

Drug Violence in Mexico

Data and Analysis Through 2014



SPECIAL REPORT

By Kimberly Heinle, Cory Molzahn, and David A. Shirk



Justice in Mexico Project

Department of Political Science & International Relations

University of San Diego

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About Justice in Mexico:

Started in 2001, Justice in Mexico (www.justiceinmexico.org) is a program dedicated to promoting analysis, informed public discourse, and policy decisions; and government, academic, and civic cooperation to improve public security, rule of law, and human rights in Mexico. Justice in Mexico advances its mission through cutting-edge, policy-focused research; public education and outreach; and direct engagement with policy makers, experts, and stakeholders. The program is presently based at the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of San Diego (USD), and involves university faculty, students, and volunteers from the United States and Mexico. From 2005-2013, the project was based at the USD Trans-Border Institute at the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, and from 2001-2005 it was based at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California-San Diego.

About the Report:

This is one of a series of special reports that have been published on a semi-annual basis by Justice in Mexico since 2010, each of which examines issues related to crime and violence, judicial sector reform, and human rights in Mexico. The *Drug Violence in Mexico* report series examines patterns of crime and violence attributable to organized crime, and particularly drug trafficking organizations in Mexico. This report was authored by Kimberly Heinle, Cory Molzahn, and David A. Shirk, and builds on the work of past reports in this series. The report was formally released on April 29, 2015 and was made possible by the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. This report does not represent the views or opinions of the University of San Diego or the sponsoring organization.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFO	Arellano Felix Organization, an organized crime group from Tijuana
AK-type	Avtomat Kalashnikova, assault rifle used by organized crime groups, e.g., AK-47
AR-type	Assault rifle typically used by organized crime groups, e.g., AR-15
BC Sur	Baja California Sur, a state in western Mexico
BLO	Beltran Leyva Organization, an organized crime group
CDG	Cartel del Golfo (Gulf Cartel), an organized crime group
CENAPI	Centro Nacional de Planeación, Análisis e Información Para el Combate a la Delincuencia (Mexican National Center for Planning, Analysis and Information for Combating Crime)
CIDA	Cartel Independiente de Acapulco (Independent Cartel of Acapulco), an organized crime group
CIDE	Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, a Mexican center for teaching and research in the Social Sciences
CISEN	Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional (Mexican Intelligence Agency)
CJNG	Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, an organized crime group
CNDH	Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (National Human Rights Commission)
CONAPO	Consejo Nacional de Población (National Population Council), a national agency for population estimates
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CPS	Cartel del Pacífico Sur (South Pacific Cartel), an organized crime group
CSN	Consejo de Seguridad Nacional (National Security Council)
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency, an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice
DTO	Drug trafficking organization
ENVIPE	Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (National Victimization and Public Security Perception Survey)
Edomex	Estado de México, a state in central Mexico
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
OCG	Organized crime group
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party), a Mexican political party
PGR	Procuraduría General de la República (Attorney General's Office)
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolution Party), a Mexican political party
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party), a Mexican political party
SCJN	Suprema Corte de Justicia Nacional (National Supreme Court of Justice), Mexico's supreme court.
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

- **Violence is lower in Mexico than elsewhere in the Americas, but average for the region.** Levels of violence are relatively lower in Mexico than in several other countries in the Americas, but are about average for the Western Hemisphere. Mexico's 2012 homicide rate of 21.5 was just above the region's average of approximately 21.4 homicides per 100,000 people. However, this was up nearly threefold from Mexico's rate of 8.1 per 100,000 in 2007. No other country in the hemisphere has seen such a large increase in the number or rate of homicides over the last decade.
- **Homicides had been declining through the mid-2000s, reaching a record low in 2007.** Continuing a long-term trend, 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). Under Zedillo, the number of intentional homicides declined fairly steadily from 15,839 in 1994 to 10,737 in 2000, totaling 80,311 homicides. The annual number of homicides fluctuated somewhat under Fox, but continued to decline generally, with a total of 60,162 homicides. Moreover, the number of homicides actually reached a record low of 8,867 intentional homicides in 2007, the first full year in office for Felipe Calderón (2006-2012).
- **Violence grew dramatically after 2008, with the number of homicides peaking in 2011.** After Calderón's first year, the number of intentional homicides documented by INEGI climbed sharply, with year-over-year increases of more than 58% in 2008, 41% in 2009, 30% in 2010, and 5% in 2011. As predicted by last year's Justice in Mexico drug violence report, the number of intentional homicides documented by INEGI declined somewhat in 2012, Calderón's final year in office. Specifically, our March 2013 report predicted that INEGI would register a modest decline for 2012 (no greater than 8.5%). According to figures released in late-2013, the number of intentional homicides documented by INEGI for 2012 declined about 4% to 26,037. 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.
- **The total number of homicides appears to have declined by nearly 15% again in 2014.** While INEGI's figures are not available for 2014, preliminary data from Mexico's National Security System (SNSP) suggests that the total number of intentional homicides in 2013 declined again this year by about the same proportion as in 2013. However, some analysts are skeptical about SNSP's data because of concerns about possible political manipulation by the Peña Nieto administration, so these findings should be viewed with caution. Keeping such concerns in mind, at the time of this report, SNSP's tally of all intentional homicides in 2014 was 15,649, down 13.8% from the 18,146 reported for 2013 the same time last year. The authors estimate a more modest rate of decline (about 9%) for INEGI's figures, to be released later in 2015.
- **Mexico's recent violence is largely attributable to drug trafficking and organized crime.** A large part of the sudden increase in violence in Mexico is attributable to drug trafficking and organized crime groups. Tallies compiled independently by media organizations in Mexico suggest that at least a third and as many as half of all intentional homicides in 2014 bore characteristics typical of organized-crime related killings, including the use of high-caliber automatic weapons, torture, dismemberment, and explicit messages involving organized-crime

groups. The Mexican newspaper *Reforma* put the figure at 6,400 organized-crime-style homicides in 2014 (though its coverage appeared to be less complete and less consistent with other sources than previous years), while *Milenio* reported 7,993 for the year.

- **Amid declining violence, serious security crises continued in central & Pacific states.** Even amid the overall reduction in violence, there were serious security crises in central and Pacific states, notably the states of Guerrero, México, and Michoacán. In early 2014, clashes broke out between the Knights Templar Organization (*Caballeros Templarios*, or KTO) and local “self-defense” (*autodefensa*) groups in Michoacán, causing the federal government to intervene and deputize some self-defense groups, creating official Rural Defense Forces. In late 2014, there were a series of violent crackdowns by authorities that resulted in the deaths of scores of people — including both alleged criminals and innocent civilians—in the states of México and Guerrero, provoking national and international condemnations. In particular, when municipal authorities in the town of Iguala, Guerrero allegedly turned over dozens of student protestors to a local organized crime group known as the *Guerreros Unidos*, the perceived corruption and ineptitude of government officials led to massive protests and even acts of violence throughout the country.
- **The Mexican government arrested major drug traffickers, including “El Chapo” Guzmán.** Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) has continued the previous administration’s efforts to arrest major organized crime figures. In early 2014, the Peña Nieto administration succeeded in arresting Mexico’s most notorious drug trafficker Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán (head of the Sinaloa Cartel). In 2014, federal authorities also eliminated key leaders of the Knights Templar Organization, killing Nazario Moreno González, a.k.a. “El Chayo” (who had been previously presumed dead) and Enrique “El Kike” Plancarte Solís. In early 2015, authorities continued to make important arrests targeting the Knights Templar Organization, the Gulf Cartel, the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, and the Zetas.
- **Recent organized crime arrests have not appeared to produce large spikes in violence.** Some experts say that destroying leadership structures leads to greater violence because it contributes to infighting, splintering, and/or encroachment by rival criminal organizations. However, compared to previous years, the Mexican government’s arrests of high-level members of organized crime groups have not resulted in such dramatic surges in violence due to infighting, splintering, or encroachment by rival criminal organizations. This may be attributable to a number of factors, including the dwindling size and capacity of criminal organizations in Mexico, the reduction in competition over drug production and trafficking routes, and/or the possible collusion of government officials to broker a peace.
- **Mexican security efforts appear more focused on prevention and criminal justice reform.** While President Peña Nieto continued the same strategies of the previous administration during his first year in office, he also began to emphasize crime prevention and judicial system reform more strongly than in the past. Indeed, both the federal and state governments have moved into high gear in the effort to transition Mexico to a new oral, adversarial criminal procedure— popularly referred to as “oral trials” (*juicios orales*)— that proponents believe will provide greater transparency, efficiency, and fairness in the Mexican criminal justice system. In 2014, the Peña Nieto administration moved these efforts forward considerably by approving a Unified Code of Criminal Procedure that will be implemented at the federal and state levels throughout the country by June 2016.

Drug Violence in Mexico

Data and Analysis Through 2014

I. INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the best available data at present on crime and violence in Mexico, particularly as it relates to organized crime. This is a topic of both enormous complexity and also urgent concern, not only to Mexican government officials and citizens but to the United States and Mexico's southern neighbors, as well. Unfortunately for all concerned, 2014 brought mixed results, at best. While Mexico's homicide rates continued to fall for the third year in a row, levels of violent crime remain unreasonably high by the standards of most ordinary Mexicans. Meanwhile, important successes in combatting organized crime—including the arrest of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, arguably the world's most wanted drug trafficker—were coupled with major setbacks, including terrible massacres, and enormous public outrage over Mexico's security situation.

The Justice in Mexico program based at the University of San Diego has worked for over a decade to provide a detailed analysis of crime and security issues in Mexico. Justice in Mexico first began to compile data specifically on organized crime related homicides in 2007, as human rights and media organizations started to publish such information. This data was incorporated into our regular monthly reports and disseminated to U.S. and Mexican security specialists. As violence continued to rise, Justice in Mexico produced its first annual report on “drug violence” in Mexico in 2010, in an effort to help make sense of the limited and confusing data available on the country's security situation. Since then, Justice in Mexico's annual *Drug Violence in Mexico* reports have compiled the latest available data and analysis to help inform a U.S. and English language audience, since international news media coverage of Mexico tends to be fleeting and gravitates toward sporadic, sensationalistic incidents rather than the analysis of broader issues and longer-term trends.

As the sixth report in this series, this analysis builds on past findings and seeks to provide new insights on Mexico's security situation. The authors draw on the latest available data from multiple sources, with a primary emphasis on the second year in office for Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018). While President Peña Nieto appeared to deliberately downplay Mexico's security challenges during his first year in office, 2014 tragically brought those problems to the forefront. As we discuss in this report, during 2014, the Peña Nieto administration was under enormous public and international pressure as a result of the rise of vigilante groups in the southern Pacific state of Michoacán and elsewhere; a surge of unaccompanied minors from Central America passing through Mexico to the U.S. border in order to flee violence in their home countries; and continued high

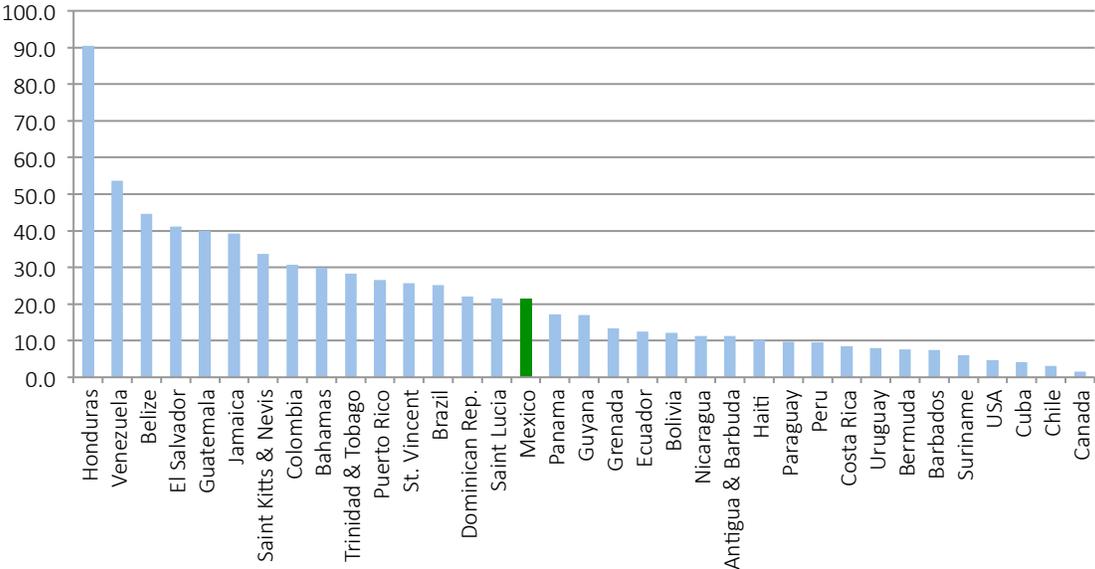
profile violence, including the extrajudicial killings of dozens of civilians ordered by Mexican government officials. What became particularly notable in 2014 was the growing impatience of ordinary citizens in the face of the seeming complacency, ineptitude, or even complicity of Mexican government officials in relation to problems of crime and violence. In 2014, this resulted in both local militia-style activities by “self defense” forces, as noted above, and spontaneous violent protests throughout the country. Thus, even as there have been significant improvements on a number of indicators, the overall security situation in Mexico remains quite precarious and major improvements to strengthen the rule of law are urgently needed.

II. UNDERSTANDING MEXICO’S RECENT VIOLENCE

A. Mexico’s Violence in Perspective

As in previous years, it is important to note at the outset that how one measures violence is contingent on many, often highly subjective factors. By some measures, the level of violence in Mexico is “modest,” particularly within the Western hemisphere. As Justice in Mexico has noted in previous reports, the latest data on homicide rates—one of the most commonly used indicators for comparing levels of violence—are much higher in other countries in the Americas. As illustrated in Figure 1, in recent years, Honduras has had nearly four times as many murders per capita as Mexico, El Salvador’s rate is three times as high, and Venezuela’s is more than twice as high. Even Colombia, which is frequently referenced as a “success story” in efforts to reduce crime and violence, has a homicide rate that is nearly 50% greater than Mexico’s.

Figure 1: National Homicide Rates (per 100,000 inhabitants) for Selected Latin American Countries in 2012

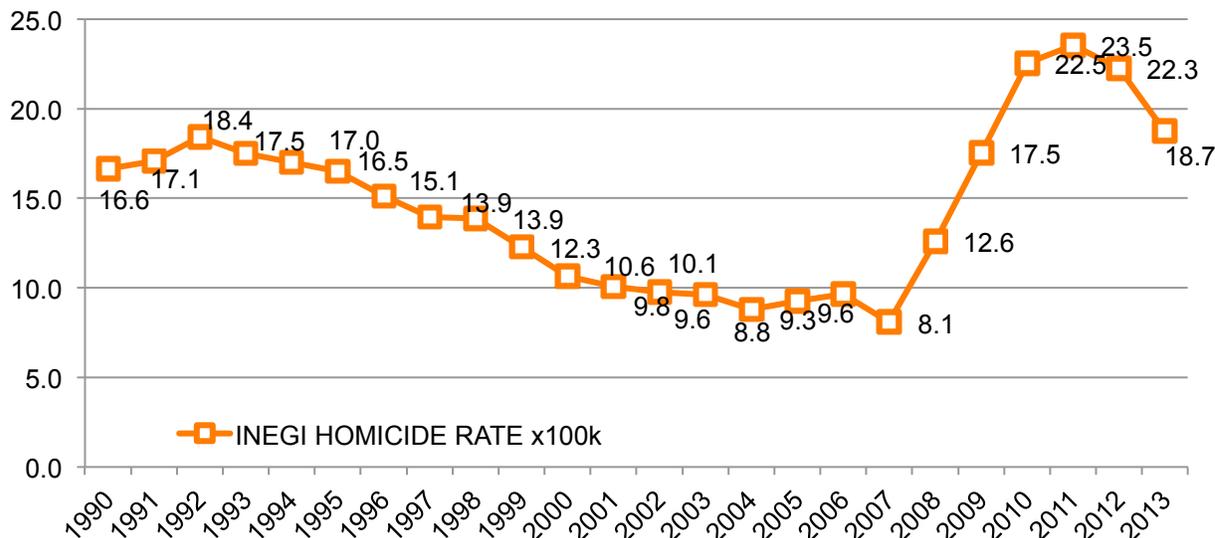


Note: This chart uses the latest available UNODC intentional homicide data for each country from 2012. See UNODC *Global Study on Homicide*, released March 2014.

Yet, this comparison offers little cause for celebration. Contemporary Latin America has some of the highest rates of criminal violence in the world, in many cases matching or exceeding the levels of violence seen during the civil conflicts that plagued the region decades ago. What is different today about violence in Latin America is that rather than fighting and dying for revolutionary ideologies, the region's young men are fighting and dying for little more than a fistful of dollars. Indeed, some reports in recent years suggest that paid gunmen and assassins working on behalf of organized crime groups earn as little as a few hundred dollars a month. In a sad twist on Francis Fukuyama's vision of our times, the "end of ideology" has wrought violence and conflict in Latin America on a scale and with a savagery that is perhaps even more horrific because there is no cause or deeper meaning.

While Mexico's violence is about average when it comes to the rate of homicides per capita, its security challenges are arguably of significant concern for a number of reasons. First, the rate of homicides in Mexico escalated quite dramatically in recent years, reversing a multi-decade downward trend. Historical data suggest that homicide in Mexico generally declined from the 1930s into the mid-2000s.¹ However, from 2007 to 2011, Mexico's rate climbed sharply, increasing threefold from roughly 8.1 to 23.5 homicides per 100,000, according to figures from Mexico's National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information, INEGI.² By World Health Organization standards, a homicide rate over 20 per 100,000 is considered to be at "epidemic" levels. While current data suggest a decline in homicides and the overall rate, the elevated level of homicide has provoked enormous alarm both domestically and internationally about the problem of violence in Mexico.

