of suspects, among many others. Moreover, it outlines intelligence gathering and related activities by the military, without specifying which of them shall be considered licit or not. Furthermore, the LSI has been denounced for its lack of specificity, which leaves delicate questions open to wide interpretation, such as the president’s power to act unilaterally to address a threat based on his subjective interpretation of a given situation.

The approval process was also tainted with controversy, since the final draft of the initiative was fast-tracked through the Chamber without substantial debate. The PRI majority in both the Chamber of Deputies (Cámara de Diputados) and the Senate spearheaded the initiative with strong backing from the PAN, especially from legislators close to former president Felipe Calderón. Given the controversial nature of the LSI, President Peña Nieto decided to send it to the Supreme Court (Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, SCJN) in order to decide whether it is in accordance to the Mexican Constitution before he enacts it. The SCJN has not yet reached a decision, and thus the LSI has not been enacted, meaning that it is not yet legally binding.

C. Anti-Corruption Efforts Flounder

Once again, corruption remained an issue of enormous public concern and frustration in 2017. Since at least 2012, Mexico has been ranked as the most corrupt OECD country, according to Transparency International’s 2018 report on the Corruption Perception Index.³⁷ Mexico scored 29 on a scale of 0 (‘highly corrupt’) to 100 (‘very clean’), down one point from its 2016 score. In Transparency International’s ranking of countries from best to worst, Mexico placed 135th out of 176 countries, down several spots from 123rd place the year before. Mexico was ranked 27th out of 32 countries in the Americas, ahead of only Guatemala, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Venezuela, and tied with Paraguay.

³⁷ “Corruption Perceptions Index 2017.” *Transparency International*. January 2018.
https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017#table

Mexico's abysmal ranking comes at a time the region has suffered several major corruption scandals, forcing three Latin American presidents out of office. According to Transparency International's latest *Global Corruption Barometer, People and Corruption: Latin America and the Caribbean*, corruption is on an upward trend throughout the region. An average of 62% of over 22,000 Latin American constituents answered that the level of corruption in their respective country has increased since 2015. Moreover, 53% of the survey participants answered that their country's government is poorly addressing the problem of corruption. The civil functionaries identified by the public as the most corrupt were elected officials and law enforcement agents, both indispensable to rule of law.

Mexico, in particular, has historically suffered from widespread corruption. The extent of the magnitude of corruption is hard to fathom, but according to a 2015 report by the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness corruption costs Mexico about 9% of its annual Gross Domestic Product. Corruption has also contributed to an increasingly disenchanted populous, as the Pew Research Center identified Mexico's top public concerns in 2017 being crime, corrupt political leaders, and corrupt police officers. In a comparison between 2015 and 2017, these concerns have increased respectively by 10%, 12%, and 9%. Moreover, Transparency International identified Mexico's bribery rate as the highest in the region with 51% of the populace paying a bribe for public services in the past 12 months, followed by the Dominican Republic and Peru with 46% and 39%, respectively (Transparency International).

During 2017, Mexico has seen numerous highly publicized corruption scandals, that include the extended manhunt for the former governor of Veracruz, Javier Duarte, on charges of political graft and organized crime; criminal charges and prosecutions against other former governors and public officials; government surveillance spyware allegedly targeting a variety of high-profile human rights lawyers, anti-corruption activists and journalists; and allegations of negligence in the wake of the destruction caused by two earthquakes in September of 2017.

Mexico has been struggling with the consolidation of the National Anti-Corruption System (Sistema Nacional Anticorrupción, SNA). The SNA, has been challenged by active government resistance, including federal-level refusal to cooperate with corruption investigations, state-level inaction on constitutionally mandated deadlines, and the withholding of information at all levels. Meanwhile, civil society organizations like Mexicans Against Corruption and Impunity (Mexicanos Contra La Corrupción y La Impunidad, MCCI) and Transparencia Mexicana, have promoted citizen initiatives, including the "3for3 Law," which called upon elected representatives to disclose personal assets, conflicts of interest and taxes. Mexico's upcoming elections are putting anti-corruption at the forefront of campaign platforms. Activists hope that the election will provide an opportunity for anti-corruption reform and impress upon the future administration the strength of public will for change in Mexico.

