

# Drug Violence in Mexico

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*Data and Analysis Through 2013*



SPECIAL REPORT

By Kimberly Heinle, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk



**Justice in Mexico Project**

*Department of Political Science & International Relations*

University of San Diego

**APRIL 2014**

## About Justice in Mexico:

Started in 2001, Justice in Mexico ([www.justiceinmexico.org](http://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 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, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, and builds on the work of past reports in this series. The report was formally released on April 10, 2014 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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ISBN-10: 978-0-9960663-0-6

ISBN-13: 978-0-9960663-0-3

### Justice in Mexico

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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. Ex: AK-47
AR-type	Assault rifle typically used by organized crime groups, Ex: 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), 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
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 2011 homicide rate of 23.7 was slightly below the region's average of approximately 24.5 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 approximately 15% in 2013.**  
While INEGI's figures are not available for 2013, preliminary data from Mexico's National Security System (SNSP) suggests that the total number of intentional homicides in 2013 declined again this year, and more than in 2012. However, some analysts are skeptical about SNSP's possible manipulation or withholding of data, so these findings should be viewed with caution. This said, at the time of this report, SNSP's tally of all intentional homicides in 2013 was 18,146, down 16.4% from about 21,700 in 2012. If the rate of decline is comparable for INEGI's tally, the total number of intentional homicides in 2012 INEGI will report for 2013 later this year will fall somewhere around 22,000 to 24,000 homicides.
- **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 two-thirds of all intentional homicides in 2013 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 7,163 organized-crime-style homicides in 2013 (though its coverage appeared to be less complete and less consistent with other sources than previous years), while *Milenio* reported 10,095 for the same year.

- **Less violence in northern states has increased the spotlight on Pacific coastal states.** In 2013, Mexico’s violence—especially drug trafficking and organized-crime-style homicides—remained highly concentrated in specific regions, states, and municipalities. The elevated amounts and rates of violence were particularly concentrated in Mexico’s Pacific coastal states, as violence in Northern states has diminished significantly. One exception in the north is Baja California, which saw a 31% increase in homicides, particularly as the city of Tijuana saw an increase in violence that ran counter to the significant declines elsewhere in the country.
- **Community self-defense groups grew stronger in Guerrero, Michoacán, and other states.** In 2012 and early 2013, public frustration with violence manifested itself in the form of armed community self-defense groups (*autodefensas*) in states like Guerrero and Michoacán. Particularly in Michoacán, where their presence has expanded into at least 29 of the state’s 113 municipalities, such groups grabbed national and international headlines in early 2013 because of their direct clashes with the Knights Templar Organization (*Caballeros Templarios*, or KTO), a splinter organization that broke from the La Familia Michoacán (LFM) organization in 2010. There are concerns that self defense groups may have ties to organized crime groups and/or engage in acts of vigilante violence, and the Mexican government has tried to set parameters and restrictions on the use of firearms by such groups, so far with mixed results.
- **President Peña Nieto continued to arrest major drug traffickers in 2013 and early 2014.** On the campaign trail during 2012, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) had pledged to reduce the government’s reliance on the counter-drug strategies employed by the Calderón administration. However, with just over one year in office, President Peña Nieto has continued the previous administration’s policies, including a heavy reliance on the military and the targeted arrest of major organized crime figures. This paid off in a number of important successes, including the arrest of Miguel Angel “Z-40” Treviño (head of Los Zetas) and Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán (head of the Sinaloa Cartel). In March 2014, the Peña Nieto administration also announced that Mexican authorities had killed two top KTO leaders: Nazario Moreno González, a.k.a. “El Chayo,” who had been previously presumed dead, and Enrique “El Kike” Plancarte Solís.
- **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.

- U.S.-Mexico security cooperation continues under the framework of the Mérida Initiative.**  
 At the outset of the Peña Nieto administration, U.S. officials reportedly expressed concerns about the more centralized, “single window” (*ventanilla única*) approach of Peña Nieto’s administration to bi-national cooperation. However, while the protocols for such cooperation have changed, U.S.-Mexico cooperation has continued across all four “pillars” of the framework established under the Mérida Initiative: 1) dismantling organized crime groups, 2) strengthening judicial sector institutions, 3) building a 21<sup>st</sup> century border, and 4) fostering resilient communities.
- 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. Important initiatives in this regard include the creation of a new agency for crime prevention headed by Roberto Campa, as well as the introduction of a new, unified federal code of criminal procedure. The creation and training of a much-touted National Gendarmerie and a more unified police command system moved to the back burner but are still ongoing. Concerted implementation and evaluation efforts will be critical to the success of these initiatives.
- The drug war’s future appears somewhat uncertain given changes in U.S. drug policy.**  
 Measures to legalize marijuana in 2013 in Uruguay and in two U.S. states—Colorado and Washington—have raised new questions about the future of the drug war. While public support for legalization of other drugs is very low, over half of the U.S. public now supports marijuana legalization. Legalization of marijuana will likely increase its availability and reduce its price, thereby reducing its profitability for the organized crime groups that currently produce, transport, and purvey it on the black market. While this will seriously diminish the capacity of organized crime groups in Mexico, it could also lead to innovation in their criminal activities to make up for lost revenue and other problems.

# Drug Violence in Mexico

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the problem of crime and violence has been a major preoccupation for both policymakers and ordinary people in Mexico, and a shared concern for the U.S. government and its citizens. Daily headlines describe shocking developments, including execution-style killings, assassinations of politicians and journalists, and mass graves. Making sense of this violence is often challenging because of sensationalistic media reporting, widespread preconceptions, a lack of access to reliable statistical information, and an overabundance of divergent and often questionable data on the topic. The result is that there are many misconceptions about the magnitude, nature, and implications of drug violence in Mexico.

The Justice in Mexico Project based at the University of San Diego has worked for several years to provide a detailed analysis of this issue. Justice in Mexico first began to compile data on organized crime related homicides in 2007, as human rights and media organizations began to disseminate such information. This information was incorporated into our regular monthly reports disseminated to U.S. and Mexican security specialists. Justice in Mexico produced its first annual report on “drug violence” in Mexico in 2010, in an effort to help make sense of the rapid increase in violence that started in 2008. Since then, the project’s annual reports have compiled the latest available data and analysis to evaluate problems of crime and violence related to drug trafficking and organized crime in Mexico. These reports are especially intended to 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.

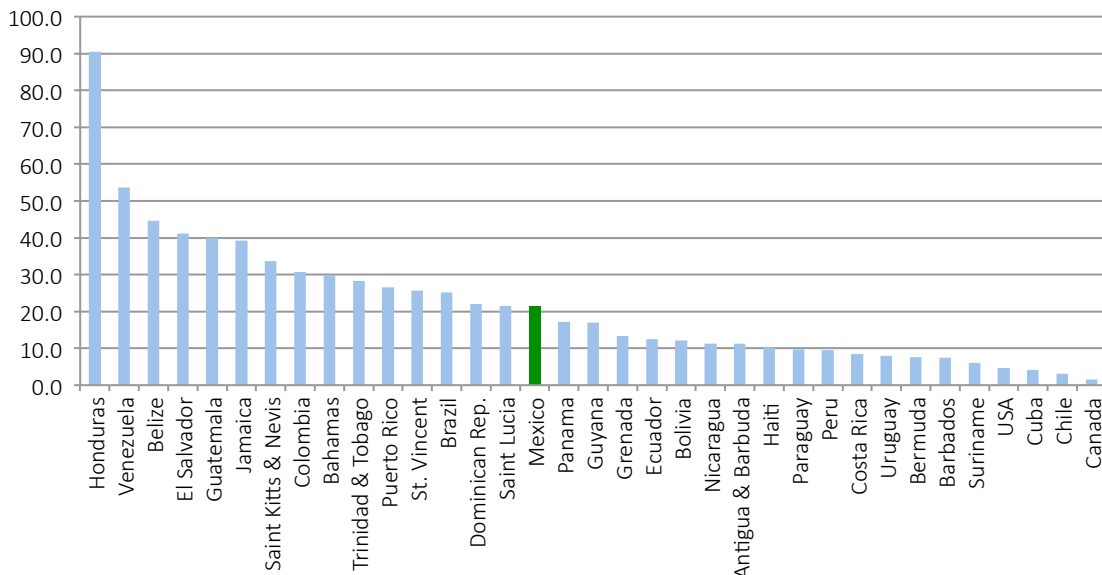
As the fifth report in this series, this study builds on past findings and seeks to provide new insights into Mexico’s recent security situation. The authors draw on the latest available data from multiple sources, with a primary emphasis on the first year in office for Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018). In contrast to his predecessor, Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), President Peña Nieto appeared to deliberately downplay Mexico’s security problems, as well as his administration’s efforts to address them during the last year. However, as we discuss in this report, crime and violence associated with organized crime remains a very serious problem in Mexico. Despite some definitive and much needed improvements in certain parts of the country, the overall security situation in Mexico remains much worse today than a decade ago and major improvements are still urgently needed.