Figure 2: Homicide Rate in Mexico, 1995-2013



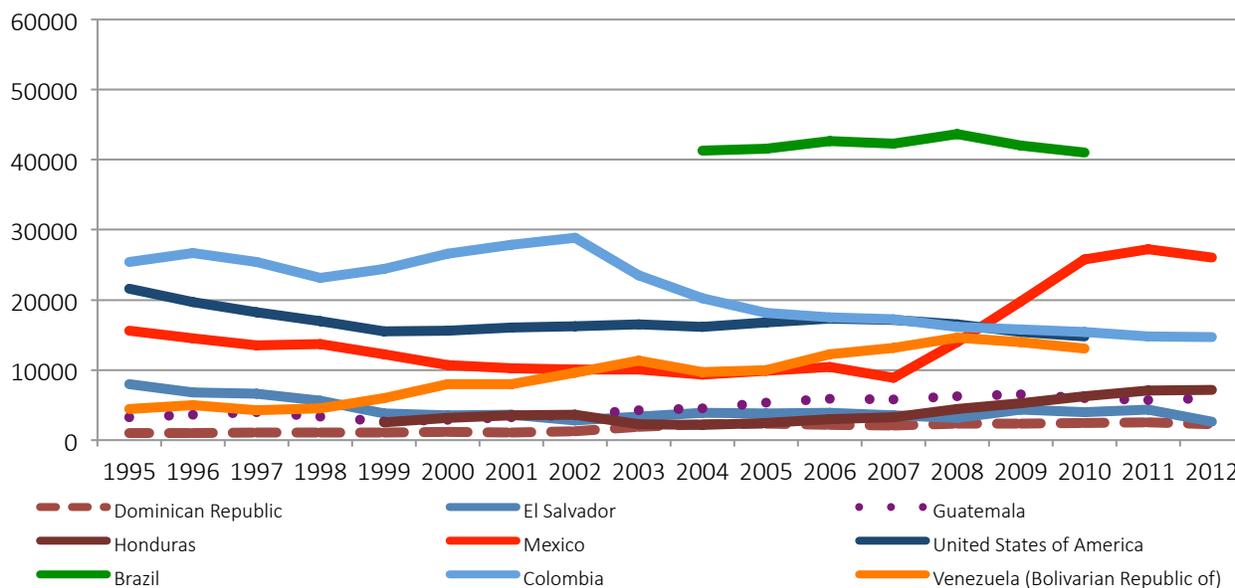
Source: INEGI. Authors' calculations based on INEGI homicide data and CONAPO's 2010 population estimates for all years. Results vary when revised CONAPO population estimates from later years are applied.

¹ Shirk and Ríos (2007) use data from homicide prosecutions to show the longer term, downward trend in homicide cases from the 1930s to the mid-2000s. Escalante (2009) uses actual homicide data to demonstrate that this trend continued from the 1990s to the late 2000s. See David A. Shirk and Alejandra Ríos Cázares. "Introduction: 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.

² It is important to note that these INEGI figures do not differentiate between intentional homicides and unintentional homicides (e.g., car accidents).

A second reason why Mexico’s violence has provoked such enormous concern has to do with the sheer number of murders in the country that resulted from these increases. Because Mexico had an estimated population of nearly 120 million people in 2014—the third largest population among all countries in the Americas, after United States and Brazil—even a modest increase in Mexico’s homicide rate translates into the loss of thousands of lives.³ Indeed, during the four-year rise in violence from 2007 to 2011, the number of murders increased from 8,867 to 27,199. No other country in the Western Hemisphere saw such a large increase either in the homicide rate or in the absolute number of homicides over the last two decades.

Figure 3: Total Homicides in Selected Neighboring Countries, 1995-2012



Source: UNODC, homicides (1995-2011).

Of course, as we noted in last year’s report, not all forms of death provoke an equal sense of concern and alarm, and there is little doubt that Mexico’s violence has provoked greater attention than other troubling problems around the world. For example, South Korea has had a suicide rate of 29 per 100,000 people in recent years; thus, more South Koreans died by their own hand than the number of people murdered in Mexico even amid the worst of its violence. More broadly, as a matter of human security, nearly two thirds of deaths around the world are attributable to non-contagious diseases, like coronary disease or diabetes, and roughly 16% of deaths are attributable to infectious diseases that are largely preventable, like AIDS and malaria.⁴ Thus, ordinary people around the world should be much more concerned about the possible dangers associated with cheeseburgers and mosquitoes than about being killed by other people, in Mexico or anywhere else.

³ The estimated population of Mexico in 2010 based on INEGI’s national census was 112,336,538. The Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) revised estimate for Mexico’s national population by mid-2014 was 119,711,492.

⁴ “10 Facts on Noncommunicable Diseases,” World Health Organization, http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/noncommunicable_diseases/facts/en. Center for Strategic & International Studies, “Infectious Diseases: A Persistent Threat.” <http://www.smartglobalhealth.org/issues/entry/infectious-diseases>

Of course, such everyday hazards are considered too mundane to grab headlines. Violence, on the other hand, is difficult to ignore precisely because it is—thankfully—outside the normal range of acceptable human conduct and experience. Murder, in particular, is a form of violence for which there are very low levels of tolerance in most societies around the world. When there is a sudden increase in the number of homicides, it is appropriate to pay attention and try to address the problem. What is particularly concerning about Mexico’s sudden increases in homicides in recent years is that much or most of this violence is attributable to organized crime groups (OCGs), commonly defined as groups of individuals acting in concert over a sustained period of time with the objective of deliberately violating established law, often with trans-national organizational capabilities and influences. Still, as scholars of organized crime have demonstrated, violence is not necessarily the norm even in the underworld.⁵ Thus, Mexico’s recent surge in violence requires some understanding of recent dynamics among Mexican organized crime groups, particularly those involved in drug trafficking.

B. The Role of Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Mexico

In addition to understanding the scale and rate of crime and violence in Mexico in recent years, it is also necessary to underscore its sources. As this and past reports have demonstrated, recent increases in violence are closely connected to the problem of organized crime, and especially drug trafficking and related activities. Mexico’s contemporary organized crime groups have their roots in the advent of alcohol and drug prohibition in the 1920s and 1930s. While alcohol smuggling from Mexico faded away almost immediately after prohibition was repealed in 1933, the smuggling of heroin and marijuana—both produced in Mexico—has continued into the present.

Drug trafficking became dramatically more profitable and well consolidated in Mexico when it became a major transit point for cocaine trafficking from Colombia to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶ With the decline of Colombia’s major drug-trafficking organizations, Mexican criminal organizations came to dominate the business by the late 1980s. As they did, Mexican traffickers also became involved in producing and trafficking synthetic drugs, like methamphetamines and MDMA (Ecstasy). Like the Colombians that they superseded, Mexican traffickers were commonly described as “cartels” because they employed some of the same practices as business organizations that seek to generally reduce market competition (e.g., explicitly or implicitly negotiating territories for operation and distribution). Indeed, the lack of market competition was key to the success of Mexican drug traffickers, who are believed by many experts to have been directly involved in protecting and regulating the illicit drug trade.⁷

This relatively harmonious arrangement changed in the aftermath of the 1985 murder of U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agent Enrique “Kiki” Camarena, which led to intense U.S. pressure on

⁵ Andreas, P. and J. Wallman (2009). "Illicit Markets and Violence: What is the Relationship?" *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 52: 225-229.

⁶ See, for example: Elaine Shannon, *Desperados: Latin Drug Lords, U.S. Lawmen, and the War America Can't Win*. New York: Viking, 1988; Luis Astorga and David A. Shirk, "Drugs, Crime, and Violence," in Peter H. Smith and Andrew Selee (eds.) *Mexico and the United States: The Politics of Partnership*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013.

⁷ See, for example: Astorga Almanza, L. A. (2000). “Traficantes de drogas, políticos y policías en el siglo XX mexicano,” in Claudio Lomnitz (ed.), *Vicios públicos, virtudes privadas: La corrupción en México*, Mexico City, CIESAS; Carlos Flores Pérez, “Organized Crime and Official Corruption in Mexico,” in Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk. San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, 2009.

Mexican authorities to arrest the three main leaders of the so-called Guadalajara Cartel. Both Ernesto Fonseca and Rafael Caro Quintero were arrested within months of Camarena's murder, while Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo managed to continue the cartel's operations until he was arrested in 1989. Thereafter, the splitting of the Guadalajara cartel into rival, regionally based factions set in motion a competitive struggle for supply routes that has continued into the present. Starting in the early 2000s, that competition grew significantly more intense and more violent due to a series of government crackdowns, internal power struggles, and splits among Mexico's organized crime groups.

Over the last several years, the accumulated toll of this violence has been the loss of tens of thousands of lives, and the problem has become a central preoccupation for both government officials and ordinary citizens. Moreover, as the level of violence in Mexico grew, it also became more diffuse in a number of ways. While there is now considerable evidence that the number of homicides in Mexico has begun to subside over the past few years, violence remains relatively high and the security situation remains highly problematic in certain parts of the country. As such, careful monitoring and study are still needed to understand the manifestations, root causes, and possible solutions to the problem of violence in Mexico.

This report examines Mexico's drug-related and organized crime-style violence in substantial detail, drawing on over several years of data gathering and research, as well as the latest available data from a variety of sources. A full discussion of the data and methodology employed in this and previous reports can be found in the appendix. What must be said at the outset is that the information available to evaluate organized crime and violence in Mexico are highly imperfect and must be considered an approximation, at best. There are significant limits, gaps, and distortions found in the available data, and too often there is insufficient transparency about how data are compiled.

As in previous years, part of the purpose of this report is to sift through and analyze the available information in order to begin to make sense of what we know and what we do not. Thus, all of the claims presented are therefore necessarily tentative, and the authors have done their best to temper any claims, conclusions, or recommendations accordingly. Perhaps the most important recommendation that follows from this report is that the Mexican government and experts working on the problem of crime and violence in Mexico should work to increase the reliability, frequency, and timeliness with which data is made available for public scrutiny. Doing so will help to inform both the public and policy decisions in ways that will ultimately help to address the problem of crime and violence more effectively.

III. FINDINGS: DRUG VIOLENCE IN MEXICO

Previous *Drug Violence in Mexico* reports prepared by Justice in Mexico discuss the general trends in organized crime homicides for years prior to 2014 in considerable detail. The purpose of this report is not to revisit past discussions, but to examine the relevant findings for 2014.

A. While Still Moderately High, Homicide Levels Continue to Decline

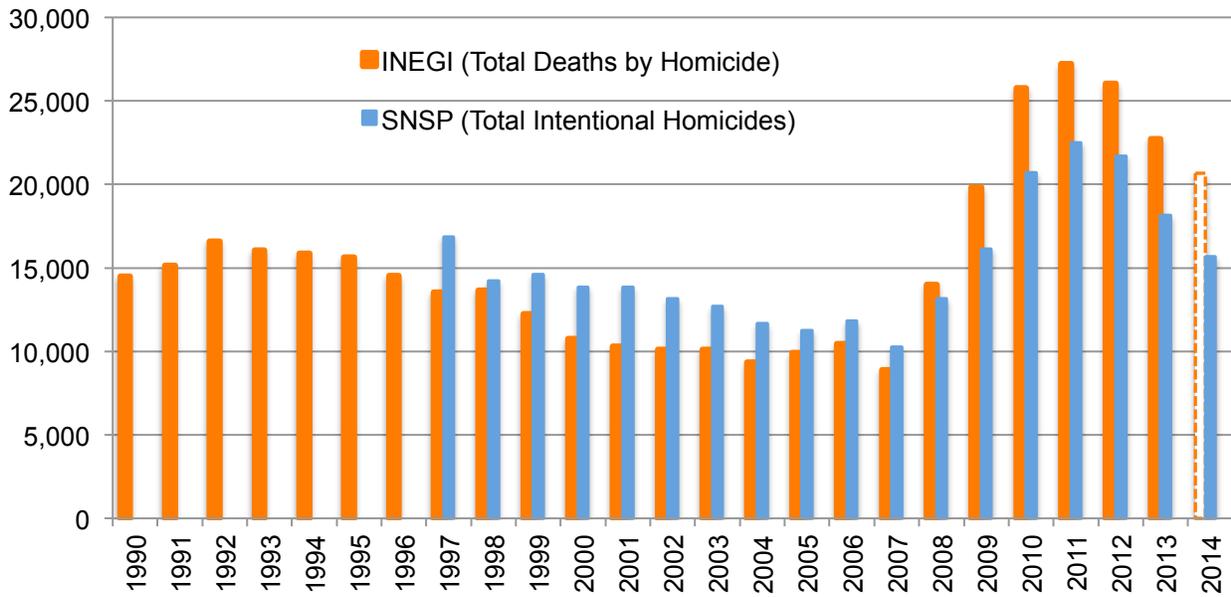
As noted earlier, homicide levels in Mexico spiked dramatically from 2007 to 2011. The overall number of homicides nationwide appeared to decline starting in 2012, and has continued to fall each year since then. Both of Mexico's official data sources on homicides—INEGI and the National Public Security System (SNSP)—have been consistent in documenting these trends (See Figure 4). It is important to note that INEGI's homicide data for any given year are made available in the latter part of the following year, so Figure 4 provides a projected figure for 2014. In 2014, INEGI released its 2013 homicide figures showing a decrease of about 12% and confirming the projection used by the authors in last year's report. Specifically, the authors estimated that INEGI would report approximately 22,131 homicides for 2013, and the final tally reported by INEGI for 2013 was 22,732, a marginal difference of about 2.5%. This year, we estimate that INEGI's tally for all homicides will decline by approximately 9%, bringing the total number of homicides reported for 2014 to roughly 20,670.⁸ While still a far cry from 8,867 homicides reported by INEGI in 2007—Mexico's historic low point—such a decline for 2014 would still be very significant, sparing roughly two thousand lives compared to 2013.

SNSP, meanwhile, has reported its figures for intentional homicides in 2014, which indicate a 13.8% percent drop in 2014, Mexico's second double digit percentage annual decrease in homicides since 2007. Once again, while homicide levels remain quite elevated according to SNSP figures, thousands of lives were spared in 2014 compared to the year before; while SNSP reported 18,146 intentional homicides for 2013, that figure fell to 15,649 for 2014.⁹

⁸ This is an approximation based primarily on the trajectory of SNSP's figures for intentional homicide. This report has offered such approximations — within a 2.5-5% margin of error—for INEGI's figures for 2012 and 2013. Rather than an identical rate of decline for both INEGI and SNSP, we suspect that as SNSP's intentional homicides decrease they will likely represent a declining share of all homicides reported by INEGI. Thus, we estimate that the rate of decline reported by INEGI will be somewhat less than the 13.8% decline reported by SNSP this year. For 2014, the authors settled on a figure of about 9.1%, a decline of roughly in proportion to the previous year's comparison of INEGI and SNSP data.

⁹ Here we must underscore that there is a significant difference in the methodologies for INEGI and SNSP, both in the type and method of data gathered. The fact that INEGI includes all homicides and SNSP focuses only on intentional homicides helps explain the higher figures reported by the former, at least since 2007. The authors have no explanation for why SNSP's figures consistently exceeded those of INEGI up to 2007, except the possibility that there may have been a change in methodology in either organization.

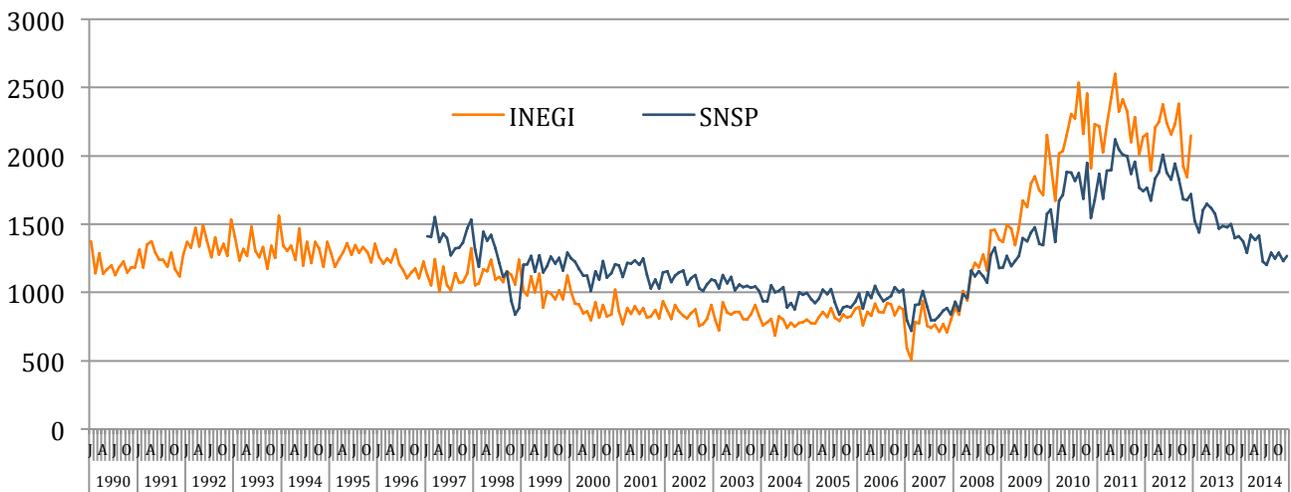
Figure 4: Total Annual Homicide Data in Mexico as Reported by INEGI & SNSP (1990-2014)



Sources: INEGI and SNSP. Note: Justice in Mexico based its estimate for INEGI in 2014 upon a rate of decrease of approximately 9% (compared to the roughly 14% decrease reported by SNSP).

Disaggregating these data by month reveals some trends that might be missed in reviewing annual totals. First, since 2007, Mexico’s homicide levels have been subject to relatively larger spikes and declines than in years past. There is also some variation within a given year, particularly at the peak of violence between 2010 and 2012, as the number of homicides documented tended to be relatively lower in the first six months of the year, while surging in the second half of the year.

Figure 5: Total Monthly Homicides (2006-2014)



Sources: INEGI and SNSP. Note: Justice in Mexico based its estimate for INEGI in 2014 upon a rate of decrease of approximately 9% (compared to the roughly 14% decrease reported by SNSP).