D. Possible Changes Ahead in 2018 Mexican Elections

As noted in this report, the resurgence of violence in 2017 sets the stage for Mexico's upcoming federal and state elections on Sunday, July 1, 2018.³⁸ At the federal level, Mexicans will vote for a new president (six-year term), 128 senators (six-year term), and 500 federal deputies (three-year term).³⁹ At the state level, Mexicans will vote for eight governors plus the head of government for Mexico City, as well as state legislators in 27 states.⁴⁰ At the local level, Mexicans will vote for mayors and city council members in 1,596 municipalities. All told, the National Electoral Institute (Instituto Nacional Electoral, INE) reports that there are more than 3,400 public offices up for election in 2018.⁴¹ There are over 87.8 million eligible voters, and the largest voting bloc is 20-24 years old.⁴²

The race garnering the most attention is the contest for the Mexican presidency. For several months, public opinion polls have favored leftist candidate and former presidential contender Andres Manuel López Obrador, also known by his initials "AMLO." Early in his political career López Obrador was a member of the PRI. He later broke from the ruling party in the late 1980s to help found the leftist PRD. In 1994, he ran for governor of his home state of Tabasco, but lost to PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo amid evidence of widespread fraud. After serving as head of the PRD, he was elected the head of government for Mexico City, where that party has governed since 1997. Over his career, Lopez Obrador cultivated a reputation for his focus on poverty and social inequality, and frequently organized mass protests to advance his political agenda.

In 2006, he was a strong contender for the PRD to win the presidential election. However, Felipe Calderón emerged the victor from a technical tie. Mexico's independent electoral monitors declared Calderón the winner by the slimmest of margins: 0.5 percent of the vote, or roughly a quarter of a million votes. In the aftermath, López Obrador and his supporters alleged that Calderón's victory was a result of electoral fraud and political bias in the post-electoral vote recount, which was restricted to precincts where there were known errors or inconsistencies in the tallies. Subsequently, López Obrador refused to recognize Calderón's

³⁸ In addition to the general election, the state of Veracruz also held an extraordinary election for three local governments on March 18, 2018.

³⁹ Technically, there are only 31 states plus Mexico City, which is the constitutional equivalent of a state-level government. The Mexican senate seats up for election include 64 in single-member districts, 32 from state-level election lists for proportional representation seats, and one senator from the largest minority party in each of 32 state-level elections.

⁴⁰ Coahuila, Tamaulipas, and Quintana Roo will hold only local elections for mayor and city council seats. Two states, Baja California and Nayarit, will not hold state or local elections in 2018. All 27 remaining states will have elections for state-level legislators, eight states will hold gubernatorial elections (in Chiapas, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Puebla, Tabasco, Veracruz, and Yucatán), and Mexico City will elect a new head of government.

⁴¹ All references for districts, states, and municipalities with elections pending are drawn from the Instituto Nacional Electoral, "Calenario Electoral 2018," February 2, 2018, <http://www.ine.mx/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Mapa-electoral-2018.pdf>

⁴² "Lo que está en juego en 2018, con la elección más grande en la historia de México," *Animal Político*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/01/2018-elecciones-calendario/>

victory and declared himself as Mexico's legitimate president, while his supporters staged massive protests and disrupted Calderón's inauguration ceremony.

Gradually, PRD leaders chose to abandon this recalcitrant approach, opting to recognize Calderón and even criticizing López Obrador for his ungraceful antics. While he ran again as the party's candidate in 2012, López Obrador quit the PRD to form his own party in 2014. The new party, the National Regeneration Movement (Movimiento Regeneración Nacional, MORENA) has quickly attracted public support and a number of prominent defectors from the Mexico's major political parties. For the 2018 elections, MORENA has formed an alliance called "Together We Will Make History" (Juntos Haremos Historia) with two smaller parties: the Work Party (*Partido de Trabajo*, PT) and the Social Encounter Party (*Partido Encuentro Social*, PES).⁴³

López Obrador's closest contender is former-PAN party chairman Ricardo Anaya Cortés, who is the candidate of the coalition "For Mexico First" (Por Mexico Al Frente) supported by the PAN, PRD, and the Movimiento Ciudadano (MC). In third-place is PRI candidate José Antonio Meade Kuribreña, who has served in both PAN and PRI administrations as Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Secretary of Social Development, Secretary of Energy, and Secretary of Finance and Public Credit. There are also two independent candidates: former-Nuevo León governor Jaime Heliodoro "El Bronco" Rodríguez Calderón and former-Mexican first lady Margarita Ester Zavala Gómez del Campo de Calderón. In opinion polls published since Fall 2017, support for López Obrador has ranged between 30-40%, Anaya has trailed in second place with 20-30%, Meade has hovered around 20-25%, and independents like Zavala and Rodríguez have generally garnered less than 10%.⁴⁴