## II. WHY VIOLENCE IN MEXICO MATTERS

### A. Mexico's Homicide Rate in Perspective

At the outset of this discussion it is important to note that, depending on how it is measured, Mexico's violence is far from the worst in the hemisphere. As Justice in Mexico has noted in previous reports, homicide rates—one of the most commonly used indicators for comparing levels of violence—are much higher elsewhere in the Americas. As illustrated in Figure 1, Honduras has 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**



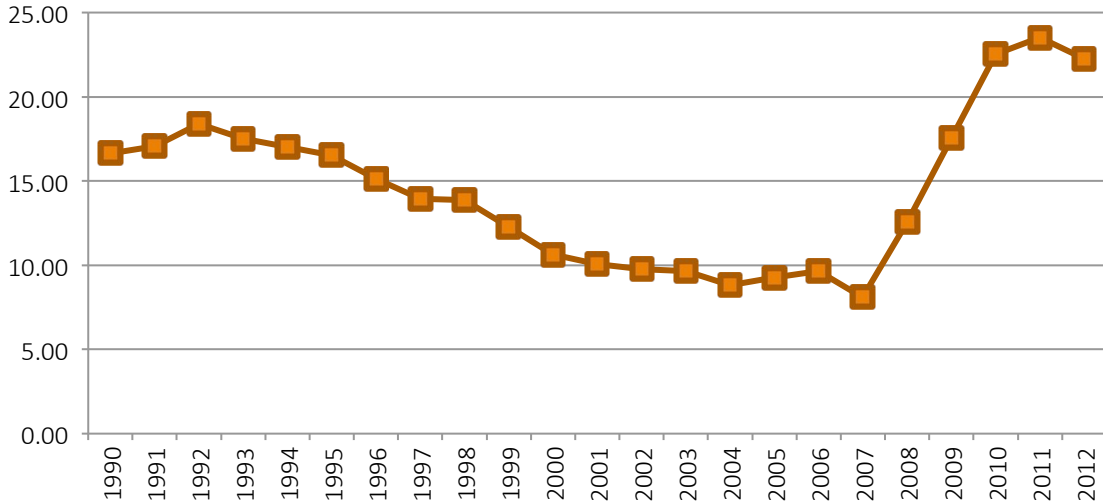
Note: This chart uses the latest available UNODC intentional homicide data for each country from 2012. See UNODC *Global Study on Homicide*, released March 2014.

Yet, Mexico's security challenges are arguably of significant concern simply because the rate and number of intentional homicides occurring there has escalated quite dramatically in recent years, reversing a multi-decade downward trend. Historical data suggest that intentional homicide in Mexico generally declined from the 1930s into the mid-2000s.<sup>1</sup> However, over the last few years, Mexico's rate climbed sharply: increasing threefold from 8.1 homicides per 100,000 in 2007 to 23.7

<sup>1</sup> 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.

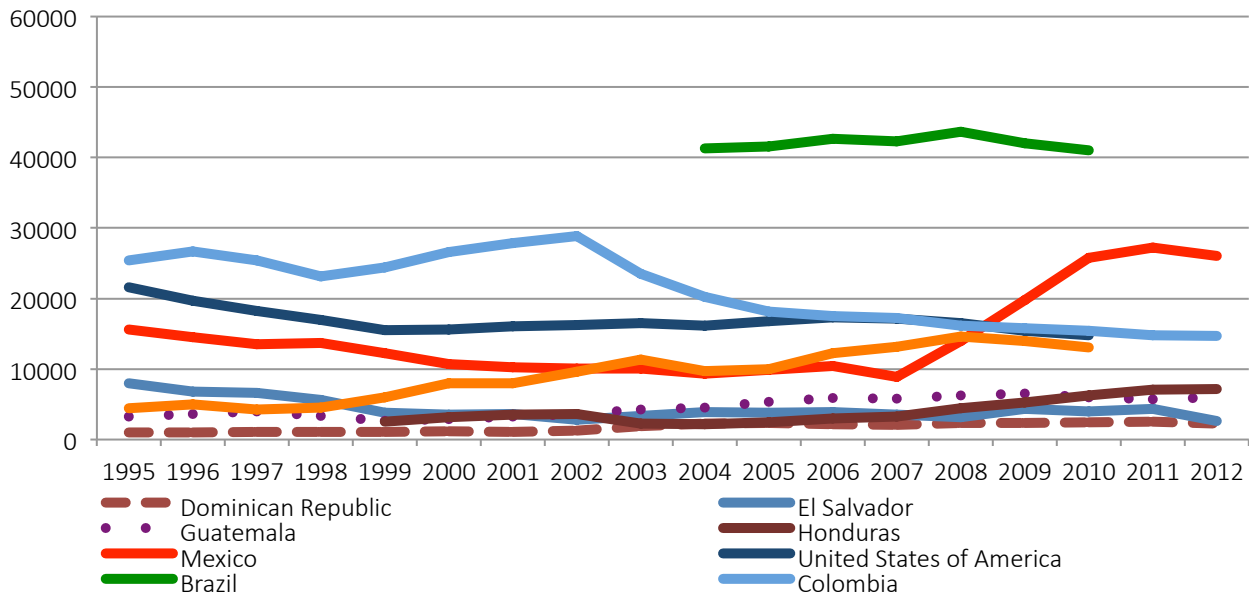
per 100,000 in 2011, according to figures from Mexico’s National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information, INEGI.

**Figure 2: Homicide Rate in Mexico, 1995-2012**



SOURCE: INEGI.

**Figure 3: Total Homicides in Selected Neighboring Countries, 1995-2011**



SOURCE: UNODC, Intentional homicides (1995-2011).

Moreover, because Mexico had an estimated population of over 110 million people in 2013—the third largest population among countries in the Americas—even a modest increase in the homicide rate translates into the loss of thousands of lives.<sup>2</sup> Thus, deaths from intentional homicides grew

<sup>2</sup> The estimated population of Mexico in 2010 based on INEGI’s national census was 112,336,538. The Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) estimate for Mexico’s national population by mid-2013 was 118,395,054.

from 8,867 in 2007 to 27,199 in 2011. No other country in the Western Hemisphere saw such a large increase in the homicide rates or in the absolute number of homicides over the last two decades.

## B. International Attention to Mexico's Violence in Perspective

Still, because violence is so much worse in some other countries in the Americas—and because Mexico has many positive attributes—some argue that Mexico's violence has attracted a disproportionate amount of attention. Indeed, the new government of President Enrique Peña Nieto took great pains to shift the narrative about Mexico from one focused on crime and violence to one more focused on Mexico's economic achievements and opportunities. This policy reflects a general perception among many Mexicans that international news coverage of Mexico has exaggerated the problem of violence. To be sure, as the authors have noted in past reports, Mexico's violence appears to be featured with far greater frequency in international media than violence in other Latin American countries.<sup>3</sup> To illustrate this point, the authors conducted a simple Boolean search for articles featuring “violence + Mexico” in the *New York Times*, one of the most respected U.S. news sources. This search produced approximately 375 results for 2013.<sup>4</sup> This was much higher than the number of articles referencing violence in the countries with the three highest homicide rates in the Americas: there were only 54 such articles for Honduras, 197 for El Salvador, and 126 for Jamaica. Based on the number of articles alone, one might easily conclude that the *Times* coverage of violence in Mexico is greatly disproportionate.<sup>5</sup>

However, some consideration must also be given to the *Times*'s overall news coverage of Mexico, which is much greater than that received by the other countries noted above (See Figure 4). Indeed, the same search for *New York Times* articles for “Mexico” in 2013 produced approximately 7,200 results, compared to roughly 840 articles referring to Honduras, 1,480 referring to El Salvador, and 1,230 referring to Jamaica during the same year.<sup>6</sup> This means that slightly more than 5% of the *Times*'s coverage on Mexico made some reference to violence in 2013, compared to about 15% for Honduras, 13% for El Salvador, and 7% for Jamaica. Since the *New York Times* may not be representative of U.S. media coverage of Mexico, further study is warranted before firm conclusions are drawn. However, these figures suggest that some respectable U.S. news sources—at least America's “newspaper of record”—may not be as disproportionately focused on Mexico's violence as it might appear at first glance.

