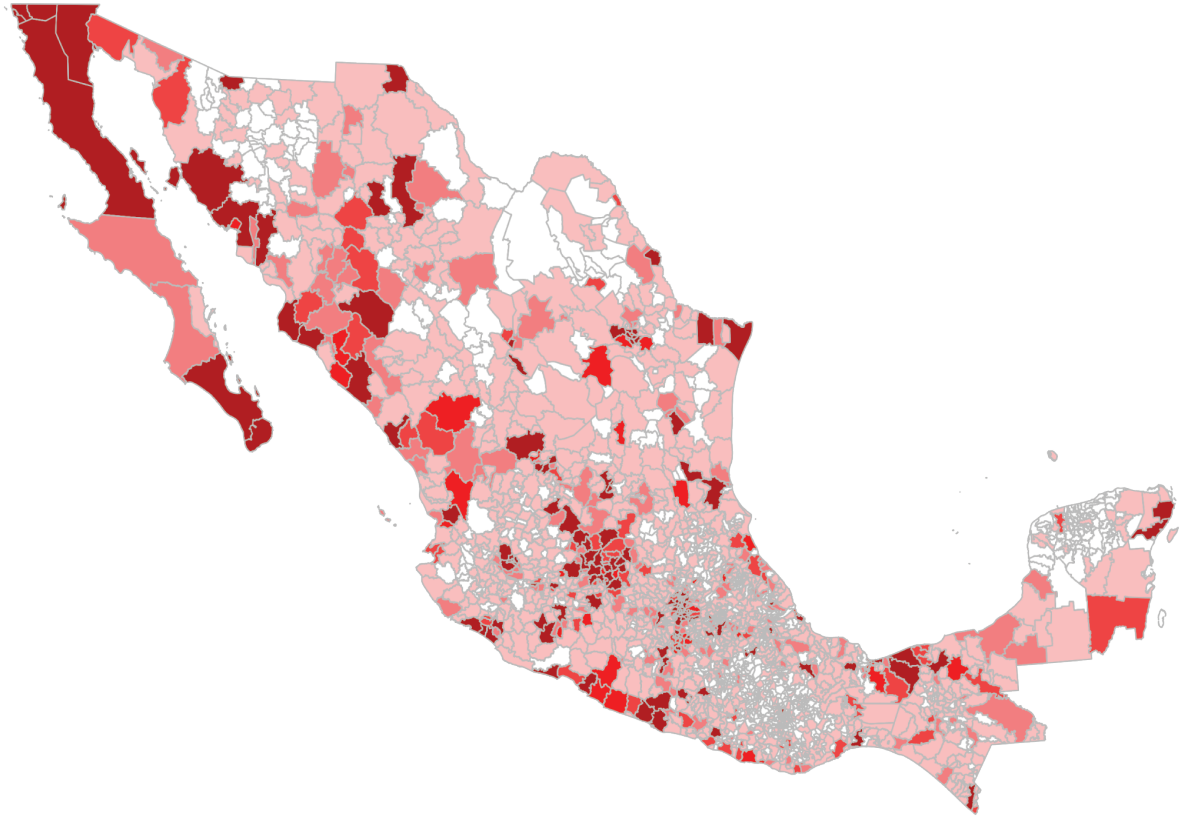


Analysis Through 2018

Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico



Laura Y. Calderón, Kimberly Heinle,
Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk



Justice in Mexico
Department of Political Science & International Relations
University of San Diego

April 2019

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 10th edition of a series of reports published by Justice in Mexico examining issues related to crime and violence, judicial sector reform, and human rights in Mexico. Since 2010, the Drug Violence in Mexico report series examined patterns of crime and violence attributable to organized crime, and particularly drug trafficking organizations. In commemoration of the 10th year anniversary, the authors have changed the series' name to "Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico" to reflect the diversification of organized crime over the last decade. This report was authored by Laura Y. Calderón, Kimberly Heinle, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, and builds on the work of past Drug Violence in Mexico reports. This publication does not represent the views or opinions of the University of San Diego or Justice in Mexico's sponsoring organizations

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A word cloud of Mexican cities in Spanish. The most prominent words are 'Irapuato' and 'Ciudad Juárez', both in large, bold, dark red font. Other significant words include 'Guadalajara', 'Cancun', 'Tijuana', 'Leon', 'Acapulco', 'Culiacan', 'Tlaquepaque', 'Ecatepec', and 'Culiacan'. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping pattern, with some appearing in smaller, lighter red fonts. The overall shape of the word cloud is roughly rectangular, with the largest words forming the central and outer edges.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
I. INTRODUCTION	7
II. UNDERSTANDING MEXICO'S RECENT VIOLENCE	8
III. FINDINGS: ORGANIZED CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN MEXICO	11
A. Record Levels of Homicide Continue in 2018	11
B. Organized-Crime-Style Killings Constitute Major Share of Homicides in 2018.....	14
C. Shifting Geographic Patterns of Violence.....	17
1. Geographic Dispersion Decreases in 2018	17
2. Significant Increases in State and Local Centers of Violence.....	22
3. Distribution of Organized-Crime-Style Homicides	27
D. Special Victims: Gender, Politics, and the Press	29
1. Males	30
2. Mayors.....	31
3. Journalists.....	34
E. Comparing Presidential Administrations.....	38
IV. ANALYZING RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN 2018.....	39
A. The Shifting Landscape of Organized Crime.....	40
B. The Trial of “El Chapo” Guzmán.....	41
C. Changing of the Guard: A New President Takes Office.....	43
D. Addressing the Socio-Economic Roots of Violent Crime.....	45
E. Re-Inventing the Federal Prosecutor’s Office.....	46
F. Debating the Military’s Role in Internal Affairs.....	48
1. Internal Security Law	49
2. The National Guard.....	50
G. Changing U.S.-Mexico Security Relations	52
1. Border Security	52
2. NAFTA and the USMCA.....	52
3. Mérida Initiative Cooperation.....	53
V. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	53
A. Better Monitoring and Analysis of Mexico’s Rule of Law Challenges	54
B. Enhancing Mexican Policing and Prosecutions	54
C. Special Measures to Address Political Violence	54
D. Reinvigorating Mexico’s Anti-Corruption Efforts	55
IV. APPENDIX: DEFINITIONS, DATA, AND METHODOLOGIES	56
A. Defining the Problem.....	56
B. The Available Data Sources and Their Limitations.....	57
C. Government Data on Homicide	58
D. Organized Crime-Style Homicides.....	59
E. Analytical and Methodological Concerns	61

A word cloud visualization of city names in Mexico. The most prominent words are "Irapuato", "Ciudad Juarez", "Cancun", "Tijuana", "Guadalajara", "Acapulco", "Leon", "Culiacan", and "Tlaquepaque". The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping pattern, with larger fonts indicating higher frequency or importance. The colors are primarily black and dark grey, with some lighter grey and white text interspersed.

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 (Jalisco New Generation Cartel), 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)
CSRL	Cartel Santa Rosa de Lima (Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel, CSRL), an organized crime group
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

OCCG	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 organized crime and violence in Mexico through 2018.** For the past ten years, the Justice in Mexico program has compiled the latest available data and analysis of trends to help better understand the facets, implications, and possible remedies to the ongoing crisis of violent crime, corruption, and human rights violations in Mexico, with special attention to the fallout of the War on Drugs. This tenth report is published under a new title—*Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico*—in acknowledgement of the gradual shift that has occurred over several years with the restructuring of the illicit drug trade and the proliferation of new forms of organized crime. Several factors contributing to this shift have been documented in past reports, including the fragmentation of Mexican criminal organizations, the decriminalization and legalization of certain psychotropic substances (most notably marijuana), and the diversification of criminal enterprises in search of new sources of illicit revenue. Accordingly, this report offers a broad assessment of the factors contributing to Mexico’s ongoing problems with organized crime and violence.
- **Mexico experienced large increases in the level of violent crime for more than a 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.
- **Mexico’s national homicide rate per 100,000 people has increased significantly since 2015.** Based on CONAPO population figures, the authors estimate that rising violence increased Mexico’s homicide rate to around 25.7 per 100,000 in 2017, the latest year for which data is available from INEGI. Based on recent SNSP figures, the national homicide rate increased again to 27.3 per 100,000 in 2018, and INEGI figures released in late 2019 are likely to reflect a similar rate. Thus, there has been a substantial increase in Mexico’s homicide rate from the 16.9 murders per 100,000 inhabitants noted by the UNODC in 2015. This means that Mexico’s homicide rate has become higher than “average” for the Americas, now rivaling those last reported by the UNODC for Brazil and Colombia.
- **Mexico saw record violence in 2018, with 28,816 homicide cases and 33,341 victims.** There were 28,816 homicide cases and 33,341 victims reported by SNSP in 2018. SNSP reports information on the number of homicide cases and victims identified by law enforcement at the national and state level on a monthly basis. In addition to the law enforcement figures reported by SNSP, INEGI provides an

independent tally of individual causes of death, including intentional homicides at the municipal level, which is typically reported in the latter half of the next calendar year. For 2018, the authors estimate that INEGI will report approximately 33,794 homicide victims, quite close to the number of victims reported by SNSP.

- **Organized crime is a major contributor to Mexico’s problems of crime and violence.** According to this and past reports, a major portion—between a third and half—of Mexico’s homicides since 2006 can be attributed to organized crime groups (OCGs), especially drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). For 2018, the most conservative estimates suggest that about 20% of all homicides in Mexico were attributable to organized crime, while high-end estimates suggest that more than two-thirds of all homicides were attributable to organized crime. This report presents a comprehensive assessment of the publicly available data to help understand Mexico’s ongoing public security crisis, and specifically the role of organized crime in relation to this problem.
- **Mexican organized crime groups are more fragmented and their activities more diversified.** In recent years, the nature of violence has changed as the country’s major drug trafficking organizations, or *cartels*, have become more fragmented, decentralized, and diversified in their activities, this has contributed to a proliferation of smaller, regional and local criminal organizations and a more complex set of challenges for the Mexican government.
- **Violent crime has spread, but remains concentrated in a small number of specific locations.** 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. To be sure, according to the latest INEGI figures available, the number of municipalities with zero homicides decreased in 2017 to just 721—only about 30% of municipalities—the lowest number since 1990. However, homicides have been regionally concentrated in the major drug trafficking zones in the northwest and the Pacific Coast. All told, the top ten most violent municipalities in Mexico accounted 33.6% of all homicide cases in Mexico in 2018 (with 24.7% concentrated in the just top five): Tijuana (2,246), Ciudad Juárez (1,004), Acapulco (839), Cancún-Benito Juárez (537), Culiacán (500), Guadalajara (374), Irapuato (374), León (350), Tlaquepaque (329), and Ecatepec (317).
- **In per capita terms, Acapulco ranked above Tijuana in the rate of homicide cases per 100k.** Tijuana’s rate of 115 homicide cases (*not* individual victims) per 100,000 inhabitants ranked second to Acapulco’s rate of 127 cases per 100,000. While SNSP does not report homicide data at the local level for all municipalities, in the case of Tijuana, the Baja California State’s Secretary of Public Security (SSP) reports cases and victims on a monthly basis at the municipal level and even at the neighborhood level. For 2018, SSP reported a total of 2,519 victims of intentional homicide in Tijuana (resulting in a rate of 129 per 100,000 inhabitants), a significant increase —by 41%—

compared to the 1,781 victims reported by the same agency in 2017 (91 per 100,000 inhabitants).

- **Violence increased in the state of Guanajuato due to the rise of Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel.** One of the most striking surges in homicides was found in the state of Guanajuato. Much of that increase was concentrated in the cities of Irapuato (374 murders) and León (350), but several smaller towns registered dozens of homicides each, including at least nine municipalities with homicide rates in excess of 100 per 100,000 (namely, Apaseo El Alto, Cortazar, Jarral el Progreso, Penjamo, Pueblo Nuevo, Salamanca, Salvatierra, and Santiago Maravatio). Much of this violence appears to be linked to the problem of petroleum theft (*huachicol*) and the Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel (Cártel de Santa Rosa de Lima, CSRL). Petroleum thieves are commonly known as *huachicoleros*, a name adopted by gasoline truck drivers to refer to the stolen hydrocarbon, or *chupaductos* (pipeline suckers).
- **Despite concerns about femicides, violence continues to disproportionately affect men.** 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 more than 8.3 times more likely to be homicide victims than women, according to the latest available data from INEGI in 2017. Of the total of 32,079 homicide victims nationwide, there were 28,522 male homicide victims (88.9%), 3,430 female homicide victims (10.7%), and 127 homicide victims of unspecified gender (0.4%) in 2017, according to INEGI, which is fairly consistent with the average distribution of violence by gender in Mexico since 1990. The fact that men are 830% more likely than women to be murdered suggests 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.
- **As a monumental election year, 2018 saw greater violence for politicians and journalists.** As with homicides generally, 2018 marked a record high for killings of mayors, mayoral candidates, and former-mayors, with 37 such victims. This number was up slightly 35 cases in 2017, and a considerable increase from Justice in Mexico’s tally of 14 victims in 2015 and six victims in 2016. The murdered politicians included partisans from the PRI (10), PRD (6), PVEM (5), PAN (4), MORENA (3), Independent (2), PES (1), and Movimiento Ciudadano (1). Meanwhile, there were 16 journalists and media workers killed in the states of Baja California Sur, Chiapas Guerrero, Mexico City, Mexico State, Nuevo Laredo, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz. The media workers killed included journalists, reporters, photojournalists, correspondents, photographers, station directors, and activists. A 2018 study found that in recent years Mexican journalists were at least three times more likely to be murdered than the general population, while mayors were at least nine times more likely.
- **Enrique Peña Nieto’s presidency (2012-18) saw the most homicides in recent history.** Based on INEGI’s official figures from 2013 through 2017 and the authors’

projections for 2018, it appears that over 150,000 people were murdered over the six years of the Peña Nieto administration. This constitutes an average of around 30,000 homicides per year during Peña Nieto's term, nearly 10,000 more per year on average than under Calderón, whose first two and last two years saw lower levels of homicide compared to Peña Nieto. On average, there were more than 82 homicides per day under the Peña Nieto administration, or more than 3.4 murders every hour.

- **Mexican president Andres Manuel López Obrador faces difficult context on taking office.** Several major developments contributed to 2018 being Mexico's most violent year on record. These include the Mexico's socioeconomic deficits, dynamic and dramatic battles for OCG hierarchy, and the downfall of "El Chapo" Guzmán. Mexico's new president seeks to make headway in improving the country's security situation by placing greater emphasis on citizen security, major changes to federal law enforcement, and efforts to minimize tensions in U.S.-Mexico relations.

Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico

Analysis Through 2018

I. INTRODUCTION

Mexico has experienced dramatic surges in crime and violence over the last decade. For the past ten years, the Justice in Mexico program has compiled the latest available data and analysis of trends to help better understand the facets, implications, and possible remedies to the ongoing crisis of violent crime, corruption, and human rights violations in Mexico, with special attention to the fallout of the War on Drugs. This tenth report is published under a new title—Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico—in acknowledgement of the gradual shift that has been occurring over several years as a result of the restructuring of the illicit drug trade. Several factors contributing to this shift have been documented in past reports, including the fragmentation of Mexican criminal organizations, the decriminalization and legalization of certain psychotropic substances (most notably marijuana), and the diversification of criminal enterprises in search of new sources of illicit revenue. Accordingly, this report offers a broad assessment of the factors contributing to Mexico’s ongoing problems with organized crime and violence.

Mexico’s violent crime wave has been most visibly exemplified by dramatic increases in the 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). 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. Preliminary figures for 2018 reported by Mexico’s National Public Security System (SNSP) suggest that over the course of Peña Nieto’s six years in office, there were more than 150,000 homicides, amounting to at least 68 murders per day, or nearly three murders every hour. All told, more than 332,000 people have been murdered in Mexico since the start of the twenty-first century, a figure that excludes a substantial number of forced disappearances and undocumented homicides.

A large portion of Mexico’s surge in violent crime over the last decade has been attributed to organized crime groups, particularly those 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 to examine trends in organized crime and violence in Mexico using the latest available data and analysis. When the first report was published in 2010, there was an urgent need 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.

In the ensuing years, it is important to acknowledge that there has been notable increase and improvement in the regularity, reliability, and rigor of official statistics related to crime and violence. Since the Calderón administration, Mexico’s National Public Security System has

endeavored to provide regular monthly updates on violent crimes committed throughout the country, a remarkable feat in national-level crime reporting. There has also been a significant increase in the quantity and quality of scholarly research and analysis on these topics. That said, the ongoing nature of Mexico's public security crisis indicates that there is still a need for continued attention to the problem and ideas about how to confront rampant crime and violence.

As the tenth annual report in this series, this study compiles the latest available data and analysis in an effort to inform public discourse and policy decisions related to crime and violence trends in Mexico. According to this and past reports, a major portion—between a third and half—of Mexico's homicides can be attributed to organized crime groups (OCGs), especially drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). However, as the country's major drug trafficking organizations, or *cartels*, have become more fragmented, decentralized, and diversified in their activities, this has contributed to a more complex set of challenges for the Mexican government. This report presents a comprehensive assessment of the publicly available data to help understand Mexico's ongoing public security crisis, and specifically the role of organized crime in relation to this problem.

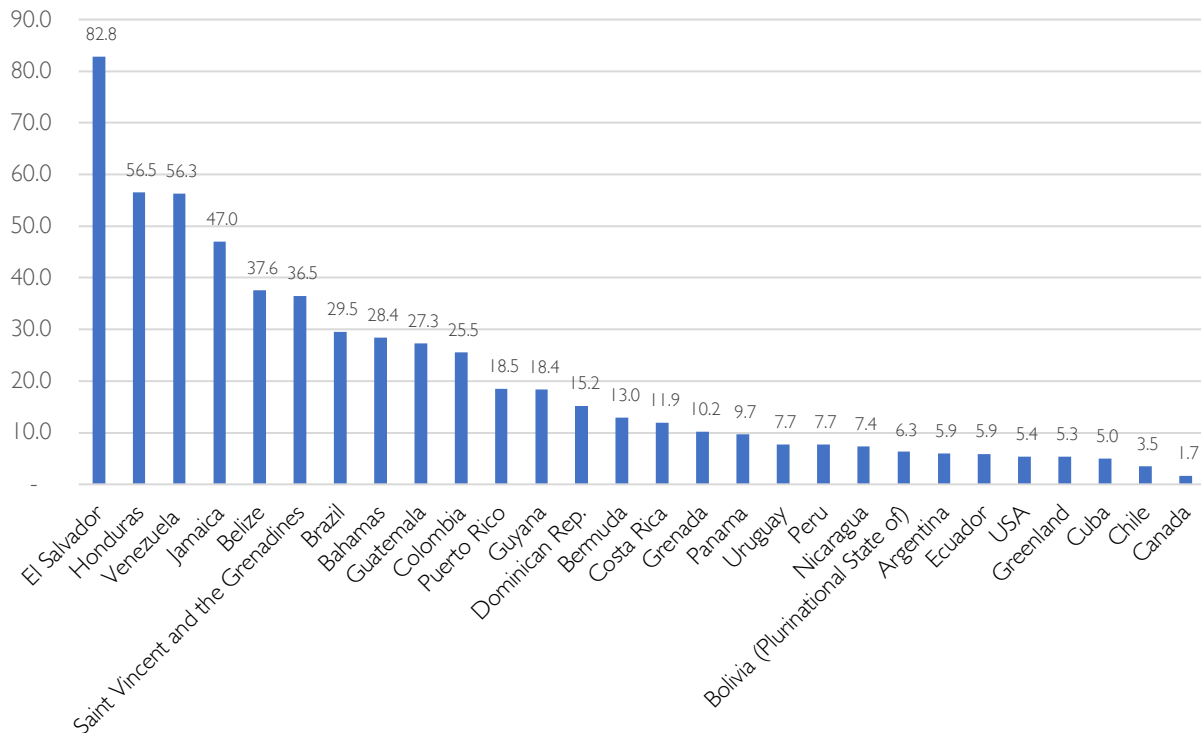
II. UNDERSTANDING MEXICO'S RECENT VIOLENCE

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 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 that occurred in 2016 were attributable to organized crime.¹ This unfounded claim was seized upon and politicized by U.S. President Donald Trump (2016-present) as a means to proliferate fear and animosity toward Mexico, which has been a favorite target of Mr. Trump's attacks. With this in mind, the authors of the 2018 report on *Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico* have endeavored to provide a more careful and balanced assessment of Mexico's situation.

To begin, it is necessary to point out that homicide levels and rates are actually far worse elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere. Indeed, 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). Brazil's 2015 homicide rate of 26.7 per 100,000 also greatly exceeded Mexico's rate of 16.4 per 100,000 that year. Moreover, due to the magnifying effect of population-based homicide rate calculations, Mexico's per capita homicide rate tends to rank well below those of smaller countries, like Belize, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, and Venezuela. Hence, in per capita terms, the number of homicides in Mexico was still somewhat "average" for the Western Hemisphere circa 2015: Mexico is home to about 13% of the region's population and roughly the same proportion of the region's homicides.

