EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On October 22, 2021, the Justice in Mexico program at the University of San Diego released the 2021 edition of its special report on *Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico* edited by Laura Y. Calderón, Kimberly Heinle, Rita E. Kuckertz, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk.

The report compiles the latest available data and information on organized crime, violence, and public security in Mexico and presents several key findings:

**Intentional Homicides:**

- In 2020, the SNSP reported an average of 2,876 intentional homicides per month for a nationwide total of **34,515 intentional homicide victims**, making it one of the worst years on record in recent decades.
- At the current rate, a **small decrease (3.7%) in homicides appears likely in 2021** with an average of 2,826 homicides per month for a total of 19,173 murders in the first eight months of 2021, with a likely total of just under 34,000 intentional homicide victims for the year.
- Homicides are **geographically concentrated in the northwest, northern border, and central regions of Mexico**, where conflicts among organized crime groups are engaged in conflicts.
- **About 25% of intentional homicides in 2020 were concentrated in just five municipalities.** In 2020, the top two municipalities accounted for nearly 10% of Mexico’s homicide cases (3,379), with around 5% in Tijuana, Baja California (1,846) and 4% in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (1,533). They are followed by León, Guanajuato (633); Celaya, Guanajuato (493); and Cajeme, Sonora (411).
- According to various tallies, **33% and 66% of murders appear to involve Mexican organized crime groups**, particularly as the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación has asserted itself to achieve dominance in various areas throughout the country.
Intentional Injuries:

- Cases of **intentional injuries in Mexico decreased in 2020 for the first time since 2016**, with the SNSP reporting 12,023 per month for a total of 144,280 intentional injury cases in 2020, a 20% decline from 2019.

- However, the **average number of intentional injuries was up in the first eight months of 2021** to 13,016 cases per month in the first eight months of 2021 for a projected total of more than 155,000 for the year.

- The **State of Mexico alone accounted for 30% of all intentional assaults in Mexico in 2020**, registering 43,503 cases. Guanajuato ranked second, with 7.7% of all cases (11,127 cases). This was followed by Jalisco with 5.2%, and Veracruz and Michoacán each with 4.6%.

- At the municipal level, nearly 80% (1,975) of Mexico’s 2,471 municipalities reported at least one case of intentional injury in 2020. The top five highest cases of intentional injuries per municipality in 2020 were recorded in Ecatepec de Morelos, State of Mexico with 5,231 cases; Toluca, State of Mexico (3,573); León, Guanajuato (2,805); Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes (2,805); and Querétaro, Querétaro (2,438).

Kidnappings:

- Although kidnappings appeared to increase gradually from 2015 through 2019, the number of kidnappings dropped significantly again in 2020. The **826 total kidnapping cases** reported by the SNSP in 2020 represented a **38% drop from the number reported in 2019**.

- The State of Mexico saw the greatest number of kidnappings in 2020 (155 cases, or 19% of all reported kidnappings). This was followed by Veracruz (122), Mexico City (65), Morelos (57), and Michoacán (48). Similar to findings from previous years, cases of kidnapping have remained geographically concentrated; 30% of all 2020 kidnappings reported by SNSP occurred in just 30 municipalities.

- A notoriously underreported crime in Mexico, Mexico’s latest National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Safety (Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción de Seguridad Pública, ENVIPE) estimates that 94% of kidnapping cases went unreported in 2019.

Robbery:

- In 2020, there were **604,265 cases of robbery reported in Mexico in 2020**, an average of over 50,000 cases per month.

- 2020 saw a **20% decrease in the number of robbery cases** from 758,032 cases in 2019.
• **The most common type of robbery is “auto and auto-related theft”** with 177,607 cases, or 29.4% of all robberies in 2020, followed closely by “other” robberies with 170,504 cases, or 28.2%. Robberies targeting financial or commercial institutions had the third highest total, following the same pattern as previous years and making up 17.4% of cases in 2020.

• **Ecatepec de Morelos in the State of Mexico had 3.5% of all robberies nationwide in 2020**, with 21,291 cases. This was followed closely by Guadalajara, Jalisco (20,993 cases). Other municipalities with large numbers included Querétaro, Querétaro (14,745 cases); Tijuana, Baja California (12,860 cases); and Iztapalapa, Mexico City (12,374 cases).

• Of Mexico’s 2,471 municipalities, 1,226 registered ten or less cases of robbery of all kinds in 2020, while 440 recorded zero. The geographic distribution of cases of **robbery appears to be more widespread than several other types of crime**, particularly those involving organized crime.

**Special Victims:**

• Assassinations of current, former, elected or alternate candidates to government office have been a serious concern in Mexico for the last several years. In 2020, the number of assassinations decreased to **7 sitting, former, and alternate mayors**, with no mayoral candidates killed. Current, former, and aspiring mayors in Mexico were over **four times more likely to be murdered than the general population** in 2020.