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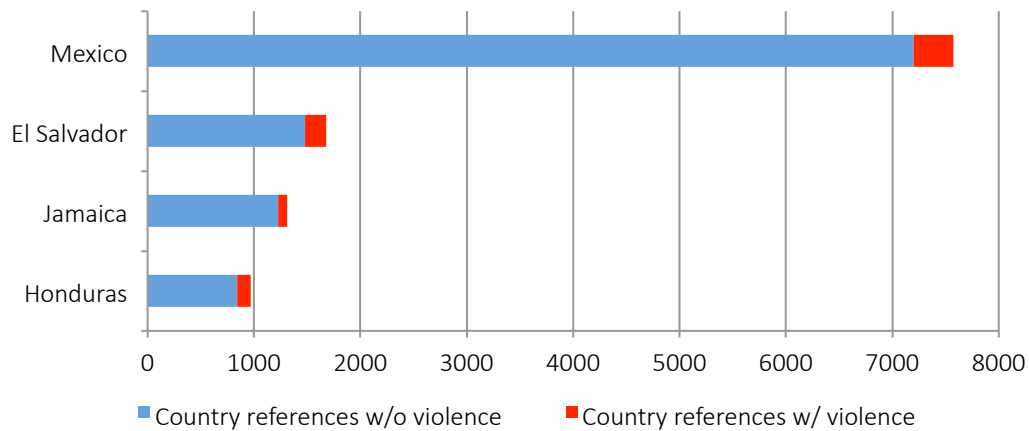
<sup>3</sup> Here an important correction must be made with regard to the Justice in Mexico drug violence report published in March 2013. While we incorrectly reported that the *New York Times* had published only 12 articles mentioning violence in Mexico in 2012, when in actuality there were a total of 698 articles that met the Boolean search criteria for “violence” + “Mexico” for that year, compared to 201 for El Salvador, 180 for Colombia, and 81 for Honduras. In these searches for “Mexico” we excluded articles primarily referencing “New Mexico” in ways that did not relate to Mexico. The authors chose the *New York Times* because it has a strong reputation for journalistic practices and is frequently characterized as the “paper of record” in the United States.

<sup>4</sup> This comparison excludes approximately 45 references to “violence + New Mexico.”

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, while internet search results are also not a scientific measure, there were nearly 20 times as many “hits” on a simple Google search for the term “violence in Mexico” (154 million results) compared to “violence in Honduras” (about 7.8 million results). The gap was somewhat narrower for the two next most violent countries in the region, El Salvador (26.3 million results) and Jamaica (17.9 million results).

<sup>6</sup> These figures for “Mexico” exclude the roughly 880 *New York Times* articles with references to “New Mexico” in 2013.

**Figure 4: New York Times Coverage of Mexico and Selected Latin American Countries (with and without References to Violence)**



Source: *New York Times*. Note: Data gathered from simple Boolean search for articles by "country name" + "violence" restricted to January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2013, subtracting articles with references to New Mexico.

Of course, 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 seen its suicide rate increase relatively rapidly to 29 per 100,000 people over the last several years, with relatively little international attention to the problem.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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. Such everyday hazards are perhaps too common to grab attention on the front pages or occupy people’s daily thoughts.

Violence, however, 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. Thus, 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.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Mexico’s recent surge in violence requires some

<sup>7</sup> South Korea’s astonishing suicide rate arguably illustrates that not all deaths are viewed with equal concern in international news coverage.

<sup>8</sup> “10 Facts on Noncommunicable Diseases,” World Health Organization, [http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/noncommunicable\\_diseases/facts/en](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>

<sup>9</sup> Andreas, P. and J. Wallman (2009). “Illicit Markets and Violence: What is the Relationship?” *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 52: 225-229.

understanding of recent dynamics among Mexican organized crime groups, particularly those involved in drug trafficking.

### C. The Role of Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Mexico

As in many other countries in the Americas, organized crime has existed in Mexico in various forms (e.g., piracy) since at least the colonial era.<sup>10</sup> 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 produced in Mexico 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.<sup>11</sup> With the fall of Colombia's major drug-trafficking organizations, Mexican networks came to dominate the business by the late 1980s.

Thanks to a lack of market competition, there was relatively little violent conflict among these groups until Mexican authorities arrested the last leader of the so-called Guadalajara Cartel, Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, in 1989. Thereafter, the splitting of Felix Gallardo's organization 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 overall level of violence in Mexico has begun to subside in the past year or two, it remains relatively high and the security situation remains highly problematic in certain parts of the country. As such, careful monitoring and study are needed to understand the manifestations, root causes, and possible solutions to the problem of violence in Mexico. This report therefore examines Mexico's violence in substantial detail, drawing on over five years of data gathering and research, as well as the latest available data from a variety of sources. Because of the important role that drug trafficking organizations and the drug war itself play in perpetuating this violence, we consider the conceptual and methodological challenges in attempting to define and measure "drug-related" or "organized crime-related" violence as a specific phenomenon below.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, works on the history of the illicit slave trade and piracy, such as Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*. (New York: Touchstone, 1997) and J. L. Anderson, "Piracy and World History: An Economic Perspective on Maritime Predation," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Fall, 1995), pp. 175-199.

<sup>11</sup> See: 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.

### III. “DRUG VIOLENCE”: DEFINITIONS, DATA, AND METHODOLOGIES

Before examining recent trends in Mexico’s violence, it is important to discuss a number of conceptual and methodological concerns. In this section, we consider the problem of defining drug-related and organized crime-related homicides as a phenomenon that is distinct from other forms of violence. We also discuss the specific sources of data that are available to analyze this type of violence, and the limits of these data.

#### 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. 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. Labeling homicides by other characteristics therefore depends on some degree of subjective interpretation, particularly when the base definitions for a given classification are unclear. 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.” 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? The same methodological challenge exists for 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.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the scale, scope, complexity, and purpose of “organized-crime groups,” or

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<sup>12</sup> 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

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”).

In Mexico, these conceptual ambiguities are somewhat alleviated by the existence of 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*).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, there are legal statutes that characterize and define drug trafficking as a specific form of organized crime.

Hence, in Mexico at least, there is a legal basis for labeling homicides that are related to organized crime activities as “organized crime killings.” However, establishing a connection can be rather difficult. 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. The kinds of homicides associated with these groups have very distinctive characteristics that merit close analysis. 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). The labels applied to such homicides are perhaps less important than the fact that these killings have a high degree of visibility and the appearance of OCG involvement, contributing to a sense of fear in the general population. Arguably, the sense of fear caused by such high-profile, gangland-style homicides is one of the reasons that Mexico’s violence has attracted such intense international attention, despite its comparatively “moderate” homicide rate.

Because there are serious methodological concerns about studying “drug” or “organized crime-style” violence, we must be careful about the analytical conclusions that we draw from available data. However, we argue that 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. Thus, for the past several years, Justice in Mexico

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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).

<sup>13</sup> 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>

has monitored and analyzed the specific kind of violence associated with drug trafficking violence using several different sources of data, which we examine below.

## **B. The Available Data Sources and Their Limitations**

For a variety of reasons, 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. In addition, there are both government and independent sources that have attempted to monitor and tally organized-crime-style homicides in recent years. We examine both sources of data and several methodological concerns below.

### **1. Government Data on Homicide**

Official data on homicides in Mexico are available from two sources. First, public-health records filed by coroners’ offices can be used to identify cases where the cause of death was unnatural, such as cases of gunshot wounds, stabbings, lacerations, asphyxiation, etc. While all datasets have limitations, the most consistent, complete, and reliable source of information in Mexico is the autonomous government statistics agency, INEGI, which provides data on death by homicide and other forms of violent crime.