This election could have major consequences for the future security strategy of the Mexican government, since López Obrador has signaled that he will bring an end the drug war. He has also indicated his support for a process of social reconciliation or "amnesty" for dealing with drug traffickers and other criminal offenders. In early April 2018, López Obrador also indicated his approval when Bishop Salvador Rangel Mendoza of Guerrero indicated that he met with drug traffickers to negotiate a pact to prevent political assassinations.⁴⁵ However, there have been few concrete policy proposals on precisely how López Obrador would deal with current prohibitions on psychotropic substances, or address other aspects of public security, including police and prison reform. Other candidates have been similarly vague in articulating their anticipated security strategy.

⁴³ This alliance is somewhat unusual, insofar as it includes the PES, a conservative party formed by evangelical Christians that strongly opposes homosexuality. Álvaro Delgado, "El PES se reinventa y ahora va con Morena," *Proceso*, December 12, 2017, <https://www.proceso.com.mx/514685/el-pes-se-reinventa-y-ahora-va-con-morena>

⁴⁴ "Mexico Election Coverage," *Bloomberg News*, April 9, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2018-mexican-election/>

⁴⁵ Zavala acknowledged the difficult circumstances leading to Bishop Rangel's decision, but denounced López Obrador's indications that he would seek reconciliation with violent criminals. "¿Diálogo con el narco? Esto piensan AMLO y Zavala sobre el pacto de un obispo con delincuentes," *Animal Político*, April 4, 2018. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/04/narco-amlo-zavala-dialogo/>

E. An Uncertain Future for U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation

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 and an estimated 60,000 heroin deaths in 2016. In his first year in office, U.S. President Donald Trump pushed the Mexican government to reinvigorate its counter-narcotics efforts, and placed a heavy emphasis on military-to-military cooperation, including new joint operations between the Mexican Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard. Trump also pledged to increase U.S. security measures along the 2,000-mile Southwest border, inspecting eight prototypes for his proposed border “wall” and sending national guard troops to assist the U.S. border patrol, despite the fact that apprehensions at the border reached a 47-year low in 2017.

Meanwhile, although U.S.-Mexico cooperation continues under the bilateral security cooperation agreement known as the Merida Initiative, tensions between the two countries have appeared to undermine the close law enforcement and security cooperation achieved under the administrations of presidents George W. Bush (2000-2008) and Barack Obama (2008-2016). President Peña Nieto has been criticized in Mexico for failing to properly defend Mexico’s national honor in the face of repeated insults from Donald Trump, both during his campaign and as president. Thus, tensions between the two countries could increase if Mexico’s next president adopts a less tolerant posture vis-à-vis the anti-Mexico rhetoric of President Trump. In particular, if López Obrador is elected and begins to dramatically modify Mexican drug enforcement policy, this could become the basis for major disagreements between the two administrations.

V. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As with past versions of this publication, the ninth annual report on *Drug Violence in Mexico* concludes with reflections and policy recommendations. As reported in this year’s publication, the number of murders in Mexico during the twenty-first century now exceeds a quarter of a million people. Given that a large share of violence remains connected to the illicit drug trade, the problem of “drug violence” remains an issue of considerable relevance in Mexico, and continued analysis of the workings of Mexico’s drug trade is still needed. In the face of a problem that challenges dispassionate analysis, this report provides a fact-based assessment of Mexico’s security situation, the problem of organized crime, and especially violence related to drug trafficking.

Over the last year, there have also been a number of excellent scholarly works that have helped to provide deeper insights into Mexico’s security situation, including an important new book entitled *The Politics of Drug Violence* by former-Justice in Mexico visiting scholar Angelica Durán Martin.⁴⁶ Also relevant is a new book by Benjamin Lessing, entitled *Making Peace in Drug Wars: Crackdowns and Cartels in Latin America*.⁴⁷ Such studies support the general conclusions of this

⁴⁶ Angelica Durán Martin, *The Politics of Drug Violence*, Oxford University Press, 2017.

⁴⁷ Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars: Crackdowns and Cartels in Latin America*, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

report over the last several years, in so far as they point to the importance of organized crime as a driver of violence in Mexico, the harms caused by corruption and collusion by criminal organizations in the illicit drug trade, and the failure of current government strategies to address the problem. Unfortunately, given the enormity and endurance of this problem, more studies and analysis are clearly needed to help identify policy solutions.