• Justice in Mexico identified **nine other local officials murdered in 2020**. There were four assassinations of city council members. In addition, there were several other former officials and local politicians killed, including four former legislators, one alternate legislator, one former city council member, one state coordinator for the PRD, and one local coordinator for the National Electoral Institute (Instituto Nacional Electoral, INE).

• **Police officers were more than five times more likely to be murdered in 2020 than ordinary citizens.** According to the non-profit organization Causa en Común, 524 police officers (280 municipal, 217 state, and 27 federal) were killed in Mexico in 2020, for an average of 1.24 daily, a 17.5% increase from the 446 police officers killed in 2019.

• According to Justice in Mexico’s Memoria dataset, **2020 was the deadliest year for journalists and media workers, totaling 22 cases in 12 different states, a 169% increase** from the 13 cases registered in nine states in 2019. In most of the cases (18), the journalists were the only victims, while in three cases there was a second victim, and in one case— involving an attack by the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) — a total of six victims were killed.
Violence Against Women:

- Of the approximately 34,531 victims of intentional homicide nationwide, 12% (2,783) were female, representing a 4% increase from 2019 to 2020. Combined with the number of femicide (feminicidio) victims (940 cases), there were 10.3 women were killed each day in 2020, slightly less (-1.9%) than the 2019 average of 10.5 women.
- In 2020, the State of Mexico had the highest number of femicide cases (150 cases), followed by Veracruz (84), Nuevo León (67), Jalisco (66), and Mexico City (64).
- According to ENVIPE, in 2018, 93.7% crimes against women were not formally investigated because either the authorities did not initiate an investigation file or victims did not denounce the crime.
- In 2020, there were 54,342 reported sex crimes, an increase of roughly 5% in comparison to 2019, which had 51,662 reported sex crimes. While every sex crime category except incest saw increases in 2019, the 2020 numbers were more varied. From 2018 through 2020, Mexico City has continued to report the highest number of total sex crimes, with 6,464 reported cases in 2020, or 12% of all reported sex crimes nationwide. The State of Mexico trailed closely behind with 6,153 reported cases, or 11% of all reported sex crimes nationwide. Nuevo León (3,654), Jalisco (3,164), and Chihuahua (2,872).

Trends in Mexican Organized Crime:

- A significant portion of violent crime—at least a third and perhaps two thirds of homicides—in Mexico over the last several years is attributable to organized crime groups, particularly those battling for control of the drug trade.
- In recent years, a Sinaloa Cartel splinter group known as the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG) gained prominence in at least 23 out of 32 Mexican states, especially in areas once dominated by its former-parent organization. This represents at least a 44% increase in CJNG’s geographic presence since late 2015.
- Most of CJNG’s growth seems to be focused in the central states of Mexico, including Mexico City, and especially along strategic drug corridors in the northern border, such as Tijuana, Baja California; Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua; and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas.
- The splintering and reshuffling of Mexico’s major OCGs has been accompanied by proliferation and diversification of criminal groups into other forms of illicit activities. As noted in this report, rates of kidnapping, extortion, and various forms of robbery in Mexico have risen over the years.
The Impact of COVID-19 on Violent Crime:

- Many organized crime operations were initially disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with supply-chain disruptions, fluctuating drug prices, closed borders, ports restrictions, and an overall change in illicit activities dynamics.
- Meanwhile, various organized crime groups took advantage of the void left by the federal government and stepped in to help communities negatively affected by the pandemic, providing humanitarian assistance, distributing care packages and enforcing quarantine curfews.

Mexican Government Responses:

- Human rights advocates have cited the growing number of human rights complaints alleging serious misconduct by the military and National Guard. Notably, in September 2020, National Guard agents shot and killed 36-year-old pecan farmer Jessica Estrella Silva Zamarripa, also injuring her husband, amid farmers’ protests at the La Boquilla dam over the diversion of water to the United States under its 1944 water treaty with Mexico.
- While the Mexican public mobilized throughout 2020 to protest targeted abuse and violence against women, the current presidential administration was criticized for a lack of sympathy about violence against women. President López Obrador stated on various occasions that the issue of femicides had been “manipulated” by his political opponents, who he claims helped to instigate the protests. He also claimed that 90% of 9-1-1 calls claiming violence against women were fake, and thus, that the problem of gender-based violence has been inflated by false reporting.
- Tensions over U.S.-Mexico security cooperation intensified in 2020, especially when U.S. authorities arrested former Mexican defense minister Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda in October 2020 on various counts related to drug trafficking and money laundering. In December 2020, the Mexican legislature approved the incorporation of several new provisions to the National Security Law (Ley de Seguridad Nacional), curbing the role of foreign officials operating within Mexico.
- The newly negotiated U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities will attempt to revive bilateral security cooperation with a focus on reducing violence, promoting public health approaches to drugs, preventing transborder crimes, and disrupting criminal networks.