A second source of data on homicide comes from criminal investigations by law enforcement to establish a formal determination of 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 homicide that are identified by law enforcement. In recent years, SNSP has its homicide data on a monthly basis to provide more timely access to information. Indeed, it should be noted that not even the FBI Uniform Crime Report provides such timely updated information on homicides.

There is a noticeable variance between public health and law enforcement homicide statistics, which appears to be attributable to the different timing and methodologies by which cases are classified. Still, data from the two sources are closely correlated and offer fairly consistent measures of the trends in overall homicide. Hence, they both provide important points of reference for this report. It is important to note, however, that the SNSP homicide data available for 2013 is incomplete at the municipal level, and that some experts have raised questions about whether the data have been withheld or political manipulated by Mexican authorities.

### **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. 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).<sup>14</sup>

For the last several years, the Mexican government has maintained records on the number of homicides attributable to drug trafficking and organized crime. Based on figures from the Mexican Attorney General's Office (PGR), Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) reported figures on drug-related homicides for the period from 2000-2008.<sup>15</sup> However, as violence began to increase more dramatically, the Mexican government stopped releasing this information.<sup>16</sup> Then, in January 2010 and January 2011, under pressure from media organizations, civic groups, and the government's autonomous transparency agency, Mexican authorities released new data on the number and location of the organized-crime-related homicides tracked internally by the government from December 1, 2006 through September 2011.<sup>17</sup> In November 2012, the outgoing Calderón administration announced that the government would no longer release any data on organized crime-related killings, on the grounds that this kind of violence is not codified by law and is too difficult to compile. The Peña Nieto administration initially took a similar stance, but then began to report figures on the number of organized-crime-related homicides until mid-2013, when it once again stopped releasing these figures. In short, the government data that are available to track organized-crime-related homicides are problematic for a number of reasons:

- 1) the data have been released only sporadically;
- 2) there are significant gaps in the time periods covered;
- 3) there appear to have been some important changes in the classification and methodology used each time these data are released;
- 4) there is too little transparency regarding how these data are collected, and;
- 5) the data cannot be verified because the underlying information is treated as classified.

Because of the difficulties involved in obtaining official government information on homicides that are linked to drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime, several media sources, non-governmental organizations, and researchers have attempted to do so on their own. These independent monitoring efforts generally 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. This typically requires sustained, labor-intensive data collection efforts, which necessitate a relatively high degree of organizational capacity. It also necessarily involves a certain

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<sup>14</sup> 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).

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> In fact, 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 on the grounds that no such data existed.

<sup>17</sup> As Justice in Mexico reported in 2012, SNSP provided municipal level data on 47,453 homicides that were believed by the Mexican government to involve OCGs, dating from January 2007 through September 2011. Cory Molzahn, Viridiana Ríos, David A. Shirk. *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011*, (San Diego, CA: Justice in Mexico, 2012).

degree of independent judgment in determining the characteristics and contextual circumstances that will be used to identify the possible involvement of organized crime.

Mexican media organizations with national coverage have been the most consistent, comprehensive, and reliable in such monitoring efforts. Until recently, the Mexico City-based newspaper *Reforma* was the main source of data on drug-related violence referenced by Justice in Mexico. *Reforma* has a large, national pool of correspondents who have been monitoring and reporting the number of drug-related killings by state in their respective jurisdictions on a weekly basis since 2006. Since *Reforma's* data are not made available after the original date of publication, Justice in Mexico began tracking and re-reporting these data in late 2007. While *Reforma* faithfully reported these data publicly throughout the Calderón administration, its weekly reporting stopped abruptly and without explanation in December 2012 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.<sup>18</sup> Because of the inconsistencies and changes in *Reforma's* reporting, Justice in Mexico has worked to incorporate data from *Milenio* and also the Lantia consulting group headed by Eduardo Guerrero and reported by *Excélsior* in Leo Zuckermann's column "Juegos de Poder."

In a story that created a great deal of attention in Mexican and international media outlets in early April 2014, the Tijuana-based publication *Zeta* identified a total of 23,640 homicides that they believe were related to organized crime, greatly exceeding other estimates and directly contradicting Mexican government claims that such killings have decreased in the last year. The 23,640 homicides tallied by *Zeta* took place from December 2012 through January 2014, for a monthly average of 1688 homicides (roughly 20,263 a year). *Zeta* and other critics claim that the government's methodology for tallying homicides is unreliable, since the government counts investigations initiated for homicides (rather than actual victims of homicide). *Zeta* based its estimations on information from several sources (both official and independent) to generate a consolidated figure. When asked about *Zeta's* claims by French newspaper *Le Monde*, Peña Nieto said that he was not familiar with their figures but questioned their reliability, insisting that government figures show a 16% decrease in international homicide and a 30% decrease in OCG homicides in 2013.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to such government and media tallies, several organizations, researchers, and individuals have attempted to develop other datasets, tallies, and lists of acts of violence in Mexico. Some of these tallies are produced by monitoring media outlets for high profile DTO and OCG-style homicides, while other efforts have been made to use web-based analytical tools and algorithms to detect the frequency of references to incidents of violence. One of the most impressive projects by an individual researcher to document homicides based on media accounts was released in 2013 by University of Alabama at Birmingham professor Christopher Kyle, whose work with students and volunteers has identified more than 8,000 cases of homicide in the state of Guerrero that have been

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<sup>18</sup> Unlike many other sources, *Reforma* has also gathered data that classifies victims by gender, by signs of torture, by signs of dismemberment or decapitation, and by the number of police and military personnel reportedly killed. It is unclear when *Reforma* resumed its reporting on *ejecuciones* in 2013, but Justice in Mexico began to collect this information again in June 2013.

<sup>19</sup> See: "Los muertos de Peña Nieto: estadística dolosa." *Proceso*. March 15, 2014. [http://hemeroteca.proceso.com.mx/?page\\_id=278958&a51dc26366d99bb5fa29cea4747565fec=367335&rl=wh](http://hemeroteca.proceso.com.mx/?page_id=278958&a51dc26366d99bb5fa29cea4747565fec=367335&rl=wh) and "Pour Enrique Peña Nieto, 'le moment mexicain arrive'." *Le Monde*. April 11, 2014. [http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/04/11/pour-enrique-pena-nieto-le-moment-mexicain-arrive\\_4399696\\_3210.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/04/11/pour-enrique-pena-nieto-le-moment-mexicain-arrive_4399696_3210.html)

coded for various characteristics, geo-referenced, and plotted on an interactive online map.<sup>20</sup> Other sources, including *El Blog del Narco*, the *Frontera* listserv, and the *Menos Días Aquí* blog, have contributed to the tracking and reporting efforts. For example, *Menos Días Aquí* consistently reports on individual cases of homicide that could be related to organized crime.

Along these lines, over the past three years, Justice in Mexico has worked with dozens of research associates, university students, and volunteers to document and classify high-profile homicides that bear characteristics that suggest a link to drug trafficking and organized crime. These include 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. This dataset—called *Memoria*—currently includes more than 4,000 victims, including nearly 2,000 identified by name and other individual characteristics (e.g., gender, age, narco-messages, etc.).<sup>21</sup> This dataset forms a basis for several observations made within this report.

In addition, the authors have also calculated projections 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. 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.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. Analytical and Methodological Concerns

For the purposes of this report, 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.<sup>23</sup> 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

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<sup>20</sup> See information on Kyle's project at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

<http://www.uab.edu/news/faculty/item/4354-uab-study-aims-high-tech-mapping-at-violence-in-mexico>.

<sup>21</sup> This dataset was referred to 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.

<sup>22</sup> 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 Resession and Multilevel/Hierarchical Models*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. 529-543.

<sup>23</sup> 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.