¹ Specifically, the report falsely asserts that "Mexico's 2016 intentional homicide total, 23,000, is second only to Syria." Antônio Sampaio, "Mexico's spiraling murder rate," <http://www.iiss.org/en/regions/latin-america-and-the-caribbean/mexico-murder-rate-9f41>

Figure 1: Homicide Rates Elsewhere in the Americas (circa 2016)



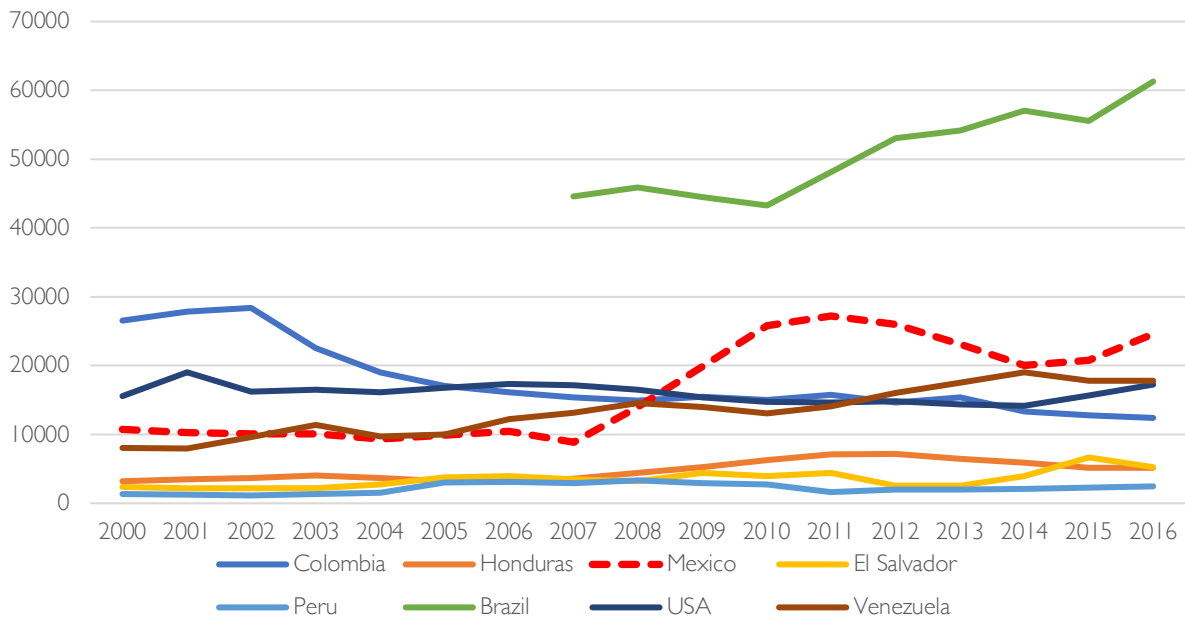
Source: UNODC homicide data for 2016 or latest year available. More recent comparative data were not available at the time of release for this report.

That said, the fact that Mexico’s population is approaching 130 million means that the overall toll of violence is much greater in Mexico than in smaller countries with higher homicide rates. Indeed, from 2000 through 2015, the most recent years for which there is comparable data, the number of homicides in Mexico (256,347) amounted to more than the combined total for those same years across 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).²

Unfortunately, Mexico’s national homicide rate has worsened considerably since 2015. Based on CONAPO population figures, this report estimates that Mexico’s homicide rate was around 25.7 per 100,000 in 2017, the latest year for which data is available from INEGI. As we discuss below, based on SNSP figures, the rate for 2018 has increased to 27.3 per 100,000, and INEGI figures released in late 2019 are likely to produce a similar rate. Thus, there has been a substantial increase in Mexico’s homicide rate from the 16.9 murders per 100,000 inhabitants noted by the UNODC in 2015. This means that Mexico’s homicide rate may no longer be considered “average” for the region, since its rate now rivals those last reported by UNODC for Brazil and Colombia. Of course, a proper comparison would require similar updates on figures from other countries in the region.

² 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.

Figure 2: Number of Homicides in Selected Latin American Countries, 2000-2016



Source: UNDOC, 2019.

What is clearly different about Mexico is that, even after more than a decade of elevated homicide levels, the problem of internal 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.³ Mexico, of course, experienced considerable violence during the massive social revolution that took place from 1910 to 1917, and the occasional aftershocks that followed. However, 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.⁴

Over the last decade, however, no country in the hemisphere has seen as large an increase in the absolute number or rate of homicides as Mexico. Thus, it is clear that the rise in violence in Mexico over the past decade represents an urgent problem that needs no exaggeration to merit serious consideration from scholars and policy makers. This tragic loss of Mexican lives should be cause for serious concern, not hyperbolic claims or political gamesmanship.

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

⁴ 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.

III. FINDINGS: ORGANIZED CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN MEXICO

To better understand the general trends in violent crime 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 2018. Previous reports prepared by Justice in Mexico over the past ten years discuss the general trends in organized crime homicides for years prior to 2018 in considerable detail. The reports are available under the title *Drug Violence in Mexico* via the “Publications” link at www.justiceinmexico.org. At the same time, because many of the same unfortunate patterns have continued over the years, the structure and content of this report follows a similar format and structure, and draws heavily on the findings of past reports.

A. Record Levels of Homicide Continue in 2018

Homicide levels in Mexico increased substantially in 2018, continuing a multi-year upward trend that began in 2015. Both of Mexico’s official data sources on homicides—SNSP and INEGI—have been consistent in documenting these trends, despite slightly different methodologies and tallies (See Appendix).⁵ Using a new methodology first introduced in 2014, SNSP reported a total of 28,816 homicide cases in 2018 (including multiple homicide cases), which reflects an increase of 16% from the previous year (See Figure 3). Using this same methodology, SNSP reported a total of 33,341 homicide victims in 2018, also an increase of 16%. That is, the number of individual homicides reported by SNSP jumped by 3,910 cases and 4,607 individual victims. Taken together, 2018 saw the highest number of homicide cases and individual homicides on record since 1990, surpassing the record figures (24,906 cases and 28,734 individual homicides) reported by SNSP in 2017.

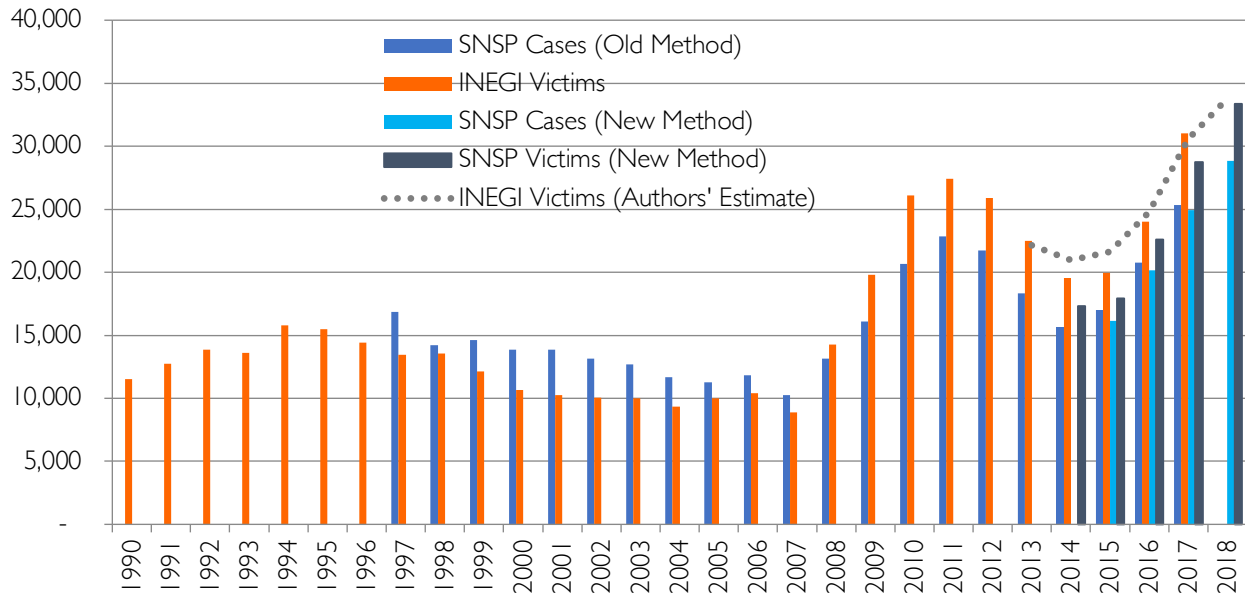
In addition to the law enforcement figures reported by SNSP, INEGI provides an independent tally of individual homicides, which for any given year is typically reported in the latter half of the next calendar year. Thus, the latest available figures for INEGI come from 2017, when the agency reported a total of 32,082 homicide victims, compared to the 28,734 homicide victims reported by SNSP for that same year. Drawing on the difference between the figures reported in recent years by INEGI and SNSP, in this and past reports the authors have generated annual estimates of the number of homicides likely to be reported by INEGI (illustrated in the grey bars in Figure 3).⁶ For 2018, the authors estimate that INEGI will report approximately 33,794 homicide victims,

⁵ 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 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.

⁶ This figure is based on the average variance in the number of homicides reported by INEGI and SNSP over multiple years. This method has resulted in a fairly reliable and conservative estimate for past reports, with a mean of +/- 3% difference from the actual number subsequently reported by INEGI from 2013-17.

quite close to the number of victims reported by SNSP.⁷ If this estimate proves correct, it suggests that the methodologies used by SNSP and INEGI have become more consistent and more reliable over time. This would be an important finding, since there has been substantial debate about the credibility of SNSP's figures, compared to those of INEGI, an autonomous government agency.

Figure 3: Homicides by Year as Reported by INEGI and SNSP (1990-2017)

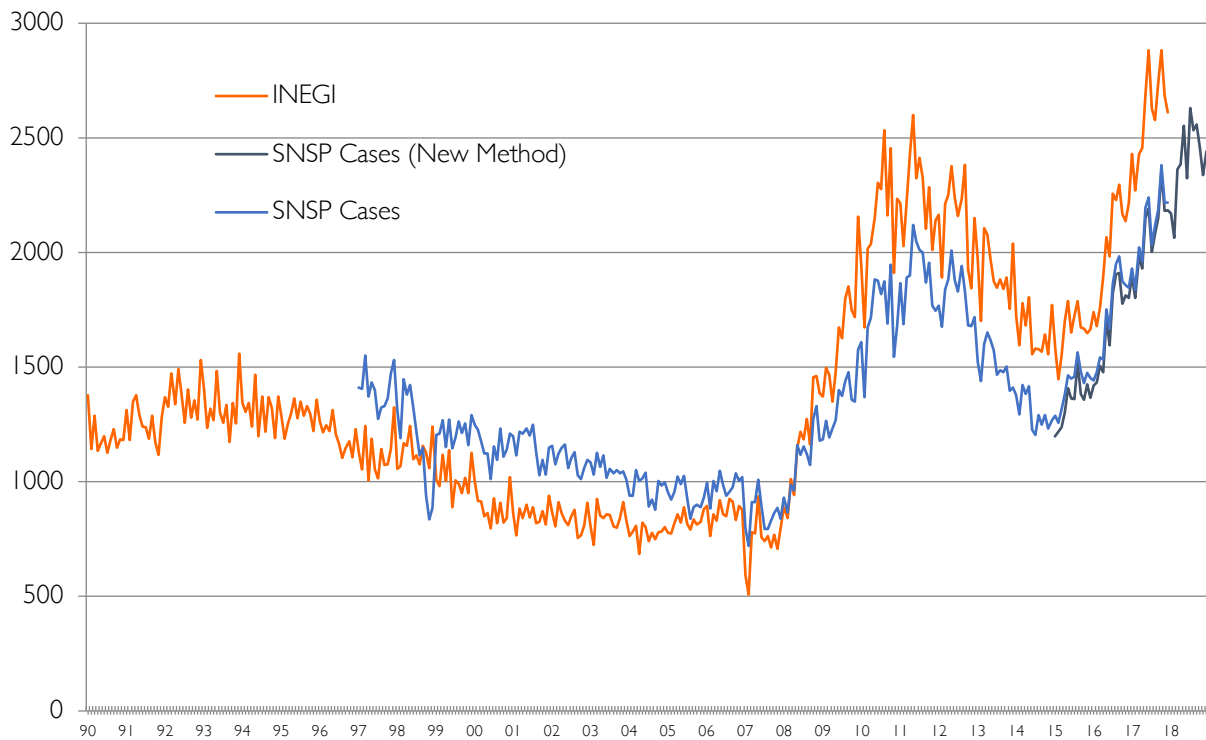


Source: INEGI, SNSP.

As illustrated below 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 largest monthly surges and the annual totals for 2017 and 2018 surpass those seen in either of the two previous years. For this reason, as has been widely reported, the number of homicides in 2017 and 2018 surpassed the totals for all other years since 1990.

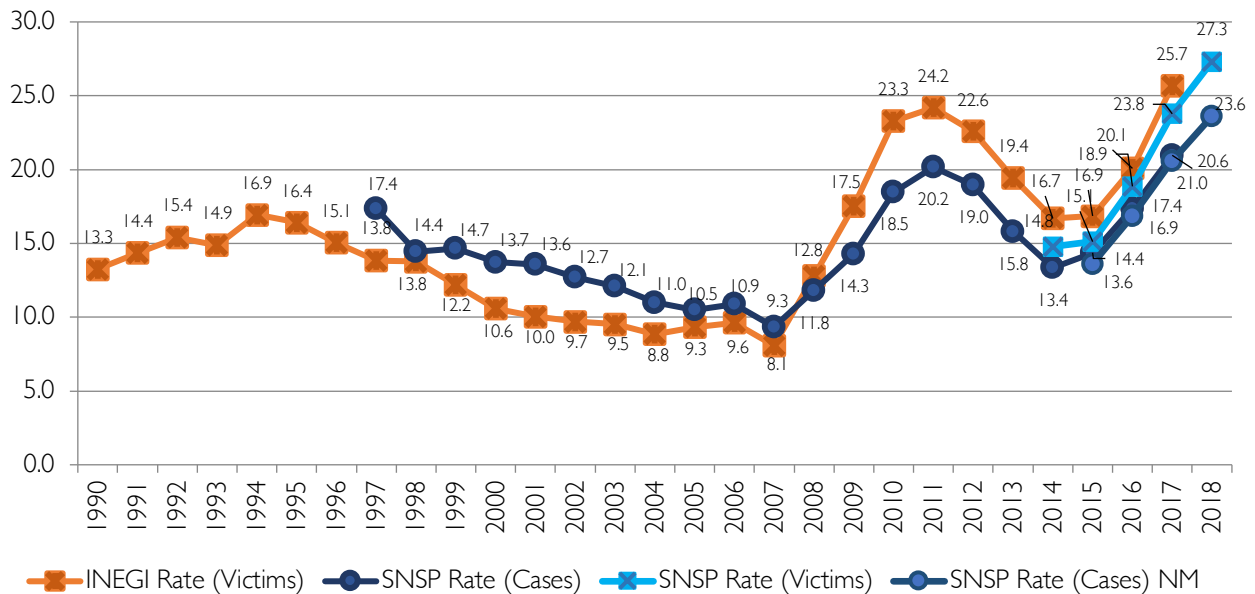
⁷ In the 2018 *Drug Violence in Mexico* report, the actual figure for 2017 reported by INEGI in mid-2018 was 31,041, compared to the authors' estimate of 30,548 homicides, a difference of about 1,533 murders or about 2%. To account for changes in SNSP's methodology and data gathering efforts starting in 2014, the authors base their 2018 estimate for the likely INEGI figure on a reduced range including the INEGI/SNSP variance over only the past three years.

Figure 4: Homicides by Month as Reported by INEGI and SNSP (1990-2018)



Source: INEGI, SNSP.

Figure 5: Homicide Rate, Based on INEGI and SNSP Data (1990-2017)



Source: INEGI, SNSP. Calculation of 2018 INEGI homicide rate based on authors' estimates. "NM" refers to "new methodology."

Of course, to properly analyze crime trends over time, it is necessary to account for per capita rates and population growth. CONAPO projections based on the 2010 census suggest that

Mexico's population rose from roughly 112 million people in 2010 to nearly 122 million people in 2018, an increase of about 10 million people. Still, even accounting for this roughly 9% overall increase in population over eight years, the number of homicide investigations reported by SNSP in 2018 exceeded the number in 2010 by 39%, which translates into a definitive increase in Mexico's homicide rate per capita.⁸ Indeed, as illustrated in Figure 5, SNSP's updated methodology indicates that Mexico's national homicide rate reached an unprecedented 27.3 homicide victims per 100,000 inhabitants in 2018.⁹ If the authors' estimates for INEGI are correct, the homicide rate based on INEGI's final figures for 2018 will be approximately 27.7 per 100,000 inhabitants. Whatever the final calculation for these years, there has been a substantial increase in Mexico's homicide rate from the 16.9 murders per 100,000 inhabitants noted by the UNODC in 2015.

B. Organized-Crime-Style Killings Constitute Major Share of Homicides in 2018

A review of available data shows that 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 (1990-2017) and SNSP (1997-2018) 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.¹⁰ In total, for 2018, Lantia reported 22,365 organized-crime-style homicides, *Milenio* reported 15,887, and *Reforma* reported 7,513. It is worth noting that *Reforma's* figures represent a decrease of nearly 24% in the number of organized-crime-style homicides reported by the same publication in 2017, while *Milenio* reported an increase of almost 27% and Lantia reported an increase of more than 18% from 2017.¹¹ This is a substantial deviation in *Reforma's* figures and appears to be a result of a change in methodology, according to author inquiries to the news organization.¹²

⁸ Again, it is important to mention that SNSP's methodology for counting homicide investigations was revised in 2014. Even so, the large difference in the number of homicide investigations in 2018 compared to 2010—a difference of 8,136 cases (39.3%)—does not seem likely to be solely attributable to this change in methodology or to the increase in population over eight years.

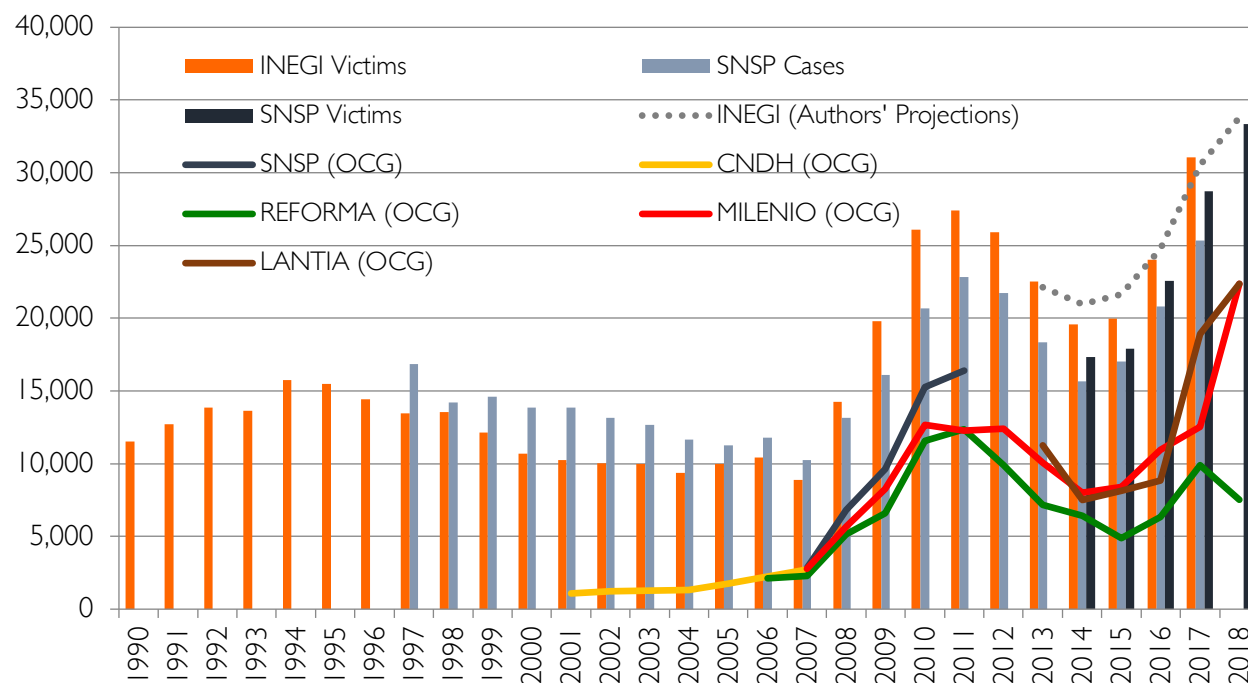
⁹ While SNSP did not report figures for homicide victims prior to 2014, the homicide rate derived from SNSP's 2018 figures exceeds the rate of 23.8 derived from its figures for 2017. SNSP's rate also exceeds the rates derived from INEGI's figures for the record surge in 2017 (25.7 per 100,000) and the previous peak in 2011 (24.2 per 100,000).

¹⁰ 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*.

¹¹ In 2017, the number of organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Reforma* was 9,883, while *Milenio* reported 12,532 and Lantia reported 18,898.

