

### SUMMARY

Justice in Mexico released the second edition of *Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico*. The report builds on 10 years of studies previously titled Drug Violence in Mexico. In 2019, the title and scope of these reports was modified in an effort to gauge the broader impacts of organized crime and violence in Mexico.

- The report was coordinated by Laura Y. Calderón, Kimberly Heinle, Rita E. Kuckertz, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, with contributions by Teagan McGinnis, Ashley Ahrens-Viquez, Mauricio Villaseñor, Quinn Skerlos and Ernesto Truqui.
- The report compiles the latest available information and research, with an emphasis on data made available mainly by the Executive Secretariat for the National Public Security System (*Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, SNSP*). This report also draws heavily on original research by Justice in Mexico and examines data from other studies and media reports in an effort to provide insight into current trends affecting Mexico's public security situation.
- Because the production of this report was delayed by interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the content focuses primarily on developments through 2019. However, where applicable, we discuss trends playing out as this report went to publication in mid-2020.

**The country's public security challenges have evolved significantly due to diversification and proliferation of organized crime.** Some important factors that have contributed to recent patterns in crime are infighting amongst splinter groups and diversification of revenue sources.

- As larger criminal organizations disband, smaller groups are left in their wake. **These small enterprises often lack the logistical capacity to form trans-national criminal partnerships, and instead turn to predatory crimes to maintain revenue.** Robberies, kidnappings, and territorial violence can all be linked to the actions of low-level criminal organizations as they fight to increase their market share.
- Organized crime groups (OCGs) have diversified their streams of income as competition increases, paving the way for the transformation of drug trafficking organizations into trans-national criminal organizations. **Such groups pose a significant threat to Mexican internal security, expanding from trafficking drugs, to sex trafficking, fuel theft, and illegal trade of exotic animals.** The constantly shifting strategies of OCGs have made law enforcement increasingly difficult for Mexican authorities.
- President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-2024) was elected in 2018 in the hopes of ending the country's security and rule of law problems. **López Obrador has used this mandate to restructure the country's security apparatus, including the creation and deployment of a new National Guard (*Guardia Nacional*).** Still, many Mexicans feel disappointed with his handling of the public security situation, as public opinion polls show an average approval of around 50%, and trending downwards since he took office in December 2018.
- This comes at a time when the resurgence of opioid production in Mexico has contributed to a **major public health epidemic related to opioid addiction and overdoses in the United States.**

**A defining statistic of crime in Mexico is homicide rate, which rose to its highest recorded level in 2019.** In 2019, SNSP reported a nationwide total of 29,406 murder cases (including cases with multiple homicides), resulting in 34,588 individual victims (an average of 2,884 victims per month).

- Yet, **the rate at which homicides have increased year-to-year has slowed**, possibly indicating that Mexico is "flattening the curve". However, the homicide rate can often be sporadic, with fluctuations in geographic and point-in-time distributions linked to fighting between OCGs. At present, homicide is the leading cause of death among individuals from the ages of 15-39.
- **There are particularly high concentrations of intentional homicides in at least five specific zones and municipalities in which the number of homicides is greater than 450 and the homicide rate exceeds 100 per 100,000 inhabitants.** High concentration areas or "hot spots" include: 1) Tijuana, 2) Ciudad Juárez, 3) Culiacán, 4) Acapulco de Juárez, and 5) León. In terms of homicide rate, the hot spots include three major clusters of violence: 1) the North-East border region with Texas (including some municipalities of Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas), 2) the Jalisco- Colima- Michoacán pacific coastal region, and 3) the Golden Triangle area (Chihuahua-Durango-Sinaloa, spilling into some municipalities of Sonora).
- **Comparing estimates on organized-crime-style homicides to official numbers, somewhere between 44% to 80% of all officially reported intentional homicides bore characteristics that suggested the involvement of OCGs.** In 2019, *Milenio* reported that there were 23,393 organized-crime-style homicides, while *Reforma* reported 15,108. Both figures represented the highest number of organized-crime-style homicides ever reported by either media organization, paralleling the rise to record official homicide figures.

**In 2019, the number of cases of intentional injury in Mexico increased for the fourth straight year in a row.**

- At the municipal level, SNSP data show that 1,856 of Mexico's 2,326 municipalities reported at least one intentional injury in 2019. 11 municipalities had more than 2,000 cases, just three had more than 3,000 cases, and only one had more than 5,000 cases.
- The top five municipalities with the highest number of cases of intentional injury in 2019 were Ecatepec de Morelos, Estado de México (5,392 cases); Toluca, Estado de México (3,935); León, Guanajuato (3,078); Querétaro, Querétaro (2,923); and Mexicali, Baja California (2,842).
- Estado de México alone accounted for nearly 30% of all intentional injuries in Mexico in 2019 with 49,094 of the 164,143 cases nationwide.
- This past year was also the first time in at least five years that Tijuana, Baja California was not one of the top five municipalities with the highest number of intentional injury cases.