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 methods for identifying and categorizing cases of drug-trafficking and organized-crime-style homicides. As discussed in detail 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”). Based on these kinds of attributes, therefore, SNSP and *Reforma* tallies of DTO and OCG-style homicides draw on similar criteria in the process of gathering their data. (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Comparing Criteria for Classifying Homicides Linked to Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime**

Mexican Government: “Organized Crime Homicides”	Reforma: “Narco-Executions” (Narcoejecuciones)
1. Victim killed by high-caliber or automatic firearm typical of OCGs (e.g., .50 caliber, AK- & AR-type)	1. Victim killed by high-caliber or automatic firearm typical of OCGs (e.g., .50-caliber, AK- & AR-type)
2. Signs of torture, decapitation, or dismemberment	2. Signs of torture, decapitation, or dismemberment
3. Body was wrapped in blankets ( <i>cobijas</i> ), taped, or gagged	3. Execution-style and mass-casualty shootings
4. Killed at specific location, or in a vehicle	4. Indicative markings, written messages, or unusual configurations of the body
5. Killed by OCG within penitentiary	5. Presence of large quantities of illicit drugs, cash or weapons
6. Special circumstances (e.g., narco-message (“ <i>narcomensaje</i> ”); victim alleged OCG member; abducted [ <i>levanton</i> ], ambushed, or chased)	6. Official reports explicitly indicting involvement in organized crime

There are also data gaps regarding the nature and victims of violence, especially with regard to drug-trafficking and organized-crime-style homicide. Government data reported to the public exclude finer details commonly used to understand violent crime, such as the time of death, gender, and occupation of victims. While *Reforma* reports data on gender and on military and police personnel, its data do not identify other relevant factors, such as the age, occupation, and time of death of the victims. These data gaps leave officials, experts, and the public with an incomplete picture of DTO- and OCG-style violence, making it difficult to diagnose the problem and prescribe solutions. For example, one common hypothesis is that youth gangs and disaffected youths are major contributors to Mexico’s recent violence, but this is not clearly provable based on available data. While they provide only a sample of such violence, independent datasets like the Justice in Mexico *Memoria* help fill the gap to provide more detailed insights into victim characteristics and other aspects of DTO- and OCG-style violence.

There are also important questions about the effectiveness of official identification of intentional homicide victims. As in any country, some deaths in Mexico are never conclusively identified as



2013, the Mexican government announced that it was reviewing more than 26,000 cases of missing persons that had been identified by the Mexican Attorney General's office. A report by Human Rights Watch recommended that the Mexican government establish a reliable national system for reporting and tracking cases of missing persons, unidentified bodies, and unidentified persons.<sup>27</sup> Such a system might be similar to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NAMUS) operated in the United States by the National Institute of Justice.

In any case, because missing persons data are not reported systematically across different countries, it is difficult to say whether the problem of disappearances in Mexico (and the effect it may have on national homicide statistics) is worse than in other countries. For example, common estimates suggest that hundreds of thousands of persons are reported missing in the United States every year, with most of those cases resolved.<sup>28</sup> Whatever the number of missing persons—or the effect on the reliability of homicide figures—what is clearly of special relevance in Mexico is the extent to which disappearances and clandestine homicides appears to be linked to organized crime groups and/or the state's efforts to combat them.

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. And, as Mexican security expert Alejandro Hope points out, these data must be viewed with caution.<sup>29</sup> Using the available data from SNSP, the Peña Nieto administration has boasted that there was a significant decrease in homicides in 2013, and an even bigger decrease in organized-crime-style homicides. Hope notes that it is not clear whether the decrease was a result of the government's strategy or merely a change in the way that the numbers have been compiled. He also notes that the decline in homicides was apparently driven primarily by a drop in those homicides classified as "other" or "no data," which raises suspicions about a miscount, miscalculation, or even manipulation by the government.

Although unusual forms of violence are not unique to organized crime groups, a decrease in the use of decapitations, bodies thrown from bridges, skulls bludgeoned, and people burned alive in gasoline-soaked barrels—as we find this year—could actually reflect a drop in killings by such organizations.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, an increase in "ordinary" homicides would be consistent with research

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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/](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>

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Mexico: Build Accurate Database of Disappeared," Human Rights Watch News. November 12, 2013. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/12/mexico-build-accurate-database-disappeared>

<sup>28</sup> In 2012, for example, the FBI reported that over 660,000 people were reported missing in the United States, where a large number of missing persons is attributable runaways and family abductions. Without a comprehensive system for reporting and tracking missing persons in Mexico, the public is left to guess the causes of missing persons. Moreover, due to a history of forced disappearances and extra-judicial killings in Mexico, the public and families are often left to assume the worst when persons go missing.

<sup>29</sup> Alejandro Hope, "Homicidios: algo no cuadra," *Animal Político*. March 25, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> While high-powered weaponry is often a hallmark of gangland violence, OCGs also appear to use a variety of tactics that are intended not only to dispatch their victims but often to send a message.

that finds a similar pattern in other forms of “post-conflict” violence, due in part to the ready availability of firearms.<sup>31</sup> Still, we argue that such puzzles are precisely why it is important for non-governmental organizations to track and monitor violence in Mexico. In this regard, a systematic analysis of all the available data is needed, including tallies of so-called organized-crime-style homicides.

Hence, this report seeks to compile the available official and data on “drug violence” as a step toward exploring such questions. Given the limitations of the data, all information presented is necessarily tentative. 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 Mexican authorities to address the problem of crime and violence more effectively and gain the public’s trust.

## IV. 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 2013 in considerable detail. Below we discuss the relevant findings for 2013 citing various sources on trends in organized-crime style homicides in recent years, with particular emphasis on the available data from 2013.

### A. Overall Levels of Homicide Have Declined but Remain High

The first and most obvious observation from the available data on intentional homicides has already been made earlier in this report. That is, homicide levels in Mexico spiked dramatically in recent years and, despite a significant decline in 2013, remain relatively high. The two official data sources on intentional homicides in Mexico—INEGI and SNSP—have been fairly consistent in documenting homicide trends. INEGI has the longest-available time series for the total number of intentional homicides in Mexico, but its figures are not yet available for 2013. SNSP’s figures are available for a shorter time period and have tended to undercount intentional homicides, compared to INEGI, since 2007. While there are differences between INEGI and SNSP figures due to the different systems for recording intentional homicides within these two agencies, the general trends identified by both sources are closely correlated.<sup>32</sup> For this reason, we expect that the 16.4% decrease

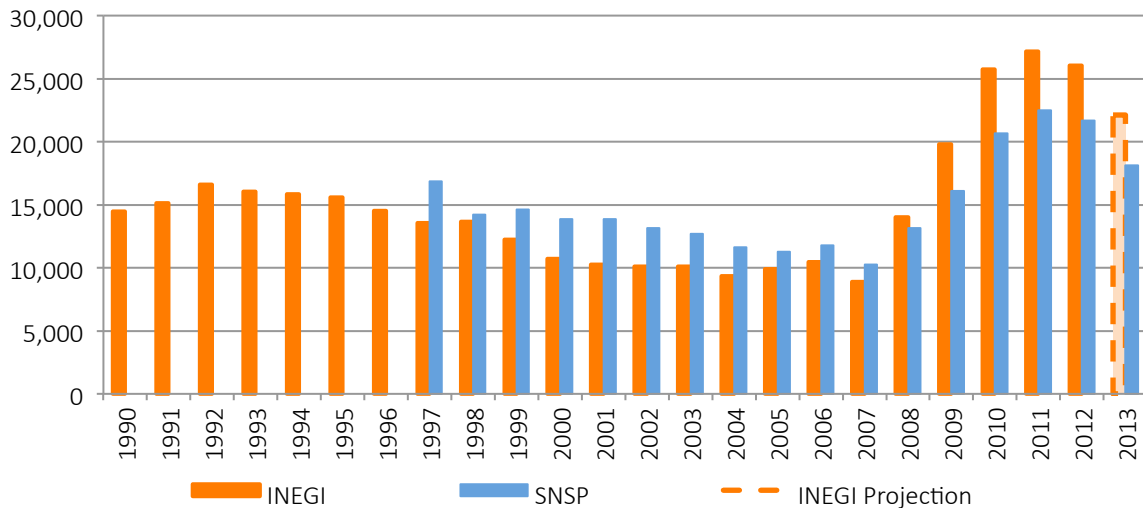
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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the discussion of post conflict violence in the 2014 UNODC *Global Study on Homicide* available online: [http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014\\_GLOBAL\\_HOMICIDE\\_BOOK\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf). See also Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, “Murder by Numbers: Socio-Economic Determinants of Homicide and Civil War,” Working Paper, Centre for the Study of African Economies Series (Ref: WPS/2004-10) March, University of Oxford, 2004. <http://www.economics.ox.ac.uk/centre-for-the-study-of-african-economies-series/murder-by-numbers-socio-economic-determinants-of-homicide-and-civil-war>