¹² *Reforma* journalist Rolando Herrera responded to author inquiries about this topic by noting that in 2018 the newspaper shifted from internal reports by its own correspondents to a review of regional newspapers and reports by local prosecutors. Email correspondence with the authors dated April 19, 2019.

Figure 6: Comparison of Homicide and Organized Crime Homicide Data from Multiple Sources, 1990 through 2018



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 counts. In contrast to past reports, here the authors only compare the proportion of organized-crime-style homicides as a percentage of the number of individual victims reported by INEGI and SNSP.¹³ This modification allows a more precise comparison of available sources, which shows that as few as a 34.2% and as many as 51.1% of all homicides in Mexico from 2006 to 2018 bore characteristics of organized crime-style violence. For 2018, the most conservative estimate (comparing *Reforma* data with the authors' homicide projections for INEGI) suggests that only about 20% of all homicides in Mexico were attributable to organized crime, while the most generous estimate (comparing *Lantia* data with SNSP) suggests that more than two-thirds of all homicides were attributable to organized crime. Given the changes in *Reforma*'s methodology for 2018 noted above, the low-end estimate seems improbable. Of the three estimates for organized crime homicides used, *Reforma*'s is now the least closely correlated with other measures, as illustrated in Table 6 in the Appendix.

¹³ The authors made this change because the five-year timeframe in which SNSP has been reporting individual homicides makes it less necessary and relevant to attempt to identify the proportion of individual organized-crime-style homicides compared to the number of cases.

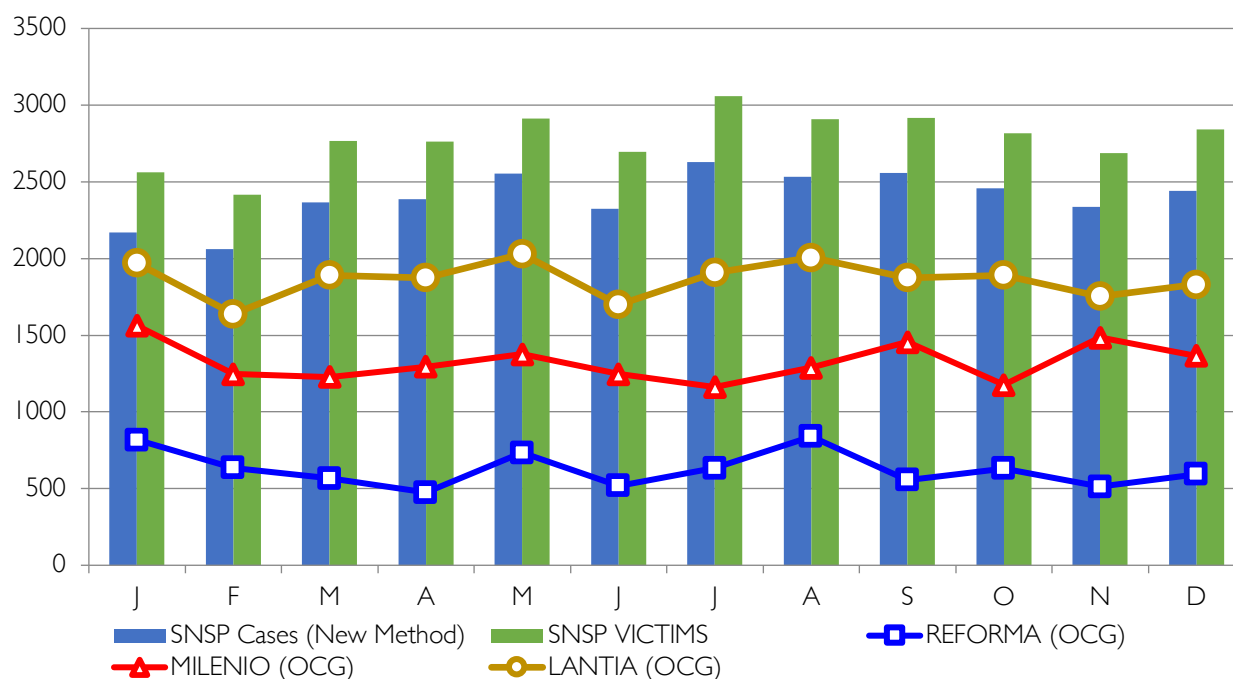
Table 1: Percentage of INEGI and SNSP Homicides Attributed to Organized Crime-Style Homicide in *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and *Lantia* Tallies, 2006-2018

YEAR	SNSP OCG (as % INEGI Victims)	SNSP OCG (as % SNSP Victims)	REFORMA OCG (as % INEGI Victims)	REFORMA OCG (as % SNSP Victims)	MILENIO OCG (as % INEGI Victims)	MILENIO OCG (as % SNSP Victims)	LANTIA OCG (as % INEGI Victims)	LANTIA OCG (as % SNSP Victims)
2006	n/d	n/d	20.3%	n/d	n/d	n/d		
2007	19.8%	27.6%	25.6%	n/d	31.3%	n/d		
2008	34.5%	52.0%	36.0%	n/d	39.8%	n/d		
2009	36.9%	59.6%	33.3%	n/d	41.8%	n/d		
2010	55.7%	73.9%	44.4%	n/d	48.5%	n/d		
2011	63.3%	71.8%	45.1%	n/d	44.8%	n/d		
2012	53.7%	55.6%	38.3%	n/d	47.9%	n/d		
2013	56.2%	60.0%	31.8%	n/d	44.8%	n/d	n/d	n/d
2014			32.7%	36.9%	40.9%	51.1%	37.5%	43.3%
2015			24.5%	27.3%	42.2%	49.5%	39.1%	45.4%
2016			26.3%	28.0%	45.6%	52.8%	36.0%	39.1%
2017			28.7%	34.4%	36.4%	50.3%	54.8%	65.8%
2018			19.8%	22.5%	41.9%	55.1%	59.0%	67.1%
AVG.	45.7%	57.2%	34.2%	36.9%	42.5%	51.1%	37.5%	43.3%

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

Finally, the authors compare the monthly data available from 2018 for intentional homicides reported by SNSP and organized crime-style homicides reported by *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and *Lantia*, as illustrated in Figure 7. Over the course of 2018, *Milenio* and *Lantia* recorded higher tallies of organized crime-style homicides than *Reforma*. Yet, the monthly increases or decreases in homicides reported by *Milenio* and *Lantia* varied considerably over course of the year, often moving in opposite directions. As a result, there was almost no correlation between these two tallies. That is, if *Milenio* reported an increase in a given month, there was a relatively low likelihood that *Lantia* would also report an increase. By contrast, there was a fairly strong positive correlation in the monthly tallies reported by *Reforma* and *Lantia*, with the two tallies showing fairly consistent shifts in the level of violence from month to month. Indeed, both *Lantia* and *Reforma*'s figures appeared to more consistently than *Milenio*'s in the same direction as those reported each month by SNSP.

Figure 7: Homicides and OCG-Style Homicides (By Month) in 2018



Sources: SNSP, Milenio, Reforma, Lantia.

Meanwhile, 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

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 Decreases in 2018

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

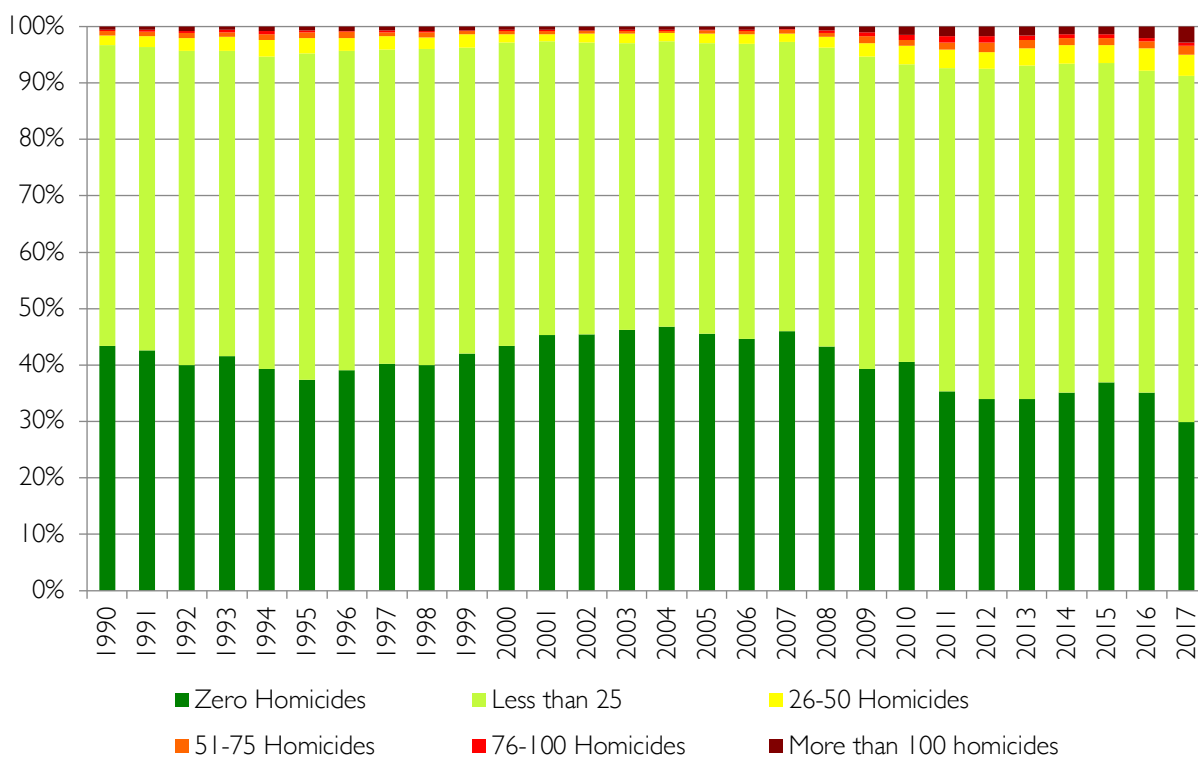
homicides, as illustrated in Figure 8.¹⁴ Indeed, for the entire Fox administration (2000-2006) and the first year of the Calderón administration (2006-2012), there was a historically unprecedented period in which over 40% of Mexican municipalities registered no murders at all.¹⁵

From 2007 to 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 ten in 2007 to 41 in 2012. From 2012 to 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.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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.

Figure 8: Concentrations of Violence at the Municipal Level, 1990-2018



Source: INEGI.

The latest available data from INEGI suggest that there has been a continued resurgence in the geographic dispersion of violence in Mexico that surpasses levels set in previous years. Indeed, the number of municipalities with zero homicides decreased in 2017 to just 721—only about 30% of municipalities—the lowest number since 1990.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the number of municipalities with more than 100 homicides increased from a record 50 in 2016 to a new record 69 in 2017. Given the increase in homicides indicated by SNSP for 2018, it seems likely that in late-2019 INEGI will report that the number of homicide-free municipalities continued to decline and the number of high-homicide municipalities also increased.

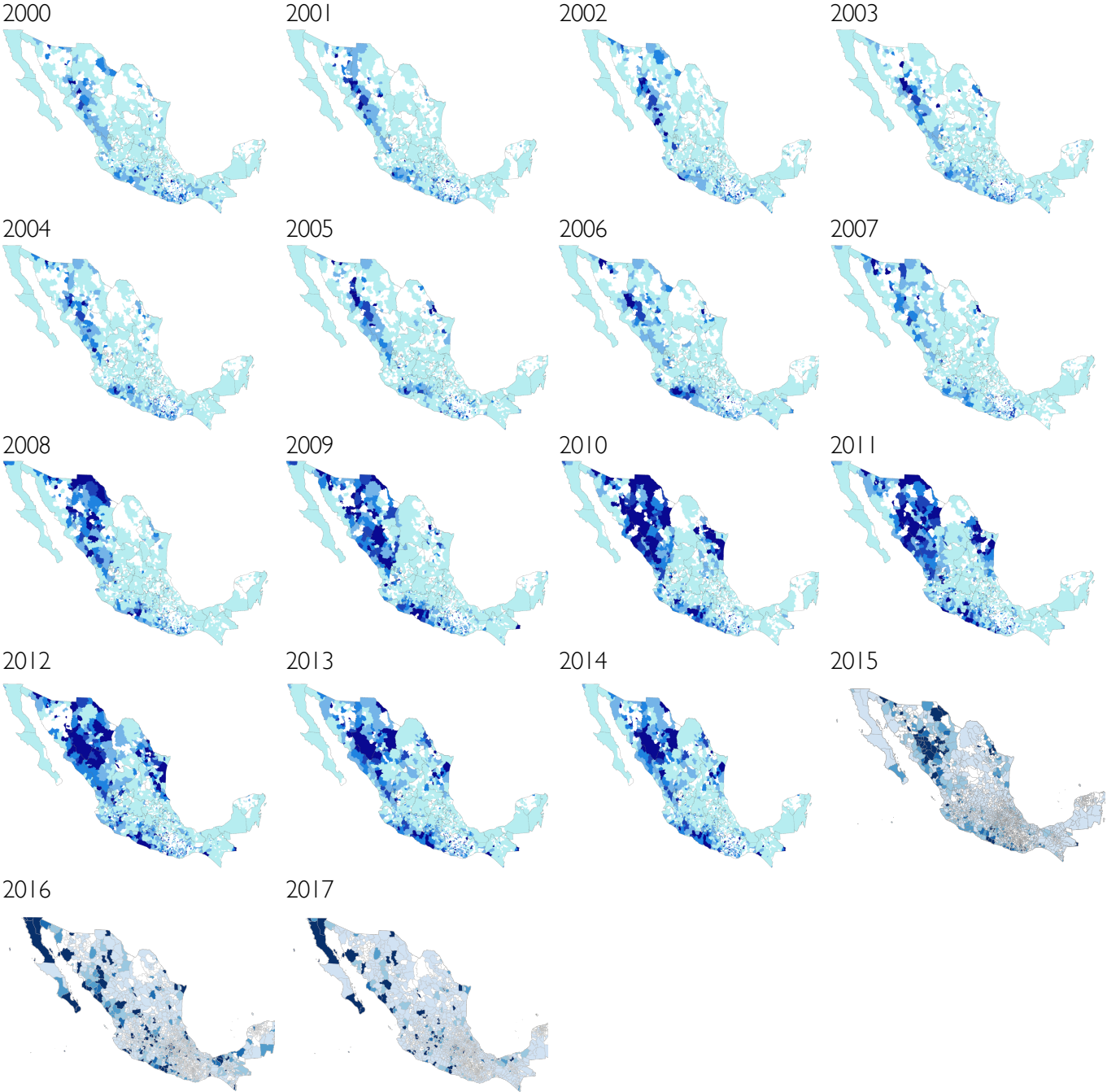
The maps in Figure 9 further illustrate the geographic distribution of violence in Mexico, showing municipal homicide levels from 1999 through 2017, as reported by INEGI. Because INEGI data are not yet available for 2018, the maps in Figure 10 show both the number of homicide cases (in red) and the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants (in blue) using data reported by SNSP at the municipal level and using CONAPO population estimates.¹⁷ These maps also show that homicides have been regionally concentrated in the major drug trafficking zones in the northwest,

¹⁶ Last year, the authors reported that the number of municipalities without homicide had dropped from 889 in 2015 to 846 in 2016 (on par with 2014).

¹⁷ 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.

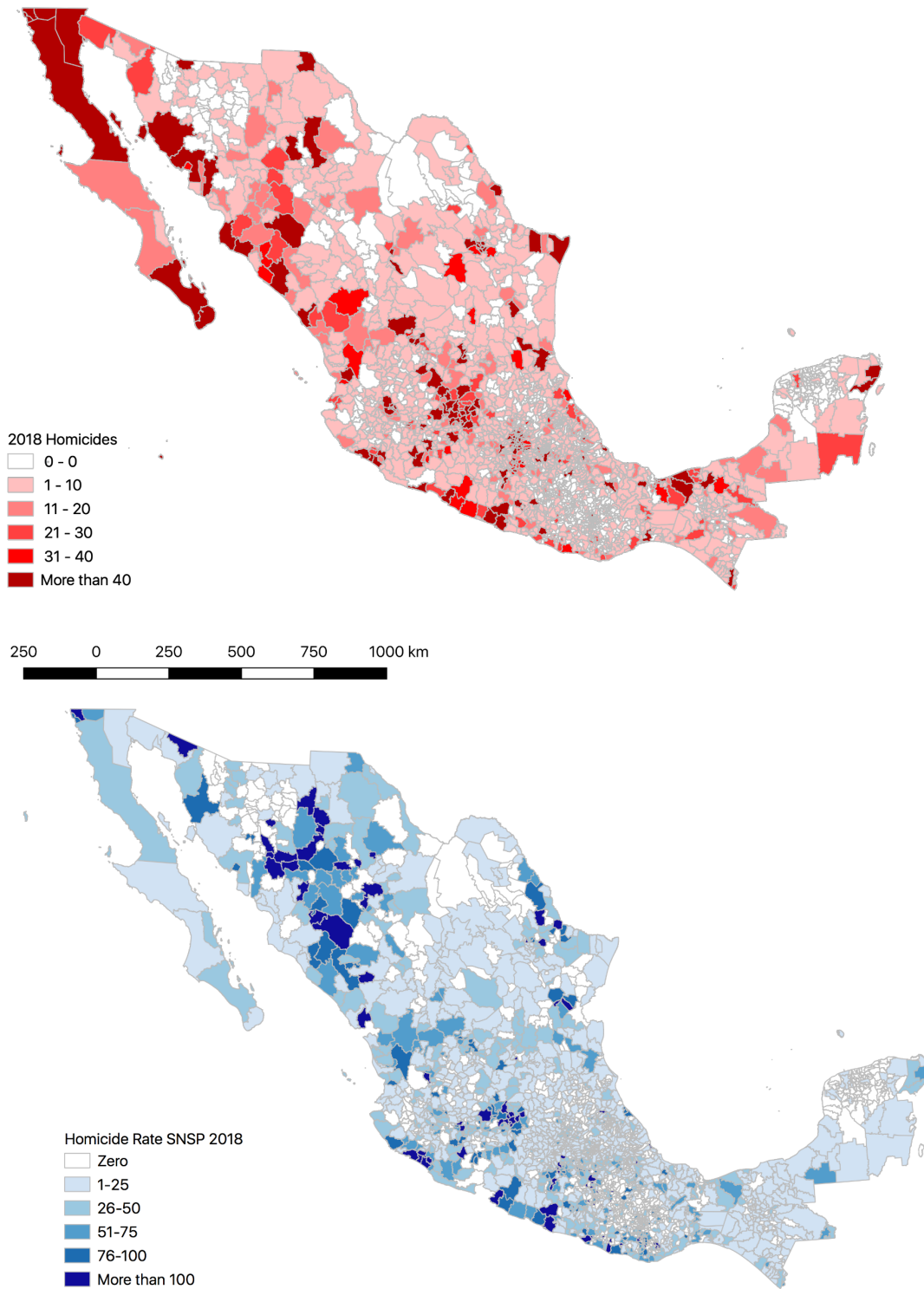
the northeast, and the Pacific Coast. The states that were hardest hit by violence after 2008 include the six Mexican border states—Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas—as well as the Pacific states of Sinaloa, Nayarit, Michoacán, and Guerrero. However, violence began to diminish in certain areas in 2011 and 2012, particularly as the number of homicides fell in key states in northern Mexico, like Baja California, Chihuahua, and Nuevo León. As we discuss below, however, since 2014 violence has resurged to previously unprecedented levels, particularly in high-drug trafficking states along Mexico’s Pacific Coast.

Figure 9: Distribution of Homicide Victims by Municipality, 2000-2017



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

Figure 10: Distribution of Homicide Victims and Rate by Municipality in 2018



Source: SNSP, CONAPO. Maps generated by Austin Juárez.