This report finds that the problem of violence in Mexico—and specifically the number of homicides—reached record levels in 2017. While the verdict is still out on whether Mexico’s per capita homicide rate also reached a new record, it is clear that the problem now matches or surpasses the level of violence seen in 2011. Stated simply, violence is on the rebound in Mexico, with a vengeance. This finding is not a surprise, as it is consistent with government reports, independent policy assessments, and the views of numerous scholars and experts that have followed these trends carefully over the last year. What this report helps to document, however, is the significant role that competition among organized crime groups has played in driving this violence, and the limited extent to which Mexican authorities are prepared to deal with this challenge. These findings also help to debunk claims by some Mexican politicians that the recent resurgence in violence is attributable to other factors, such as the implementation of the country’s new oral, adversarial criminal justice system.

While it is clear that organized-crime groups are a major driver of violence, the solutions to deal with this problem will not be easy to achieve. 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. Yet, there is evidence that Mexico’s decade-long security crisis has been a drag on growth, undermining investment, reducing labor market vitality, and contributing to a vicious cycle of socioeconomic-induced strife.⁴⁸ Mexico’s security crisis seriously compromises the integrity and safety of government officials, threatens media reporting and freedom of expression, and erodes public confidence in government officials and institutions, all of which threaten to undermine democratic governance in Mexico.⁴⁹

More broadly, Mexico’s security crisis illustrates the pitfalls and contradictions of current international drug policy, which emphasizes a highly ineffective supply-side approach while failing miserably to address the demand for drugs as a serious public health problem. In particular, the “kingpin approach” of directly targeting major organized crime figures as a means to disrupt drug trafficking networks appears to have major negative consequences in terms of the violent reverberations that result from the fragmentation and competition within and among criminal organizations. This, in turn, has led many organized crime groups in Mexico to diversify into a

⁴⁸ Ted Enamorado, Luis F. López-Calva, and Carlos Rodríguez-Castelán, “Crime and growth convergence: Evidence from Mexico,” *Economics Letters*, Volume 125, Issue I, October 2014, pp. 9-13; Ted Enamorado, Luis F. López-Calva, Carlos Rodríguez-Castelán, and Hernán Winkler, “Income Inequality and Violent Crime: Evidence from Mexico’s Drug War,” *Journal of Development Economics*, Volume 120, May 2016, pp. 128-143.

⁴⁹ Luisa Blanco, “The Impact of Crime on Trust in Institutions in Mexico,” *European Journal of Political Economy*, Volume 32, December 2013, pp. 38-55.

variety of other illicit activities, which suggests that this problem will not fade quietly away even if all psychotropic substances were legalized tomorrow.

Thus, perhaps Mexico's most important and daunting task is to strengthen the country's judicial sector in order to develop a more effective approach to crime prevention and reducing criminal impunity. In this regard, Mexico urgently needs to develop a criminal justice system based on the principles of engagement and public sector accountability. That is, Mexico's police, prosecutors, judges, and other judicial system operatives must be better prepared to fulfill their duties, properly rewarded for their professional achievements, and also held to account for their decisions and actions. These principles are particularly important 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. Current criminal justice sector reform efforts in Mexico aim to advance these goals, but still face a long road ahead.

Based on these findings, the authors offer a number of recommendations to encourage future progress in reducing the problems of organized crime and violence in Mexico:

A. 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, is needed 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.

B. Enhancing Mexican Policing and Prosecutions

One of Mexico's challenges is to identify more effective ways for law enforcement to address the problem of organized crime. While the kingpin strategy has had serious problems, allowing violent actors like Joaquín Guzmán or Ruben Oseguera to operate with impunity is clearly not a desirable option. The authors have long advocated bolstering the capacity of Mexican law enforcement. What is clearly needed are better long-term, comprehensive criminal investigations to ensure successful prosecutions targeting not only drug kingpins but all levels of a criminal enterprise, including corrupt politicians and private sector money laundering operations. Doing so would help to address the problem of splinter groups vying for succession when a major kingpin is removed. International organizations and bilateral assistance programs should work closely Mexico to help train police and prosecutors to conduct more effective and wide-reaching criminal investigations and prosecutions of criminal enterprises.