Of course, past trends are not necessarily a good basis for future predictions, so it is impossible to say whether the current downward trend in the number of intentional homicides will continue into 2015. Still, there does appear to be a structural shift in the violence in Mexico, as the number of homicides in certain highly conflicted parts of the country has subsided substantially. If the current downward trend continues, it is plausible that the number of homicides could even return to their historic lows within the next five to ten years. However, as reported last year, since Mexico's violence accelerated more quickly than it has been decelerating, the number of homicides will not reach 2007 levels until well after 2020, if the current rate of decline continues.¹⁰

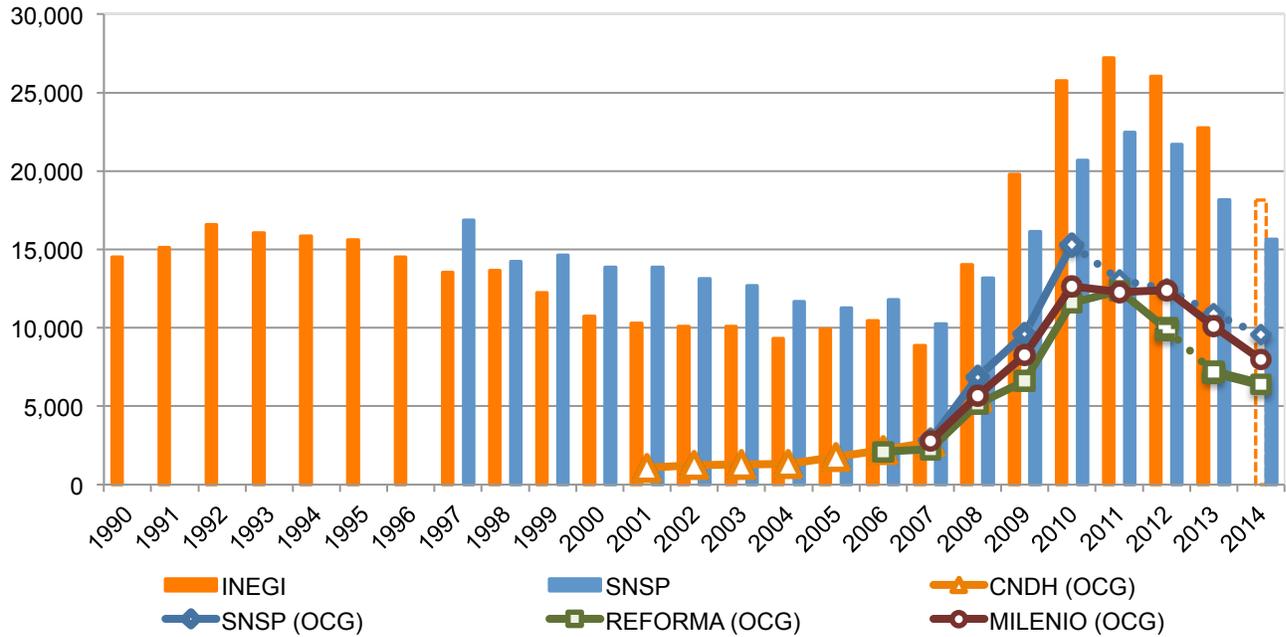
B. Organized-Crime-Style Killings Still Constitute a Major Share of Homicides

A review of data generated by various independent sources shows that a large proportion of homicides in recent years bears characteristics typically associated with organized crime-style violence: gun battles, group executions, torture, dismemberment, high powered weaponry, beheadings, “narco” messages, mass graves, and other methods used by drug trafficking and organized crime groups. About a third—and as many as half—of all homicides identified in 2014 bore such characteristics. The solid lines in Figure 6 plot the available data on organized-crime-style homicides from SNSP (2007-2011), *Reforma* (2006-2012 and 2013-2014), and *Milenio* (2007-2014), while the dotted lines show the authors' projections for SNSP (2012-2013) and *Reforma* (2013).¹¹ All available figures and projections on organized-crime-style homicides are plotted against the official tallies of intentional homicides reported by both INEGI and SNSP originally shown in Figure 4 above (including the authors' 2014 projections for INEGI).

¹⁰ More specifically, from 2007 to 2011, the average annual rate of increase in the number of intentional homicides was greater than 20% according to SNSP and greater than 33% according to INEGI. While INEGI data are not available for 2014, the average annual rate of decline reported by SNSP since 2011 has been about 10%.

¹¹ 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*.

Figure 6: Comparison of Homicide and Organized Crime Homicide Data for Various Sources, 1990 through 2014



Sources: INEGI, SNSP, *Reforma*, *Milenio*. Note: Dotted lines constitute estimates. Multi-data point projections calculated with assistance from economist Tophier McDougal.

The last complete annual dataset from the Mexican government on organized crime-style homicides was released in 2010, so there has been no publicly available official annual figures on such killings since then. However, based on the trajectory of figures released in recent years, the authors estimate that the government’s official tally for organized-crime-style homicides came to roughly 8,000 deaths in 2014.¹² *Milenio*, which produced its figures throughout the year, reported 7,993 organized-crime-style homicides for the same year.¹³ Meanwhile, in 2014, *Reforma* put the figure for organized-crime-style homicides at 6,400, the lowest number reported by that newspaper since 2008. However, it is notable that *Reforma*’s tallies have appeared to be less complete and less consistent than in previous years.

Determining the approximate proportion of homicides resulting from organized-crime-style violence depends upon which sources are used to calculate each figure (See Table 1). Based on the estimated number of INEGI homicides provided above, in 2014 organized-crime-style homicides represented approximately 30%-40% of the total number of all homicides, according to figures from

¹² In 2011, SNSP refused to release its data for organized-crime-style homicides for the last three months of the year. For this reason, in our 2012 report, Justice in Mexico calculated a projection for those three months, which placed the estimated number of organized-crime-related homicides at roughly 16,800 deaths. No data were provided by SNSP for 2012, but for that year the authors projected an estimate (based on the close correlation between SNSP and *Reforma* data at that time) of roughly 14,600. Based on data released in the first six months of 2013, the authors estimate a total of roughly 11,400 organized-crime-style homicides in that year. No government data were released in 2014, so this year’s estimate of approximately 8,000 organized-crime-style homicides is based on the close correlation of SNSP and *Milenio* organized-style-homicide figures in recent years.

¹³ The available data on organized-crime-style homicides reported by SNSP from January through June were fairly closely correlated (.706) to those reported by *Milenio*.

Milenio (38.7%), *Reforma* (31.0%), and the consulting firm Lantia (36.3%).¹⁴ Because SNSP intentional homicide figures are typically lower than those produced by INEGI, tallies of organized-crime-style homicides represent a significantly larger proportion—40-50%—of all homicides when SNSP data are referenced using these same tallies and estimates: *Milenio* (51.1%), *Reforma* (40.9%), and Lantia (48.0%). In short, whether organized-crime-style homicides represent just one-in-three or as many as half of all homicides, they continue to be a major form of murder in Mexico.

Table 1: Percentage of INEGI and SNSP Homicides Attributed to Organized-Crime-Style Homicide in *Reforma* and *Milenio* Tallies, 2006-2014

YEAR	MILENIO OCG (as % INEGI)	MILENIO OCG (as % SNSP)	REFORMA OCG (as % INEGI)	REFORMA OCG (as % SNSP)	LANTIA OCG (Como % INEGI)	LANTIA OCG (Como % SNSP)
2006	n.a.	n.a.	20.3%	18.0%		
2007	31.3%	27.0%	25.6%	22.1%		
2008	40.5%	43.2%	36.6%	39.0%		
2009	41.8%	51.4%	33.3%	40.9%		
2010	49.1%	61.2%	45.0%	56.0%		
2011	45.2%	54.6%	45.5%	55.0%		
2012	47.7%	57.2%	38.1%	45.7%		
2013	44.4%	55.6%	31.5%	39.5%	49.6%	62.1%
2014	38.7%	51.1%	31.0%	40.9%	36.3%	48.0%
AVE.	42.3%	50.2%	34.1%	39.7%	43.0%	55.0%

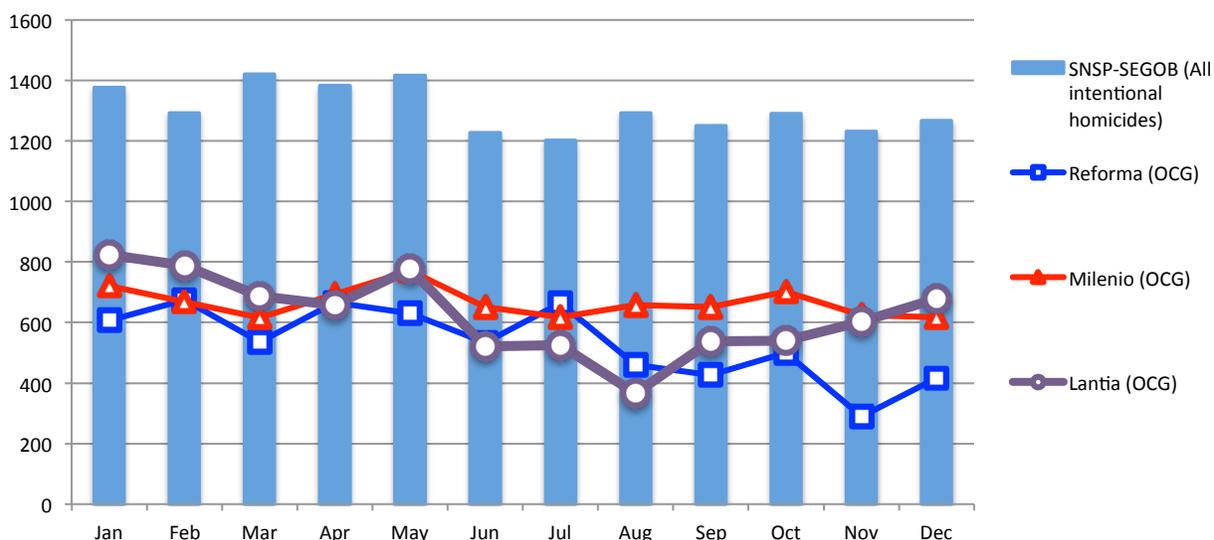
Sources: INEGI, SNSP, *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and Lantia for all available years and projections. Note: This table shows the proportion of organized-crime-style homicides relative to all homicides, as reported by each source (relative to the two official sources of data on homicide: INEGI and SNSP). For percentages shown in red, one or both sources in the comparison are based on projections estimated by the authors.

The number of organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Milenio* in 2014 represented over 50% of the total number of intentional homicides reported by SNSP that same year, though this constituted the lowest proportion reported by *Milenio* since 2008. If the authors' 2014 projections for INEGI are reasonably accurate, then the number of organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Milenio* would constitute about 38.7% of the total number of homicides for that year, also the lowest proportion since 2008.¹⁵ More conservatively, comparing *Reforma's* tally for 2014 to the authors' projection for INEGI in the same year, it would appear that organized-crime-style homicides made up just over a third of all homicides in Mexico (once again a lower proportion than at any point since 2008). In short, even though the number of homicides declined significantly in 2014, the proportion attributable to organized crime also appeared to decline significantly compared to previous years.

¹⁴ Lantia is a consulting firm headed by Mexican security expert Eduardo Guerrero. Lantia's data are not publicly available for previous years.

¹⁵ By any measure, organized crime style homicides were at their lowest proportion in 2007, but the comparison is made here to 2008 because of this was the year that homicides made a dramatic increase, reversing historical trends.

Figure 7: Comparison of Intentional Homicides and Organized Crime Homicides for Various Sources in 2014



Source: SNSP, *Milenio*, *Reforma*, and *Lantia*. Note: Dotted lines refer to the authors' projected estimates for the months where data on organized-crime-style homicides from SNSP and *Reforma* are unavailable.

Finally, it is worth comparing the monthly data available from 2014 for intentional homicides reported by SNSP and organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and *Lantia*. It seems that there was a very high degree of consistency among figures on organized-crime-style homicide reported by these three sources for the first six months of the year. In August 2014, *Milenio* seemed to report significantly higher figures than either *Reforma* or *Lantia*. Meanwhile, *Reforma's* figures deviated considerably from those of the other two independent sources, particularly in November and December of 2014. It is worth noting as well that the figures produced by *Milenio* and *Lantia* are both more closely correlated to the general homicide figures generated by SNSP than are those produced by *Reforma*.

C. Shifting Geographic Patterns of Violence

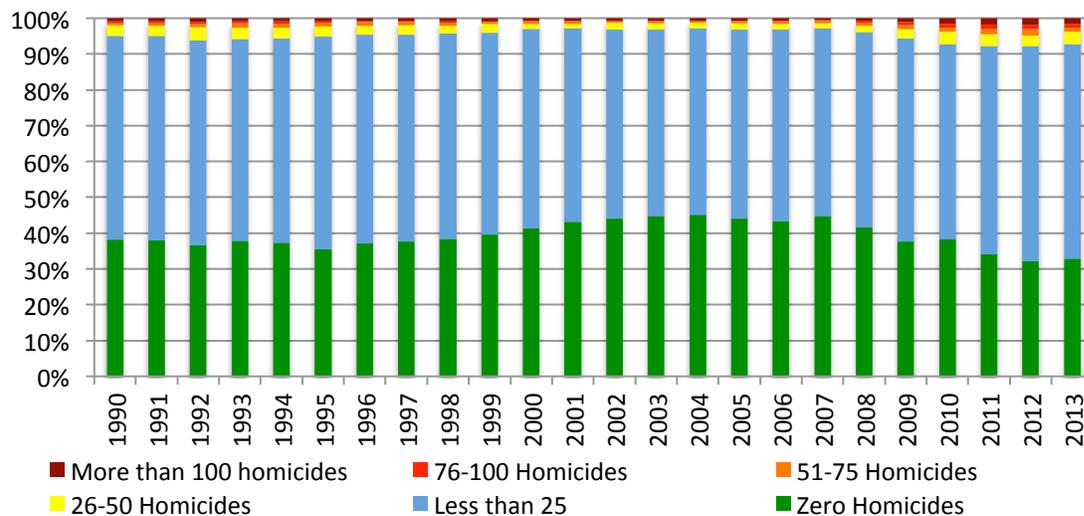
While there is a general perception that Mexico's violence is pervasive and persistent throughout the country, the reality is that violence has been highly localized, has been sporadic, and has frequently shifted from one geographic area to another in recent years. Using the data on homicides and organized 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. The Geographic Dispersion of Intentional Homicides Reverses Slightly

In past reports, one of the most important findings about the geographic distribution of violence in Mexico is that over the last several years the phenomenon of homicide not only increased in number but also became dispersed throughout more areas of the country. In 2007, the historic low point in

homicide rates in Mexico, INEGI figures reported that approximately 1,073 of Mexico’s roughly 2,450 municipalities had zero homicides, as illustrated in Figure 8.¹⁶ 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 saw not a single murder. Thereafter, Mexico experienced a fairly steady decline in the number of “murder-free” municipalities each year, reaching a low of 727 municipalities in 2012. Meanwhile, during the same time period, there was steady increase in the number of municipalities with more than 25 homicides, growing from 62 in 2007 to 178 in 2012. However, in 2013, the geographical dispersion of homicide reversed for the first time since 2007. That is, from 2012 to 2013, the number of municipalities with more than 25 homicides declined from 178 to 171, and the number with zero homicides grew from 727 to 776. Given the decrease in overall homicides in 2014 indicated by SNSP’s figures, there is a strong probability that INEGI figures reported later this year will show that the geographic dispersion of homicide—at least as measured here—has continued to subside.

Figure 8: Distribution of Homicides at the Municipal Level, 1990-2013

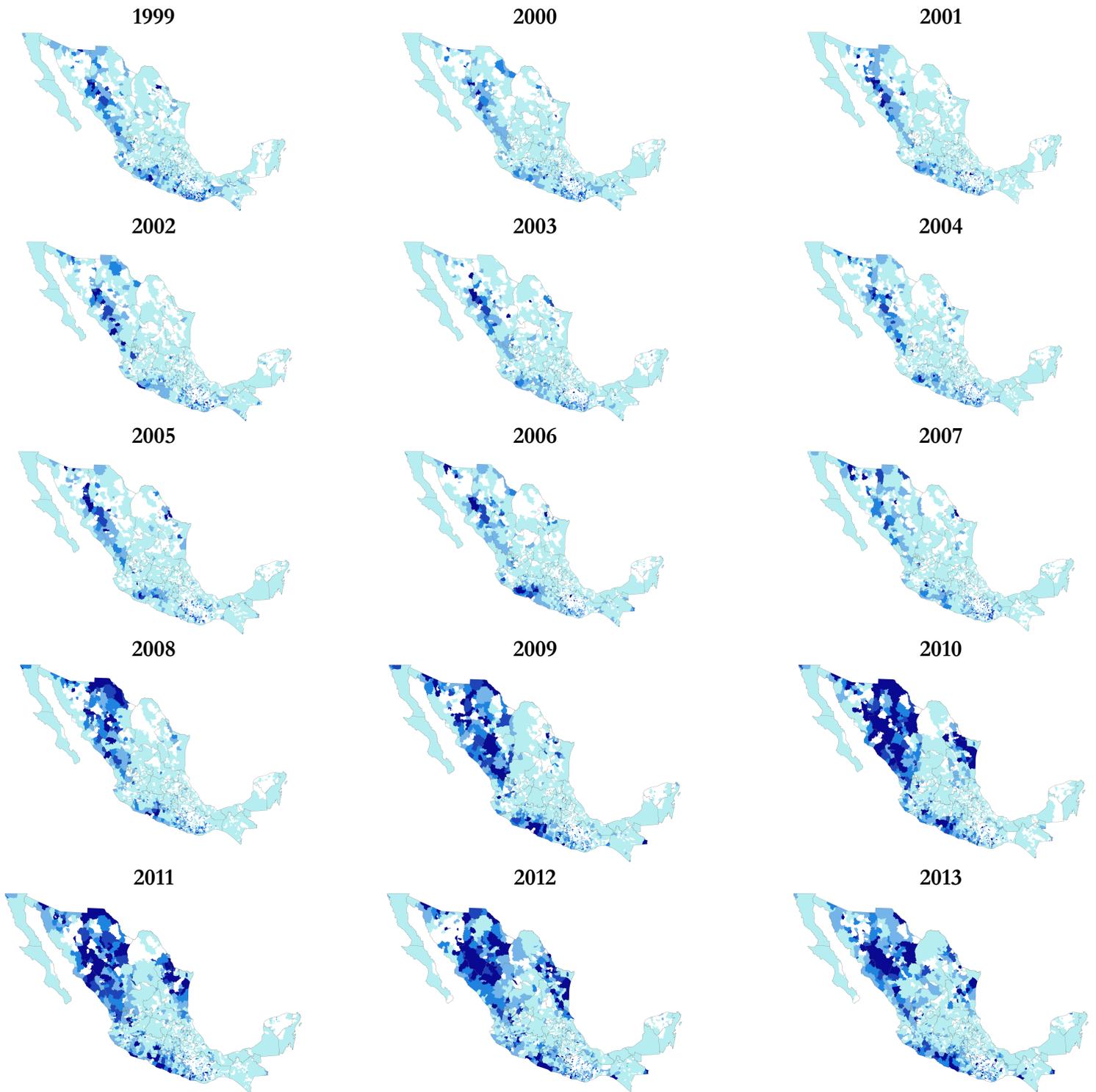


Source: INEGI.

The maps in Figure 9 below help to further illustrate the geographic distribution of violence in Mexico by showing the homicide rate at the municipal level from 1999 through 2013, as reported by INEGI. Because INEGI data were not available for 2014 at the time that this report was released in April 2015, the authors rely on the 2013 intentional homicide figures reported by SNSP. The 2013 SNSP maps in Figure 10 show the number of homicides by municipality (in red) and the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants by municipality (in blue) using CONAPO population estimates.