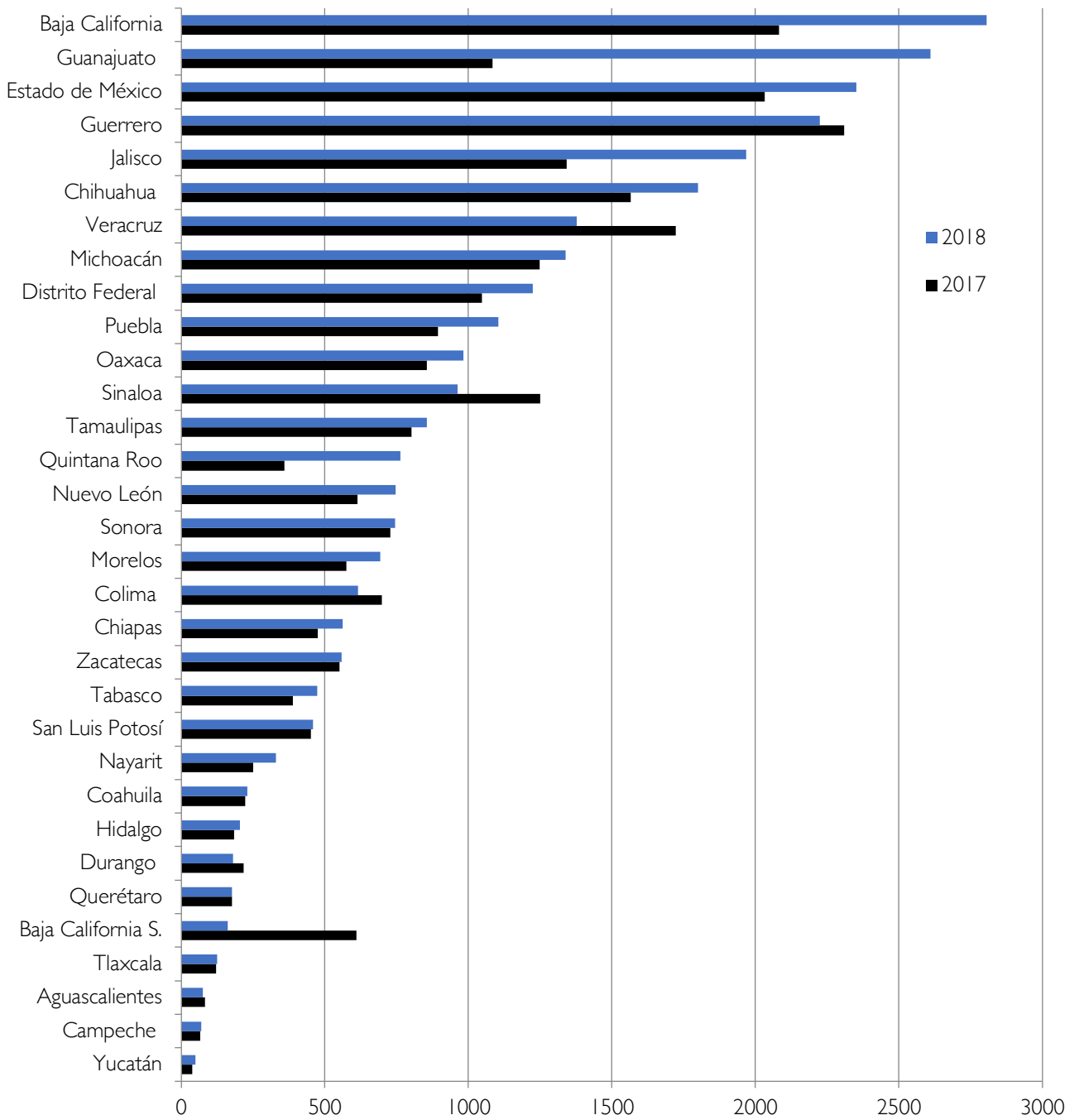
2. Significant Increases in State and Local Centers of Violence

SNSP data provided in Figure 11 show that the top five states with the largest number of intentional homicide cases in 2018 were Baja California (2,805), Guanajuato (2,609), Mexico State (2,352), Guerrero (2,224), and Jalisco (1,968). In 2018, the state with the largest annual increase in total homicides was Guanajuato, which saw more than double the 1,084 homicides registered the year before, for reasons discussed below. Meanwhile, the largest decrease in homicides was found in the state of Baja California Sur, which saw 162 homicide cases in 2018, down 448 cases (74% less) compared to the previous year. The state with the lowest number of homicide cases in 2018 was once again Yucatán, with 45 cases, up three cases (about 6% more) compared to the previous year.

At the local level, as illustrated in Table 2, the top ten most violent municipalities in Mexico were: Tijuana (2,246), Ciudad Juárez (1,004), Acapulco (839), Cancún-Benito Juárez (537), Culiacán (500), Guadalajara (374), Irapuato (374), León (350), Tlaquepaque (329), and Ecatepec (317). The share of homicide cases reported by SNSP these municipalities rose from 26.7% in 2017 to 33.6% in 2018 (with 24.7% concentrated in the top five). This was the highest proportion of homicide cases concentrated among major centers of violence since in 2010, when over 44% of Mexico's homicide cases were concentrated in the top ten municipalities (and 35% were concentrated in the top five). In this sense, a concentrated effort to eradicate homicides in just five municipalities could significantly reduce the country's overall homicide rate.

In per capita terms, with 127 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, Acapulco ranked as the most violent of the ten municipalities with the most homicides. As noted earlier, homicide rates can be deceiving, since the smaller the unit of analysis the greater the homicide rate. For example, the most violent municipality in all of Mexico in 2018 was the hamlet of Onavas, Sonora, which—with just two homicides among its 309 residents—had a homicide rate of 647.2 per 100,000. Conversely, though, as the size of the population goes up, even a modest increase in the homicide rate has enormous implications in terms of total loss of life. Thus, it is necessary to examine both the absolute number and the frequency of homicides with an eye to these kind of considerations.

Figure 11: Intentional Homicides by State SNSP, 2017 and 2018



Source: SNSP.

Table 2: Top Ten Municipalities by Total Number of Homicide Cases, 2007-2018

#	Municipality	2007	Rate
1	Tijuana	207	14
2	Juarez	200	15
3	Acapulco	186	26
4	Iztapalapa	186	10
5	Ecatepec	155	9
6	G. A. Madero	151	13
7	Monterrey	139	12
8	Nezahualcoyotl	135	12
9	Culiacan	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	Juárez	1,620	117
2	Tijuana	782	51
3	Chihuahua	424	53
4	Culiacán	401	49
5	Acapulco	216	30
6	Ecatepec	213	12
7	Guadalajara	174	11
8	Iztapalapa	172	9
9	Durango	160	29
10	G. A. Madero	151	13
Top 10 total/share		4,313	20.7%
Top 5 total/share		3,443	16.6%

#	Municipality	2009	Rate
1	Juarez	2,399	170
2	Tijuana	1,094	69
3	Culiacan	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	Iztapalapa	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	Culiacan	798	97
5	Acapulco	489	70
6	Ecatepec	424	24
7	Mazatlán	418	97
8	Monterrey	359	32
9	Tepic	309	85
10	Torreon	287	47
Top 10 total/share		9,186	44.2%
Top 5 total/share		7,389	35.5%

#	Municipality	2011	Rate
1	Juárez	1,460	100
2	Acapulco	1,008	145
3	Monterrey	700	62
4	Culiacán	649	79
5	Chihuahua	554	66
6	Torreón	455	72
7	Tijuana	418	25
8	Ecatepec	325	19
9	Mazatlán	307	71
10	Guadalupe	254	36
Top 10 total/share		6,130	29.5%
Top 5 total/share		4,371	21.0%

#	Municipality	2012	Rate
1	Acapulco	1,271	184
2	Juarez	850	58
3	Monterrey	685	61
4	Culiacan	471	57
5	Torreon	792	126
6	Chihuahua	587	69
7	Tijuana	320	18
8	Nuevo Laredo	544	132
9	Cuernavaca	270	73
10	Ecatepec	533	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	Culiacan	479	58
4	Juarez	453	30
5	Ecatepec	312	18
6	Monterrey	266	24
7	Chihuahua	251	29
8	Torreon	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	Culiacan	399	43
4	Juarez	389	28
5	Ecatepec	349	20
6	Chihuahua	184	20
7	Morelia	182	24
8	Leon	166	11
9	Chilpancingo	166	64
10	Iztapalapa	160	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	Culiacan	441	47
4	Ecatepec	355	20
5	Juárez	269	19
6	Chilpancingo	212	81
7	Guadalajara	193	13
8	Iztapalapa	181	10
9	Zapopan	176	13
10	Nezahualcóyotl	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	Juárez	470	30
4	Culiacán	439	53
5	Ecatepec	298	17
6	Chihuahua	275	31
7	Chilpancingo	234	99
8	Mazatlán	224	49
9	Iztapalapa	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	Culiacán	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%

#	Name	2018	Rate
1	Tijuana	2,246	115
2	Juárez	1,004	64
3	Acapulco	839	127
4	Benito Juárez (Cancún)	537	61
5	Culiacán	500	60
6	Guadalajara	480	33
7	Irapuato	374	75
8	León	350	22
9	Tlaquepaque	329	45
10	Ecatepec	317	18
Top 10 total/share		6,976	33.6%
Top 5 total/share		5,126	24.7%

Source: SNSP Homicide Cases, CONAPO.

i. Tijuana's Second Record-Breaking Year

Tijuana was by far the municipality with the most homicides in Mexico in 2018. Indeed, some have claimed that Tijuana is the most violent city in the world based on homicide rates per 100,000 residents.¹⁸ Whatever the case, the internal rankings for Mexican municipalities clearly illustrate Tijuana's ascent as Mexico's murder capital. According to data from the SNSP, Tijuana had 2,246 homicide investigations resulting in a rate of 115 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, based on population estimates by CONAPO. SNSP does not report the number of homicide victims at the local level and, as the authors have noted, INEGI figures for 2018 will not be disclosed late 2019. Thus, it is difficult to calculate a more precise number of victims at the municipal level throughout the country with respect to the past year. However, in the case of Tijuana, it is possible to have a more precise number since the State's Secretary of Public Security (SSP) reports cases and victims on a monthly basis at the municipal level and even at the neighborhood level. For 2018, SSP reported a total of 2,519 victims of intentional homicide in Tijuana (resulting in a rate of 129 per 100,000 inhabitants), a significant increase —by 41%—compared to the 1,781 victims reported by the same agency in 2017 (91 per 100,000 inhabitants).

In terms of total homicides, Acapulco was considered Mexico's most violent municipality from 2013 to 2016. However, Tijuana saw an 85% increase in homicide cases over the course of 2017. Whereas 1,618 homicide cases were recorded in Tijuana in that year, the number reported by SNSP rose over 38% to 2,246 cases in 2018. Prior to 2017, Tijuana was last ranked as the most violent municipality in 2007, when violence was considerably lower throughout the country. Even as a wave of violence struck the city between 2008-2010, Tijuana still ranked behind Ciudad Juárez, which peaked at 3,746 homicides in 2010, according to SNSP data. Since many had lauded the city for regaining control of its security situation, the resurgence of violence in Tijuana has become a cause of frustration for local authorities, and will likely be a major focus of the 2019 mayoral and state elections in Baja California.

There are a number of reasons for the record-breaking levels of violence in Tijuana. First, as detailed in a policy brief published by Justice in Mexico in 2018 (Arredondo, et. al., 2018), the increase in homicides reflects the rise of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG).¹⁹ As noted in a separate Justice in Mexico brief (LaRosa and Shirk, 2018), following the arrest of Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, the CJNG has

¹⁸ Indeed, a ranking titled "The 50 most violent cities in the world," the Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad y la Justicia Penal, A.C., a Mexican non-governmental organization, places fifteen Mexican cities among the world's top 50 most violent cities, with five of the top six from Mexico. Specifically, Tijuana came in first with 138 homicides per 100,000 residents, Acapulco in second (111), Ciudad Victoria in fourth (86), Ciudad Juárez in fifth (86), and Irapuato in sixth (81). However, our review found that the ranking inaccurately references official data from INEGI and SNSP, fuses the data for certain municipalities (e.g., Tijuana and Rosarito), and features other methodological inconsistencies across various cases that make it problematic to compare Mexican municipalities to those in other countries. See: Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal AC. "Las 50 ciudades más violentas del mundo 2018." *Seguridad, Justicia y Paz*. March 12, 2019.

¹⁹ 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

been battling the Sinaloa Cartel for control of drug trafficking routes through Tijuana.²⁰ Second, in the midst of the clash between the New Generation Cartel and the Sinaloa Cartel, lower level gangs and criminal organizations have stepped up violent criminal activities and turf battles over local communities and street corners, particularly in the city's marginalized zones.

ii. Guanajuato, the Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel, and Fuel Theft

As noted earlier, one of the most striking surges in violence was seen in the state of Guanajuato. Much of that increase was concentrated in the cities of Irapuato (374) and León (350), but several smaller towns registered dozens of homicides each, including at least nine municipalities with homicide rates in excess of 100 per 100,000 (namely, Apaseo El Alto, Cortázar, Jarral el Progreso, Pénjamo, Pueblo Nuevo, Salamanca, Salvatierra, and Santiago Maravatío). Much of this violence appears to be linked to the problem of petroleum theft (*huachicol*) and the Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel (Cártel de Santa Rosa de Lima, CSRL). Petroleum thieves are commonly known as *huachicoleros*, a name adopted by gasoline truck drivers to refer to the stolen hydrocarbon, or *chupaductos* (pipeline suckers).²¹

From 2011 to 2016, Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) reported the loss of 755,869 liters of “distinct product,” including raw oil, gasoline, diesel, and other hydrocarbons lost via major pipelines throughout Mexico.²² In 2018, official figures estimated 81,000 barrels of gasoline were stolen daily.²³ Pipeline theft became more popular as the gasoline supply in some areas decreased and prices drastically increased across the country. As a result, *huachicoleros* identified an opportunity to steal petroleum products and sell them in heavily transited highways for half the market price, costing PEMEX approximately 6 million pesos in losses from 2011 to 2016.²⁴ *The Associated Press* reported the Mexican government lost more than \$3.4 billion (USD) in 2018 alone from the activity.²⁵

Petroleum stealing has been spreading throughout the country, but much of the activity originated in an area called the *Triángulo Rojo* (Red Triangle) in Puebla. The Red Triangle is a transit zone for 40% of the fuel distributed from Mexico City to the rest of the country.²⁶ Guanajuato is an alternate distribution channel that became hotly contested in 2018 among organized crime groups like the CJNG and the CSRL. The CSRL is built primarily on the business of *huachicol* – fuel theft – and thus has been at the forefront of shootouts, confrontations with federal and military

²⁰ 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>

²¹ Calderón, Laura. “Huachicoleros on the rise in Mexico.” *Justice in Mexico*. May 20, 2017. <https://justiceinmexico.org/huachicoleros-rising-mexico/>

²² “¿Quiénes son los huachicoleros?” *Debate*. May 4, 2017. <https://www.debate.com.mx/mexico/Quienes-son-los-huachicoleros-20170504-0254.html>

²³ “President: Mexico has nearly stopped fuel theft.” *The Associated Press*. April 10, 2019. <https://www.apnews.com/ce9c618ead1b4667998cfb1c5fa70f72>

²⁴ “¿Quiénes son los huachicoleros?” *Debate*. May 4, 2017. <https://www.debate.com.mx/mexico/Quienes-son-los-huachicoleros-20170504-0254.html>

²⁵ “President: Mexico has nearly stopped fuel theft.” *The Associated Press*. April 10, 2019. <https://www.apnews.com/ce9c618ead1b4667998cfb1c5fa70f72>

²⁶ Badillo, Jesús. “El Triángulo Rojo, mina de ‘oro negro’ de huachicoleros.” *Milenio*. May 5, 2017. <https://www.milenio.com/estados/triangulo-rojo-mina-oro-negro-huachicoleros>

authorities, and road closures in Guanajuato as it attempts to control the flow of petroleum. The CSRL came into existence after a split from the CJNG in 2017, and is now under the control of alleged leader José Antonio “El Marro” Yépez Ortiz.²⁷

The Mexican government’s response to the *huachicoleros* has included joint military and police operations, increased surveillance operations in strategic areas, and legislation reform. The changes passed in 2017 increased sentences for fuel stealing to up to 25 years in prison and fines up to 2 million pesos if found guilty.²⁸ President López Obrador also addressed the problem immediately after taking office in December 2018, sending the military to the streets to confront the *huachicoleros*. As a result of these efforts, the average number of barrels of gasoline stolen has plummeted from 81,000 per day in November 2018 to 5,000 per day in April 2019, according to official figures.²⁹

3. Distribution of Organized-Crime-Style Homicides

As noted earlier in the report and discussed in detail in the Appendix, a major share of Mexico’s violence is driven by organized crime groups. News media organizations, researchers, and Mexican government sources have attempted to classify, track, and analyze such killings since the early 2000s to get a better sense of the problem. However, citing the conceptual and methodological challenges involved, and the Mexican government has not reported any official data on the number of organized-crime-style homicides since 2013.³⁰ Thus, as noted above, the only data available for such homicides in 2018 are those reported at the state level by independent sources, such as the Mexican newspaper *Milenio*, which reported a record total of 15,887 individual homicides linked to organized crime.³¹ According to these figures, the largest number of organized-crime-style homicides was concentrated in the state of Guanajuato (2,233), which amounted to more than 40% of the 5,503 homicides reported in that state. Guanajuato was followed by Guerrero (1,668), Baja California (1,623), Chihuahua (1,598), Veracruz (1,316), Michoacán (1,006), Oaxaca (805), Mexico State (761), Jalisco (637), and Sinaloa (620).

²⁷ Bunker, Robert J. and John P. Sullivan. “Mexican Cartel Tactical Note #41: Cártel Santa Rosa de Lima (CSRL) Logo and Symbols Identification.” *Small Wars Journal*. March 6, 2019. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/mexican-cartel-tactical-note-41-cartel-santa-rosa-de-lima-csrl-logo-and-symbols>

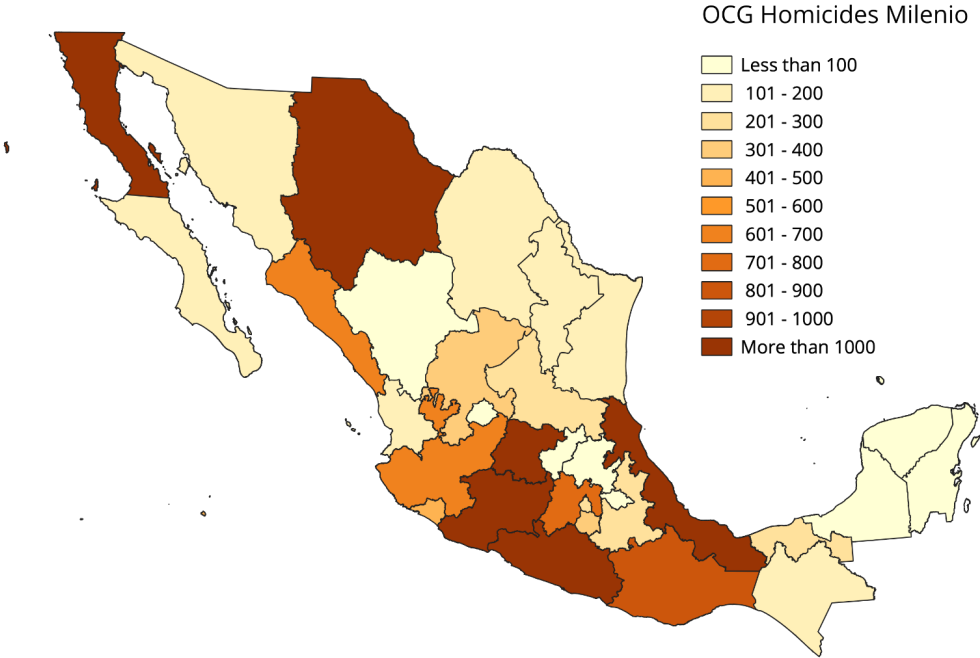
²⁸ Reforma. “Aprueban diputados aumentar penas por robo de combustible.” *El Diario*. April 28, 2017. http://diario.mx/Nacional/2017-04-28_c72f4276/aprueban-diputados-aumentar-penas-por-robo-de-combustible/

²⁹ “President: Mexico has nearly stopped fuel theft.” *The Associated Press*. April 10, 2019. <https://www.apnews.com/ce9c618ead1b4667998cfb1c5fa70f72>

³⁰ While the Calderón administration had abandoned the practice, the Peña Nieto administration briefly reported mid-year statistics for the number of organized-crime-style homicides in 2013. However, in mid-2013, the government abandoned the reporting of such figures and no new official data specifying the number of organized-crime-style homicides has been reported since.