**The number of officially reported kidnappings in Mexico had slowly and steadily risen over the years, but leveled off in 2018 and 2019, when there was an increase of roughly 15%, from 1,329 (2018) to 1,323 (2019).**

- Veracruz had the highest number of officially reported kidnappings (298) in 2019, followed by Estado de México (206), Mexico City (175), Morelos (72), and Puebla (70). Yucatán was the only state to register no cases of kidnapping.
- At the municipal level, the top three municipalities with the most cases of kidnapping were all located in Mexico City: Gustavo A. Madero (25 cases), Iztapalapa (25), and Cuahémoc (24). The next three were all in Veracruz: Xalapa (22 cases), Veracruz (19), and Martínez de la Torre (17). Thirty percent of all kidnappings occurred in 2019 in just 28 municipalities
- From 2012 to 2018, the number and geographic distribution of kidnappings reported by SNSP followed the same pattern as the numbers reported in ENVIPE crime victimization surveys. This illustrates that while official data on kidnappings may not reflect the true volume of cases, they may be useful in predicting trends from year to year.

**Over the years, there has been a steady rise in officially reported cases of extortion from 5,072 cases in 2015 to nearly 8,500 cases in 2019.**

- Estado de México had the highest number of extortion cases in 2019 with 2,487 cases, or 29% of all 8,500 registered nationwide. Mexico City had the second highest with 856 cases, followed by Jalisco (742), Veracruz (560), and Nuevo León (509).
- At the municipal level, the two municipalities with the most cases of extortion were both in Estado de México: Ecatepec de Morelos with 296 and Toluca with 275. Guadalajara, in the state of Jalisco, registered 186 cases of extortion, followed by Monterrey in Nuevo León with 181 and Querétaro in the state of Querétaro with 176. Most of these municipalities also ranked in the top five or six cities with the most kidnappings in 2018 and 2017.
- Similar to kidnapping statistics, these data help to identify observable trends in known cases of extortion, but may not illustrate its true incidence in part due to the overall lack of reporting on this crime. Unlike kidnapping, trends observed using ENVIPE and SNSP data do not coincide, suggesting that official data may not be a reliable indicator of extortion trends observed from year to year.

**In 2019, Mexico recorded its most violent year on record for women. Nearly half (45%) of all women in Mexico reported being victims of violence at the hands of their partner and 18% specified that they were victims of physical abuse.**

- The number of women who were victims of violent crimes in 2019 was slightly higher (2.5%) than in 2018 (including cases of intentional injury, extortion, intentional homicide, corruption of minors, femicide, kidnapping, and human trafficking). Numbers of female victims of such crimes increased each year from 62,567 in 2015 to 74,632 in 2019, a 19.3% increase over the past five years.
- According to different sources, more women were victims of homicide in 2019 than ever before. Of the approximately 34,588 victims of intentional homicide nationwide, around 2,800 were female (8%). In addition, cases of femicide have steadily risen over the years. **Cases classified as femicides grew from 411 in 2015 to 945 in 2019, representing an increase of approximately 130%. Most cases were reported in Veracruz (157), Estado de México (123), Mexico City (71), Nuevo León (67), and Jalisco (58), while Baja California Sur had the fewest (only two).** Likewise, 473 cases were officially reported from January to June 2020. However, such figures may be much higher when one accounts for shortcomings and biases in the collection and conceptualization of femicide data.
- **With regard to sex crimes, there were almost 10,000 more cases in 2019 (51,662) than in 2018 (42,873), and almost 20,000 more cases in 2019 than in 2015 (31,171).** In 2019, Mexico City had the greatest number of registered sex crimes with 6,507 cases—almost 13% of all 51,662 cases nationwide. Estado de México saw the second highest volume of registered sex crimes (5,678), followed by Jalisco (3,428), Nuevo León (3,053), and Chihuahua (2,934).

The killings of high-profile targets such as mayors, local political figures, police, military officers, and journalists have also increased.