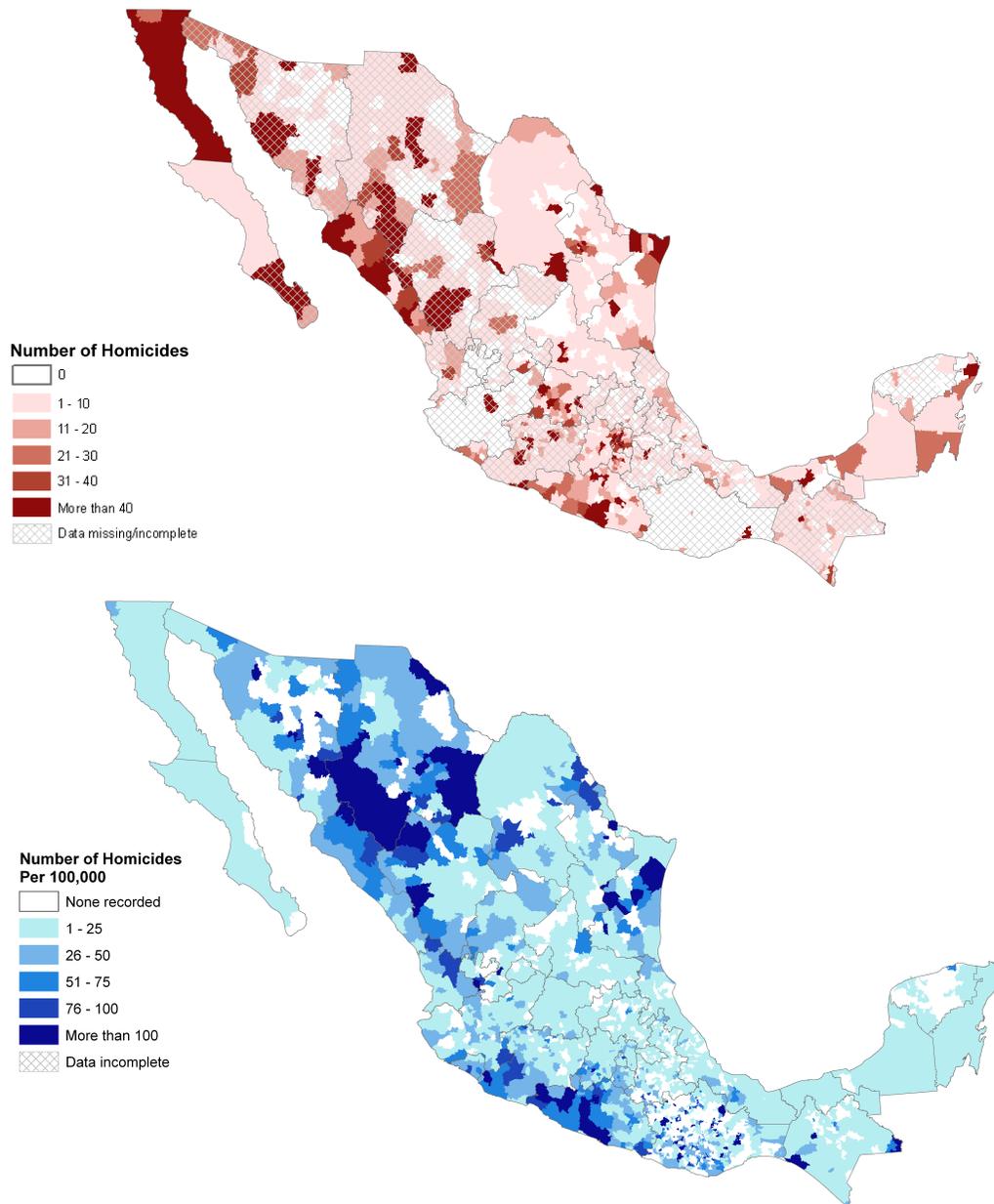
¹⁶ These figures are approximate because there is no data for some municipalities. Also, the number of municipalities in Mexico changes from time to time as new ones are created. From 2012 to 2013, for example, it appears that dozens of new municipalities were added to INEGI’s homicide dataset.

Figure 9: Geographic Distribution of Homicides Per 100,000 Inhabitants, by Municipality, 1999-2013



Source: INEGI. Maps generated by Theresa Firestine.

Figure 10: Geographic Distribution of Homicides by Total Number (Red) and Homicide Rate (Blue) at the Municipal Level in 2014



Source: SNSP and CONAPO. Maps generated by Theresa Firestine. It should be noted that the legend for the figure showing the total number of homicides per municipality was mislabeled by the authors in our previous report (entitled *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis from 2013*). The red map in the figure above is now correctly labeled to show the number of homicides (not the rate per 100,000 people).

Taken together, this series of maps makes apparent the increase and geographic dispersion of homicides from 2007 to 2012 (especially after 2009), as well as the increase in the relative increase of such homicides per capita during that period. We also see that violence receded significantly from 2012 onward, according to the available data from both INEGI and SNSP. There were also some important changes that became especially noticeable in 2014. For example, from 2010 to 2013, at least 35 municipalities have had more than 100 murders per 100,000 people, regardless of whether

the rate is calculated using available INEGI or SNSP figures. However, in 2014, SNSP's data suggest that the number of municipalities with more than 100 homicides per capita dropped to just 21 municipalities.

However, it is necessary to underscore again that the SNSP's data was incomplete for a significant number of municipalities at the time that authors downloaded and began working with these data in February 2015, as was the case in the author's report for the previous year. Thus, it is very possible that the number of municipalities with homicide rates over 100 per 100,000 inhabitants is under-reported at this time. That is, using an updated SNSP dataset or using the INEGI figures that will be released later this year, the reduction and receding of violence may be less than appears to be the case using the available preliminary data.

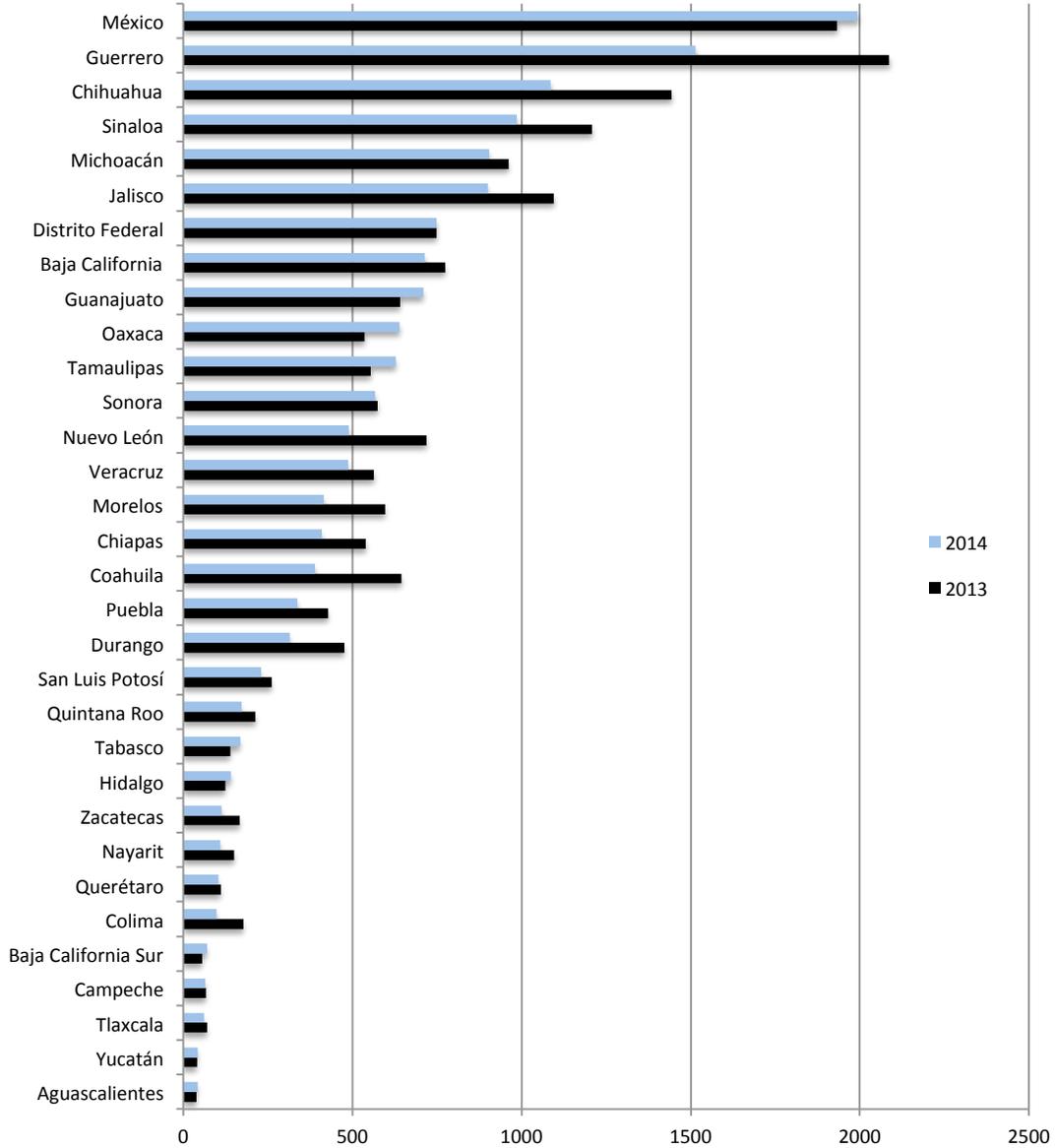
It is also worth noting that CONAPO's population estimates were revised since our last report (mostly upward from the original projections for 2014), which has the effect of changing the number of homicides per 100,000 people.¹⁷ While CONAPO's revisions led to an increase in the estimated population for some municipalities and a decrease for others, the net population increased from 111,566,783 to 119,711,492, or approximately 7.3%. According to the authors' calculations, CONAPO's population adjustment resulted in a net decrease in the national homicide rate of nearly 3.4%.¹⁸

Lastly, these maps also show that homicides have been regionally concentrated in the major drug trafficking zones in the northwest, the northeast, and the Pacific Coast. The states that were hardest hit by violence after 2008 include the six Mexican border states—Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas—as well as the Pacific states of Sinaloa, Nayarit, Michoacán, and Guerrero. However, violence began to diminish in certain areas in 2011 and 2012, particularly as the number of homicides fell in key states in northern Mexico, including Baja California, Sonora, and Chihuahua.

¹⁷ For example, using SNSP and CONAPO data, the small town of Oquitoa, Sonora had just one homicide but — because it has just a few hundred people—it also had the highest homicide rate per 100,000 people in Mexico in 2014. Yet the rate varies considerably depending on which CONAPO population projection is used. Using CONAPO's original estimate for Oquitoa's population for 2014 (426 inhabitants), the homicide rate in Oquitoa would be 234 homicides per 100,000 people. Using CONAPO's revised estimate for Oquitoa's population for 2014 (476 inhabitants), the homicide rate in Oquitoa would be 210 homicides per 100,000 people. Those who have argued that the Peña Nieto administration has deliberately manipulated government statistics to shed a more favorable light on the security situation, might well conclude that the revision of CONAPO's population figures was intended to have this effect.

¹⁸ Because some municipalities saw no change or data were not available, the authors compared and then averaged the original and revised CONAPO-derived homicide rates for all municipalities.

Figure 11: Intentional Homicides by State, Comparing 2013 to 2014



Source: SNSP.

In 2014, using the data available from SNSP on homicides illustrated in Figure 11, we see that the states with the largest number of intentional homicides were México (1,994), Guerrero (1,514), Chihuahua (1,086), Sinaloa (986), Michoacán (904), and Jalisco (900). Nearly all of these states (that is, all except México) saw a decrease in the number of murders compared to the previous year.¹⁹ This is notable not only because the state of Mexico is now thrust into the position of having the most homicides in the country, but because the other states that saw declines are widely considered to have far more serious problems with crime and violence. Indeed, in 2014, Michoacán and

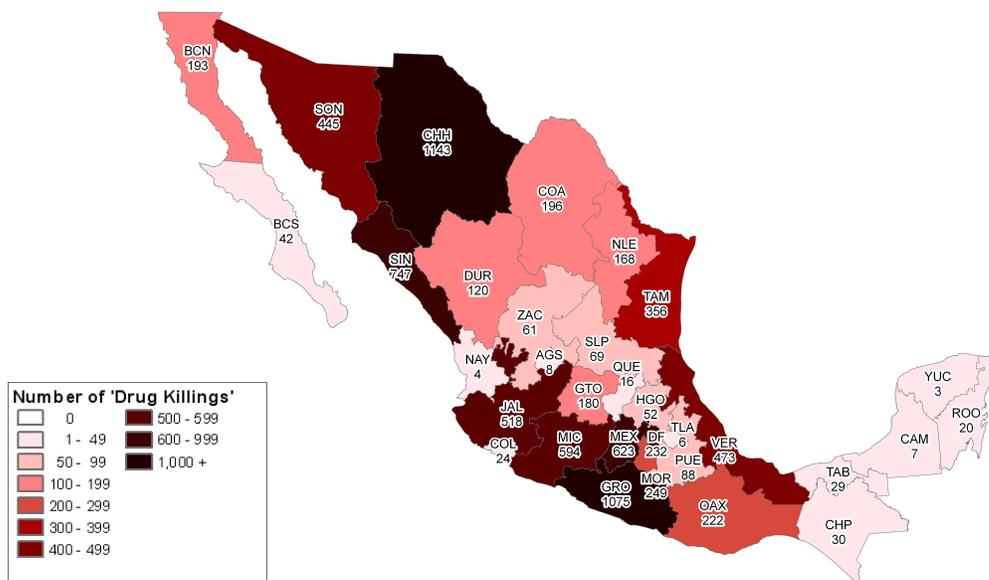
¹⁹ In fact, only nine Mexican states saw an increase in homicides in 2014: Aguascalientes (7.7%), Baja California Sur (25%), Guanajuato (10.6%), Hidalgo (13.7%), México (3.2%), Oaxaca (19.4%), Tabasco (20.9%), Tamaulipas (13.2%), and Yucatán (5.0%).

Guerrero were easily the two states that attracted the most attention for their security challenges. The growth of organized-crime-style violence in the state of México also has political salience, given that Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto had been its governor. Nationwide, the largest decreases in the number of homicides in 2014 were found in the states of Guerrero (-27.5%), Chihuahua (-24.7%), Coahuila (-39.5%), Nuevo León (-31.8%), and Sinaloa (-18.4%). Meanwhile, the five Mexican states exhibiting the largest numerical increases in homicide in 2014 were Oaxaca (19.4%), Tamaulipas (13.2%), Guanajuato (10.6%), México (3.2%), and Tabasco (20.9%), according to SNSP.

2. Distribution of Organized-Crime-Style Homicides

In 2014, the Mexican government did not report any data on the number of organized-crime-style homicides that took place last year. Thus, the only data available for such homicides in 2014 are those reported at the state level by independent sources, such as the Mexican newspaper *Milenio*, which reported a total of 7,993 homicide cases that appeared to involve organized crime.²⁰ According to these figures, almost half of organized-crime-style homicides were concentrated in the top five states: Chihuahua (1,143), Guerrero (1,075), Sinaloa (747), México (623), and Michoacán (594). In 2014, the states with the least organized-crime-style homicides remained mostly unchanged from 2013: Aguascalientes (8), Campeche (7), Tlaxcala (6), Nayarit (4), and Yucatán (3).²¹ The distribution of organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Milenio* is reflected in Figure 12 and the year-over-year change is represented in Figure 13.

Figure 12: Organized-Crime-Style Homicide Map for 2014

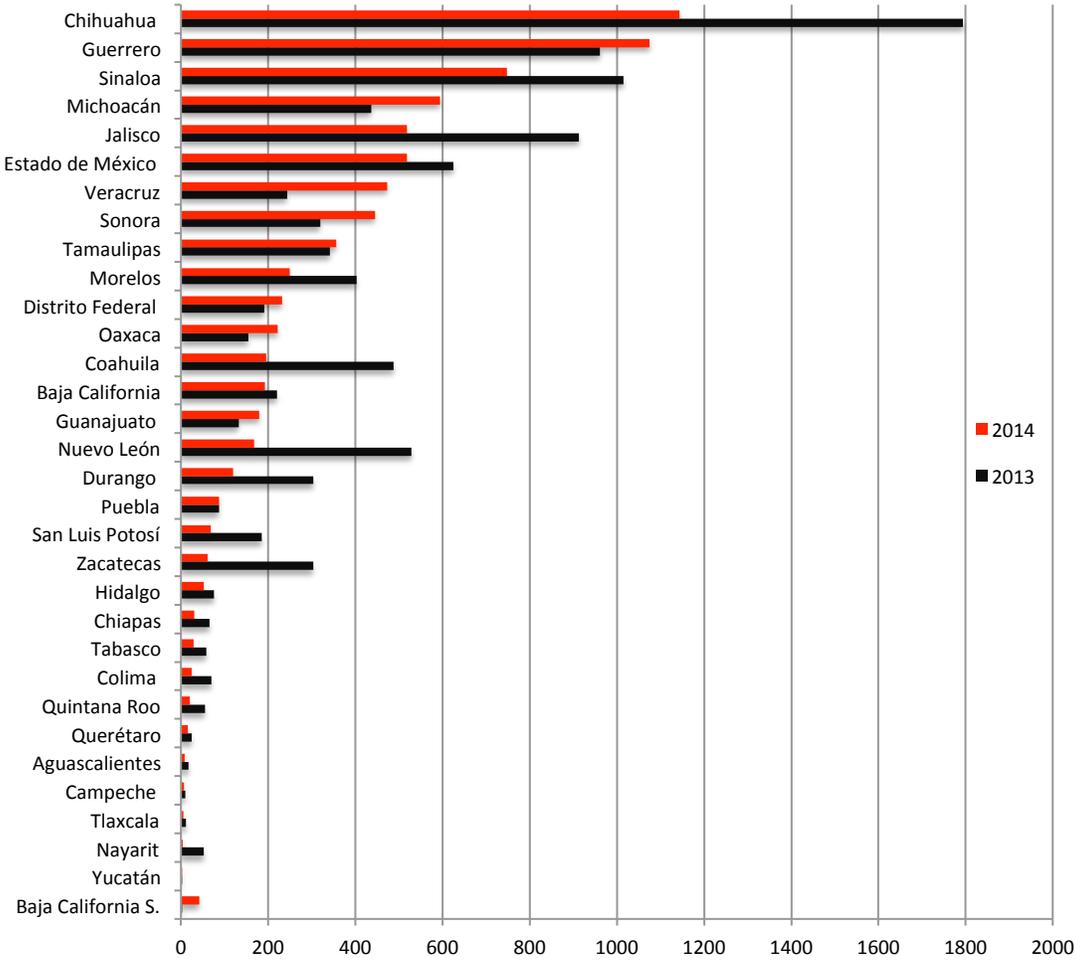


Source: *Milenio*. Map generated by Theresa Firestone.

²⁰ In past years, the authors of this report have relied on *Reforma*'s tallies of organized-crime-style homicides. However, here we give preference to *Milenio* over *Reforma* because the latter has been less consistent in its monitoring of organized-crime-style homicides and less forthcoming with its data than the former.