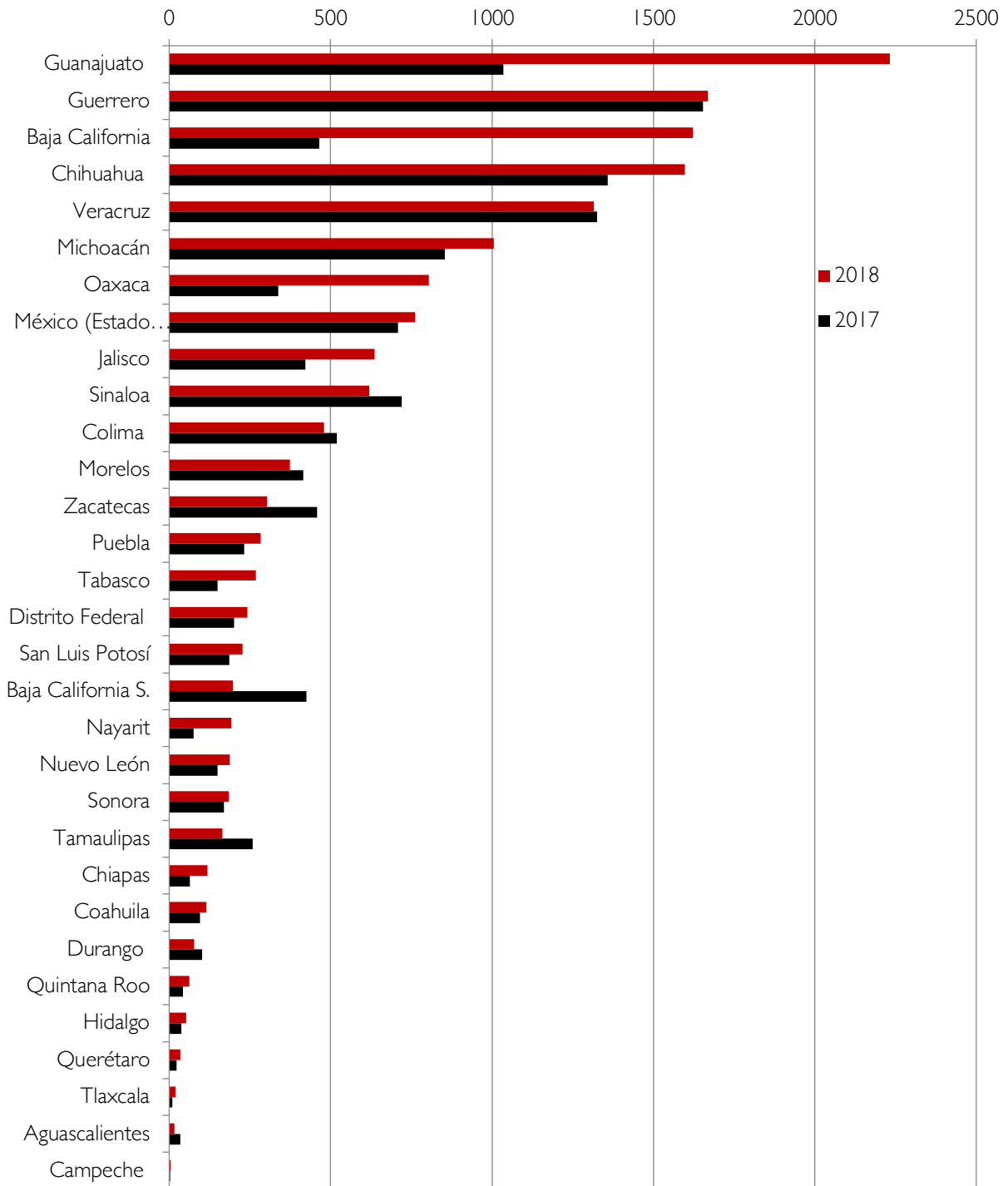
³¹ In earlier years, the authors of this report relied on *Reforma*’s tallies of organized-crime-style homicides. However, we have given preference to *Milenio* over *Reforma* in recent years, including here, because the latter has been less consistent in its monitoring of organized-crime-style homicides and less forthcoming with its data than the former. Mariana Hernández, “Impone 2018 marca histórica con 15 mil 877 homicidios,” *Milenio*, January 2, 2019. <https://www.milenio.com/policia/impone-2018-marca-historica-15-mil-877-homicidios>

Figure 12: Organized-Crime-Style Homicide Map for 2018



Source: *Milenio*. Map produced by Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira.

Figure 13: Organized-Crime-Style Homicides by State, Comparing 2017 and 2018



Source: *Milenio*.

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

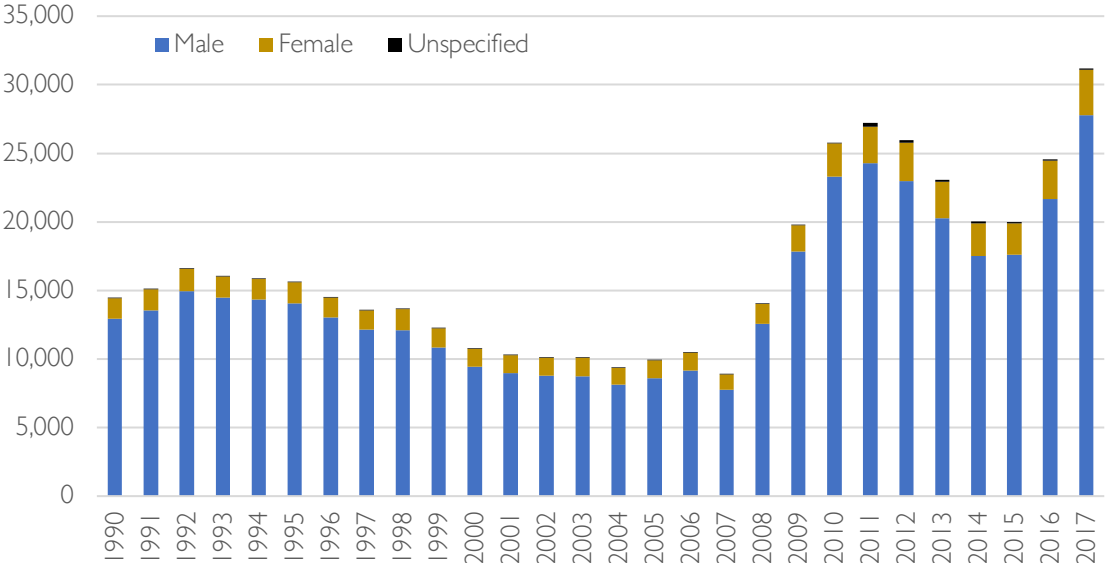
Justice in Mexico monitors and analyzes patterns of violence targeting certain special populations, specifically men, public officials, and journalists. What is made clear is that in Mexico and all

around the world, homicides are committed primarily by men and against men. Additionally, high-profile targets of violence, public officials, and journalists have been killed while performing their respective duties as representatives of the state. They are 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 men are far more likely to die by homicide than women. 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 more than 8.3 times more likely to be homicide victims than women, according to the latest available data from INEGI in 2017.³² Of the total of 32,079 homicide victims nationwide, there were 28,522 male homicide victims (88.9%), 3,430 female homicide victims (10.7%), and 127 homicide victims of unspecified gender (0.4%) in 2017, according to INEGI, which is fairly consistent with the average distribution of violence by gender in Mexico since 1990. The fact that men are 830% more likely than women to be murdered suggests 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.

Table 3: Proportion of Woman and Male Victims of Violence in Mexico, 1990-2017



Source: INEGI.

Nationwide, interpersonal violence jumped from the eleventh leading cause of death in Mexico in 2007 to the fourth leading cause of death in 2017, behind heart disease, kidney disease, and diabetes. Intrapersonal violence also caused the most premature deaths in Mexico in 2017, a

³² As calculated using CONAPO’s population projection estimates (122,478,171 male inhabitants and), Mexican men had a homicide rate of 23.29 per 100,000 inhabitants, while Mexican women had a rate of 2.80 per 100,000.

jump from its eighth-place ranking in 2007.³³ Controlling for income, interpersonal violence has also been the leading cause of death for young men of modest means in Mexico in recent years.³⁴ 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.³⁵ Indeed, the OECD estimates that one in four 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.³⁶

2. Mayors

Assassination of current, former, elected, or substitute candidates to the mayoral position in Mexico is a serious concern. Justice in Mexico’s *Memoria* dataset includes 209 mayors, candidates, and former mayors killed from 2002 through 2018. 2018 was an important election year, where Mexicans had to vote for president, 128 senators and 500 congressional representatives, and thousands of local offices. During this election, the problem of political violence became more evident and received close attention by scholars and the media.

As with homicides generally, 2018 marked a record high for killings of mayors, mayoral candidates, and former-mayors, with 37 such victims. This number was up slightly 35 cases in 2017, and a considerable increase from Justice in Mexico’s tally of 14 victims in 2015 and six victims in 2016. The age of the victims ranged between 23 and 82 years old with an average of 46 years old. Of the 37 murdered in 2018, there were ten mayors, 14 former mayors, and 13 candidates. The 2018 victims were diverse in their political ties, with party affiliations to the PRI (10), PRD (6), PVEM (5), PAN (4), MORENA (3), Independent (2), PES (1), and Movimiento Ciudadano (1). The largest share of these murders took place in Michoacán (7), Guerrero (4), Puebla (4), Mexico State (3), and Hidalgo (3). In 11% of the cases, there were visible signs of torture in the victims’ bodies, and in 89% of the cases a firearm was the cause of death. The timing of a large share of the murders (43%) took place in the months of May and June, which is especially relevant because 2018 was an election year.

In 2018, the mayors and former-mayors whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico include: Santiago Cháidez Jiménez (Former Mayor of Canelas, Durango); Miguel Angel Licon Islas (Former Mayor of Mizquiahuala, Hidalgo); Víctor Molina Dorantes (Former Mayor of Colipa, Veracruz); Francisco Genaro Hernández Sánchez (Former Mayor of Ejutla Crespo, Oaxaca); Juan Carlos Andrade Magaña (Movimiento Ciudadano Mayor of Jilotlán de Dolores, Jalisco); José Efraín García García (PT Mayor of Tlanepantla, Puebla); Abel Montúfar Mendoza (PRI Mayor of Coyuca de Catalán, Guerrero); Rodrigo Salado Agatón (Former Mayor of Acapulco, Guerrero); Alejandro

³³ “Mexico.” *Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation*. Last accessed March 24, 2019.

<http://www.healthdata.org/mexico>

³⁴ Díaz-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.

³⁵ Ingram, Matthew C. “The Local Educational and Regional Economic Foundations of Violence: A Subnational, Spatial Analysis of Homicide Rates across Mexico’s Municipalities,” Working Paper. Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2014.

https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/mex_hom_analysis_ingram.pdf

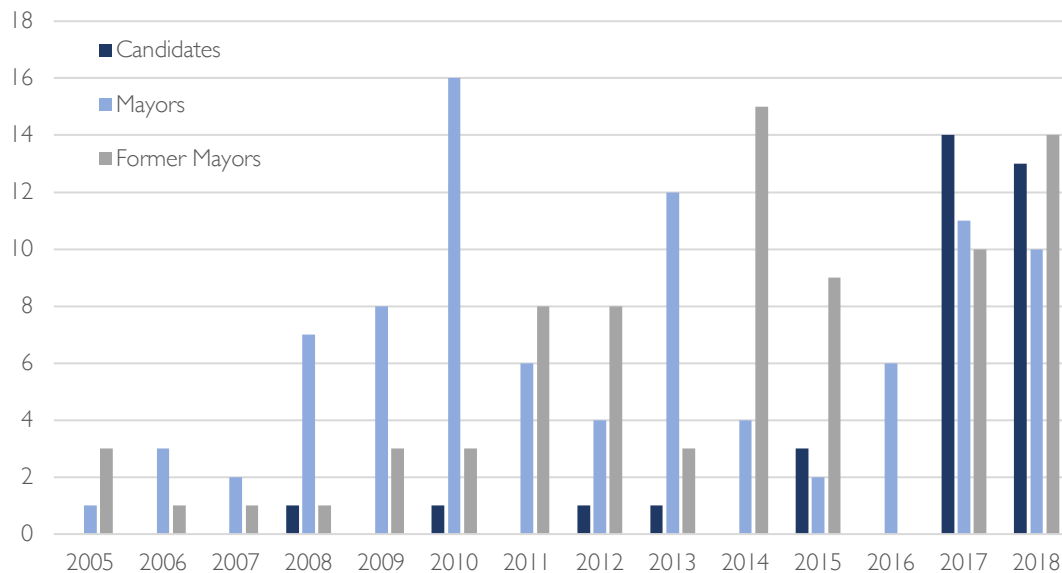
³⁶ Pierre-Marc René, “OCDE: crece número de ‘ninis’ en México,” *El Universal*, November 24, 2015,

<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/sociedad/2015/11/24/ocde-crece-numero-de-ninis-en-mexico>

González Ramos (PAN Mayor of Pacula, Hidalgo); Andrés García Jaime (Former Mayor of Amacuzac, Morelos); Manuel Carlos Munguía Estrella (Former Mayor of Onavas, Sonora); Arcadio Rodríguez Pérez (Former Mayor of Tzompantepec, Tlaxcala); Fernando Purón Johnston (Former Mayor of Piedras Negras, Coahuila); Alejandro Chávez Zavala (PAN Mayor of Taretan, Michoacán); Javier Ureña Contreras (PRI Interim Mayor of Buenavista Tomatlán, Michoacán); Víctor José Guadalupe Díaz Contreras (PRI Mayor of Tecalitlán, Jalisco); Eliseo Delgado Sánchez (MORENA Mayor of Buenavista Tomatlán, Michoacán); Pedro Vargas Ramírez (Former Mayor of Zapotitlán Tablas, Guerrero); Genaro Negrete Urbano (Mayor of Naupan, Puebla*); Gualberto Heminio Rosas Lastra (Former Mayor of Valerio Trujano, Oaxaca); Félix Aguilar Caballero (PVEM Mayor of Nopalucan de la Granja, Puebla); Arturo Cortés Villada (Former Mayor of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas); Carlos Mayorga Guerrero (Former Mayor of Amatán, Chiapas); Francisco Piceno Camacho (Former Mayor of Penjamillo de Degollado, Michoacán).

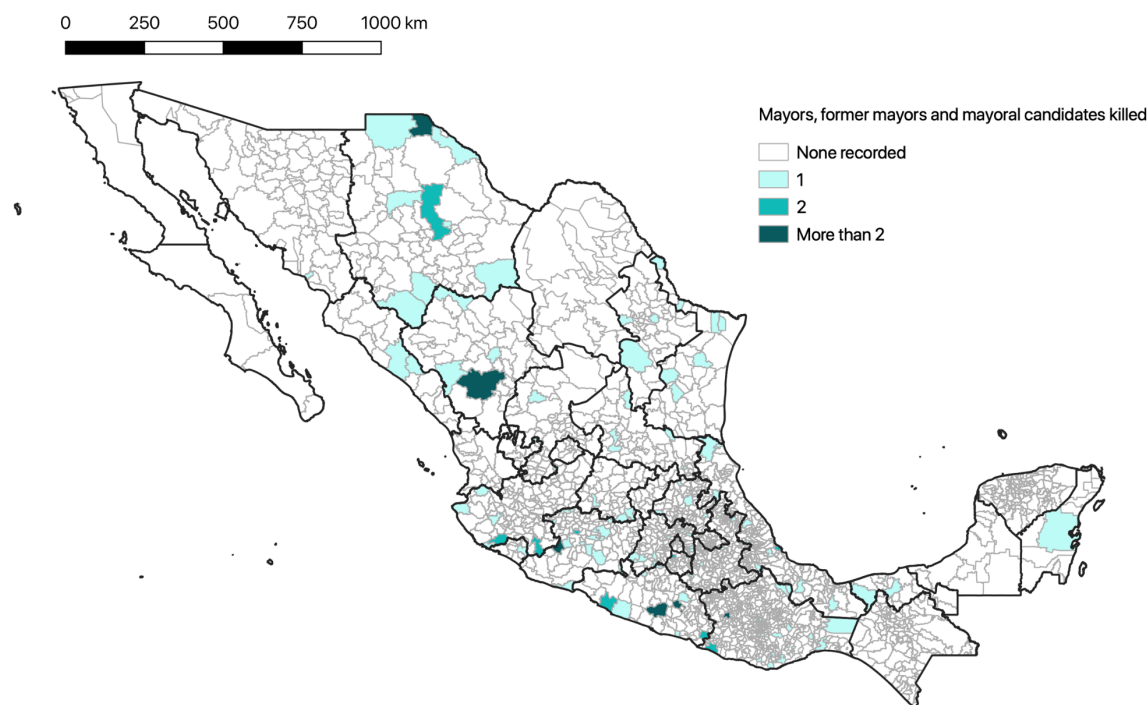
*Sources did not specify party affiliation

Figure 14: Mayors, Mayoral Candidates, and Former-Mayors Killed in Mexico, 2005-2018



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset.

Figure 15: Map of Mayors, Mayoral Candidates, and Former -Mayors Killed in Mexico, 2006-2018



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset. Map produced by Austin Juarez.

Justice in Mexico acknowledges that, while it includes information on mayors, former mayors, and mayoral candidates, the *Memoria* database currently does not account for all historical cases of local political assassinations. However, starting in 2018, the project started to gather data on other political assassinations such as party leaders, congress representatives, and *regidores*. In 2018 alone, there were five cases of assassinations against local *regidores* in the states of Oaxaca (2), Colima (1), and Guanajuato (1), all with the use of firearms. In addition, one federal Congressman was killed in Mexico State and one PES party leader was also killed in Guerrero. Among these victims were: Gabriel Hernández Alfaro (PES local leader in Guerrero); Francisco Rojas San Román (PRI Federal Congressman); Martín Cázares Zárte (PAN *Regidor* for Tecomán, Colima); Jorge Montes González (PRI *Regidor* for Celaya, Guanajuato); Erika Cázares (PVEM *Regidora* for Juan Galindo, Puebla); Pamela Zamari Terán Pineda (PRI *Regidora* for Juchitán de Zaragoza, Oaxaca); and María Teresa Vega Terán (PT *Regidora* for Juchitán de Zaragoza, Oaxaca).

In per capita terms, in 2018, the murder rate for Mexico's roughly 2,400 sitting mayors killed was 4 per 1,000, or about 9 times the homicide rate for the general population in Mexico, according to the authors calculations using SNSP and CONAPO data. This is numerically higher than the rate estimated by a 2018 Justice in Mexico study of murders targeting sitting mayors in 2016, which was 2.46 murders per 1,000, though in that year mayors were assassinated at about 12 times the rate of the general population (and more than three times the rate of journalists).³⁷ In

³⁷ 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

2010, the worst year for mayoral killings, the rate was as high as 6 per 1,000 (about 28 times greater than the average person in Mexico), according to the same study. Naturally, these findings raise serious concerns about the growing trend of political assassinations in Mexico, particularly in the aftermath of an election year that brought sweeping changes.

3. Journalists

Mexico is one of the world's most dangerous places for journalists. Dozens of reporters and media workers have been killed or disappeared in Mexico over the years, and 2018 was no different. 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 2018, CPJ reported that there were 47 confirmed cases of journalists killed, 58 unconfirmed cases, and four media-support workers killed in Mexico. Nearly 77% of those confirmed cases involved reporters working the crime beat, approximately 38% involved reporters working on issues related to corruption, and 36% involved reporters working on political issues.³⁸ Taking into account one case documented in 2019, from 1992 to date (March 2019), CPJ documents 48 journalists killed, 45 of whom were targeted for murder, and 40 of those were murdered with impunity.³⁹ In 2018, four journalists were killed in Mexico, tying it with the United States in fourth place on CPJ's list of journalists killed. Only Afghanistan (13 journalists killed), Syria (9), and India (5) had more.⁴⁰

CPJ also considers Mexico the seventh deadliest country worldwide on its Global Impunity Index, an index on which Mexico has placed for 11 years and counting. The Global Impunity Index, writes CPJ, "spotlights countries where journalists are slain and their killers go free." CPJ considers Mexico's prosecuting of cases involving murdered journalists to have "worsened" since 2017. Of the other six countries placed higher on the Index than Mexico, only two (Syria and Afghanistan) also "worsened" this past year, whereas the remaining four countries (Somalia, Iraq, South Sudan, and the Philippines) all "improved."⁴¹

In 2018, CPJ reported that there were ten reporters murdered in the world that matched their criteria, with four confirmed cases and six unconfirmed cases in Mexico.⁴² The four CPJ-confirmed cases include:

³⁸ "1337 Journalists Killed." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 24, 2019. https://cpj.org/data/killed/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&start_year=1992&end_year=2019&group_by=year

³⁹ "Mexico / Americas." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 24, 2019.

<https://cpj.org/americas/mexico/>

⁴⁰ "54 Journalists Killed." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 24, 2019.

https://cpj.org/data/killed/2018/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&start_year=2018&end_year=2018&group_by=location

⁴¹ Witchel, Elisabeth. "Getting Away with Murder." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. October 2018.

<https://cpj.org/x/74ad>

⁴² "4 Journalists Killed in Mexico." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 24, 2019.

https://cpj.org/data/killed/americas/mexico/murder/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&cc_fips%5B%5D=MX&start_year=2018&end_year=2018&group_by=year

- **Carlos Domínguez Rodríguez:** A freelance columnist/commentator who covered corruption, crime, and politics, Rodríguez was stabbed to death on January 13, 2018, in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas.⁴³
- **Leslie Ann Pamela Montenegro del Real:** A journalist, satirist, and social media commentator for *El Sillón* who covered politics and culture, Montenegro del Real was shot and killed on February 5, 2018, in Acapulco, Guerrero.⁴⁴
- **Leobardo Vázquez Atzin:** An internet reporter for *Enlace Informativo Regional* who covered corruption, crime, and politics, Atzin was shot and killed on March 21, 2018, in Gutiérrez Zamora, Veracruz.⁴⁵
- **Mario Leonel Gómez Sánchez:** A reporter for *El Heraldo de Chiapas* who covered business, corruption, crime, politics, and culture, Gómez Sánchez was shot dead on September 21, 2018, in Yajalón, Chiapas.⁴⁶

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 the murder of nine media workers in 2018, more than double that tallied by CPJ. Of the nine registered by Article 19, eight occurred under the Peña Nieto administration, bringing the total murdered under that *sexenio* to 47. Still, since President López Obrador took office in December 2018, Article 19 has registered one murder per month of a journalist or media worker to date, totaling four in just the first four months of AMLO's presidency.⁴⁷

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, considering 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 2018, Justice in Mexico has identified at least 176 journalists and media-support workers who were murdered, with the vast majority of these deaths (165) 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 16). In 2018, Justice in Mexico entered 16 such individuals into the *Memoria* dataset.