- **25 current, former, or aspiring mayors were assassinated in 2019.** Statistics drawn from Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* database suggest that mayors are 13 times more likely to be murdered than the average individual. In 2019, most murders of mayors, former mayors, mayoral candidates, and alternate mayors took place in Oaxaca (6), Veracruz (3), and Estado de México (3). In 20% of all the cases, there were visible signs of torture on the victims' bodies, while in 84% of the cases, the cause of death was gunshot. Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* dataset includes 264 mayors, mayoral candidates, and former mayors killed from 2002 through 2019.
- **The *Memoria* project started to track homicides of other local political figures**, such as city council members (*regidores*), former candidates to state and national legislature, and municipal trustees (*síndicos*). **These victims amounted to 13 cases in 2019**, with seven cases against city council members in Jalisco (2), Guanajuato (2), Oaxaca (1), Estado de México (1), and Mexico City (1), all of which involved the use of guns, as well as cases targeting two *síndicos* and a former party leader in Oaxaca.
- In 2019, 446 police officers were killed in Mexico—an average of 1.16 daily, representing a 1.3% decrease from the 452 police killed in 2018. In 2019, the *Memoria* dataset recorded **414 members of police institutions killed. Most victims belonged to municipal police (250 or 60.4%), followed by state police (104 or 25.1%), and state investigative police (policía ministerial) (47 or 11.4%)**. The rest of the police institutions had significantly fewer victims: federal police had nine (2.2%) and federal investigative police (*policía ministerial federal*) had four (1%). It is also important to note that in the case of police homicides, there are more cases where an OCG claimed authorship for the crime compared to other populations.
- According to the Secretary of National Defense (*Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional*, SEDENA), 284 members of the military have been killed and 1,661 wounded, while 4,735 aggressions have been recorded from 2007 to 2019. The *Memoria* dataset recorded **21 military officers and six members of the National Guard killed, including 18 victims affiliated with the Mexican Army and one with the Mexican Air Force**.
- The number of journalists murdered decreased slightly in 2019, though Mexico still ranks among the most dangerous places for journalists to go about their work. **The *Memoria* dataset includes 13 journalists and media workers killed in 2019**, whereas 17 were documented in 2018. In 77% of the cases, the cause of death was gunshot. The killings in 2019 occurred in Guerrero (2), Morelos (2), Sonora (2), Tabasco (2), Estado de México (1), Oaxaca (1), Quintana Roo (1), Sinaloa (1), and Veracruz (1). Only six out of the 32 states in Mexico have not had recorded cases of journalists murdered since 2000: Aguascalientes, Campeche, Hidalgo, Querétaro, Tlaxcala, and Yucatán.

Summarizing the general phenomenon of violent crime, **robbery accounted for the largest percentage of violent crimes in 2019. In 2019 alone, there were over three-quarters of a million robberies reported nationwide.**

- There were 758,032 cases of robbery reported in Mexico in 2019—an average of just over 63,000 cases per month. This was the first decline in cases of robbery over the past five years, as Mexico had seen an increase each year since at least 2015.
- The most common type of robbery was “auto and auto-related theft” with 221,807 cases, or 29.3% of all robberies. The other subtypes with the most recorded cases in 2019 were “other” (212,358 cases or 28.0% of all robberies), and “business robbery” (116,205 cases, 15.3%).
- At the municipal level, when taking into consideration all types of robberies, Guadalajara, Jalisco had the most registered cases in 2019 with 30,230 or nearly 4% of all robberies nationwide, followed by Ecatepec de Morelos, Estado de México (25,168); Iztapalapa, Mexico City (17,630); Tijuana, Baja California (16,934); and Querétaro, Querétaro (16,499). Nearly 1,200 municipalities (1,185) registered 10 or fewer cases of robbery of all kinds in 2019, of which 362 recorded zero.

2019 Special cases:

- Tijuana has ranked among the top 10 Mexican cities with the most homicides over the past two decades, and since 2017 it has had the highest number in the country. In 2019, the municipality of Tijuana reported 2,001 victims of intentional homicide, resulting in a 113 per 100,000 inhabitants homicide rate.
- One of the major “hot spots” for violence identified in 2019 was Guanajuato with the highest number of organized crime related homicides in 2019 (2,673 cases, according to *Reforma*), and was also featured in *Milenio's* top five states with the highest number of organized crime-related homicides every month (totaling 2,934 deaths).
- An extraordinary show of force from the Sinaloa Cartel occurred in October 2019, when security forces detained Ovidio Guzmán López, the son of jailed drug lord Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, in Culiacán, Sinaloa. Heavy fighting erupted in the streets immediately after, as the Sinaloa Cartel launched a large retaliation demanding Ovidio's release. In an unprecedented turn of events, authorities bowed to the cartel's reign of violence in the public space and released Ovidio that same day.
- In November 2019, a clash between *Los Salazar* (Sinaloa Cartel) and *La Línea* (Juárez Cartel), left nine U.S.-Mexico dual citizens dead—an incident that drew international attention. 17 members of a local Mormon family, the LeBarón's, were ambushed by cartel members in two separate incidences while driving from Sonora to

Chihuahua. Authorities confirmed the death of nine individuals total – three mothers and six of their children, including a 7-month-old baby.