<sup>32</sup> 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

in SNSP's tally from 21,700 intentional homicides in 2012 to 18,146 in 2013 is a reasonable basis upon which to estimate a similar rate of decline for INEGI (Figure 6). That is, we project that when its figures become available later this year, INEGI will report a final tally of approximately 22,000 homicides for 2013, plus or minus about 1,000 homicides (i.e., a margin of plus or minus about 5% of that number).<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 6: Total Annual Intentional Homicides in Mexico as Reported by INEGI & SNSP (1990-2013)**



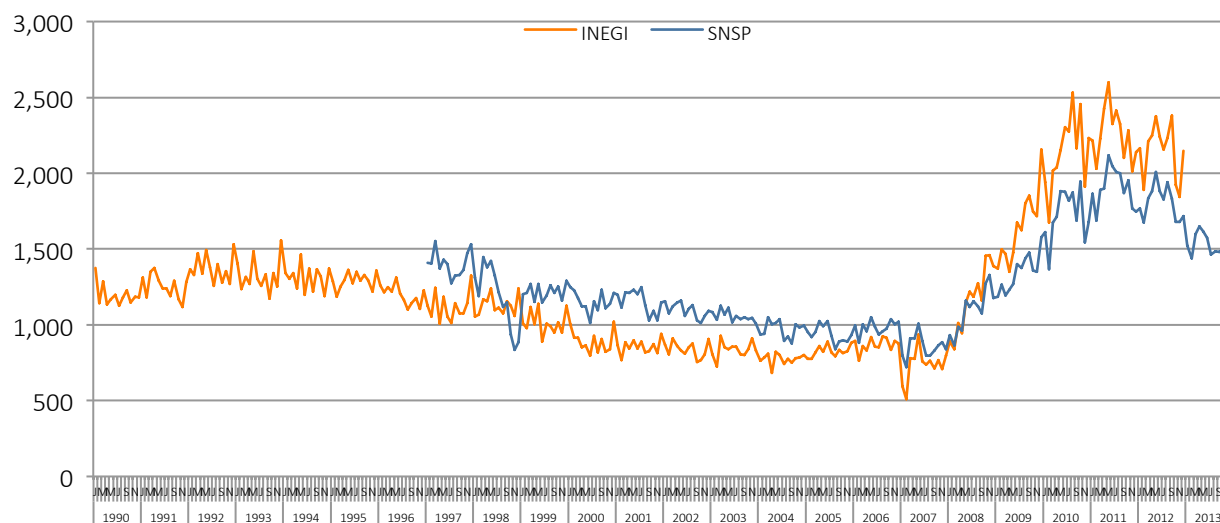
Sources: INEGI and SNSP. Note: Justice in Mexico based its estimate for INEGI in 2013 upon a rate of decrease of approximately 15% (similar to the 16.3% decrease reported by SNSP).

It is also worth taking a closer look at homicide figures from both sources on a monthly basis (See Figure 7). Disaggregating by month reveals some trends that might be missed in reviewing annual totals. First, in 2008 and 2009, there were steady increases in the number of homicides over the course of both years, such that the number of homicides in the second half of the year was significantly greater than in the first. However, starting in 2010, the number of homicides has been somewhat staggered over the course of the year, tending to surge in the second half of the year, followed by significant decreases in the later part of the year. From 2010 to 2012, the increases in the number of intentional homicides during the first half of the year were sizeable enough to offset decreases in the latter half, resulting in overall annual increases. 2012 was the first year in which a surge in homicides in the first part of the year was smaller than the sharp decline in the second half, resulting in a slight decrease (about 3.5%) in the total number of intentional homicides for that year.

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.

<sup>33</sup> More specifically, the precise figure for our estimate is 22,131. We base this estimate for INEGI on a decrease of approximately 15% from 2012 to 2013, with a margin of error of about +/- 1% of the total number of homicides estimated.

**Figure 7: Total Monthly Intentional Homicides (2006-2013)**



In 2013, the total number of intentional homicides reported by SNSP from January to June was 9,401, compared to more than 11,000 deaths in the same months during the previous two years. Since the number of intentional homicides was also once again lower the second half of 2013, Mexico experienced the first double digit percentage annual decrease in homicides since 2007. Of course, it is impossible to say whether the current downward trend in the number of intentional homicides will continue into 2014, since the past is not necessarily a good basis for future predictions. Homicides could increase, decrease, or level off in the coming years, depending on a wide range of factors. Thus far, the average rate of decline in overall homicides from 1990 to 2006 was 1.8%. Had homicides continued to decline at this rate they would have been expected to fall to around 7,800 homicides by 2013, or about 6.6 per 100,000 people—nearly on par with the United States. Today, even if intentional homicide continues to decline at its current average annual rate of more than 15%, it will take until after 2020 to reach the historic low that Mexico experienced in 2007, since Mexico’s violence accelerated more quickly than it has been decelerating.<sup>34</sup>

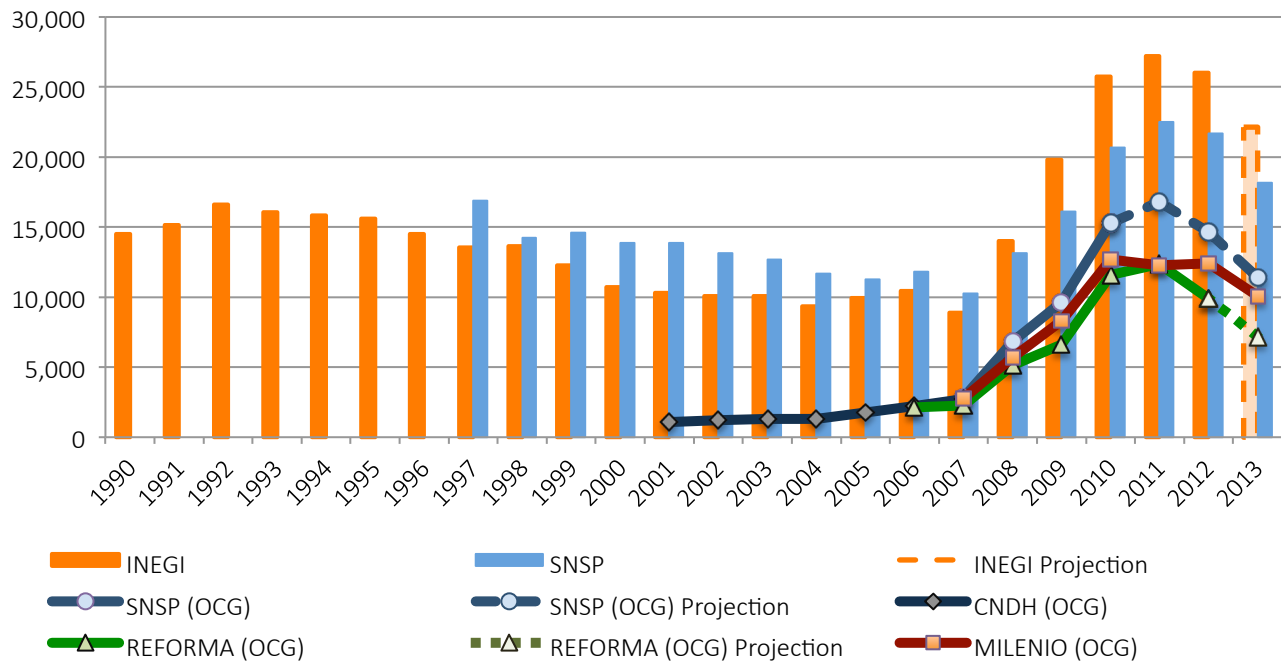
## **B. Organized-Crime-Style Killings Constitute a Major Share of All Homicides**

A large part of the sudden increase in violence discussed above is directly attributable to drug trafficking and organized crime groups. Official estimates and tallies compiled independently by media organizations in Mexico show that a large proportion of homicides in recent years bears characteristics typical of organized crime-related murders, including the use of high-caliber automatic weapons, torture, dismemberment, gun battles, and explicit messages involving organized-crime groups. The solid lines in Figure 8 plot the available data on organized-crime-style homicides from SNSP (2007-2011), *Reforma* (2006-2012), and *Milenio* (2007-2013), while the dotted lines show

<sup>34</sup> 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 2013, the average annual rate of decline reported by SNSP since 2011 has been about 10%.

the authors' projections for SNSP (2012-2013) and *Reforma* (2013).<sup>35</sup> 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 6 above (including the authors' 2013 projections for INEGI).