⁴³ "Carlos Domínguez Rodríguez." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 24, 2019.

<https://cpj.org/data/people/carlos-dominguez-rodriguez/index.php>

⁴⁴ "Leslie Ann Pamela Montenegro del Real." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 24, 2019.

<https://cpj.org/data/people/leslie-ann-pamela-montenegro-del-real/index.php>

⁴⁵ "Leobardo Vázquez Atzin." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 24, 2019.

<https://cpj.org/data/people/leobardo-vazquez-atzin/index.php>

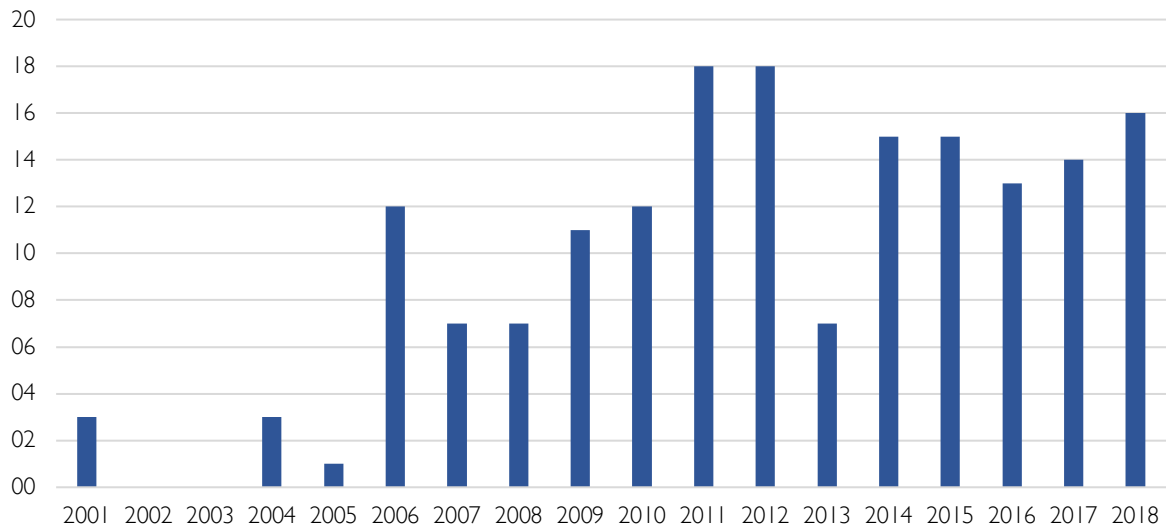
⁴⁶ "Mario Leonel Gómez Sánchez." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. Last accessed March 24, 2019.

<https://cpj.org/data/people/mario-leonel-gomez-sanchez/index.php>

⁴⁷ "Periodistas asesinados en México, en relación con su labor informativa." *Article 19*. March 16, 2019.

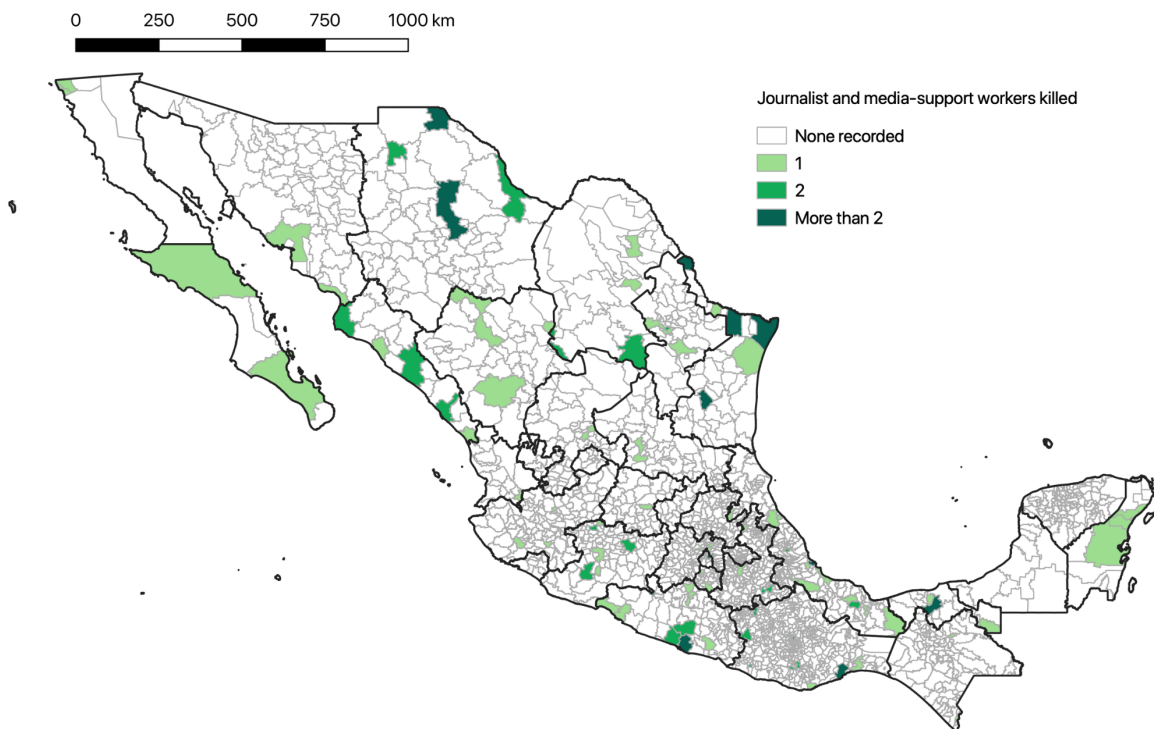
<https://articulo19.org/periodistasasesinados/>

Figure 16: Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico, 2000-2018



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset.

Figure 17: Map of Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico, 2000-2018



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset. Map produced by Austin Juarez.

The Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset includes 16 journalists and media workers killed in the year 2018, whereas 14 were documented in 2017. From the total number of victims, 14 were male and two were women, and all victims were Mexican nationals. The average age of victims recorded in 2018 was 46 years old (the youngest was 34 and the oldest was 80 years old). Nine victims were killed by a firearm, four were stabbed, and one was bludgeoned to death. According

to Justice in Mexico’s findings, the assassinations took place in the states of Baja California Sur, Chiapas Guerrero, Mexico City, Mexico State, Nuevo Laredo, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz. The media workers killed included journalists, reporters, photojournalists, correspondents, photographers, station directors, and activists. In 2018, the reporters and media workers whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico include (chronologically oldest to most recent):

Table 4: Journalists Killed in Mexico in 2018, by Age and News Organization

FIRST NAME	FATHER'S SURNAME	MOTHER'S SURNAME	AGE	MEDIA ORGANIZATION
Alicia	Díaz	González	52	El Financiero
Carlos	Domínguez	Rodríguez	77	N/D
Diego	García	Corona	35	Semanario Morelos
Gabriel	Soriano	Kuri	40	Radio y Televisión de Guerrero
Héctor	González	Antonio	N/D	Todo Noticias
Javier Enrique	Rodríguez	Valladares	N/D	Canal 10 Cancún
José Gerardo	Martínez	Ariaga	35	El Universal
José Guadalupe	Chan	Dzib	35	Playa News y El Tábano
Juan Carlos	Huerta		N/D	Panorama Sin Reservas
Leobardo	Vasquez	Atzin	42	Enlace Informativo Regional
Leslie Ann P.	Montenegro	Del Real	36	El Sillón
Luis	Pérez	García	80	Encuesta Hoy
Mario Leonel	Gómez	Sánchez	40	El Heraldo Chiapas
Rafael	Murúa	Manríquez	34	Radiokashana
Rubén	Pat	Cauich	N/D	Playa News
Sergio	Martínez	González	47	Semanario Enfoque

Source: Justice in Mexico Memoria Dataset.

Ultimately, while it is clear that 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. The above noted 2018 study by Laura Calderón found that Mexican journalists were at least three times more likely to be murdered than the general population in 2016.⁴⁸ More precisely, using 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.⁴⁹ However, because there is not an annualized estimate for the number of journalists in Mexico, it is not possible to calculate an updated statistic for the higher susceptibility of journalists at this time.

⁴⁸ 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

⁴⁹ 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_El/article/view/281/281

E. Comparing Presidential Administrations

Former President Enrique Peña Nieto's *sexenio* ended on November 30, 2018, capping six years in office (2012-2018). This provides a unique opportunity with full datasets to compare the number of homicides and OCG-related killings during his administration to his predecessors.

Justice in Mexico previously reported that 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 5. 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.⁵⁰ 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 5: Homicides and OCG-Style Homicides by Presidential Term

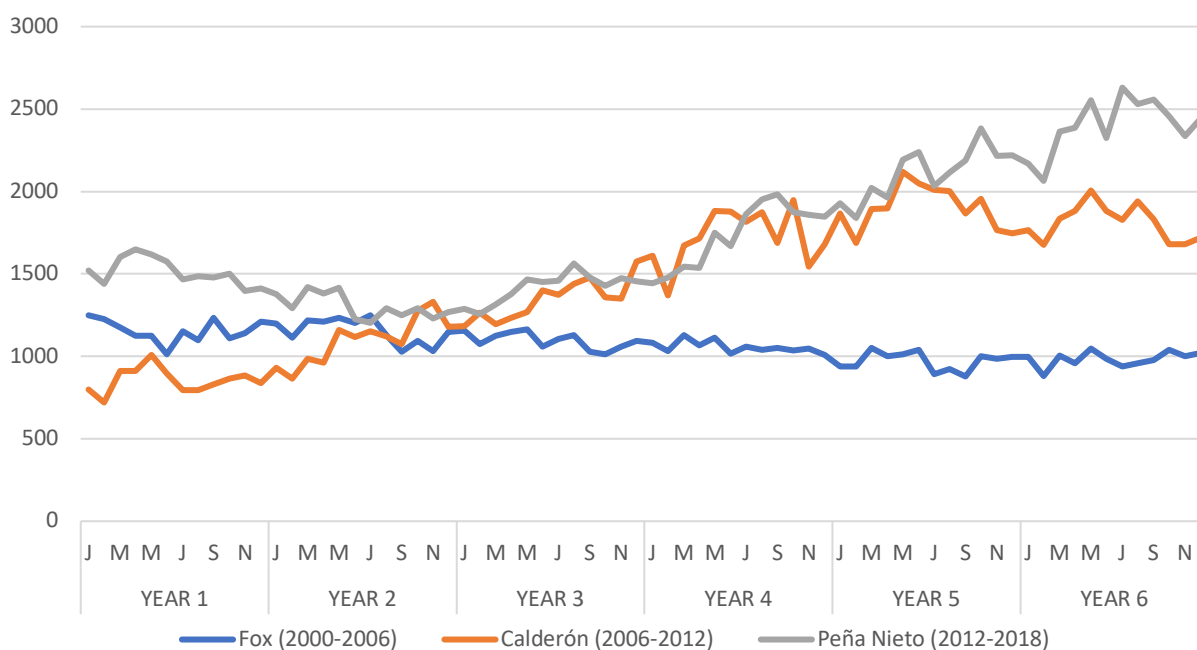
Data Source	Salinas (1990-1994)*	Zedillo (1995-2000)	Fox (2001-2006)	Calderón (2007-2012)	Peña (2013-2017)
INEGI Homicides	67,525	79,759	60,073	122,319	150,451
SNSP Homicides	n.a.	n.a.	74,389	104,794	97,125
CNDH-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	8,901	n.a.	n.a.
SNSP-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	50,950	n.a.
Reforma-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	47,845	42,176
Milenio-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	54,087	72,375
LANTIA (OCG)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	76,996
% OCG (SNSP/Milenio)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	44%	48%
% OCG (SNSP/Milenio)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	52%	75%

Source: INEGI, SNSP, CNDH, SNSP, Reforma, Milenio, Lantia.

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, under Calderón, 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.

⁵⁰ 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 18: Total Monthly Homicide Cases by Presidential Administration in Mexico



Source: SNSP.

Based on INEGI’s official figures from 2013 through 2017 and the authors’ projections for 2018, it appears that over 150,000 people were murdered over the six years of the Peña Nieto administration. This constitutes an average of around 30,000 homicides per year during Peña Nieto’s term, nearly 10,000 more per year on average than under Calderón, whose first two and last two years saw lower levels of homicide compared to Peña Nieto, as illustrated using SNSP data on homicide cases in Figure 18. On average, there were more than 82 homicides per day under the Peña Nieto administration, or more than 3.4 murders every hour. By *Milenio*’s account, during the Peña Nieto administration, over 72,000 Mexicans died each day as a result of organized crime-style killings, compared to around 54,000 under Calderón.⁵¹

IV. ANALYZING RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN 2018

In 2018, the number of homicide rates in Mexico continued to increase for the fourth consecutive year. As the authors have noted in previous reports, Mexico’s economic difficulties over the past years (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.⁵² Moreover, there has been substantial recent attention to the fact that violence itself is harmful to Mexico’s

⁵¹ *Reforma*’s more conservative figures suggest that the number of organized crime killings fell from nearly 48,000 under Calderón to about 42,000 under Peña Nieto. However, given the methodological issues with *Reforma*’s tallies noted above, the authors give preference to *Milenio*’s count here.

⁵² 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>

economic outlook.⁵³ Indeed, 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.⁵⁴ This suggests that there is a self-enforcing dynamic—a particular kind of security trap—in which poor economic conditions contribute to widespread violence, which cannot be easily escaped.

Yet socio-economic conditions alone are insufficient to understand the often rapid surges in violence associated with Mexico's security crisis. Whether there is conflict or harmony among organized crime groups—particularly those involved in international drug trafficking—tends to be a major contributor to overall levels of homicide at both at the national and local level. Thus, it is important to call attention to several major developments that contributed to 2018 being Mexico's most violent year on record. These include the dynamic and dramatic battles for OCG hierarchy, the trial of "El Chapo" Guzmán in New York, the transition to President López Obrador, efforts to address Mexico's socioeconomic deficits, changes to federal law enforcement, the military's involvement in domestic affairs, and tensions in U.S.-Mexico relations. We discuss these developments below.

A. The Shifting Landscape of Organized Crime

A major portion of the increase in violence in Mexico over the last several years is attributable to competition between organized crime groups, particularly those battling for control of the drug trade. Mexico's drug trafficking organizations became especially powerful in the 1970s and 1980s, thanks to protection from corrupt, high level government officials and law enforcement agencies.⁵⁵ However, with Mexico's gradual democratization over the 1990s, the introduction of political alternation at the local, state, and eventually the national level disrupted long-standing corruption networks and led to conflicting protection rackets at different levels of government, contributing to increased competition among major drug trafficking organizations.⁵⁶ In this context, as the

⁵³ The Institute for Economy and Peace documents the economic toll that it has had in its annual "Mexico Peace Index: 2019." IEP found that the level of peace nationwide in Mexico decreased in 2018 by 4.9% compared to 2017, which led to a 10% increase in the toll it took on Mexico's economy. This brought the cost of violence to 5.16 billion pesos, which is almost one quarter the national GDP. "The cost of lost opportunity is high," the report states. "Reducing violence throughout Mexico to the level of its five most peaceful states would generate a peace dividend of 2.5 billion pesos a year, or 10 billion pesos over a period of four years." "Mexico Peace Index 2019." *Institute for Economy and Peace*. April 2019. <http://economicsandpeace.org/reports/>

⁵⁴ Ted Enamorado, Luis F. López-Calva, and Carlos Rodríguez-Castelán, "Crime and growth convergence: Evidence from Mexico," *Economics Letters*, Volume 125, Issue 1, 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.

⁵⁵ Carlos Antonio Flores Pérez "Organized Crime and Official Corruption in Mexico" in Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk, *Police and Public Security in Mexico* (San Diego; University Readers, 2009).

⁵⁶ See: Luis Astorga. "Transición democrática, organizaciones de traficantes y lucha por la hegemonía." *Atlas de la seguridad y la defensa de México*, 2009, edited by Benítez Manaut, Rosríguez Sumano & Rodríguez Luna. Mexico, D.F.: Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia; Luis Astorga and David A. Shirk, "Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.- Mexican Context," in *Shared Responsibility: U.S.-Mexico Policy Options for Confronting Organized Crime*, ed. by Eric L. Olson, David A. Shirk, and Andrew Selee (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars – Mexico Institute; San Diego: University of San Diego, 2010); Guillermo Trejo and Sandra Ley, "Why Did Drug Cartels Go to War in Mexico?"

authors' past reports have noted, U.S. and Mexican counter-drug efforts targeting major drug trafficking organizations, including efforts to eradicate production, interdict illicit goods in transit, and disrupt organized crime leadership structures, have contributed to fragmentation and further infighting among criminal organizations. This increased competition among criminal organizations has been a major contributor to violence, and has especially drawn criticism to the use of leadership disruption, or "kingpin" removal. Indeed, as made evident by the rise in the number of homicides following the 2015 recapture and 2018 extradition of Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, leadership disruption can have very undesirable consequences, in that it contributes to internal schisms, encroachment from rival organizations, and ultimately greater violence.

Amid Guzmán's decline, a new violent criminal organization known as the Jalisco New Generation Cartel as an offshoot of the Sinaloa Cartel. A March 2018 Justice in Mexico policy brief titled, "The New Generation: Mexico's Emerging Organized Crime Threat" identifies Guzmán's downfall as a major contributor to the dramatic increase in violence over the past three years.⁵⁷ 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, most notably the CJNG. By teaming up with former rivals of Guzmán's Sinaloa Cartel, such as the remnants of the Arellano Felix Organization and the Juárez Cartel, the CJNG was able to challenge Sinaloa and other competitors through a series of violent clashes for control of key territories and illicit activities. Meanwhile, in 2018, the CJNG and its allies were able to strengthen their position in certain locations, most notably in Baja California Sur, which appears to be returning to much lower levels of violence. In addition, the CJNG has also suffered internal schisms of its own, most notably with the splintering of the Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel, as noted above.

In sum, all of these developments illustrate the unfortunate consequences that can result from leadership disruption tactics, since the resulting power vacuum causes new organized crime groups to emerge. 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. This is precisely why Mexico's new president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has declared that his government will abandon the strategy of targeting top organized crime figures.

B. The Trial of "El Chapo" Guzmán

After decades of pursuit that included three arrests (1993, 2014, 2016), two escapes (2001, 2015), and an extradition to the United States (2017), Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, finally saw his day in court. The 11-week trial for the notorious kingpin of the Sinaloa Cartel began in November 2018 in the Federal District Court of New York and concluded on January 30, 2019. The jury found

Subnational Party Alternation, the Breakdown of Criminal Protection, and the Onset of Large-Scale Violence." *Comparative Political Studies*. 51(7), 2018, p. 900–937.

⁵⁷ 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>

Guzmán guilty on ten counts related to drug trafficking.⁵⁸ Although the sentencing hearing is scheduled for June 25, 2019, concerns have since risen about the impartiality and potential misconduct of the jurors, leading some to call for new trial.⁵⁹ Such speculation exemplifies the dramatic nature of the trial in its entirety.

Guzmán's trial was often referred to in the media as the "trial of the century."⁶⁰ It included testimony from at least 16 of Guzmán's "underlings and allies, some of whom served as cartel bag men."⁶¹ Several of these witnesses are among those who made allegations of corruption about Mexican government officials, including members of the current and past Mexican presidential administrations.