²¹ It is worth noting that in 2014 Nayarit saw a dramatic drop in from 53 to 4 organized crime style killings, taking the place of Baja California Sur, which increased from 3 to 42.

Figure 13: Organized-Crime-Style Homicides by State, Comparing 2013 to 2014



Source: *Milenio*.

The year-to-year comparison of organized-crime-style homicides tracked by *Milenio* shows in Figure 13 that organized-crime-style violence seems to have declined significantly in 2014, according to available evidence. There were twice as many Mexican states (21) that saw an annual decrease in organized-crime-style homicides compared to the number that saw an increase (10).²² Even more so than in 2013, the total annual increase among states with rising organized-crime-style homicides in 2014 (823) was significantly offset by the total decrease in declining states (-3,045).

Thus, assuming that there was adequate publicly accessible information to reliably track and monitor such killings, *Milenio*'s data lend credibility to official claims that there has been an overall decline in homicide for 2014. However, if media coverage of homicides is biased or incomplete, this would result in significant underreporting of organized-crime-style homicides nationwide or possibly in certain regions where media coverage is more scarce (e.g., rural) or subject to manipulation. For example, some critics of the Peña Nieto administration contend that there has been an effort by the Mexican government to discourage media reporting on crime and violence, which could limit the

²² Yucatán was the only state that saw no change, with only three such killings in both 2013 and 2014.

availability of information through press releases and other sources that might inform the public about organized-crime-style homicides.

With these caveats in mind, there was clearly a significant level of organized-crime-style violence in 2014. As in previous years, such violence was not randomly distributed but centered primarily in major drug production and trafficking areas. In 2014, we also see that the states with the largest number of organized-crime-style homicides were concentrated in Chihuahua (1,143), Guerrero (1,075), Sinaloa (747), Michoacán (594), and Jalisco (518). In all of these states, drug violence therefore appears to be a predominant factor explaining homicides, since organized-crime-style homicides amount to at least half the number of homicides reported by SNSP for 2014.²³

The five states that saw the largest numerical decrease in organized-crime-style homicides from 2013 to 2014 were Chihuahua (-651), Jalisco (-395), Nuevo León (-361), Coahuila (-292), and Sinaloa (-268), for a combined total of 1,967. The five states that saw the largest percentage decreases in organized-crime-style homicides from 2013 to 2014 were Nayarit (-92.5%), Zacatecas (-79.9%), Nuevo León (-68.2%), Colima (-65.7%), and Quintana Roo (-63.6%).

The five states that saw the largest numerical increase in organized-crime-style homicides in 2014 were Veracruz (+230), Michoacán (+158), Sonora (+126), Guerrero (+114), and Oaxaca (+68), with a combined total of 696. The five states that saw the largest percentage increases in organized-crime-style homicides were Baja California Sur (+1,300%), Veracruz (+94.7%), Oaxaca (+44.2%), Sonora (+39.5%), and Guanajuato (+36.4%).

3. Significant Decreases in Local Centers of Violence

The decrease in violence in 2014 was also apparent in the data for the ten municipalities that registered the highest number of homicides. From 2008 through 2011, as measured by the number of homicides, the largest share of homicides was concentrated in the border metropolis of Ciudad Juárez, but thereafter the number of homicides in that city declined significantly. In 2014, SNSP statistics still placed Ciudad Juárez as the municipality with the fourth highest number of homicides, though this number continued to decline by perhaps as much as 14% from the previous year (with the caveat that Ciudad Juárez was one of many cases for which data were incomplete). Meanwhile, the number of homicides also declined again in Acapulco, the city that has registered the most homicides since 2012, from 883 to 590 homicides, a decrease of more than a third. (See Table 2).

²³ In the case of Chihuahua, the number of organized-crime-style homicides estimated by *Milenio* actually exceeds SNSP's estimate for 2014, though this is likely due to the fact that SNSP's data was still incomplete for Chihuahua when downloaded for this analysis in February 2015.

Table 2: Total Number and Rate (Per 100K) of Overall Homicides by Municipality, 2012-2014

#	Name	2012	Rate	Est. Pop.	Name	2013	Rate	Est. Pop.	Name	2014	Rate	Est. Pop.
1	Acapulco	1,271	184	689,496	Acapulco	883	129	683,048	Acapulco	590	70	837,271
2	Juarez	850	58	1,476,025	Tijuana	492	27	1,795,949	Tijuana	462	27	1,696,430
3	Monterrey	685	61	1,128,592	Culiacan	479	58	828,459	Culiacan	399	43	928,801
4	Culiacan	471	57	825,709	Juarez	453	30	1,497,806	Juarez*	389	28	1,411,179
5	Torreon	792	126	628,107	Ecatepec	312	18	1,766,387	Ecatepec	349	20	1,743,268
6	Chihuahua	587	69	846,861	Monterrey	266	24	1,124,610	Chihuahua*	184	20	899,868
7	Tijuana	320	18	1,743,928	Chihuahua	251	29	857,557	Morelia*	182	24	762,431
8	N. Laredo	544	132	410,653	Torreon	238	38	633,928	Leon	166	11	1,514,077
9	Cuernavaca	270	73	369,958	Zapopan	217	16	1,361,212	Chilpancingo	166	64	260,365
10	Ecatepec	533	30	1,759,650	Morelia	209	27	760,718	Iztapalapa (DF)	160	9	1,806,218

Source: SNSP and CONAPO. SNSP data for 2014 were incomplete for municipalities with an asterisk (*). Also, Iztapalapa is technically a delegation within the Federal District, not a municipality.

It is also notable that nearly all of the ten most violent cities in Mexico experienced a decrease in the number of homicides, with the only exception being Ecatepec de Morelos in the state of México. Also, none of the top ten most violent municipalities came close to 1,000 homicides or had a homicide rate greater than 100 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, which is a significant and positive change from previous years. Amid these declining rates, three cities —Torreon, Monterrey, and Zapopan—moved off the “top ten” list entirely in 2014. Again, unless they have been significantly under-reported by SNSP, these figures show a significant shift in the number and rate of homicides in Mexico.

D. Victim Characteristics

The characteristics of victims of homicide in Mexico fit with some of the general patterns of homicides around the world. Homicides are committed primarily by men and against men. Firearms, especially high caliber weapons, are an important *modus operandi* for intentional homicide. However, there are some aspects of homicide, and especially organized-crime-style homicides, that stand out, particularly the extreme nature of the violence employed, the extent to which public officials and journalists are often targeted, and the extent to which military and especially police have been targeted. We discuss these issues in some detail below.

1. General Population

The most obvious, but under-appreciated observation that can be made about homicide anywhere in the world is that it is a predominantly male problem. This is certainly the case in Mexico. As noted by José Merino and Jessica Zarkin in an article for *Animal Político* in December 2014, in terms of homicide, there are effectively two Mexicos. Mexican men have a homicide rate of 33.5 per 100,000 people (on par with South Africa), while Mexican women have a homicide rate of 4.6 per 100,000 people (on par with the United States). When separated by age, however, the leading cause of death for young men in Mexico hinges on economic status, since wealthy young men are more likely to die of car accidents and those of modest means more likely to be murdered.

With regard to organized-crime-style homicides, as reported in last year’s report, using the Justice in Mexico *Memoria* database, the authors have also found that the vast majority of victims—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 32

years, which appears to contradict widespread assumptions that organized crime violence involves uneducated, unemployed, and disaffected youths. However, the authors also believe 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 must be interpreted with consideration of the biases inherent in information gleaned from media reports.

Meanwhile, of the more than 5,000 homicide cases identified in our sample, the age of the victim was reported in nearly a third of all cases and averaged around 32 years. There were over 712 victims (14.2%) whose corpses were accompanied by some kind of message (narco-message or *narcomensaje*). Although not all of the messages' contents were publicly released, many at least mentioned a specific organized crime group: about 10% mentioned the Zetas or its members, about 3% mentioned the La Familia Michoacán Organization or Knights Templar Organization or their members, and about 1% referred to the Sinaloa Cartel or its members. Also, based on the time of day deaths were documented, a large proportion of organized-crime-style homicides (and the discovery of such crimes) occurs during daylight hours, especially during the mornings, contrary to common assumptions.

2. Changing Modes of Violence

As the sheer number of organized-crime-style homicides has declined since 2012, the nature of this violence has also appeared to change. As the authors reported in 2014, there appears to be a significant reduction in homicide cases involving the use of torture, narco-messages, and decapitation. Unfortunately, in 2014 such details on organized-crime-style homicides were not forthcoming from the Mexican daily newspaper *Reforma*, the primary source that the authors have used to tally such information in previous years. While *Reforma* has a reputation as one of Mexico's most independent newspapers, its detailed monitoring of crime and violence has declined considerably since the start of the Peña Nieto administration, consistent with other news media organizations.

In light of the reduced availability of information from *Reforma* and other sources in recent years, Justice in Mexico has worked with a network of researchers and volunteers to compile an original dataset that includes more than 5,000 individual cases of organized-crime-style homicides that occurred from 2006 through 2014, the authors analyzed a variety of victim characteristics and circumstances surrounding these cases. Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* database provides a useful sample of the kind of violence perpetrated by OCGs. Of the available information for all years, for example, firearms were used in over 2,800 cases (56%) and the authors found evidence of torture was reported in 739 cases (14.7%). However, as noted above, reporting of such data is irregular and often incomplete, so these are conservative estimates at best.

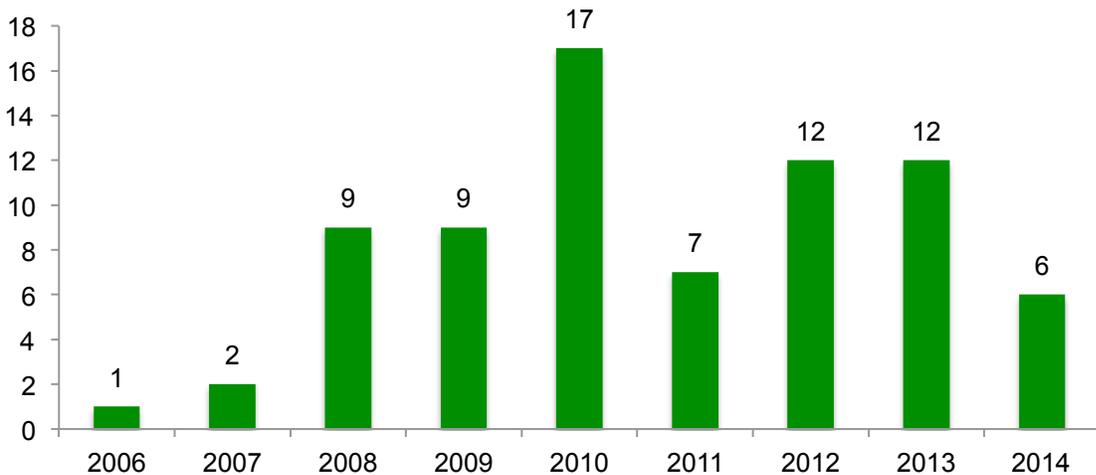
3. Mayors

Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* dataset includes 75 mayors and former mayors killed from 2006 through 2014, many with the characteristics of organized-crime-style homicides.²⁴ While the peak of violence

²⁴ In last year's report, the authors mistakenly noted that there were 70 mayors in the database, when there were actually 69.

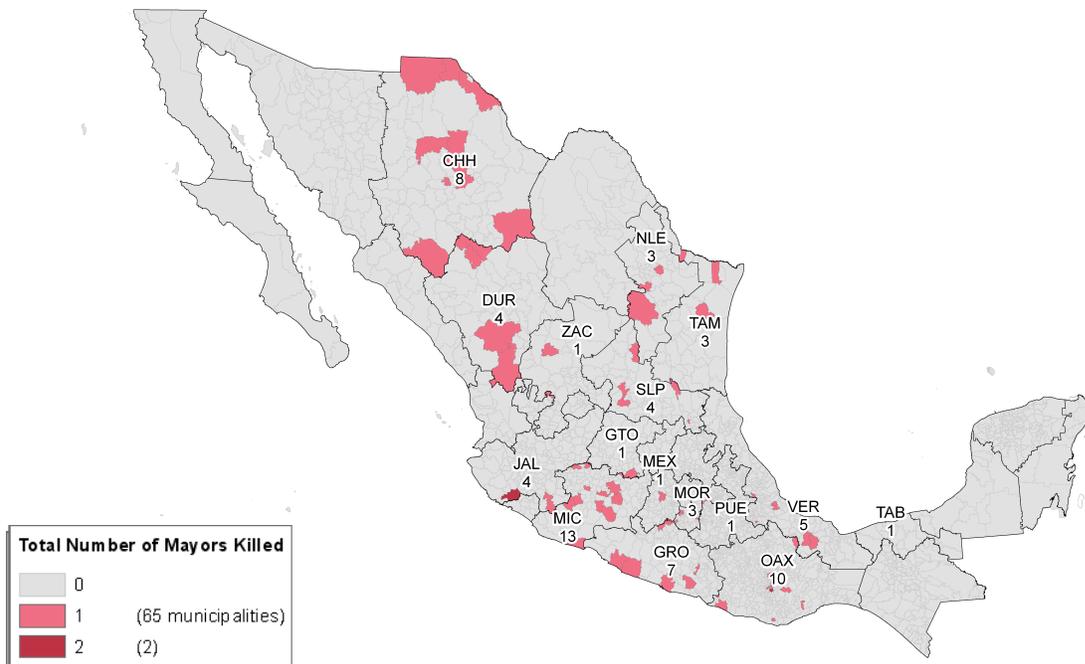
in Mexico occurred during 2011, the year with the most killings of mayors was actually 2010, when 17 cases were reported. Despite the reduction of the total number of homicides in Mexico since 2011, there have been a total of 30 mayors killed. However, the rate of mayoral killings dropped in half in 2014, with 6 mayors killed, compared 12 mayors in each of the two previous years. This was the lowest number of mayors killed since 2007. Two of the mayors killed in 2014 were from the state of Jalisco, and the others were from the states of México, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, and Zacatecas. In early 2015, a former mayor was murdered, and a PRD mayoral candidate named Aide Nava in Ahuacuatzingo, Guerrero was also killed and beheaded.

Figure 14: Mayors & Ex-Mayors Killed in Mexico (January 2006-December 2014)



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset. Map generated by Theresa Firestine.

Figure 15: Map of Mayors & Ex-Mayors Killed in Mexico (January 2006-March 2014)



4. Journalists

As reported in previous years, dozens of reporters and media workers have been killed or disappeared in Mexico, making it one of the world's most dangerous places for journalists. The various organizations tallying homicides involving reporters in Mexico use different criteria for tallying and classifying this violence, since motives are often difficult to confirm. For example, one of the most respected sources, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), focuses primarily on cases where a murder was confirmed to have been committed in relation to the journalist's profession. From 1992 through 2014, CPJ reported that there were 32 confirmed cases, 41 unconfirmed cases, and four media-support workers killed in Mexico. Over 80% of those cases involved reporters working the crime beat, a third involved reporters working on issues related to corruption, and a fifth of those cases involved reporters working on issues related to politics.

In 2014, CPJ reported that there were 61 reporters murdered worldwide that matched their criteria, with two confirmed cases and one unconfirmed case in Mexico. Based on CPJ's tally, Mexico ranked as the world's tenth deadliest place for reporters and media workers in 2014.

- The first of the two cases confirmed by CPJ was that of Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz, a newspaper reporter for *Notisur* and *Liberal del Sur*. Jiménez de la Cruz was abducted at his home (after dropping off his children at school) in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz on February 5, and killed sometime prior to the discovery of his body on February 11, 2014, in a grave with two others in Las Choapas, Veracruz. Jiménez reported on crime, and his body was found with that of a union leader on whose kidnapping he had reported. Authorities investigating the case alleged that his murder was the result of a personal dispute and not his reporting.²⁵
- The second case confirmed by CPJ was the August 11, 2014 murder of Octavio Rojas Hernández, a reporter from the newspaper *El Buen Tono*, based in Córdoba, Veracruz. Rojas Hernández was a crime reporter and was shot four times in front of his home, by an assailant posing as a potential car buyer. Representatives of Rojas Hernández's news organization alleged that he was likely killed for reporting on the purported organized crime ties of the director of the municipal police of Cosolapa to a gang of gas pipeline thieves. Fermín Hernández Venegas, the police chief of Cosolapa was himself shot to death on the morning of April 17, 2015.²⁶
- The third case, still unconfirmed by CPJ at the time of this report, was that of Jorge Torres Palacios, from the Acapulco-based newspaper *Dictamen* and the local website *Libertad Guerrero Noticias*, who was abducted from his home (without a demand for ransom) and killed sometime in late May or early June in 2014. Torres Palacios' decapitated body was found in an

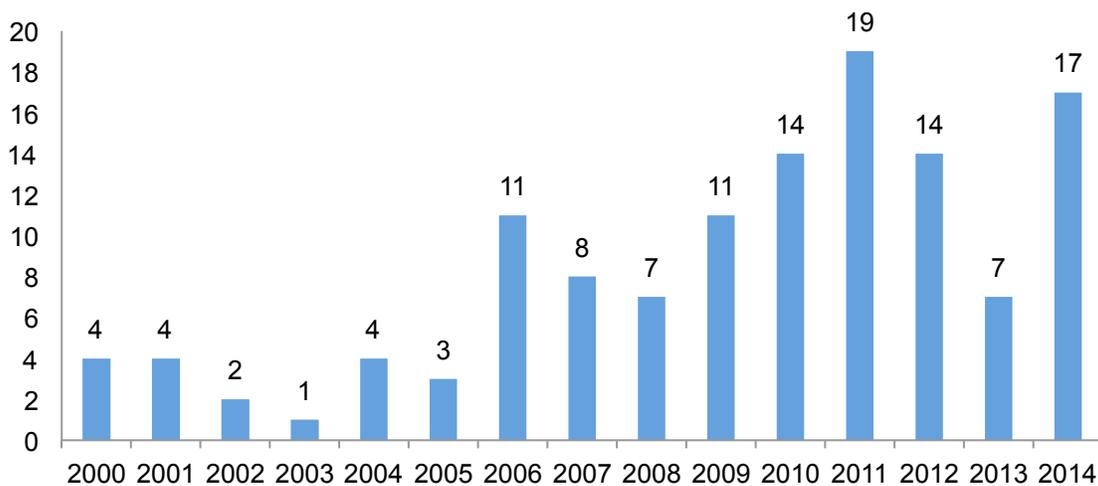
²⁵ "Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz," Committee to Protect Journalists website. <https://cpj.org/killed/2014/gregorio-jimenez-de-la-cruz.php>. Accessed April 20, 2015.