C. Special Measures to Address Political Violence

The Mexican government and international organizations need to pay greater attention to the fact that local politicians in Mexico have a homicide rate that is at least three times higher than the murder rate for journalists (and twelve times higher than the general population). Mexico's high mayoral murder rate reflects the efforts of organized crime groups to obstruct good governance, or

at least obtain protection from corrupt politicians, especially at the local level. Such high levels of political violence are found in no other OECD country, and there is a serious risk that problems of corruption and violence will seriously undermine Mexico's democratic system. To address this problem, Mexico needs governmental and non-governmental efforts to promote more effective state and local law enforcement, provide dedicated protection for local candidates and government officials that are threatened by organized crime, and stronger anti-corruption efforts at the state and local level.

D. Reinvigorating Mexico's Anti-Corruption Efforts

Now that Mexico has begun to allow for limited re-election, systemic corruption stands as the primary factor that inhibits the proper functioning of the electoral connection in Mexico. Over the past two decades, Mexico has seen a dramatic increase in transparency, but the mechanisms of accountability have remained weak. The Mexican public is regularly alerted to abuses of power and acts of corruption by public officials who go largely unpunished for their misdeeds. Mexican civic organizations, international agencies, and foreign governments can help Mexico crackdown on corruption. For example, foreign governments can investigate corruption claims and, where appropriate, deny travel privileges or freeze the assets of Mexican nationals wanted on corruption charges. International foundations and non-governmental organizations can partner with Mexican anti-corruption agencies and organizations to provide much needed funding and technical assistance.

E. Moving Beyond Marijuana: Toward a Public Health Approach to Drugs

As California and other states move to the legalization of marijuana, this shift has begun to have unintended consequences in Mexico. Drug trafficking organizations are diversifying their activities and attempting to cover their losses by ramping up exports of heroin, cocaine, and other "hard" drugs. In this sense, further drug policy reforms are needed to properly regulate the production, distribution, and consumption of more potent drugs, including cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. Since there is little public support for full legalization of such substances, would-be reformers should work to objectively monitor, and document the results of public health-based approaches currently underway domestically and in other countries, such as Portugal and the Czech Republic. In the shift to a public health approach, however, one short term concern is that Mexican organized crime will lose valuable revenues and diversify into more predatory criminal activities, making it even more necessary to bolster law enforcement capacity in Mexico.

The 2018 Mexican federal and state elections may open up the possibility for some of these recommendations to gain purchase in the near future, particularly those having to do with new strategies for fighting organized crime. Others, such as the push for drug policy reform, may require sustained longer term efforts to inform and advise policy decisions in both governmental and non-governmental settings. What is clear is that drug violence in Mexico remains a persistent and serious problem that cannot be easily resolved in the short term or by a silver bullet. Sustained, data-driven efforts will be needed to effectively address Mexico's security challenges in the years to come.

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.⁵⁰ 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.”⁵¹ 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.⁵² Moreover, the

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ 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?

⁵² 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,

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”).

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*).⁵³ 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 makes 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). Like other forms of specialized violence—such as “intra-family violence” and “violent hate crimes”—there will always be methodological challenges in conceptualizing, identifying, and tracking organized-crime-style violence. However, 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.

“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).

⁵³ 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>

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 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.⁵⁴ 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.

Official reporting on individual homicides by SNSP and INEGI appears to be becoming more consistent thanks to changes in SNSP's methodology. As a result, the disparity between SNSP and INEGI figures has declined in recent years. In 2014, the total number of individual homicides reported by INEGI (20,010) was roughly 15% higher than the figure reported by SNSP (17,324). In 2015, the INEGI figure (20,762) was over 11% higher than the SNSP figure (18,650). In 2016, the gap narrowed to just over 7% higher for INEGI (24,560) compared to SNSP (22,932). Assuming that the gap between SNSP and INEGI figures for 2017 remains around 7%, in mid-2018 INEGI could be expected to report around 27,214 as the total number of homicides in Mexico for 2017. This figure would be on par with or slightly greater than the number (27,213) reported by INEGI 2011, which was by any measure the worst year for homicides in Mexico since 1990.

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 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).⁵⁵

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-

⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁵ 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.

2008, based on data from the Mexican Attorney General's Office (PGR).⁵⁶ 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 2013.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ Other sources, including *El*

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ 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).