Vicente Zambada, for example, who is the son of Guzmán's long-time partner in running the Sinaloa Cartel, Ismael Zambada García, testified that his father had access to \$1 million each month to bribe high ranking government officials. Another witness testified about the former Chief of Mexico City's Federal Police, Guillermo González Calderoni, who was the first high ranking official on Guzmán's payroll dating back to the 1980s. Calderoni, writes *The New York Times*, allegedly "provided Mr. Guzmán with secret information on an almost daily basis" in exchange for financial compensation, including an invaluable tip in the early 1990s that the United States government had built a radar installation on the Yucatán Peninsula to track [El Chapo's] drug flights from Colombia."⁶²

The most damning testimony, however, was the allegation that former Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto accepted a \$100 million bribe from Guzmán. The testimony was provided by a Colombian drug lord, Alex Cifuentes Villa, who worked with Guzmán from 2007 to 2013. Cifuentes alleged that Peña Nieto contacted Guzmán after taking office in 2012, "asking the drug lord for \$250 million in exchange for calling off a nationwide manhunt for him," writes *The New York Times*.⁶³ Guzmán then countered with \$100 million, which Peña Nieto denied he accepted. Regardless, such accusations at the highest level of government highlighted more than anything

⁵⁸ Ingber, Sasha. "El Chapo, Notorious Drug Kingpin, Found Guilty After Dramatic Trial in New York." *National Public Radio*. February 12, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/12/690720516/el-chapo-notorious-drug-kingpin-found-guilty-after-dramatic-trial-in-new-york>

⁵⁹ Paul, Deanna. "El Chapo' is facing life in prison. Here's why he may get a new trial." *The Washington Post*. February 22, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/02/22/el-chapo-was-facing-life-prison-heres-why-he-may-get-new-trial/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.2c2033f79080

⁶⁰ For example, see *Telegraph's* article, "El Chapo' Guzman facing life as lawyers offer extraordinary capitulation in 'trial of the century,'" published February 3, 2019. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/02/03/could-chapo-guzman-walk-free-jury-decides-fate-end-telenovela/>

⁶¹ Feuer, Alan. "El Chapo Trial Shows That Mexico's Corruption Is Even Worse Than You Think." *The New York Times*. December 28, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/28/nyregion/el-chapo-trial-mexico-corruption.html>

⁶² Feuer, Alan. "El Chapo Trial Shows That Mexico's Corruption Is Even Worse Than You Think." *The New York Times*. December 28, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/28/nyregion/el-chapo-trial-mexico-corruption.html>

⁶³ Feuer, Alan. "Former Mexican President Peña Nieto Took \$100 Million Bribe, Witness at El Chapo Trial Says." *The New York Times*. January 15, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/15/nyregion/el-chapo-trial.html>

the pervasiveness of corruption in Mexico. In addition, “El Chapo” Guzmán’s trial also revealed the true size and power of the drug trafficking industry in Mexico.⁶⁴

C. Changing of the Guard: A New President Takes Office

On December 1, 2018, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador was sworn in as the 58th president of Mexico. Under the slogan, “Together we will make history (Juntos Haremos Historia),” López Obrador (commonly known as AMLO) successfully led a center-left campaign as a member of the National Regeneration Movement (*Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional*, MORENA).⁶⁵ He captured over 50% of the vote, one of the highest election margins in Mexican political history.⁶⁶

Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s political career spans more than 40 years. His political experience is rooted in Mexico’s long-standing political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI), though his career traversed several political parties and elected positions. He left the PRI in 1988 to join the National Democratic Front (*Frente Democrático Nacional*, FDN), a dissident left-wing coalition assembled to challenge the hegemonic rule of the PRI. That same year, López Obrador ran as opposition for Tabasco’s governorship. Although he lost, he ultimately became the president of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Democrático*, PRD), a center-left party founded from the remnants of the FDN. López Obrador served as PRD president from 1996 to 1999. In 2000, he was then elected as Mayor of Mexico City.⁶⁷

López Obrador resigned from his mayoral position to seek the presidential nomination for the PRD for the 2006 Presidential elections. He led the majority of the election polls, but ultimately lost to National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN) candidate, Felipe Calderón, by less than one percent. López Obrador ran again for president in 2012, once again falling short and protesting the election results.⁶⁸ Ultimately, López Obrador stepped away from the PRD and founded his own political party, MORENA, in 2014. In coalition with a left-wing Labor Party (*Partido del Trabajo*, PT), and right-wing Social Encounter Party (*Partido Encuentro Social*, PES), López Obrador secured his presidential position in the 2018 elections.⁶⁹ His campaign focus on

⁶⁴ Justice in Mexico Director David Shirk commented in a *Los Angeles Times* article on the fiscal scale of organized crime groups. “It’s reasonable to say that at a minimum, these guys were running a \$6-billion industry, and the number of firms competing in that industry was very small. For an individual like Guzmán,” he continued, “we’re surely in the hundreds of millions annually, and a billion is not impossible and is in fact quite probable in terms of net worth.” Sharp, Sonja. “\$100 million is ordinary money in the world of ‘El Chapo.’” *Los Angeles Times*. January 22, 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-el-chapo-money-20190122-story.html>

⁶⁵ Najar, Alberto. “5 razones que hacen históricas las elecciones presidenciales en México.” *BBC Mundo*. July 1, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-43578377>

⁶⁶ Ahmed, Azam and Paulina Villegas. “Lopez Obrador, an Atypical Leftist, Wins Mexico Presidency in Landslide.” *The New York Times*. July 1, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/01/world/americas/mexico-election-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador.html>

⁶⁷ Palacios, Surya. “Perfil: ¿Quién es Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)?” *Alto Nivel*. July 2, 2018. <https://www.altonivel.com.mx/elecciones-2018/amlo/perfil-amlo-lopez-obrador/>

⁶⁸ “Palacios, Surya. “Perfil: ¿Quién es Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)?” *Alto Nivel*. July 2, 2018. <https://www.altonivel.com.mx/elecciones-2018/amlo/perfil-amlo-lopez-obrador/>

⁶⁹ Najar, Alberto. “5 razones que hacen históricas las elecciones presidenciales en México.” *BBC Mundo*. July 1, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-43578377>

firebrand promises to bring change to Mexico resonated with many Mexican voters. According to the National Electoral Institute (Instituto Nacional Electoral, INE), López Obrador secured between 53% and 53.8% of the vote, whereas his opponents, Ricardo Anaya and José Antonio Meade, received between 22% and 22.8% and between 15.7% and 16.3% of the votes, respectively.⁷⁰

With President López Obrador's *sexenio* underway (2018-2024), his proposed policies and progressive agenda may have unique implications on Mexico's current security. During his campaign, he emphasized his determination to uproot corruption across Mexico and address rampant issues of poverty and violence. In particular, his rule of law and security-specific proposals include establishing state-level entities and obligatory trainings to monitor and increase the professionalization of law enforcement officials across Mexico, targeting the socio-economic roots of organized crime, amending the 19th article of the Mexican constitution to better combat crimes of corruption with preemptive detention/holding, proposing amnesty legislation, and restructuring the judiciary.⁷¹

In addition to addressing crime and violence, President López Obrador also has prioritized fiscal responsibility and austerity. As such, he has begun to decrease governmental expenses; limit the salary of the president, public servants, and the judiciary; and end pensions received by former Mexican presidents.⁷² He even cut his presidential income to 40% of what his predecessor, President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), earned.⁷³ President López Obrador now takes home \$108,000 pesos per month (\$60,000 USD annually).⁷⁴ He also moved out of the presidential palace and into a smaller home, and committed to selling the presidential jet to recoup funds.⁷⁵ With savings from government cuts in spending, President López Obrador seeks to invest funding into social programs, crime and violence prevention, "scholarships for students, pensions for the elderly, and infrastructure projects" in low-income areas, writes *Reuters*.⁷⁶

Despite López Obrador's progressive agenda, critics are skeptical, pointing out that his proposed policies are relatively experimental in Mexico. Still, Mexican voters spoke on election day. Former

⁷⁰ Lafuente, Javier. "La Victoria de López Obrador Lleva al Poder a la Izquierda en México." *El País*. July 2, 2018. https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/07/02/mexico/1530496335_470433.html

⁷¹ Clement La Rosa, Lucy. "Implications of Lopez Obrador's Security Agenda." *Justice in Mexico*. June 30, 2018. <https://justiceinmexico.org/lopez-obradors-security-agenda/>

and Zepeda Gil, Raúl. "Pacificación a la Mexicana: Apuntes sobre la Propuesta de Amnistía de López Obrador." *Nexos*. July 9, 2018. <https://seguridad.nexos.com.mx/?p=886>

⁷² "Mexico's Supreme Court Agrees to Lower Salaries After Spat." *The Associated Press*. January 8, 2018.

<https://www.apnews.com/450f4ccc115f42d784b9f32f31786c9c> and Morales, Alberto and Misael Zavala. "Una 'buena decisión', que Ministros se Bajaran el Sueldo en 25%: AMLO." *El Universal*. January 9, 2019. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/politica/una-buena-decision-que-ministros-se-bajaran-el-sueldo-en-25-aml0>

⁷³ Associated Press. "Mexico's President-Elect Amló to Take 60% Pay Cut in Austerity Push." *The Guardian*. July 16, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/16/mexicos-president-elect-to-take-60-per-centpay-cut>

⁷⁴ Associated Press. "Mexico's President-Elect Amló to Take 60% Pay Cut in Austerity Push." *The Guardian*. July 16, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/16/mexicos-president-elect-to-take-60-per-centpay-cut>

⁷⁵ "Mexico President-Elect Hails Passage of Public Sector Pay Cuts." *Reuters*. September 14, 2018.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-politics/mexico-president-elect-hails-passage-of-public-sector-pay-cuts-idUSKCN1LU2KW>

⁷⁶ "Mexico President-Elect Hails Passage of Public Sector Pay Cuts." *Reuters*. September 14, 2018.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-politics/mexico-president-elect-hails-passage-of-public-sector-pay-cuts-idUSKCN1LU2KW>

President of Costa Rica Laura Chinchilla commented that recent populist elections, like that of López Obrador, reflect a regional demand for change. “The results are not endorsements of ideologies, but rather demands for change, a fatigue felt by people waiting for answers that simply have not arrived.”⁷⁷

Upon his election, López Obrador affirmed his commitment to “establish an authentic democracy” in Mexico.⁷⁸ Political promises, apprehensive criticisms, and hopeful constituents aside, the attainability of López Obrador’s proposed security agenda will be tested in 2019.

D. Addressing the Socio-Economic Roots of Violent Crime

President López Obrador has pledged to address the socio-economic roots of criminal violence by channeling more public funds to education and job creation. While recent Mexican presidents have emphasized economic growth as a top priority, López Obrador has focused particularly on providing educational and employment opportunities through government-funded scholarships and public-private partnerships with employers. An explicit objective of these efforts is to assist young Mexicans—especially young men—who make up a disproportionate share of the perpetrators and victims of violent crimes in Mexico.

López Obrador has tasked Luisa Maria Alcalde, the head of the Secretariat for Work and Social Welfare (Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, STPS), with advancing these job creation efforts. One of the principle STPS programs launched in January 2019 is the “Youth Constructing the Future” (*Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro*, JCF) program, which provides small monthly scholarship (2,400 pesos or around \$125 USD) to university students, and monthly stipends (3,600 pesos or around \$190 USD) for young people participating in a one-year job training program. According to an official statement by STPS, the program seeks to address the fact that 22% of the target population—the roughly 2.6 million Mexican youth aged 18-29—are neither employed nor matriculated in school, compared to the OECD average of 15%. STPS will coordinate with the Secretariat of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*, SEP) to distribute a total of 300,000 scholarships to students that have completed high school equivalency (*bachillerato*) who are seeking university education, with job training stipends for up to 2.3 million youth to connect to employers in the private sector (70%), public sector (20%), and NGO (10%) sectors.⁷⁹

It is arguably laudable that López Obrador is attempting to tackle long-standing economic problems that make many Mexicans vulnerable to illicit activities to make a better life for

⁷⁷ Ahmed, Azam and Paulina Villegas. “Lopez Obrador, an Atypical Leftist, Wins Mexico Presidency in Landslide.” *The New York Times*. July 1, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/01/world/americas/mexico-election-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador.html>

⁷⁸ “Esto fue lo que dijo López Obrador tras su Victoria electoral (discursos completos).” *Animal Politico*. July 2, 2018. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/07/discursos-lopez-obrador/>

⁷⁹ These educational investments are in addition to other SEP scholarships offered by the López Obrador government, including the Benito Juárez Scholarship (Beca Benito Juárez) for middle school education. “Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro,” Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (STPS), <https://jovenesconstruyendoelfuturo.stps.gob.mx>; “Todavía Puedes Registrarte a la Beca ‘Benito Juárez’ de AMLO,” *Noticieros Televisa*, November 21, 2018 <https://noticieros.televisa.com/historia/todavia-puedes-registrarte-beca-benito-juarez-amlo/>

themselves. The plan to increase educational and work training opportunities is an ambitious effort to scale up the approach that López Obrador used during his time as head of the Mexico City government. Starting in 2004, López Obrador launched a program to provide scholarships to thousands of students in Mexico City, which expand educational opportunities and helped to greatly bolster his reputation as a social reformer.⁸⁰ He was also criticized by political opponents for deficit spending, as the Mexico City government debt grew from 28 billion pesos in 2000 to 45 billion in 2005.⁸¹

Leaving aside debates about the fiscal soundness of López Obrador's social welfare spending, his approach has potential to make a positive impact on Mexican society. There is certainly potential that taking this approach nationwide will provide an important boost to students that might not otherwise be able to afford to pursue a university education, as well as access to employment. The program may also have significant multiplier effects with benefits throughout the Mexican economy, by stimulating consumption and increasing the skills of young Mexican workers. In this sense, the program seeks to reverse address the deep and chronic socioeconomic deficits that have stifled Mexican economic development for decades.

However, providing education and employment opportunities is at best a first step to addressing other social ills—substance abuse, marital problems, domestic violence, societal discrimination, etc.—that frequently lead to the dislocation of young people who turn to deviant subgroups to find alternative social support systems (such as gangs). Future development of social support systems to address these problems will be needed to provide a more comprehensive approach to the complex socioeconomic factors that lead to violent criminal behavior. Finally, even if López Obrador's government makes progress in preventing some Mexican youth from entering a life of crime, it is doubtful that the "Youth Constructing the Future" program will be able to rescue "high risk" individuals or persons that have already become involved in criminal activities. For this, the López Obrador administration will need to consider instituting a program similar to the Programa de Atención a Jóvenes en Situación de Riesgo he instituted in Mexico City in 2002.⁸²

E. Re-Inventing the Federal Prosecutor's Office

Even as López Obrador works on crime prevention, it will be necessary to dramatically improve the provision of public security throughout the country. The new president appears poised to preside over the largest restructuring of federal law enforcement in decades. Unlike the other initiatives noted above, this is where López Obrador's approach appears to fall very much in line with those of previous presidents, which suggests that there are few fresh, bold ideas on how to improve Mexico's law enforcement apparatus. Still, there is significant potential for the López

⁸⁰ Consejo de Desarrollo Social, *La política social del gobierno del Distrito Federal, 2000-2006*, Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, November 2006, http://www.sideso.cdmx.gob.mx/documentos/politica_social_df_2000_2006.pdf

⁸¹ To be fair, the expansion of public sector debt partly reflected the devaluation of the Mexican peso from around 9.3 pesos to the dollar in 2000 compared to 11 pesos to the dollar in 2006. In dollar terms, Mexico City's debt increased during this period by about a third, from around \$3 billion to \$4.1 billion USD. Sergio Sarmiento, "Deuda del Peje," *El Siglo de Torreón*, April 5, 2006. <https://www.elsiglodetorreon.com.mx/noticia/206123.deuda-del-peje-jaque-mate.html>

⁸² Consejo de Desarrollo Social, *La política social del gobierno del Distrito Federal, 2000-2006*, Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, November 2006, p. 127.

Obrador administration's policy choices in this arena to have lasting consequences for years, if not decades, to come.

First, like many of his predecessors, López Obrador seeks to improve Mexico's public security efforts by restructuring federal law enforcement agencies. One of the most important initiatives is the resurrection of a cabinet level secretariat for Public Security and Citizen Protection (Secretaría de Seguridad Pública y Protección Ciudadana, SSPPC). SSPPC is similar to the Public Security Secretariat (Secretaría de Seguridad Pública, SSP) created by President Fox (2000-2006), which assumed the security functions previously held by the Mexican interior ministry (*Gobernación*). After the term of Fox's successor, Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), SSP was reintegrated into the interior ministry under President Enrique Peña Nieto.

The neonatal SSPPC is now headed by Alfonso Durazo Montaña.⁸³ Durazo was a key campaign advisor to the president and a former spokesman for PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio in the 1990s and PAN President Vicente Fox in the early 2000s.⁸⁴ However, Durazo's appointment as head of SSPPC has drawn criticism because of his lack of prior experience as an agency head, and especially in the area of public security. As head of the new agency, Durazo will oversee the work of Gen. Audomaro Martínez Zapata at Mexico's newly created National Intelligence Center (Centro Nacional de Inteligencia), which replaces the CISEN; Planeación, Información y Protección Civil head Leonel Cota Montaña, former-PRD party chairman and ex-Baja California Sur governor; and Órgano Administrativo de Prevención y Reinserción Social head Francisco Garduño.

Given the complexity and importance of this agency, perhaps the most important is whether a relative unknown like Durazo has the administrative and policy expertise to lead SSPPC effectively. On the other hand, given that President López Obrador has made public security a top priority—holding daily, early morning policy sessions—Durazo's primary role may be to serve as a conduit of the president's objectives, as he has done in past administrations. One important change signaled in early January is that the administration is re-assessing the formula for distributing federal security grants to state and local governments. In 2019, the state-level Fund for Security Allocation (Fondo de Aportaciones para la Seguridad, FASP) and the municipal-level Program for Fortifying Security (Programa de Fortalecimiento para la Seguridad, FORTASEG) will use these new criteria to distribute over 11 billion pesos (about \$500 million USD) to state and local governments.⁸⁵

In addition to these changes on the public security front, López Obrador had the opportunity to name the head of the autonomous General Prosecutor's Office (*Fiscalía General*). This agency created five years prior—to replace the Attorney General's Office (*Procuraduría General de la República*, PGR)—with the goal of introducing greater prosecutorial independence from the executive branch. The new fiscal, Alejandro Gertz Manero (79), was appointed for a nine-year

⁸³ "Durazo toma protesta a equipo de trabajo de la nueva SSP," *El Sol de México*, December 1, 2018. <https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx/mexico/politica/durazo-toma-protesta-a-equipo-de-trabajo-de-la-nueva-ssp-2742811.html>

⁸⁴ "Perfil | Alfonso Durazo, el hombre cercano a 3 presidenciables," *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com.mx/alfonso-durazo-el-hombre-cercano-a-3-presidenciables/>

⁸⁵ Dennis A. García, "Recursos para seguridad, bajo nuevos criterios: Durazo," *La Jornada Baja California*, <http://jornadabc.mx/tijuana/06-01-2019/recursos-para-seguridad-bajo-nuevos-criterios-durazo>

period terminating in 2027, coinciding with the first three years of the next presidential term (2024-2030).⁸⁶ Ostensibly, the overlapping mandate is one of the features that will help to ensure some degree of autonomous oversight over the executive branch, beginning with López Obrador's eventual successor.

However, Gertz Manero's appointment has drawn criticism from National Action Party, as well as the Mexican and international NGO community. Having served as one of López Obrador's top security advisors during and after the 2018 presidential campaign, Gertz Manero's appointment leaves the current president with a key ally who could conceivably prevent independent investigations of executive branch activity. On the other hand, Gertz Manero has a long and colorful history as a man of many party affiliations. He oversaw counter-drug operations under the PRI during Operation Condor in the 1970s, served as Public Secretary of the Federal District (1998-2000) during the Mexico City government of Cuautémoc Cárdenas Solórzano, and served as head of the Public Security Secretariat (2000-2004) during the Fox administration.⁸⁷

In this regard, while it might have been ideal to have named a presumably more neutral figure, it would be hard to characterize Gertz Manero as purely partisan.⁸⁸ All things considered, it is difficult to imagine what presidential nominee would satisfy those who call for complete objectivity and unanimous partisan support. What is clear is that Gertz Manero will prove to be an instrumental figure in the new administration's efforts to promote law and order and attack the problem of corruption. How he structures the new Attorney General's office—how federal prosecutorial units are divided into specific jurisdictions and whether there is any overlap—will have lasting consequences for how Mexico fights crime.

F. Debating the Military's Role in Internal Affairs

The involvement of Mexico's military in domestic issues continued to evolve in 2018. The Supreme Court's determination on the Internal Security Law (*Ley de Seguridad Interior*) and President López Obrador's advocacy for the creation of the National Guard (*Guardia Nacional*) were specifically at the center of the discussion.

⁸⁶ The nominee was approved by 91 out of 117 votes from the three parties of López Obrador's political coalition (Morena, PT, and the PES), as well as the MC, PRI, PRD, and PVEM. Support for Gertz Manero was overwhelming compared to the two other nominees: Bernardo Bátiz (9 votes) and Eva Verónica de Gyves (0 votes). Seventeen Senators voted in opposition of the slate. Juan Arvizu Arrijoja, "Eligen a Gertz Manero como primer Fiscal General," *El Universal*, January 18, 2019. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/politica/designan-gertz-manero-como-primer-fiscal-general>

⁸⁷ During his time as Public Security Secretary, Gertz Manero oversaw the creation of a new national police force, the Federal Preventive Police (*Policia Federal Preventiva*, PFP), which eventually became the Federal Police (*Policia Federal*, PF). For more on his work in Operation Condor, see Richard Craig, "Operation Condor: Mexico's Antidrug Campaign Enters a New Era," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Aug. 1980), pp. 345-363.

⁸⁸ Gertz is also a member of the Citizen's Movement Party (Movimiento Ciudadano), formerly known as the Citizen's Convergence Party (Convergencia Ciudadana).

1. Internal Security Law

The Internal Security Law was pushed through Congress in 2017 in an effort to address Mexico's notoriously high levels of crime and violence. Despite being introduced and backed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI), the Internal Security Law 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 2017.⁸⁹ Overall, the law sought to expand safety on the domestic front, minimize threats and risk towards internal security, and increase the role of the military in domestic affairs, including in intelligence and evidence gathering in proposed crimes.