²⁶ "Octavio Rojas Hernández," Committee to Protect Journalists website; <https://cpj.org/killed/2014/octavio-rojas-herandez.php>. Accessed on April 20, 2015. Jorge A. Pérez, Alfredo Valadez, and Rubicela Morelos, "Matan al director de la policía municipal de Cosolapa, Oaxaca," *La Jornada*, April 18, 2015. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/04/18/estados/024n2est> Accessed on April 20, 2015.

orchard. Prosecutors investigating the case noted the possible involvement of organized crime, though Torres Palacios also wrote columns that were critical of local officials.²⁷

CPJ’s criteria for identifying the murders of reporters and media workers are fairly conservative, since they focus only on cases where there is a confirmed motive associated with the journalist’s profession. The Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset includes cases of organized-crime-style homicides, and includes cases of journalists who may have been killed for a variety of motives not limited to their reporting. From 2000 to 2014, Justice in Mexico has identified 127 journalists and media-support workers who were murdered, with the vast majority of these deaths (98) occurring after 2006. 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 2014, Justice in Mexico entered 17 such individuals into the *Memoria* dataset.

Figure 16: Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico (January 2006-December 2014)



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset.

By this tally, 2014 was the second worst year on record for murders of reporters and media workers in Mexico, which goes against the overall trend of reduced violence but substantiates ongoing concerns about protections for journalists in Mexico. As noted last year, the organization *Article 19* claimed that 2013 was the most dangerous on record for journalists in Mexico, when taking into consideration other types of violence such as kidnappings, beatings, threats, and other types of aggression. Data for 2014 were not available from *Article 19*, but the ongoing threats against journalists in Mexico are well documented in its 2014 report entitled *Disentir en Silencio*.²⁸

²⁷ “Jorge Torres Palacios,” Committee to Protect Journalists website. <https://cpj.org/killed/2014/jorge-torres-palacios.php> Accessed April 20, 2015.

²⁸ “Disentir en Silencio,” Informe 2013 by *Article 19*. http://www.articulo19.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Art19_Informe2013web.pdf Accessed on April 26, 2015.

Figure 17: Map of Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico (January 2006-December 2014)



Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset. Map generated by Theresa Firestine.

According to Justice in Mexico’s tally, on average, at least eight members of the media were killed each year since 2000, and an average of 12 were killed in each full year of the Calderón administration (counting 2007-2012) and in each full year of the Peña Nieto administration (counting 2013 and 2014). In 2014, the reporters and media workers whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico included: Octavio Atilano Román Tirado (*El Sol* newspaper), Julián Bacasegua Castro (*Nueva Prensa*), Mario Alberto Crespo Ayón (*Uno TV/Noroeste/Primera Hora/Línea Directa*), María Del Rosario “@Miut3” Fuentes Rubio (social media journalist/#reynosafollow), Benjamin Galván Gómez (owner *Última Hora/Primera Hora*), Jesus Antonio Gamboa Urias (*Nueva Prensa*), Adrián Gaona Belmonte (*La Caliente*), Miguel Angel Guzmán Garduño (*Vértice*), Norberto Herrera Rodríguez (*Canal 9*), Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz (*Notisur/Liberal del Sur/La Red*), Raúl López Mendoza (*Cambio de Michoacán*), Ciro Felipe Palacios García (photojournalist), Victor Pérez Pérez (*Sucesos*), Omar Reyes Fabian (*Tiempo*), Octavio Rojas Hernández (*El Buen Tono*), Jorge Torres Palacios (*El Dictamen, Libertad Guerrero*), and Marién Valez García (*La Última Palabra*).

5. Police and Military Personnel

Over the last several years, hundreds of police officers and dozens of military personnel have been killed in the line of duty in circumstances that appeared to involve organized crime. In recent years, *Reforma* newspaper has been the only source that consistently tracks and reports these deaths. However, in 2014, *Reforma* stopped reporting these figures. Using the Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset, the authors have identified over 550 federal, state, and local law enforcement personnel and 60 military personnel that have been victims of OCG-style violence since 2006. This dataset provides only a sample of cases and details that were not available in every case.

E. Comparing Administrations

As noted last year, under Mexican presidents Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) and Vicente Fox (2000-2006), the number of overall homicides documented by INEGI declined significantly. In total, under Zedillo, INEGI documented 80,311 homicides, with an average of 13,385 people killed per year, or more than 36 people per day, or roughly 1.5 per hour (Table 3).²⁹ 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 3: Estimated Homicides and OCG-style Homicides by Presidential Administration

Source	Zedillo (1995-2000)	Fox (2001-2006)	Calderón (2007-2012)	Peña Nieto (2013)
INEGI Homicides	80,311	60,162	121,669	42,795
SNSP Homicides	n.a.	74,398	104,794	33,795
CNDH-OCG	n.a.	8,901	n.a.	n.a.
SNSP-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	65,988	n.a.
Reforma-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	47,845	13,563
Milenio-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	54,087	17,599

Note: Figures in red reflect the authors' estimates and projections based on available data. Also, this table corrects a miscalculation of SNSP homicides from 2007-2012 in the initial release of this report.

Under President Calderón (2006-2012), the number of intentional homicides annually increased more than two and a half times 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 to about 4% to 26,037. All told, throughout the Calderón administration, INEGI reported 121,669 people killed, an average of over 20,000 people killed per year, more than 55 per day, or just over two every hours.

Based on INEGI's official figures from 2013 and the authors projections for 2014, it appears that more than 40,000 people have been murdered over the course of the first two years of the Peña Nieto administration. Because the homicide rate remains considerably higher than during the first half of the previous administration, the annual average number of homicides under the Peña Nieto administration remains about 5% higher than during the Calderón administration. Thus, despite the declining rate of violence, there were still more than 59 homicides per day during the first two years of the Peña Nieto administration. At least a third of these homicides (13,563 according to *Reforma*), if not more than half (17,599 according to *Milenio*), took place under circumstances appearing to involve organized crime.

²⁹ 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.

V. ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENTS IN 2014

As detailed in this report and in previous years, the security situation in Mexico has deteriorated significantly according to a wide array of measures during the past decade. This report has, for the second straight year, offered some optimism that the situation is improving, particularly as measured by intentional homicides and those related to organized crime groups. However, there does remain room for further improvement, particularly in areas of the country where the causes of public insecurity are particularly deeply rooted. Enrique Peña Nieto, who completed the second full year of his presidency in 2014, was able to claim some substantial victories in 2014 on the public security front, but last year also provided him with challenges that could help define the president's success moving forward.

A. Counter-Drug Efforts

When he entered office in December 2012, Enrique Peña Nieto promised a shift in public security strategy away from the focus of the previous administration on dismantling Mexico's powerful drug cartels by going after their leadership structures, toward efforts that reduce the impacts of all crime – organized and other – on the public. That said, the rate of capturing and killing cartel bosses has not appeared to slow during the first two years of Peña Nieto's presidency, with at least 12 high-ranking cartel bosses captured or killed during that time. While significant in garnering public support as well as support from the United States, from whom the Mexican government receives substantial financial and institutional contributions, these disruptions to the power structure of these organizations often appear to lead to increased instability resulting from infighting among splinter organizations.

The biggest victory for Enrique Peña Nieto's government in 2014 came in February with the arrest of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán. Guzmán, who was the founder and leader of the Sinaloa cartel, based in the state of the same name, was arrested in Mazatlán on February 22 in an operation led by the Mexican Navy. U.S. agencies also collaborated in Guzmán's arrest. El Chapo had been Mexico's most-wanted man, and his arrest left the future of the Sinaloa cartel in question, though most experts expressed their belief that the organization – widely considered to be the most powerful and professional of Mexico's remaining criminal organizations – was structured and disciplined enough to withstand the loss of its principle leader, as well as the face of the organization.

A year later, this appears to be the case. Evidence of the group's relative stability may lie in the absence of a flare-up in violence following El Chapo's arrest, as happened following the arrests of key Gulf Cartel leaders in Tamaulipas in early April, evident of a power vacuum and resulting infighting. Left behind after the arrest of Guzmán is Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, the organization's other co-founder, who has seen a number of close associates arrested during 2014, including his own son in November. While El Chapo's arrest was hailed on both sides of the border as the largest blow to Mexican organized crime in many years, the overall structure of the cartel he allegedly headed appears largely intact, its capabilities seemingly undiminished, and his own prospects for extradition before 2018 almost nonexistent.

Further south, the Mexican government has continued to make headway in arresting and killing leaders of the Knights Templar Organization in Michoacán, including Enrique “Kike” Plancarte Solís and Nazario Moreno González, “El Chayo,” who were killed by Mexican armed forces in separate shootouts in March. More recently, KTO’s leader, and the face of the organization, Servando “La Tuta” Gómez Martínez, was arrested in late February. All told, at least seven principle KTO leaders were arrested or killed in 2014, including Nazario “El Chayo” Moreno González, killed in March. Moreno González previously led the La Familia Michoacana criminal organization, from which the KTO split in 2010. He had long been one of Mexico’s most-wanted criminals, and created headaches for the federal government when he was falsely reported killed in 2010 despite the popular consensus in Michoacán that he remained alive and in control of his operations.

The Mexican government also continues to capture top leaders of the Zetas criminal organization in the northern border states of Nuevo León and Tamaulipas, most recently with the arrest of that group’s newest alleged leader, Omar Trevino Morales, “Z-42,” near Monterrey, Nuevo León, in early March of this year. Trevino Morales had been recognized as the leader of the Zetas since 2013, when his brother Miguel Ángel Trevino Morales, “Z-40” was arrested. It is still too early to gauge what effects these high-level arrests will have moving forward, as lower-ranking members of the organizations presumably move to fill power vacuums, while rival cartels potentially eye these disruptions as opportunities to expand their own operations. The northern states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León, where the Zetas as well as the rival Gulf Cartel have their strongest presence, have been the site of multiple federal police and military deployments. As detailed in the report “Plan Tamaulipas: A New Security Strategy for a Troubled State,” high-impact crimes such as kidnappings and extortions have spiked there in recent years, particularly in Tamaulipas, which has the highest kidnapping rate in the country (2.5 reported per 100,000 citizens, compared with 0.4 per 100,000 national average).³⁰ As in other hot spots in Mexico, these crimes appear to stem from the splintering in criminal organizations resulting from the continued elimination of cartel bosses. These splinter groups, who often fight among each other for dominance, often turn to kidnapping and extorting local populations due to the cost and operational capacity required for large-scale drug trafficking operations. In recent years this has occurred not only in areas controlled by the Zetas, but also disconcertingly areas controlled by factions of the Gulf Cartel.³¹

B. Public Security Crisis and Self-Defense Forces in Michoacán

Michoacán remained one of the predominant public security stories in 2014, beginning in January with the federal government’s announcement that it would “institutionalize” the state’s myriad self-defense groups (*grupos de autodefensa*) that had emerged to counter the criminal activities of the Knights Templar organization (KTO), particularly extortion of local businesses and infiltration into the state’s agricultural industry, upon which large swaths of the population depend, and from which the first *autodefensas* emerged. From their emergence in early 2013 the *autodefensas* spread with little to no resistance from state and federal security forces until January 2014 when the Federal Police and Mexican armed forces were deployed to the state to restore order there.

³⁰ “Plan Tamaulipas: A New Security Strategy for a Troubled State.”

³¹ *Ibid.*

On January 27, Mexican Interior Minister Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong announced that the federal government and self-defense groups in Michoacán had agreed on a pact by which the groups would be absorbed into the state security apparatus, to form what were termed “Rural Defense Corps” that would operate under the authority of the Mexican Army, and the Rural State Police, which is intended to replace the state’s municipal police forces, and operates under the authority of the Michoacán state police. The eight-point document, signed by several self-defense leaders, specified that the corps would be temporary, and that they would be required to provide the federal government with a registry of all of their members, and to register all of their weapons. The following month, Peña Nieto announced a \$3.4 billion development program for the state, closely resembling a similar program implemented in Ciudad Juárez at the peak of that city’s bout with organized crime violence. In the case of Michoacán, though, rebuilding the social fabric may prove even more difficult than in the case of Juárez, since despite the relatively lower levels of violence, criminal organizations have penetrated deeper into the state’s economy, as became clear the same month, when self-defense group spokesman Estanislao Beltrán made it known that the *autodefensas* were receiving financing from the state’s mining industry, which the KTO, as well as its predecessor, La Familia Michoacana, had widely infiltrated and extorted.

The transition from vigilante self-defense groups to state-sponsored rural security forces has not been an altogether smooth process, however, underscored by conflicts between *autodefensas* turned rural defense groups. Hipólito Mora, the founder of the *autodefensa* in the La Ruana community in the Tierra Caliente region of Michoacán and currently a commander for the Rural Defense Corps, was indicted January 3 along with 26 others in connection with the deaths of 11 in a December 16 firefight in which his son was killed. Mora claims that his group came under attack from the group led by Luis Antonio Torres, “El Americano,” also a rural police commander. There is a long-standing conflict between the two men, originating during their time with the self-defense groups. Moreover, public support has waned for self-defense groups since a year ago, as evidenced by a public perceptions survey conducted by Mexico Unido Contra la Delincuencia and Consulta Mitofsky in which 32% of respondents expressed approval of the groups, as compared with 43% in 2014.³²

Meanwhile, in Michoacán, which has been another focal point for public security efforts given the rise of the Knights Templar criminal organization and the resulting emergence of self-defense organizations there since early 2013, the government appointed public security commissioner, Alfredo Castillo, has left his position a year his installation by the federal government to coordinate security operations there. Castillo has been replaced by Mexican Army General Pedro Felipe Gurrola Ramírez. The move was announced by Interior Minister Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, and was made in order to shift the focus to the state’s elections, coming up in June. Castillo’s success as Michoacán’s public security commissioner is under debate, with some crediting him with bringing the chaotic situation involving the Knights Templar criminal organization and the self-defense groups (*grupos de autodefensa*) that emerged to counter it somewhat under control, while others maintain that the underlying problems persist. Speaking with *El Universal*, several security experts weighed in on the matter, generally agreeing that Castillo’s tenure saw an improvement of the overall security situation in Michoacán, but was not successful in bringing the self-defense groups under control. Castillo undertook a campaign beginning early in 2014 to institutionalize the *autodefensas*, folding them into the state’s security apparatus as part of the Rural Defense Corps. Gerardo

³² “Posicionamiento MUCD XIV Encuesta Nacional Sobre Percepción de Inseguridad Ciudadana en México.” *Mexico Unido Contra la Delincuencia and Consulta Mitofsky*. March 10, 2015.

Rodríguez, a professor of national security and terrorism and member of the Analysis Collective of Security with Democracy (Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia, Casede), gives Castillo credit for exposing ties between organized crime and public officials, but said that was the extent of his success, given that he was unable “to articulate a State strategy for fighting a low intensity war,” adding that he also failed to establish meaningful cooperation with local officials. Jorge Chabat, researcher at the Center for Economic Research and Teaching (Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, CIDE), recognized that since Castillo’s instatement a year ago, there have been advancements in the form of fewer criminal groups operating in the open, but that such groups still have not been eliminated entirely. Sergio Bárcena Juárez, a professor in the judicial and social studies department at Tecnológico Monterrey, said that Castillo “never was able to achieve a sustained and stable treaty, first between the *autodefensas* and [criminal groups], and later between the *autodefensas* and the government was very erratic.” Now that many members of the former *autodefensas* have been incorporated into the Rural Police force in Michoacán, Castillo announced in early January that it would be disbanded for the eventual creation of the Citizens’ Force (Fuerza Ciudadana), which will be Michoacán’s answer to President Peña Nieto’s call for 32 unified police forces to replace the inconsistent and often corrupt municipal police forces in each Mexican state and the Federal District.

Bárcena Juárez also criticized Castillo for not recognizing the danger of new groups emerging, such as the Viagras. There have been reports recently that the Viagras, a criminal group that, like the predecessors to the Knights Templar, La Familia Michoacana, espouse social goals as their primary motivator, have been eyeing the weakening of the KTO as an opportunity for expanding their own operations. The widest reports have been of the Viagras making their presence known in Apatzingán, the economic center of Michoacán’s troubled Tierra Caliente region, and the former stronghold of the KTO, from which the Viagras are believed to have emerged as a splinter organization. Javier Cortés, general vicar of the Apatzingán diocese, told AFP that the Viagras are quietly waiting for missteps from the government to use to their benefit. Raúl Benítez Manaut, a public security expert at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM), said that the Viagras “are taking advantage of their connections with paramilitary groups; there is fertile ground for them to be the next bosses of Michoacán.” Jaime Rivera from the Michoacan University (Universidad Michoacana), said that although they do not currently have great operational capacity, they are the strongest armed group to emerge from the downfall of the KTO, and “could represent a new challenge for the State.” An armed confrontation between Federal Police and former members of the Rural Forces on January 6 resulting in 44 arrests and nine dead raised concerns that the Viagras had infiltrated that organization. An intelligence report published in *Milenio* revealed that the former Rural Forces members, who had taken over the Apatzingán municipal building, were under the command of the Viagras. Alfredo Castillo, before leaving his post as public security commissioner, insisted that there was no credible evidence that any members of organized crime had managed to enter into the Rural Forces.

As detailed by the authors in the report “Citizen Security in Michoacán,” released earlier this year, the federal government will have to carefully implement its five point Plan Michoacán, conducting and presenting regular evaluation and assessment of the outcomes of its programs using precise, program-specific performance metrics in order to address the roots of organized crime in the state

and its effects on the population.³³ Moreover, as in other parts of Mexico, domestic drug consumption has increased and become a greater threat to public security. As such, federal government efforts and international aid should focus greater resources and effort on preventing and treating drug consumption in Michoacán as part of their initiatives to stamp out the roots of organized crime. The increased pressure on the state's judicial apparatus underscores the importance of Michoacán ensuring that the operators of its criminal justice system – particularly prosecutors, public defenders, and court personnel – be adequately trained and prepared for the transition to the new justice system, mandated to be implemented nationwide in 2016. Finally, while the federal government's appointment of a public security commissioner in Michoacán does appear to have provided some needed stability to a rapidly deteriorating situation, the intervention runs the risk of unwittingly stifling civic engagement. As such, the federal government's liaison should work intently to create spaces and regular opportunities for dialogue and collaboration among citizens and civic organizations, and should particularly empower the state and local citizen security counsels to provide consistent communications and constructive feedback on the progress of security measures.

C. The Next Generation: Jalisco's New Cartel

The above noted events in 2014 also contributed in a number of changes in the landscape of Mexican organized crime, as some organized crime groups gained strength even as others faltered. For example, the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG)—in contrast with other groups like the embattled Gulf Cartel, Knights Templar, and Zetas—grew significantly in power and scope over the course of 2014. In response to a recent information request, the PGR revealed in April 2015 that the CJNG is currently operating in its home state of Jalisco, along with Colima, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Nayarit, Guerrero, Morelos, Veracruz and the Federal District.³⁴ The group gained national attention five years ago, but has spread rapidly over the past year in part due to the weakening of other groups in the region such as the Knights Templar in Michoacán and, according to Alejandro Hope, security director of the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness (Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad, Imco), relative complicity on the part of the Mexican government since its formation in 2010.