⁵⁸ Until recently, the Mexico City-based newspaper *Reforma* was the main source of data on drug-related violence referenced by Justice in Mexico. However, while *Reforma* faithfully reported these data publicly throughout the Calderón administration, its weekly reporting stopped abruptly and without explanation in December 2012, just as President Peña Nieto took office. In mid-2013, *Reforma* resumed its reporting of these data, though since the start of 2014 they have begun to do so with less detail than in the past. For this reason, Justice in Mexico has worked to incorporate data from *Milenio* and also the Lantia consulting group headed by Eduardo Guerrero and reported by *Excelsior* in Leo Zuckermann's column "Juegos de Poder."

⁵⁹ 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, 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

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.).⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹

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 2016.⁶² 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

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.

⁶⁰ 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.

⁶¹ 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.

⁶² SNSP data at the municipal level are available from 2011 to 2013.

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 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.⁶³ In addition, there is also a large number of missing persons whose fate remains a mystery.⁶⁴

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

⁶³ 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>

⁶⁴ In 2015, Mexico’s Secretary of the Interior (SEGOB) released its “2014 Annual Report of Missing or Disappeared Persons,” in which it reported 24,812 missing persons, as of December 31, 2014. This number is up 4,000 from the database released in 2012 by Centro de Investigación y Capacitación Propuesta Cívica, a Mexico City-based non-governmental organization, which revealed a list of 20,851 persons who went missing from 2006 through 2012, far greater than the number of missing persons reported at the time by official sources. The *Propuesta Cívica* database is reportedly based on a “secret” list obtained from the PGR. “INFORME ANNUAL 2014: Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas (RNPED).” *Secretaría de Gobernación*. August 2015. http://www.senado.gob.mx/comisiones/derechos_humanos/docs/Informe_Anual_2014_RNPED.pdf Anabel Hernández, “Supera los 25 mil, la lista secreta de desaparecidos,” *El Diario*, December 29, 2012. http://diario.mx/Nacional/2012-12-29_86eda41c/supera-los-25-mil-la-lista-secreta-de-desaparecidos/ At the time of this report, the actual dataset is accessible through the Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad Con Democracia, A.C. (CASEDE) at the following site: <http://www.seguridadcondemocracia.org/biblioteca-virtual/derechos-humanos/bases-de-datos-sobre-personas-desaparecidas-en-mexico-2006-2012.html>

those areas most affected by drug trafficking and organized crime activities.⁶⁵ 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.

A final consideration is that all of the various indicators consistently reflect the same the general trends with regard to violence. That is, there is a remarkably high statistical correlation in the data produced by virtually all the sources referenced in this report. Using a common measure of the statistical relationship between two variables, known as a Pearson's correlation coefficient, in Table 3 the authors compared the governmental and nongovernmental annual data homicide and OCG-style homicides.

Table 3: Statistical Correlations for Homicide and OCG-Homicide Data in Mexico

	INEGI Victims	SNSP- Cases	CNDH- OCG	SNSP- OCG	Reforma- OCG	Milenio- OCG	Lantia- OCG
INEGI	-	0.945	0.830	0.996	0.910	0.993	0.583
SNSP	0.945	-	-0.006	0.996	0.875	0.960	0.891
CNDH-OCG	0.830	-0.006	-	1.000	0.996	1.000	n.a.
SNSP-OCG	0.996	0.996	0.996	-	0.997	0.994	n.a.
Reforma-OCG	0.910	0.891	1.000	0.997	-	0.896	0.940
Milenio-OCG	0.993	0.960	1.000	0.994	0.896	-	0.846
Lantia-OCG	0.583	0.891	n.a.	n.a.	0.940	0.846	-

The linear relationships between these various sources are generally very strong, suggesting that there is remarkably high degree of consistency in the direction and trends found in the data being compared. Thus, for example, when INEGI data show an increase in the number of homicide victims in a particular year, SNSP data on homicides are also very likely to show an increase for that year. Similarly, Milenio measures of organized-crime-style homicides track closely to those of Reforma and Lantia. Moreover, both INEGI and SNSP data are strongly correlated to the various measures of OCG-style homicides. Thus, while the total number of homicides or OCG-style homicides may vary across different sources, the trends documented by these sources are quite similar. One notable exception is with regard to the homicide data for INEGI and the Lantia data on OCG-style homicides, for which there is still a moderately strong, positive correlation. The other exception is with regard to SNSP homicide data and CNDH data on OCG-style homicides, for which there is a negligible relationship. In both cases, these variables are not as closely matched and do not as consistently predict one another.

⁶⁵ 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.

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