**Figure 8: Comparison of Intentional Homicide and Organized Crime Homicide for Various Sources, 1990 through 2013**



Sources: INEGI, SNSP, *Reforma*, *Milenio*. Projections calculated with assistance from economist Topher McDougal.

Based on the national figures reported by SNSP from January through June, the authors project that the government's official tally for organized-crime-style homicides came to roughly 11,000 deaths in 2013.<sup>36</sup> *Milenio*, which reported its figures throughout the year in a manner that appeared to be more or less consistent with the official tally, reported 10,095 for the same year.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, in 2013, *Reforma* put the figure at 7,163 organized-crime-style homicides.<sup>38</sup> However, *Reforma's* tallies appeared to be less complete and less consistent with other sources in 2013 than in previous years.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> As noted in the methodological discussion in Section III, 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*.

<sup>36</sup> 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 its 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) of roughly 14,600. Based on data released in the first six months of the year, the authors estimate a total of roughly 11,400 organized-crime-style homicides in 2013.

<sup>37</sup> 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*.

<sup>38</sup> Into 2013, *Reforma* resumed its reporting of tallies of the number of organized-crime-style homicides, but the authors were only able to obtain these figures from mid-July through late November. The figure of 7,163 homicides was based on *Reforma's* available figures by using a regression model for five of the first six months of 2013, based on all monthly

Organized crime-style killings constitute a significant portion of homicides in Mexico, and appear to account for nearly the entire increase in homicides in recent years. That said, determining the approximate proportion of homicides that result from organized-crime-style violence depends upon which sources are used to calculate each figure (See Table 2). On average, for all the years in which it is possible to make same year comparisons to INEGI’s tallies for intentional homicides, the number of organized-crime-style homicides represented approximately 30%-50% of the total number of intentional homicides, according to figures reported by SNSP (51.1%), *Milenio* (39.5%), and *Reforma* (34.9%). Because SNSP intentional homicide figures are typically lower than those produced by INEGI, tallies of organized-crime-style homicides represent a significantly larger proportion—40-60%—of all homicides when SNSP data are referenced using these same tallies: SNSP (59.7%), *Milenio* (49.1%), and *Reforma* (39.5%). In short, whether organized-crime-style homicides represent just one-in-three or as many as two-in-three homicides, they are a very prominent (and perhaps the most prominent) form of murder in Mexico.

**Table 2: Percentage of INEGI and SNSP Homicides Attributed to Organized-Crime-Style Homicide in *Reforma* and *Milenio* Tallies, 2006-2013**

YEAR	SNSP OCG (as % INEGI)	SNSP OCG (as % SNSP)	MILENIO OCG (as % INEGI)	MILENIO OCG (as % SNSP)	REFORMA OCG (as % INEGI)	REFORMA OCG (as % SNSP)
2006	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	20.2%	17.9%
2007	31.9%	27.6%	31.3%	27.0%	25.6%	22.1%
2008	48.8%	52.0%	40.5%	43.2%	36.6%	39.0%
2009	48.5%	59.6%	41.8%	51.4%	33.3%	40.9%
2010	59.3%	73.9%	49.1%	61.2%	45.0%	56.0%
2011	61.8%	74.8%	45.2%	54.6%	45.5%	55.0%
2012	56.2%	67.4%	47.7%	57.2%	38.1%	45.7%
2013	51.5%	62.8%	45.6%	55.6%	32.4%	39.5%
AVERAGE	51.1%	59.7%	42.6%	49.1%	34.9%	39.5%

Sources: INEGI, SNSP, *Reforma*, *Milenio*. Note: This table shows the proportion of organized-crime-style homicides relative to all homicides, as reported by each source (relative to the two main sources of data on intentional homicide: INEGI and SNSP). The percentage is shown in red where one or both sources are based on projections estimated by the authors.

The number of organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Milenio* in 2013 represented over 55% of the total number of intentional homicides reported by SNSP that same year.<sup>40</sup> If the authors’ 2013 projections for INEGI are reasonably accurate, then the number of organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Milenio* would constitute about 45% of the total number of intentional homicides for that year. More conservatively, comparing the relatively low end projection for *Reforma*’s tally in 2013 to the projection for INEGI in the same year, it would appear that organized-crime-style homicides

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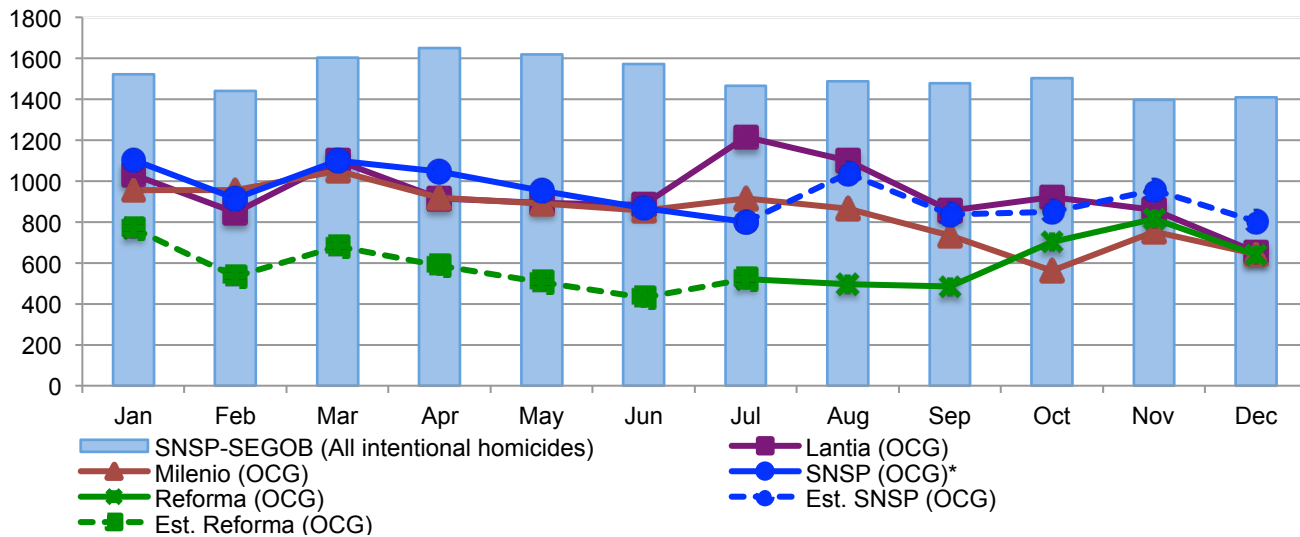
data reported by the newspaper since 2011 and then generating a prediction variable. The authors are grateful to Dr. Topher McDougal for his assistance with this calculation.

<sup>39</sup> The monthly figures on organized-crime-style homicides reported by *Reforma* for the second half of the year were negatively correlated (-.518) to *Milenio*’s figures for that same period. Comparisons were not possible between SNSP and *Reforma* because SNSP stopped reporting after June 2013 and the authors’ compilation *Reforma*’s tallies are complete only from July to December of that year.

<sup>40</sup> However, compared to INEGI—for which official 2013 figures are not available—SNSP has tended to undercount the total number of intentional homicides since 2008.

make up at least a third of all homicides in Mexico.<sup>41</sup> In short, while the number of homicides declined significantly in 2013, the proportion attributable to organized crime did not appear to change very dramatically from previous years.