The CJNG, led by Nemesio Osegera Cervantes, “El Mencho,” formed in 2010 after the death of Ignacio “Nacho” Coronel, who had been the leader of the Sinaloa Cartel in Jalisco, which left a power vacuum in the region that several criminal groups scrambled to fill. The group emerged as the predominant force in Jalisco thanks in large part to its ties with the Milenio Cartel, the organization that dominated Michoacán prior to the rise of the La Familia Organization and the Knights Templar, which effectively took over that state in the 1990s and early 2000s. The CJNG struck off on its own and has had held a strong presence in neighboring Michoacán since 2000.³⁵ According to Jesús Pérez Caballero, an expert on organized crime, drug trafficking and criminal justice in Latin America, the CJNG continues to rely heavily on structures put in place by the Milenio Cartel, which today has been largely dismantled.³⁶ Pérez Caballero adds that Jalisco's capital Guadalajara is

³³ Kimberly Heinle, Cory Molzahn, and David A. Shirk, “Citizen Security in Michoacán,” 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.

³⁴ Mosso, Rubén. “Invade cártel de Jalisco ocho estados y el DF.” *Milenio*. April 20, 2015.

³⁵ Jesús Pérez Caballero. “CJNG: Cómo adaptarse con éxito a la ‘guerra al narcotráfico’ en México.” *Insight Crime*. Oct. 14, 2014.

³⁶ *ibid.*

attractive to organized crime groups due to its strategic location as a transshipment point, and has played host to several criminal organizations in the past, including the now-defunct Guadalajara cartel, as well as the Sinaloa and Milenio cartels. The city has ample local know-how and infrastructure to facilitate drug trafficking, money laundering, and other criminal operations that may make the CJNG an increasingly important player in Mexico's underworld in the coming years.

As was the case with the now greatly weakened La Familia Michoacana, the CJNG emerged with the expressed purpose of countering the presence of the Zetas criminal organization in its home state, branding itself the *mata-zetas*, or "Zeta killers." Since establishing dominance in the region, however, the CJNG has taken an oppositional stance to the Mexican government there, similar to La Familia's open conflict with the Federal Police in Michoacán in 2009-2010. The CJNG has targeted security forces in several attacks in 2015, most notably in an ambush of Jalisco state police (Fuerza Única) agents in early April that left 15 officers dead. The same day another presumed cell of the CJNG killed the municipal police director of Zacoalco de Torres, leaving a sign on his body threatening future attacks against authorities. An ambush on March 19, 2015 in the Ocotlán municipality left five members of Mexico's National Gendarmerie dead. In all, 21 killings of police officers were attributed to the CJNG over a 20-day period between March 19 and April 7, 2015. The April attack against the unified police led some security experts to argue that the ambush exposed weaknesses in the state's relatively nascent police force. Security analyst Gerardo Rodríguez Sánchez-Lara warned that the attack should alert authorities that the cartel is attempting, or has possibly achieved, infiltration into the state's security apparatus, as well as ties with local authorities, as has been seen in the nearby Pacific states Michoacán and Guerrero.³⁷

In addition to its open challenge against Mexican security forces, the CJNG has also recently made its presence known in the state of Michoacán, battling both the Knights Templar organization there as well as self-defense forces. This is likely in a push to insert its influence in Lázaro Cardenas, Michoacán, which houses Mexico's second busiest port by volume (recently reclaimed by Mexican security forces), and thus a valuable resource for moving shipments of drugs and precursor materials for the production of methamphetamines, the group's principle activity.

Authorities have made some high-profile arrests of CJNG members, notably of Rubén Oseguera González, "El Menchito," son of the group's leader, in January 2014 and of Abigael González Valencia, "El Cuini," arrested in February and alleged to have been the group's head of finances. These arrests, however, have not appeared to slow the group's expansion. Moreover, a federal district court judge ordered El Menchito to be released from prison in January of this year on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence against him. Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes is now considered to be a primary objective of both the U.S. and Mexican governments, and his organization is widely regarded as one of the biggest current threats posed to public security in Mexico.

³⁷ Monroy, Jorge. "En cinco años, nuevo cártel se empoderó sin algún freno." *El Economista*. April 13, 2015.

D. The Continued Problem of Official Corruption and Human Rights Abuses

Mexico's problem with disappearances continues to play a role into 2015, and is keeping Mexico in the international spotlight, particularly with the ongoing crisis in Iguala, Guerrero (See Textbox: "The Ayotzinapa Massacre"). The case of Iguala also brought to the forefront of public attention the problem of political corruption in Mexico, particularly at the municipal level. Many security experts point to official corruption as one of the foundational causes of Mexico's public security challenges, and the scale of corruption evident through increased scrutiny on Guerrero and Michoacán in recent months reveals a significant challenge for the federal government moving forward.

In Guerrero, the federal government pronounced that public security operations within 13 municipalities had been controlled by organized crime, prompting its intervention. Tomás Zerón de Lucio, head of the Criminal Investigation Agency of Mexico's Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR), said that the leadership of municipal police forces had also been handicapped by local criminal organizations to work on behalf of their interests. According to Zerón de Lucio, these groups decided which operations would be carried out and when, and that the only distinction between criminals and police was their official designation. As a result, the federal government took over security functions in those municipalities beginning October 20 of last year. As reported by the organization Mexico

The Ayotzinapa Student Massacre

The most reviled case of official corruption in 2014 was the case of local authorities in Iguala, a small inland town in the state of Guerrero. On September 26, 2014, dozens of student protestors and innocent civilians came under fire and were assaulted by police, and dozens were taken into custody. Forty-three students from a rural teacher's college based in the nearby town of Ayotzinapa who were taken into custody were never seen again, and quickly became known as the "Ayotzinapa 43."

Details gradually emerged suggesting that Iguala mayor José Luis Abarca Velázquez and his wife, María de los Ángeles Pineda Villa, were angered by the students' protests and allegedly ordered municipal police to "teach them a lesson." Shortly after the students were detained turned over to a local organized crime group known as the Guerreros Unidos, Mayor Abarca and his wife went into hiding and were only found weeks later. It took the federal government until January 2015 to confirm that the students were actually dead and, while authorities searched, they unearthed dozens of other victims whose bodies had been buried in and around Iguala in recent years, suggesting that such disappearances—perhaps with similar government complicity—were a serious problem.

The entire process was devastating for the families of the victims and outrageous to the public at large, who decried the complicity or ineptitude of government officials at all levels. Marches, public demonstrations, and even acts of violence took place around the country, including an assault on the state capitol in Chilpancingo, which was subsequently set ablaze by Molotov cocktails. Even though the immediate blame for the massacre was placed squarely on Iguala's local authorities, the state's governor stepped down in disgrace within weeks of the incident and, even though federal authorities ultimately captured the fugitive mayor, his wife, and other perpetrators of the massacre (including both officials and members of the Guerreros Unidos) many also severely criticized the Peña Nieto administration for failing to respond quickly and effectively to the crisis.

Indeed, while many Mexicans were outraged by an exasperated off-hand remark by Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam, who ended a press conference with the unfortunate phrase, "Enough, I'm tired" (*Ya me cansé*), which caught on as a social media slogan for millions of Mexicans fed up by the evident insensitivity and ineptitude of government officials. In public protests and social media, some even adopted the more critical view that the Iguala massacre should be considered an act of state ("fue un acto de estado"), and called for the resignation of Peña Nieto himself.

From Emily Edmonds-Poli & David A. Shirk, *Contemporary Mexican Politics*, 3rd Edition, (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming).

United Against Crime and Consulta Mitofsky, the tragic incident in Iguala had a nationwide impact on public perceptions of security in their country, with public distrust in local police and a fear of becoming a victim of kidnapping or robbery remaining relatively flat from last year, despite declines in both categories from 2013.³⁸

Fallout from the federal government's takeover of public security functions in Michoacán has included the arrests of several political figures accused of having ties with organized crime, including several mayors as well as the son of former Governor Fausto Vallejo. Michoacán's former secretary general and interim governor, José Jesús Reyna García, was formally arrested for alleged links to organized crime on May 7 on orders from a federal judge. Reyna, a member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI), was removed from his role as secretary general in early April after Mexico's Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) found possible connections with the Knights Templar Organization (Caballeros Templarios, KTO). Reyna was indicted the following month.

There was also a spate of arrests of Michoacán mayors, largely from the troubled Tierra Caliente region. These include Uriel Chávez of the Apatzingán municipality, Jesús Cruz Valencia (Aguililla), Dalia Santana Pineda (Huetamo), Salma Karru, (Pátzcuaro), all from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI); and Arqímides Oseguera (Lázaro Cárdenas) and José Luis Madrigal Figueroa (Numarán) from the Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD). Also under indictment for suspected ties to the KTO is Rodrigo Vallejo, who appeared in a video with KTO leader Servando Gómez, "La Tuta." Rodrigo Vallejo is the son of former Michoacán Governor Fausto Vallejo, who resigned from his position in June as the allegations against his son surfaced, though he cited health reasons.

Finally, eight members of a Mexican Army battalion were apprehended for their involvement in the extrajudicial killing of 22 suspected members of organized crime—21 men and one female minor—in the Tlatlaya municipality of the State of Mexico (Estado de México, Edomex) near the border with Guerrero on June 30, 2014. According to the CNDH, 15 of the 22 individuals killed were shot by soldiers despite having surrendered. In one of his last statements as CNDH president, Raúl Plascencia Villanueva affirmed that after repelling an armed attack by the alleged criminals, the soldiers entered the warehouse where the incident occurred and in an "arbitrary, disproportional, unnecessary action detached from the system of human rights" shot dead 12 individuals who had either surrendered or were wounded (including the young female named Erika Gómez González, who had been shot in the leg and was then reportedly killed execution style).³⁹ Regarding the other three victims, the CNDH said that it was not possible to determine whether their wounds resulted from an exchange of gunfire or whether they were executed, because their bodies were moved from their original locations. The fact that they had been tampered with, presumably to give the appearance that they had had been wounded while engaged in an exchange of gunfire, was sufficient

³⁸ "Décima cuarta encuesta nacional sobre percepción de inseguridad ciudadana en México." *México Unido Contra la Delincuencia*. Accessed March 28, 2015.

³⁹ Julia described soldiers turning over the injured Erika Gómez and shooting her in the chest before turning her back over and placing a rifle next to her body, as appeared to be the case for other bodies at the scene, giving the appearance that they were armed when they were shot and killed. Following the incident in Tlatlaya, Julia said that she was in PGR custody for a week, where she was approached by members of the PGJEM, the Mexican Navy (Marina), and the PGR's organized crime division coerced her into stating that the people who had died were criminals. She also said that she was made to sign a number of documents, but was not given copies of any of them. Finally, she added, she received no food during the first three days, and that she was photographed along with weapons seized in the warehouse.

for the CNDH to conclude that they were killed extra-judicially. SEDENA's official account of the incident maintained that all of the 22 dead were killed while engaged in an armed confrontation with the soldiers, but a survivor of the incident—a young woman using the pseudonym “Julia”—claimed in an interview that the soldiers killed the surviving gunmen in execution-style killings after they had been disarmed, and moved bodies and planted weapons in order to make it appear as though they had died while engaged in a shootout. According to the woman, only one of the gunmen died as a result of the confrontation.

The soldiers were charged with violating military code, and were taken into the custody of the Mexican military's legal authority (Procuraduría General de Justicia Militar). One of the detainees, a lieutenant, also faced charges of insubordination (*desobediencia e infracción de deberes*). According to Mexico's National Defense Ministry (Secretaría de Defensa Nacional, SEDENA), these pending charges were “independent of the investigations being carried out by civil authorities,” namely Mexico's Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR). The eight soldiers were held in a military prison facility. If eye witness accounts are verified, this would represent the worst massacre carried out by the Mexican armed forces since President Enrique Peña Nieto took office in December 2012.

Interior Minister Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong has maintained that should this be the case, it would be “an isolated action and not the general behavior of the Army and Navy.” José Miguel Vivanco, however, stresses that the massacre is just one side of the problem, and that it is now the “cover-up” that needs to be investigated thoroughly to discover any official—military or civilian—who helped in hiding the true events from the public. Moreover, the case will prove to be the first high-profile challenge for recent changes to Mexico's justice system allowing personnel of the armed forces accused of committing abuses against civilians to be tried in civilian courts. Javier Oliva, security expert at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM), said that the event underscores the risks of an overdependence on the armed forces to perform security functions for which local authorities no longer take responsibility.

E. Increased Scrutiny on Disappearances in Mexico

One consideration that cannot be ignored when evaluating homicides committed in Mexico is the number of disappeared, underscored by the continued discovery of clandestine graves in a number of states throughout Mexico. As noted below in the text box on “Recent Data on Disappearances in Mexico,” 2014 was the year with the highest number of disappearances on record, due partly to increased monitoring by the country's new National Registry for Missing or Disappeared Persons. This problem of disappearances has come to the forefront in recent years amid accusations that the Mexican government has not properly investigated cases of homicide. The issue was especially a concern during the search for the 43 missing teacher trainees in Guerrero in September and October, when dozens of human remains were discovered in unmarked graves. At the time of this report, only one of the students has been positively identified among many charred remains found scattered in a riverbed close to where the students disappeared.

One possible explanation for an apparent increase in disappearances is that criminal organizations, no longer as extensively involved in open, armed conflict with one another, now tend more towards concealing the remains of their victims, in contrast with the peak of cartel violence in 2011-2012 when bodies were regularly displayed in public, often mutilated and displaying “narco-messages” directed toward rival groups. It is well-documented that criminal organizations – particularly in the southern-most states, have diversified their activities to include kidnappings for ransom, extortion, and infiltration into local economies, as was seen with the Knights Templar Organization and their intrusion into Michoacán’s lime and mining industries.

With this increased contact between criminal organizations and the general public it is likely that the groups would wish to keep a lower profile, as activities such as extortion would only be hindered by increased attention of the authorities. Moreover, while it appears that organized crime-related homicides are reduced as the groups increasingly engage in other criminal activities such as extortion, at the same time the general population where the groups operate find themselves directly impacted by these activities. While down somewhat in 2014, levels of extortion are up significantly since 2006, as are incidences of kidnapping, particularly in hot spots such as Tamaulipas, as mentioned earlier.

Whatever the contributing factors, despite efforts to monitor disappearances more carefully, the Mexican government has struggled to provide consistent and reliable figures. The RNPED figures reported in the textbox on “Data on Disappearances” were revised by the government multiple times in 2014. In May 2014, the Mexican Interior ministry announced that there were 8,000 disappearances in Mexico. In June 2014, Interior Minister Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong clarified that there were 16,000 missing persons. In August 2014, Mexico’s Interior Ministry (Secretaría de Gobernación, SEGOB) reported that there were more than 22,000 missing persons, of which more than 12,500 occurred under the Calderón administration (2006-2012) and more than 9,500 occurred since the start of the Peña Nieto administration.

Recent Data on Disappearances in Mexico

Mexico saw a record number of disappearances and missing persons in 2014, according to the National Registry of Missing or Disappeared Persons (Registro Nacional de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas, RNPED).

- According to *Animal Politico*, in the first ten months of the year, Mexico recorded 4,836 cases of people who could “not be found” (“no localizadas”). From 2007 through October 2014, there were 22,610 disappearances, plus another 995 cases from prior to 2007, for a total of 23,605 missing or disappeared persons. 40% of these cases were recorded during the Peña Nieto administration.
- At the state level, Tamaulipas registered the most disappearances, with 5,380 cases through October 2014, 30% of which were recorded during the Peña Nieto administration. Jalisco had the next most with 2,150 cases, 49% during the Peña Nieto administration.
- México state (Edomex) had the third most disappearances, with 1,745, with more than half reported since December 2012. Coahuila, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Baja California, Nuevo León, Guanajuato, and Michoacán rounded out the remaining top ten states, respectively. Moving into 2015, according to the most recent official data released on disappearances, reported by the Attorney General’s Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) on January 19 of this year, the number of disappeared has increased to 23,271 since October. The PGR’s Search Unit is actively searching for 621 of those, just 2.7%.

Adapted from Chris Issel: “2014 Tallies Most Disappearances on Record in Mexican History,” available online: <https://justiceinmexico.org/2014-tallies-most-disappearances-on-record-in-mexican-history/>

F. Analyzing Peña Nieto's Second Full Year in Office

As illustrated elsewhere in this report, the Peña Nieto administration, relying on data provided by offices of the attorneys general of Mexico's 31 states and the Federal District, asserts that 2014 brought a second consecutive year of declining homicides, as well as marked reductions in other crimes associated with organized crime, such as kidnapping and extortion. Nevertheless, there remains some uncertainty as to the veracity of the administration's strategy and its effectiveness in decreasing crime's impact on Mexican society.

When Peña Nieto, of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI), was elected in 2012, it was widely seen as a rebuke of the previous 12 years governed by the National Action Party (Partido de Acción Nacional, PAN), and in particular the six-year term of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), which oversaw the most violent period in Mexico in recent memory, resulting from Calderón's military-led campaign against Mexico's powerful drug cartels. In turn, Peña Nieto promised a fundamental shift in public security strategy, which would focus on reducing the impact of all crime on the population while professionalizing the nation's police forces. The Peña Nieto administration also made efforts to shift focus away from public security and towards economic development, particularly through the controversial move to open Mexico's state-run oil company Pemex to private investment.

Nevertheless, Peña Nieto has not been able to escape having to address the continued impacts of organized crime on Mexican society, and received particularly harsh domestic and international criticism for his slow reaction to the disappearance of 43 teacher trainees from Iguala, Guerrero in September. It is also evident from a number of recent surveys that there remains a high level of distrust of authorities in Mexico, which Moreover, a public perception survey conducted by Consulta Mitofsky and Mexico United Against Crime (México Unido Contra la Delincuencia, MUCD) released in March of this year found that despite the 5.4% decrease in overall crime from 2013 and 2014 according to the SESNSP, the number of victims of crime increased from 24.5% to 30.8% during the same period.⁴⁰ This contradiction in progress—or the lack thereof—from 2013 to 2014 points to the possibility of an increase in crimes going either unreported or uninvestigated, the so-called “cifra negra.” MUCD and Consulta Mitofsky estimate the *cifra negra* in Mexico at 93.8% of all crimes committed, having been on the rise in recent years. The study attributes seven out of 10 of these unreported crimes to reasons associated with a distrust of authorities on the part of Mexican citizens. José Luis Chicoma, Dalia Toledo and Liliana Alvarado, security experts from the Ethos Laboratory of Public Policy (Laboratorio de Políticas Públicas Ethos), estimate the *cifra negra* at 93%, up from 88% in 2008.⁴¹ Moreover, according to Chicoma, just 5% of reported crimes result in a conviction.