#### Governmental Responses and U.S.-MEXICO BI-National Security Cooperation:

- The National Guard was officially deployed to the streets in June 2019. Formed from the ranks of the Mexican military and police, the National Guard was created to combat the country's ongoing challenges with organized crime and violence. **It was initially deployed in the summer of 2019 to Mexico's southern border to assist with the increasing flow of migrants crossing into Mexico from Central America, but started assisting in drug trafficking arrests, highway and street patrols, and crime prevention throughout Mexico during the second half of 2019.**
- Alejandro Gertz Manero became the new Attorney General (*Fiscal General*), in a change to replace the former *Procuraduría General de la República* (PGR) with the new *Fiscalía General de la República* (FGR). Because the Attorney General is appointed to a nine-year term, the position is expected to have a greater degree of prosecutorial independence from the executive branch than the PGR had in the past. Still, there is opposition and criticism against Gertz Manero because of his close ties to the president, his lack of autonomy and his unwillingness to investigate top administration officials. **In mid-January 2020, a leaked draft proposal for reforming the criminal justice system prepared by Gertz Manero and Julio Scherer, the president's chief legal adviser, brought strong pushback from experts who argued that it would fundamentally undermine the country's oral, adversarial model of criminal procedure and devalue human rights protections.**
- U.S.-Mexico cooperation continues under the Merida Initiative. **The Merida Initiative remains in effect, though with less financial support from the U.S. government.** Congress boosted funds appropriated for the agreement from \$139 million in FY2019 to \$150 million in FY2020, but then approved a substantial decrease down to \$61.3 million for FY2021. The reduction in funds is likely a result of congressional concern over the Merida Initiative's effectiveness and efficacy.

Prospects for 2020: Available data from January through May 2020 reveal novel trends during a year marked by a global pandemic and international public protests demanding equal access to justice.

- **The COVID-19 pandemic has not slowed the rate of violence in Mexico, generally, though it is clearly having a range of effects on organized crime.** Port of entry closures at the U.S.-Mexico border and lockdowns in both countries have caused disruptions that appear to present challenges for illicit drug trafficking operations, money laundering, and other organized crime activities.
- Data obtained by Justice in Mexico from an omnibus survey conducted by *DATA Opinión Pública y Mercados* (DATA-OPM), indicates that **the security situation remains a salient concern during the COVID-19 pandemic.** While 14.9% of the respondents felt that security had improved in their neighborhoods, about 37.7% indicated that security had worsened, and 46.3% indicated that it remained the same. When asked to rank the level of insecurity in their cities from 1 (very little) to 10 (a lot), 83.1% described their city's insecurity level at 5 or more, 24.2% of which ranked insecurity in their city at number 10.
- From January through May 2020, SNSP recorded 12,184 intentional homicides for an average of 2,436.8 per month or 80.7 per day. **If this monthly rate continues, Mexico would expect to see an annual total of 29,565 intentional homicides in 2020, which is just barely higher than the 29,421 registered in 2019.**
- From January through May 2020, SNSP recorded 58,897 cases of intentional injuries for an average of 11,779.4 per month or 390 per day. **At this monthly rate, Mexico would expect to see 141,353 cases of intentional injury over a 12-month span, which would be approximately 22,000 cases less than the total reported in 2019.**
- From January through May 2020, SNSP recorded 258,470 cases of robbery, or an average of 51,694 per month (or 1,711.7 per day). At this monthly rate, Mexico would expect to see 620,328 cases in 2020, a significant decrease of almost 138,000 from 2019. **If this trajectory holds, it will be the second year that robberies have gone down since the number peaked in 2018 with 810,602 cases.**
- From January through May 2020, SNSP recorded 365 kidnappings, or an average of 73 per month (2.4 per day). **At a rate of 73 cases per month, Mexico would expect just over 200 recorded cases of kidnapping in 2020, a dramatic decrease from the 1,323 cases recorded in 2019.**
- From January through May 2020, SNSP recorded 3,347 cases of extortion, or an average of 669.4 per month (22.2 per day). **At that monthly rate, Mexico would expect to see over 8,033 recorded cases of extortion in 2020 or just under 500 cases fewer than the 8,500 recorded in 2019. The number of cases peaked at 721 in February and steadily declined to 603 in May.**