On November 15, 2018, however, the Supreme Court ruled the law unconstitutional, arguing that it went against both the Mexican Constitution and international treaties to which Mexico is a signatory.⁹⁰ The Court also said that Mexico's Congress, which had approved the law the year before, should not legislate on matters of internal security.⁹¹ This seemed to mark an important shift on the part of the Mexican Supreme Court (*Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación*, SCJN), which determined in a crucial 1996 ruling that the military "may participate in civilian activities to protect public safety, in support of civilian authorities."⁹² This ruling provided a constitutional basis for the use of the armed forces for domestic security operations, which had in reality begun decades earlier. Since then, researchers and human rights organizations have documented numerous human rights violations committed by the Mexican military. Such offenses could only be tried in military tribunals until 2012, when a Mexican Supreme Court ruling significantly limited the use of the military justice system for trying cases involving alleged human rights abuses.⁹³

The Supreme Court's ruling that the Internal Security Law is unconstitutional was another important victory for human rights activists and institutions, which fought hard to stop the law's passage. The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), for example, shared its concerns about the law in a communication just weeks before the Supreme Court's decision. In particular, WOLA noted the control the new law would have given the military in overseeing civilian authorities in domestic affairs, and the military's expanded role in investigations. "Paired with the absence of effective controls and accountability mechanisms to oversee those actions, this will limit the power of authorities within the civilian justice system, resulting in impunity," WOLA

⁸⁹ Calderón, Laura et al. "Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2017." *Justice in Mexico*. April 2018. <https://justiceinmexico.org/2018-drug-violence-mexico-report/>

⁹⁰ Roldán, Mariluz. "CIDH celebra invalidación de Ley de Seguridad Interior." *El Universal*. November 26, 2018. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/politica/cidh-celebra-invalidacion-de-ley-de-seguridad-interior>

⁹¹ Roldán, Mariluz. "CIDH celebra invalidación de Ley de Seguridad Interior." *El Universal*. November 26, 2018. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/politica/cidh-celebra-invalidacion-de-ley-de-seguridad-interior>

⁹² Moloeznik points out that the SCJN's first decision or "thesis" was published in the *Semanario Judicial de la Federación y su Gaceta*, Novena Época, Tomo III, Mexico, March, 1996. Subsequent decisions by the SCJN established legal precedent for military intervention, including Tesis P/J 35/2000, 39/2000; in, *Seminario Judicial de la Federación y su Gaceta*, Tomo XI, April, 2000, pages 556 and 557. See Marcos Pablo Moloeznik, "The Militarization of Public Security and the Role of the Military in Mexico," in Robert Donnelly and David A. Shirk (eds.), *Police and Public Security in Mexico* (San Diego: Justice in Mexico, 2009).

⁹³ Cory Molzahn, "Mexico's Supreme Court Limits Reach of Military Jurisdiction," *Justice in Mexico*, August 15, 2012, <https://justiceinmexico.org/mexicos-supreme-court-limits-reach-of-military-jurisdiction/>

stated.⁹⁴ The law also drew criticism from the general public. A Change.org petition submitted a month after the draft law was initially published accumulated more than 467,000 signatures urging the Mexican government to reject the law. WOLA summarized that the five main reasons for the public's rebuke included the following:

- Lack of accountability mechanisms and civilian oversight;
- Expanding the military's jurisdiction over civilians;
- Insufficient regulation of the military's use of force;
- Lack of transparency in how the Internal Security Law will be implemented; [and]
- The Internal Security Law disincentives police reform.⁹⁵

Esmeralda Arosema de Troitiño, the spokesperson for Mexico's Interamerican Commission on Human Rights (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, CIDH) argued that the Supreme Court's decision set a precedent for President López Obrador's then-incoming government. The decision "constitutes an indispensable judicial precedent as the base for the new government to present a concrete plan to gradually draw down military in public security matters..." Arosema de Troitiño stated.⁹⁶

2. The National Guard

While the Internal Security Law was up for debate, similar developments with the proposed bill to restructure Mexico's public security apparatus were also ongoing. President López Obrador ran on the platform to create a National Guard (*Guardia Nacional*), a 60,000-person armed security force drawn from the ranks of the Mexican military and police, which was approved by the Mexican Senate on February 21, 2019 and the Chamber of Deputies on February 28, 2019.⁹⁷ The National Guard is to be introduced over the first few months of 2019 and will ultimately replace Mexico's Federal Police (*Policía Federal*, PF), an agency that was once similarly touted as the solution to Mexico's security woes.⁹⁸ Indeed, López Obrador's immediate predecessor, President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), tried to create a 40,000-person national police force, which he referred to as a *gendarmerie*, though this initiative ultimately resulted in a new, specialized division within the existing Federal Police force, which currently reports to the Secretary for Security and Citizen Protection (*Secretaría de Seguridad y Protección Ciudadana*, SSPC).

⁹⁴ Joint Statement. "International Observatory on Mexico: The Decision of Mexico's Supreme Court on the Internal Security Law Will Set a Fundamental Precedent on Militarization in the Country and in the Region." *Washington Office on Latin America*. November 2, 2018. <https://www.wola.org/2018/11/mexico-supreme-court-internal-security-law/>

⁹⁵ Suarez-Enriquez, Ximena and Maureen Meyer. "Multiple Sectors Push Back Against the Implementation of Mexico's New Internal Security Law." *Washington Office on Latin America*. January 25, 2018.

⁹⁶ Roldán, Mariluz. "CIDH celebra invalidación de Ley de Seguridad Interior." *El Universal*. November 26, 2018. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/politica/cidh-celebra-invalidacion-de-ley-de-seguridad-interior>

⁹⁷ The bill required the amendment of various articles of the Mexican Constitution in order to mitigate concerns of human rights violations and civilian oversight, and therefore required approval by a majority of state legislatures, as well.

⁹⁸ The agency was initially created as the Federal Preventive Police (Policía Federal Preventiva, PFP) during the Fox administration and redesigned as the Federal Police under President Felipe Calderón.

By contrast, as originally contemplated, López Obrador's proposed replacement for the Federal Police would have reported to Mexico's military command, a prospect that was highly criticized due to concerns about human rights protections and accountability. Causa en Común, a collective of more than 500 civil society organizations and businesses, delivered a petition to Congress in November 2018 urging their elected officials to reject President López Obrador's proposal. Congresswoman Lucia Rojas also argued that the National Guard would only deepen the military-focused strategy already in Mexico. "And it's become clear in the last 12 years that there's absolutely no evidence that having the army on the streets helps to reduce the violence," she said.⁹⁹ For his part, Jan Jarab of the UN's Office on Human Rights in Mexico sent a letter to Mexico's Congress arguing that the National Guard "would establish at the constitutional level this paradigm of military involvement in security issues, the same one that has contributed to the deterioration of human rights in Mexico."¹⁰⁰ The Washington Office on Latin America also expressed concerns about human rights protections, arguing that the Mexican Government needed to establish a proper framework for the National Guard with effective human rights protections and civilian oversight.¹⁰¹

López Obrador's initial proposal was modified in response to these criticisms. As approved, the agency will have a civilian reporting structure, as it will form part of the cabinet-level SSPC, which is currently headed by a civilian named Alfonso Durazo. *The New York Times* reported that a blended force of 18,000 Federal Police officers, 35,000 military police and 8,000 naval police will be transferred into the newly-created National Guard.¹⁰² As a civilian agency, all National Guard personnel will be subject to legal action in civilian courts rather than military tribunals. Moreover, as *Reuters* reported, constitutional changes introduced to create the National Guard will require that "national guard members receive human rights training, are tried by civil courts and will not be able to move detainees to military institutions."¹⁰³

Ultimately, the creation of the National Guard is intended to rectify the fact that state and local police forces are poorly-trained, under-compensated, inadequately staffed, and too easily corrupted to confront the law enforcement challenges they face, and particularly problem of organized crime. Still, all crime is inevitably "local" and, most criminal offenses in Mexico fall under state and municipal jurisdiction. Moreover, the international conventional wisdom on policing emphasizes community engagement and local problem-solving approaches as the key to

⁹⁹ "Mexican president-elect's party presents national guard plan." *Reuters*. November 20, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-politics/mexican-president-elects-party-presents-national-guard-plan-idUSKCN1NP2MZ>

¹⁰⁰ Jarab continued, "[It] would threaten the possibility of having a capable civilian corps in the future that could exercise public security in strict accordance with international human rights standards." Sánchez, Citlal Giles. "Preocupa a representante de la ONU en México creación de la Guardia Nacional." *La Jornada Guerrero*. December 22, 2018. <https://www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/index.php/politica/item/5446-preocupa-a-representante-de-la-onu-en-mexico-creacion-de-la-guardia-nacional>

¹⁰¹ Press Release. "Mexico Must Consider Human Rights, Accountability Concerns When Implementing its New National Guard." *Washington Office on Latin America*. February 28, 2019. <https://www.wola.org/2019/02/mexico-national-guard-human-rights-accountability/>

¹⁰² Kirk Semple and Paulina Villegas, "Mexico Approves 60,000-Strong National Guard. Critics Call It More of the Same," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2019.

¹⁰³ "Mexican president-elect's party presents national guard plan." *Reuters*. November 20, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-politics/mexican-president-elects-party-presents-national-guard-plan-idUSKCN1NP2MZ>

reducing crime. Thus, it remains unclear how well a national civilian police force—whether called the “federal police,” the “gendarmerie,” or the “national guard”—will be able to properly re-enforce state and local law enforcement efforts, or provide effective responses to local community problems.

G. Changing U.S.-Mexico Security Relations

U.S.-Mexico relations are entering a period of uncertainty with two new heads of state taking office in the span of a relatively short period of time, following President Trump’s inauguration in January 21, 2017 and President López Obrador’s formal swearing in ceremony on December 1, 2018. Coming from opposing ends of the ideological spectrum, both were controversial, populist candidates who won their respective vote with grand promises for radical change. Prominent in his campaign for the presidency was Trump’s pledge to increase U.S. security measures along the Southwest border, as well as to renegotiate trade agreements – two issues that played out in 2018.

1. Border Security

This past year saw President Trump dramatically and publicly, though unsuccessfully, push for the U.S. Congress to approve the building and fortification of the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border wall. This ultimately led to longest U.S. government shutdown when President Trump refused to sign the spending bill without funds appropriated for border security. Tension surrounding the wall’s construction was heightened as a humanitarian crisis unfolded at the border in November 2018 with the arrival of a 5,000-person caravan of Central American migrants. President Trump continues to threaten to close the U.S.-Mexico border in response to the alleged national security concerns posed by the caravan. Both Democrats and Republicans have strongly cautioned against such actions given the enormous economic impact it would have, among other consequences.

2. NAFTA and the USMCA

U.S.-Mexico relations were also put to the test in 2018 with the renegotiation of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was part of President Trump’s promise to address he deemed as unfair trade agreements. The revised NAFTA, which is known as the U.S.-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) Free Trade Agreement, has not yet been agreed upon by the U.S. Congress. Still, the act of renegotiating it put bilateral relations (and, in this case, trilateral relations) in the public spotlight. On manufacturing, the Trump administration negotiated new “Rules of Origin” to increase the North American content of goods traded between all three countries from 62.5% to 75%. In particular, the United States will benefit from new content requirements for U.S. steel, aluminum, auto parts, chemicals, and other industrial goods. Mexico will also be forced to increase pay to \$16/hour in the 40-45% of exports in the automotive sector. In the service sector, where the United States has substantial advantages and trade surpluses, new regulations will help to lower barriers on financial services, telecommunications, and data services. Also, new protections on copyright have been introduced to address intellectual property concerns that were not envisioned under NAFTA at the dawn of the internet age.

3. Mérida Initiative Cooperation

U.S.-Mexico cooperation continues under the bilateral security cooperation agreement known as the Merida Initiative. However, 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).¹⁰⁴ Although Mexico and the United States have collaborated on these issues, experts in the field like Clare Seelke of the Congressional Research Service express doubts about the future bilateral cooperation on these matters.¹⁰⁵ Former President Peña Nieto was 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 could indeed increase if President López Obrador adopts a less tolerant posture vis-à-vis the anti-Mexico rhetoric of President Trump than did his predecessor.

V. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As with past versions of this publication, *Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico* concludes with reflections and policy recommendations. As reported in this year's publication, Mexico's security crisis continues to reach new heights, with no end in sight. It is too early to tell if the new government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador will be able to bring down the tide of violence in his first few years in office, as he has pledged to do. However, it is not clear that President López Obrador's government will be able to make significant progress toward this goal, or what policy options offer the most effective ways of doing so within a six year timeframe. The president appears to be convinced that strong leadership to address Mexico's underlying socioeconomic deficits is the key that unlocks the door to a brighter future. This is a compelling notion, but it oversimplifies the challenge at hand.

For the past ten years, this report has helped to illustrate that the problems of organized crime and violence in Mexico are immense, complex, and interconnected. Indeed, as the authors have tried to underscore, one cannot be addressed without the other. While socioeconomic deficits are an important underlying contributor to the "unrule" of law in Mexico, recent surges in violence are a function of the choices and strategies that past governments have employed to combat organized crime, as well as the complex interactions among criminal organizations themselves. Just as concerning, the ability of organized crime groups to thrive hinges critically on the acquiescence, protection, and even active involvement of corrupt government officials, as well as corrupt private sector elites, who share in the benefits of illicit economic activities.

This is part of the reason that targeting kingpins has been ineffective; the hydra is a many-headed-beast that cannot be slain without removing all the heads (and making sure they cannot grow back). An effective strategy to combat organized crime, therefore, necessarily relies on thwarting criminal actors at all levels: not just those at the top, and not just those on the street. To combat organized crime and improve citizen security, more generally, the Mexican government needs to hold violent actors to account, aggressively prosecute official corruption, and starve the beast by

¹⁰⁴ Calderón, Laura, Ferreira Rodríguez, Octavio, and David Shirk. "Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2017." *Justice in Mexico*. April 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Kuckertz, Rita. "Panel analyzes the 2018 Mexican Election." *Justice in Mexico*. October 3, 2018. https://justiceinmexico.org/panel_analyzes_2018_mexican_election/

routing out illicit dealings in the business and financial sector (including money laundering, fraud, and other white collar financial schemes that frequently involve organized crime).

In this sense, President López Obrador's efforts to crack down on fuel theft rings exposed the many layers of illegality and corruption in a key area of Mexico's economy—the energy sector—and the challenge of addressing these issues. As noted, fuel theft was so pervasive that PEMEX officials and private sector distributors were very likely involved at multiple levels. Stopping the loss of oil revenue is therefore likely to be a major accomplishment for the López Obrador administration, but if the perpetrators of these activities go unpunished, impunity will continue to reign in Mexico. With these points in mind, the authors offer a number of recommendations to encourage Mexico's progress in combatting organized crime and violence in Mexico:

A. Better Monitoring and Analysis of Mexico's Rule of Law Challenges

There are several organizations that are working actively to try to trace and analyze the problem of organized crime and violence in Mexico, 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 Mexico's rule of law challenges, particularly that which is associated with organized crime. Unfortunately, even as Mexico's security crisis has worsened recently, major donors have scaled back or turned away entirely from supporting work focused on addressing Mexico's rule of law challenges.

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 Sinaloa cartel leader Joaquín Guzmán or CJNG head 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 and branches 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 have a homicide rate that is three times higher for journalists (and 12 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 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.

IV. 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.¹⁰⁶ 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 “family.”¹⁰⁷ 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 construed and culturally variable concept.

Thus, although government officials, schools, 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.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the scale, scope, complexity, and purpose of

¹⁰⁶ 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.

¹⁰⁷ 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 have never met, should that case be considered one of “intra-family violence” or merely a random coincidence among strangers?

¹⁰⁸ 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 Bielopera and Finklea (2012) point out, contemporary discussions of organized crime focus especially on its transnational nature and its ability to challenge the state, particularly in an era of accelerated flows of goods, people, and capital across national borders. See: Jerome P. Bielopera and Kristin M. Finklea, “Organized Crime: An Evolving Challenge for U.S. Law Enforcement,” *CRS Reports for Congress*. January 2012. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2012); Michael D. Maltz, “On Defining ‘Organized Crime’: The Development of a Definition and a Typology,” *Crime & Delinquency* 1976 22:338; Moises Naim, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers, and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2006).

“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*). 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 extraordinarily 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.

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 any other form of violence crimes. Hence, homicide data provide an important measure of Mexico’s recent violence.

C. 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, National Institute of Statistics and Geography (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 those caused by car crashes.

A second source of data on homicide comes from criminal investigation 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 there is an enormous feat, and highly uncommon; not even the FBI Uniform Crime Report provides such timely updated information on homicides.

As 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 homicide 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 of 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.¹⁰⁹ 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

¹⁰⁹ 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 coroners' 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.

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, as noted in this report.

D. 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).¹¹⁰

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 to 2008, based on data from the Mexican Attorney General's Office (PGR).¹¹¹ 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 2013.¹¹² 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

¹¹⁰ According to Mexican security expert Viridiana Ríos, who worked with the Office of the Mexican President on analyzing these data, the Technical Secretary for the National Security Council (CSN) coordinated the compilation of these data at that time during the Calderón administration.

¹¹¹ Moleznik, Marco 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.

¹¹² 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).

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 newspapers *Reforma* and *Milenio* – have been the most consistent, comprehensive, and reliable in such monitoring efforts.¹¹³ 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.¹¹⁴ Other sources, including *El Blog del Narco* and the *Menos Días Aquí* blog, have contributed to the tracking and reporting efforts by developing online platforms for reporting and sharing data on the problem of violence in Mexico.

Along these lines, Justice in Mexico has worked with dozens of research associates, university students, and volunteers to construct a dataset that documents and classifies individual, high profile homicides that bear characteristics that suggest a link to drug trafficking and organized crime. This dataset – called *Memoria* – currently includes more than 20,000 victims, and wherever possible provides specific individual characteristics (e.g., name, gender, age, narco-messages, etc.).¹¹⁵ 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.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ 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 done so with less detail than in the past. For this reason, Justice in Mexico has worked to incorporate data from *Milenio*, as well as the Lantia consulting group headed by Eduardo Guerrero and reported by *Excelsior* in Leo Zuckermann's column, "Juegos de Poder."

¹¹⁴ 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/1wcz0u>. See also, Chris Kyle, "Violence and Insecurity in Guerrero," Mexico Institute and Justice in Mexico Briefing Paper Series on *Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Organized Crime*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; University of San Diego, January 20, 2015.

¹¹⁵ This dataset was referenced in earlier 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.

¹¹⁶ 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 STAT. For more information on multiple data imputation in statistical methodologies, please see: Andrew Gelman and Jennifer Hill, "Missing

E. 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 2016.¹¹⁷ However, SNSP's municipal level data on organized crime-style homicides run from December 2006 through September 2011, and again from January 2013 to June 2013. There are also gaps in the data available for *Reforma* newspaper for monthly figures on organized crime-style homicides, though such data are available from *Milenio*. Justice in Mexico has attempted to compensate for these missing figures by using estimations calculated to reflect likely patterns wherever possible. However, the lack of continuity and timeliness in data collection efforts makes it necessary to rely on different sources and occasional inferential projections to address different questions.

In terms of methodological concerns, there are also questions regarding the techniques for identifying and categorizing cases of drug trafficking and organized crime-style homicides. As 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 Crime Victimization Survey (Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública, ENVIPE) 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.¹¹⁸ In addition, there is also a large number of missing persons whose fate remains a mystery.¹¹⁹

Data Imputation," in Andrew Gelman and Jennifer Hill, *Data Analysis Using Regression and Multilevel/Hierarchical Models*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, Pp. 529-543.

¹¹⁷ SNSP data at the municipal level are available from 2011 to 2013.

¹¹⁸ 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>

¹¹⁹ 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 Attorney General's Office (PGR). "INFORME ANNUAL 2014: Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas

Meanwhile, hundreds of homicide victims only turn up weeks or months after the fact, as evidenced by the discovery of mass graves in many different parts of the country, particularly those areas most affected by drug trafficking and organized crime activities. 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 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 6: Pearsons Correlations for Homicide and OCG-Homicide Data in Mexico

	INEGI	SNSP	CNDH-OCG	SNSP-OCG	Reforma-OCG	Milenio-OCG	Lantia-OCG
INEGI	-	0.944	0.830	0.996	0.899	0.981	0.945
SNSP	0.945	-	1.000	0.996	0.891	0.919	0.945
CNDH-OCG	0.830	0.830	-	1.000	0.996	1.000	n.a.
SNSP-OCG	0.996	0.996	0.996	-	n.a.	1.000	n.a.
Reforma-OCG	0.910	0.891	1.000	0.996	-	0.569	0.727
Milenio-OCG	0.981	0.919	1.000	1.000	0.569	-	0.884
Lantia-OCG	0.945	0.933	n.a.	n.a.	0.727	0.884	-

The correlations between the data reported by these various sources are generally very strong, suggesting that there is a high degree of consistency in the direction and trends found in the data being compared. Thus, for example, when INEGI data shows an increase in the number of homicide victims in a particular year, SNSP data on homicides area 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 relationship between Reforma’s data and other sources, since the former’s annual figures do not as consistently match the others.

(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/

A word cloud featuring the names of Mexican cities, including Guadalajara, Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana, Leon, Acapulco, Cancun, Irapuato, Culiacan, Tlaquepaque, Ecatepec, and Toluca. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping pattern, with larger fonts indicating higher frequency. The color palette is monochromatic, using various shades of red and brown.

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