These conclusions are consistent with findings from the “Criminal Traffic Light Survey” (Encuesta Semáforo Delictivo), a citizen-led effort to gauge advancements and setbacks at local, state, and federal levels in the public security situation in Mexico. Semáforo Delictivo found that 96% of respondents feel that corruption among authorities is the primary cause of insecurity in Mexico, followed by ineffectiveness of authorities (89%), and a lack of transparency (79%). By comparison, 69% felt that street-level drug dealing and a lack of opportunities for youth were significant causes

⁴⁰ “Posicionamiento MUCD XIV Encuesta Nacional Sobre Percepción de Inseguridad Ciudadana en México.” *México Unido Contra la Delincuencia and Consulta Mitofsky*. March 10, 2015.

⁴¹ Monroy, Jorge. “Encaran a Osorio: no bajaron los delitos, creció la impunidad.” *El Economista*. Feb. 25, 2015.

for insecurity, and 59% felt the same about a lack of interest on the part of citizens.⁴² Meanwhile, according to the same study 74% of respondents felt that the security situation had worsened over the past year, while just 5% felt that it had improved.

Upon entering office in December 2012, Peña Nieto began the creation of a National Gendarmerie (*Gendarmería Nacional*), a key component in his proposed crime strategy during his 2012 campaign. The initial proposal of 40,000 agents was drastically scaled back in 2013, and the agency's launch was pushed back to July 2014, though agents were first deployed to five states (Baja California, Chiapas, Guanajuato, Jalisco and Tamaulipas) in September. While the stated mission for the agency was, in the words of the president, to “contribute to the protection of Mexicans, their goods and sources of employment when these are being threatened by crime,” and to “strengthen the local public safety institutions, safeguard production cycles in cities and states where this is required,” the agency's role remains largely undefined.⁴³

Following the dismantling of once-powerful drug trafficking organizations in Mexico, smaller splinter groups have turned to extorting local businesses for income, raising the need to lend support to local police forces. Three security experts speaking with *El Universal* in November – Jorge Chabat, Javier Oliva and Ernesto López Portillo – agree that the Gendarmerie by and large is not adhering to the legal framework under which it was created.⁴⁴ Chabat pointed to the case of Iguala, where the agency was deployed to assume, rather than bolster, public security functions. Agents were also deployed to Michoacán to address the activities of the Knights Templar organization there, as well as assist in the search for KTO leader Servando Gómez Martínez. Chabat, Oliva and López Portillo agreed that the only function they have undertaken that is in strict adherence to their legal framework was the assistance they provided to residents of Los Cabos, Baja California after the passing of hurricane Odile in September.

At the end of 2014, with the July 2015 rapidly approaching on the horizon, Peña Nieto reached his lowest approval ratings since entering office in December 2012. A recent study by *El Universal* and Buendía & Laredo showed that just 41% approved of Peña Nieto's job performance, while 50% disapproved.⁴⁵ A year prior, 50% approved of his job performance, while just 37% disapproved. The findings revealed the lowest perception of the presidency during the past six years. The disappearance of the students in Iguala, Guerrero was the issue garnering the most responses when respondents were asked what was the worst point of Peña Nieto's presidency, receiving 10% of responses, exceeding those for reforms (9%), insecurity (6%), poor governance and energy reform (5%). 54% said that Peña Nieto was in its worst moment of his presidency, and 47% responded that Mexico is a worse or much worse state than before Peña Nieto, while just 30% feel that it is better.

VI. CONCLUSION

The general conclusion of this report is that there appears to be a real and significant decrease in homicides in Mexico in 2014. However, the data presently available are incomplete and widely

⁴² “Encuesta Semáforo Delictivo.” *Semáforo Delictivo*. Accessed March 20, 2015.

⁴³ Dibble, Sandra. “New gendarmerie in Baja California.” *San Diego Union Tribune*. Sep. 5, 2014.

⁴⁴ Muedano, Marcos. “Gendarmería pierde rumbo.” *El Universal*. Nov. 30, 2014.

⁴⁵ “Encuesta. Baja índice de aprobación de EPN.” *El Universal*. Dec. 1, 2014.

viewed as circumspect because of concerns about possible government manipulation and pressure on media organizations to de-emphasize problems of crime and violence. In other words, the problems related to the availability and credibility of data that can help to monitor and evaluate Mexico's security situation that were underscored in last year's *Drug Violence in Mexico* report have persisted. The authors have made our best possible effort to work with the available data to provide an objective assessment of Mexico's security situation, the problem of organized crime, and especially violence related to drug trafficking.

That said, the widespread perception that authorities have been have failed to properly report the level of violence seriously detracts from the credibility of government efforts. The massive demonstrations and public outrage expressed in response to ongoing violence—in particular, the tragic events in Guerrero in September 2014—were largely motivated by the perception that the Mexican government is aloof, inept, and insincere in its efforts to improve the country's security situation. Indeed, there was widespread disenchantment with public authorities and key institutions in general in 2014, with over a third of Mexicans expressing little or no confidence in the Mexican army (an all time low), over half expressing little or no confidence in the National Human Rights Commission, more than two thirds expressing little or no confidence in the Presidency, and three quarters expressing little or no confidence in the country's political parties. These indicators reflect sharp increases in public dissatisfaction, and have been accompanied by the lowest measures of support for democratic governance more generally since the year 2000. Thus, such sentiments may spell important consequences not only for the upcoming midterm elections in July 2015, but for Mexico's political future in general.

Ultimately, the authors see the improvements in Mexico's security situations as modest, long overdue, and difficult to attribute to specific public policy measures. There has clearly been a shift in the balance of power among competing organized crime groups in Mexico, and part of that adjustment is certainly attributable to government efforts to disrupt the powerful criminal organizations that have held sway in the country for decades. One result of the realignment has been to give certain criminal organizations near complete monopolies over key drug trafficking areas, which has reduced the competition and conflict that produced the dramatic increases in violence seen in recent years. It is likely that some of those monopolies have been established through collaboration with government authorities, which therefore casts significant doubt on government actions that weaken a given criminal organization (to the possible advantage of another). There are also unintended consequences, since alternative forms of criminal violence remain at elevated levels due to the fragmentation of organized crime. Yet, it is clear that recent government efforts have clearly seriously reduced the capabilities of certain criminal organizations in Mexico—particularly, the Knights Templar Organization and the Zetas—that presented a major threat to Mexican national and citizen security. The fight against Mexico's powerful organized crime groups is far from over, but—whatever the cause—continuation of the downward trend in lethal violence is sorely needed.

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 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.⁴⁶ Labeling homicides by specific characteristics therefore involves some degree of subjective interpretation. For example, while the concept of “intra-family violence” might seem rather straightforward, there could be multiple and competing notions of what constitutes a homicide that occurs within a “family.”⁴⁷ The same methodological challenge exists when classifying and counting other categories of crime, such as “hate crimes” targeting persons based on the victim’s ethnicity or sexual orientation. Indeed, sociologists and criminologists would be quick to point out that “crime” itself is a socially-constructed and culturally variable concept.

Thus, although government officials, scholars, and media sources make common references to terms like “drug violence,” “narco-violence,” “cartel-related violence,” “drug-war violence,” “organized-crime-related violence,” etc., there are naturally significant challenges in attempting to catalogue and measure such violence. Efforts to focus narrowly on drug-trafficking-related violence are problematic because the activities of drug traffickers have diversified significantly into other areas of organized crime. Indeed, the very definition of “organized crime” is itself much debated among scholars and experts: the term is used interchangeably to describe an affiliation, a lifestyle, and a type of crime.⁴⁸ Moreover, the scale, scope, complexity, and purpose of “organized-crime groups,” or OCGs, varies 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”).

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ For example, if a person is killed by their domestic partner, does that constitute “intra-family” violence? If someone is killed by an ex-spouse, is that still violence within the “family”? If someone is killed by a fourth cousin that they never met, should that case be considered one of “intra-family violence” or merely a random coincidence among strangers?

⁴⁸ As Maltz (1976) notes, defining and studying organized crime is complicated and, like all forms of crime, subject to evolving societal norms and biases. Contemporary official and scholarly definitions tend to emphasize the sustained and concerted efforts of individuals to deliberately defy the state for material gain. Moreover, as Naim (2006) and Bjelopera and Finklea (2012) point out, contemporary discussions of organized crime focus especially on its transnational nature and its ability to challenge the state, especially in an era of accelerated flows of goods, people, and capital across national borders. See: Jerome P. Bjelopera and Kristin M. Finklea, “Organized Crime: An Evolving Challenge for U.S. Law Enforcement,” *CRS Report for Congress*. January 2012. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2012); Michael D. Maltz, “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).

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*).⁴⁹ 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 leaves virtually any discussion of the violence attributable to “drug trafficking” or “organized crime” in Mexico open to subjective interpretation and unsubstantiated allegations.

Despite all of these conceptual and methodological issues, it is also difficult to ignore the extraordinary characteristics of the violence that Mexico has recently experienced, or the role that DTOs and OCGs have played in it. Such groups use specific types of weapons, specific tactics (e.g., targeted assassinations, street gun battles, etc.), extreme forms of violence (e.g., torture, dismemberment, and decapitation), explicit messages to authorities and each other (e.g., notes, signs, and banners), and public displays of violence intended to spread fear (e.g., bodies hanging from bridges). Hence, 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 other forms of violent crimes. Hence, homicide data provide an important measure of Mexico’s recent violence.

1. Government Data on Homicide

Official data on homicides in Mexico are available from two sources. First, public-health records filed by coroners’ offices can be used to identify cases where the cause of death was unnatural, such

⁴⁹ Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, *Ley Federal Contra la Delincuencia Organizada*. (Last version published on March 14, 2014). <http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/101.pdf>

as cases of gunshot wounds, stabbings, lacerations, asphyxiation, etc. While all datasets have limitations, the most consistent, complete, and reliable source of information in Mexico is the autonomous government statistics agency, INEGI, which provides data on death by homicide and other forms of violent crime. It must be noted that INEGI's homicide figures include both intentional and unintentional homicides, such as car accidents.

A second source of data on homicide comes from criminal investigations by law enforcement to establish a formal determination of intentional criminal wrongdoing, and the subsequent conviction and sentencing of suspects charged with these crimes. The National Public Security System, SNSP, compiles and reports data on cases involving intentional homicides that are identified by law enforcement. In recent years, SNSP has released its homicide data on a monthly basis to provide more timely access to information. It should be noted that this is an enormous feat, and highly uncommon; not even the FBI Uniform Crime Report provides such timely updated information on homicides.

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.⁵⁰ Both 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.

2. Organized-Crime-Style Homicides

Neither of the two official sources on homicide statistics identifies whether there is a connection to organized crime in a particular case, such as “drug” killings. However, both government and independent sources have attempted to do so by examining other variables associated with a given crime. For example, characteristic signs of possible organized crime involvement in a homicide might include the fact that the victim was carrying an illegal weapon, was transporting drugs, had been abducted, was killed in a particular fashion, or was under investigation for organized crime activities. These kinds of details are available to criminal investigators and analysts and are compiled by the SNSP (e.g., CISEN, CENAPI, SSP, SEDENA, SEMAR, and Gobernación).⁵¹

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. Early figures on “drug-related” homicides were

⁵⁰ The key source of the discrepancy is that homicides are identified by different means and reported at different times. Coroners' reports are based on autopsies conducted at the time that a body is found, and are reported for that calendar year. Hence, a person killed the year before, or even a decade ago, will be registered in the year of the autopsy. Law-enforcement efforts to document homicides generally reflect the calendar year in which a formal charge of homicide was levied. SNSP data may also include homicides that were not identified through a coroner's examination. Still, the statistical correlation in the years where the two data sets overlap (1997-2012) produces a Pearson's coefficient of .949, which suggests a very strong relationship between the two variables being measured.

⁵¹ According to Mexican security expert Viridiana Ríos, who worked with the office of the Mexican president on analyzing these data, during the Calderón administration, the compilation of these data at that time was coordinated by the Technical Secretary for the National Security Council (CSN).

reported by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) from 2000-2008, based on data from the Mexican Attorney General's Office (PGR).⁵² 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 2013.⁵³ However, since mid-2013, the Mexican government has not released figures identifying the number of organized crime-style figures. Critics argue that the refusal to release data on such killings reflects a politically motivated effort by the Peña Nieto administration to change the media narrative about Mexico's security situation.

Because of the limitations of government data—and a lack of transparency on how these data are collected—several media sources, non-governmental organizations, and researchers conduct their own independent monitoring of efforts on homicides and organized-crime-related violence. Such efforts typically involve identifying and recording homicide cases reported by authorities and media sources, and then isolating those cases that bear characteristics typical of DTOs and OCGs. Mexican media organizations with national coverage—notably, the Mexico City-based newspaper *Reforma* and *Milenio*—have been the most consistent, comprehensive, and reliable in such monitoring efforts.⁵⁴ In addition to such government and media tallies, several organizations, researchers, and individuals—such as Molly Molloy at the 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.⁵⁵ 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.

⁵² Moloeznik, Marcos Pablo (2009). "The Militarization of Public Security and the Role of the Military in Mexico," in Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk (eds.), *Police and Public Security in Mexico*, San Diego: University Readers, 2012.

⁵³ 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).

⁵⁴ Until recently, the Mexico City-based newspaper *Reforma* was the main source of data on drug-related violence referenced by Justice in Mexico. However, while *Reforma* faithfully reported these data publicly throughout the Calderón administration, its weekly reporting stopped abruptly and without explanation in December 2012, just as President Peña Nieto took office. In mid-2013, *Reforma* resumed its reporting of these data, though since the start of 2014 they have begun to do so with less detail and consistency than in the past. For this reason, Justice in Mexico has worked to incorporate data from *Milenio* and also the Lantia consulting group headed by Eduardo Guerrero and reported by *Excelsior* in Leo Zuckermann's column "Juegos de Poder."

⁵⁵ For example, as reported last year, University of Alabama at Birmingham professor Christopher Kyle's Guerrero Violence Project (GVP) database has identified more than 10,000 cases of homicide in the state of Guerrero that have been coded for various characteristics, geo-referenced, and plotted on an interactive online map, viewable at: <http://bit.ly/1wczk0u>. See also, Chris Kyle, "Violence and Insecurity in Guerrero," Mexico Institute and 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.

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 5,000 victims, including nearly 3,000 identified by name and other individual characteristics (e.g., gender, age, narco-messages, etc.).⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷

3. Analytical and Methodological Concerns

As made clear above and in previous reports, the available data have significant limitations. First, there is no dataset that spans the time period and levels of analysis that are of interest. While INEGI data on intentional homicides are available at the municipal level through 2012, they are not yet available for 2013. SNSP figures on intentional homicide are available starting in 1997 and through 2013, including monthly figures for all of 2013.⁵⁸ However, SNSP's municipal level data on organized-crime-style homicides run from December 2006 through September 2011, and also from January 2013 to June 2013. There are also gaps in the data available for *Reforma* newspaper for monthly figures on organized-crime-style homicides, though such data are available from *Milenio*. Justice in Mexico has attempted to compensate for these missing 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

⁵⁶ This dataset was referenced in previous reports as the Victims and Violence Monitor. In 2013, the dataset was renamed “*Memoria*” to reflect its effort to analyze and respect the memory of those affected by such violence, whatever their identity or role. The dataset includes cases reported both by the media and the government, typically involving certain types of weapons, methods of killing, markings, and messages declaring organized crime affiliations, etc. These efforts have been conducted through intensive data gathering workshops hosted by Justice in Mexico and through an online portal developed to facilitate consistent reporting and coding of data. Each case is reviewed and vetted by Justice in Mexico staff before being incorporated into the dataset.

⁵⁷ As reported last year, this technique leverages a multiple regression model to estimate the variable of interest (e.g., homicides reported by INEGI) based on a number of other data sources for those same time periods, up until the point in time when the outcome variable is no longer available. The model is then used to predict the missing values of the outcome variable forward in time based on the same alternate sources still available. The authors are grateful to Dr. Topher McDougal for his guidance and assistance in generating these predictions using STATA. For more information on multiple data imputation in statistical methodologies, please see: Andrew Gelman and Jennifer Hill, “Missing Data Imputation,” in Andrew Gelman and Jennifer Hill, *Data Analysis Using Regression and Multilevel/Hierarchical Models*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. 529-543.

⁵⁸ SNSP data at the municipal level are available from 2011-2013. However, as noted earlier, SNSP data for some municipalities were incomplete for 2013 at the time that this report went to print.

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, in large part because of the limited capacity of the country’s federal and state agencies to investigate them properly.⁵⁹ In addition, there is also a large number of missing persons whose fate remains a mystery.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ 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.

⁵⁹ 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>

⁶⁰ One of the most widely cited estimates of missing persons in Mexico over the last few years comes from a database released in December 2012 by Centro de Investigación y Capacitación Propuesta Cívica, a Mexico City-based non-governmental organization, which revealed a list of more than 20,000 persons who went missing from 2006 through 2012, far greater than the number of missing persons reported by official sources. The *Propuesta Cívica* database is reportedly based on a “secret” list obtained from the PGR, and contains the names of 20,851 persons who went missing from December 2006 through November 2012, including over 1,200 children below the age of 11. Listed among the disappeared are an estimated 7,137 people from Mexico City, one of the places that have registered the fewest organized-crime-related homicides. Anabel Hernández, “Supera los 25 mil, la lista secreta de desaparecidos,” *El Diario*, December 29, 2012. http://diario.mx/Nacional/2012-12-29_86eda41c/supera-los-25-mil-la-lista-secreta-de-desaparecidos/ At the time of this report, the actual dataset is accessible through the Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad Con Democracia, A.C. (CASEDE) at the following site: <http://www.seguridadcondemocracia.org/biblioteca-virtual/derechos-humanos/bases-de-datos-sobre-personas-desaparecidas-en-mexico-2006-2012.html>

⁶¹ For example, at least 177 bodies were identified in 2011 in the largest mass gravesite attributed to OCGs. The mass grave was discovered in the town of San Fernando in the northeastern border state of Tamaulipas; most of the victims were killed by blunt instruments, and most appeared to be migrants and travelers passing through the state. With dozens of smaller gravesites discovered throughout northern Mexico, this may suggest a shift in tactics among organized-crime groups to different means of obtaining revenue and lower-profile methods of killing. In the recent past, competition and conflict over territorial control among drug trafficking organizations may have provided strong incentives for organized-crime groups to send violent signals to authorities and rivals, including running gun battles, public executions, video-recorded murders, leaving dead bodies in the streets, and the like. However, as some Mexican organized-crime groups are now increasingly seeking revenue by preying on “non-combatants,” such as Central American migrants, they appear to be less interested in advertising their handiwork to authorities and to each other, and more interested in evading detection and confrontation.

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