**Figure 9: Comparison of Intentional Homicide and Organized Crime Homicide for Various Sources in 2013**



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 2013 for intentional homicides reported by SNSP and organized-crime-style homicides reported by SNSP, *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and the consulting firm Lantia.<sup>42</sup> It seems that there was a very high degree of consistency among figures on organized-crime-style homicide reported by the Mexican government (SNSP), *Milenio*, and Lantia for the first six months of the year. Midyear, just before the federal government stopped reporting those figures, *Milenio* and Lantia deviated considerably and continued to report significantly different tallies until December, when both sources (and *Reforma*, as well) agreed that there were around 650 organized-crime-style homicides that month. Again, it is worth noting that *Reforma's* tallies were unavailable for the first part of 2013 and *Reforma* appeared to develop significantly lower tallies than other sources in July, August, and September. However, there was remarkable consistency between all three independent sources in October, November, and December of that year.

<sup>41</sup> The authors' projection for *Reforma* estimates a total of 7,163 organized-crime-style homicides in 2013, or roughly 32.4% of the authors' projection for INEGI intentional homicides in the same year. *Reforma's* tally is around 40% of the full year projection for SNSP intentional homicides in 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Lantia is a consulting firm headed by Mexican security expert Eduardo Guerrero. Lantia's data are not publicly available for previous years, but are worth using as a point of comparison for 2013 because of Guerrero's well-respected work on this topic. See, for example: Eduardo Guerrero, "Después de la guerra," *Nexos*, December 1, 2013. <http://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=15586>

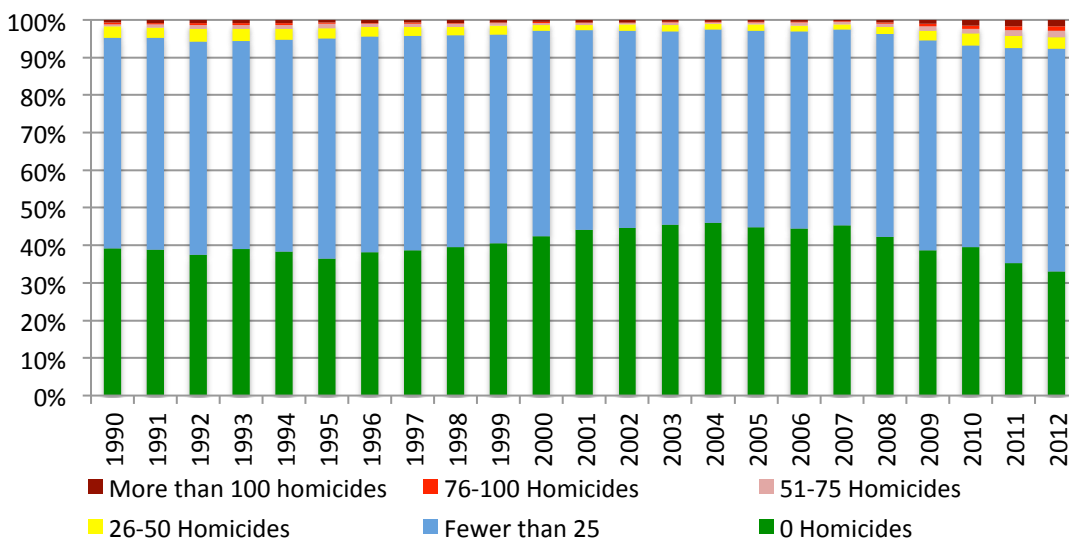
## C. Shifting Geographic Patterns of Violence

An uneven geographic distribution is one of the most important characteristics of violence in Mexico. Using the data on homicides and organized crime-related homicides available at the municipal and state levels, respectively, the authors review some of the shifts and trends in the geographic distribution of violence below.

### 1. Expanded Geographic Distribution of Intentional Homicides

One of the most important findings about the geographic distribution of violence in Mexico is that homicide not only increased but became more prevalent in more areas of the country over the last several years. In 2007, the historic low point in homicide rates during the last century, INEGI figures show that 1,073 of Mexico’s roughly 2,457 municipalities reported zero homicides, as illustrated in Figure 10. By 2011, the high point in Mexico’s recent violence the number fell to 836 “murder-free” municipalities. Meanwhile, the number of municipalities with more than 100 intentional homicides grew from ten in 2007 to 41 in 2012. Still, even taking into consideration the geographic dispersion of homicides, the worst violence—concentrations of 26 or more homicides per municipality—has remained concentrated in fewer than 10% of municipalities in any given year.

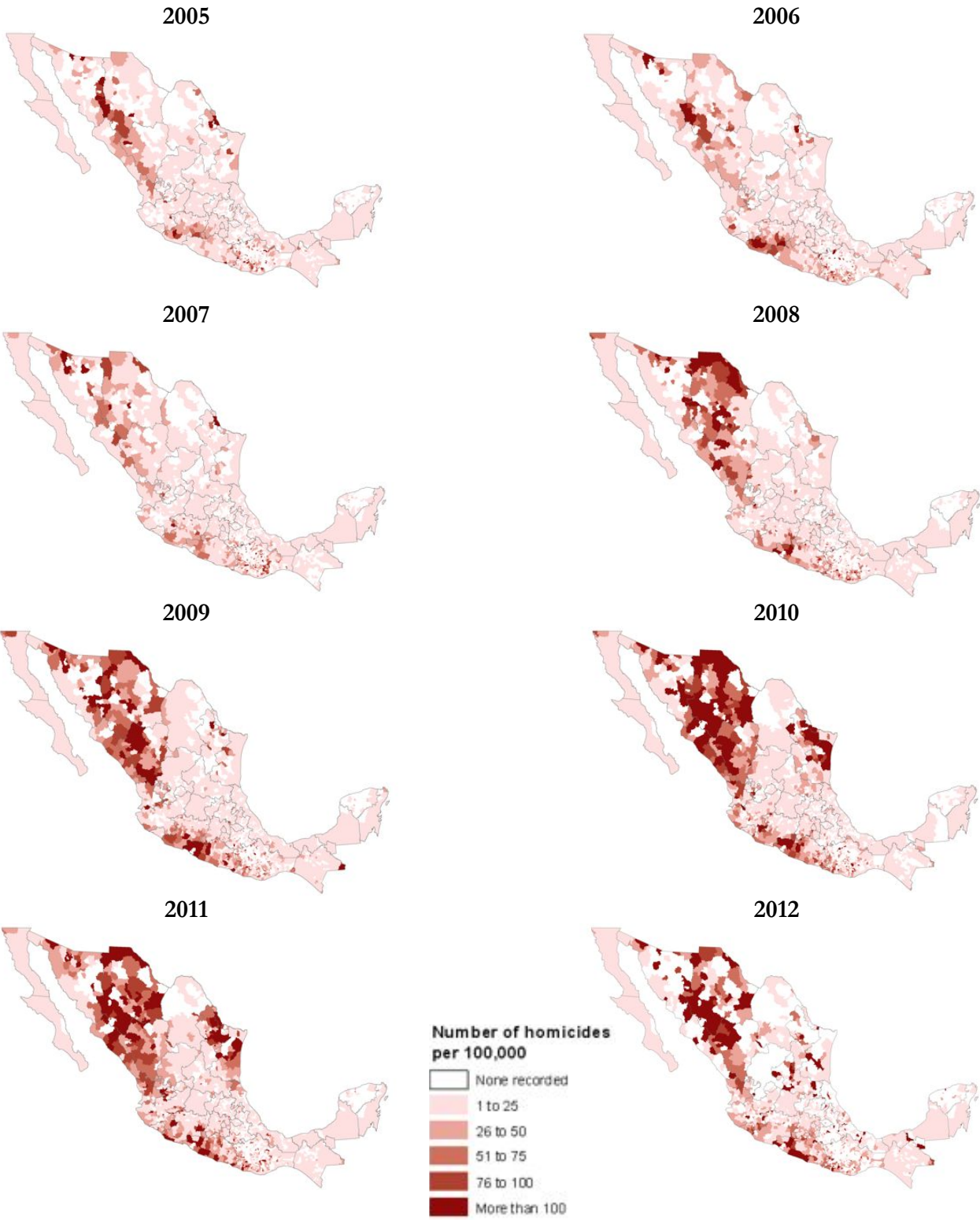
**Figure 10: Distribution of Homicides by Municipality, 1990-2012**



Source: INEGI.

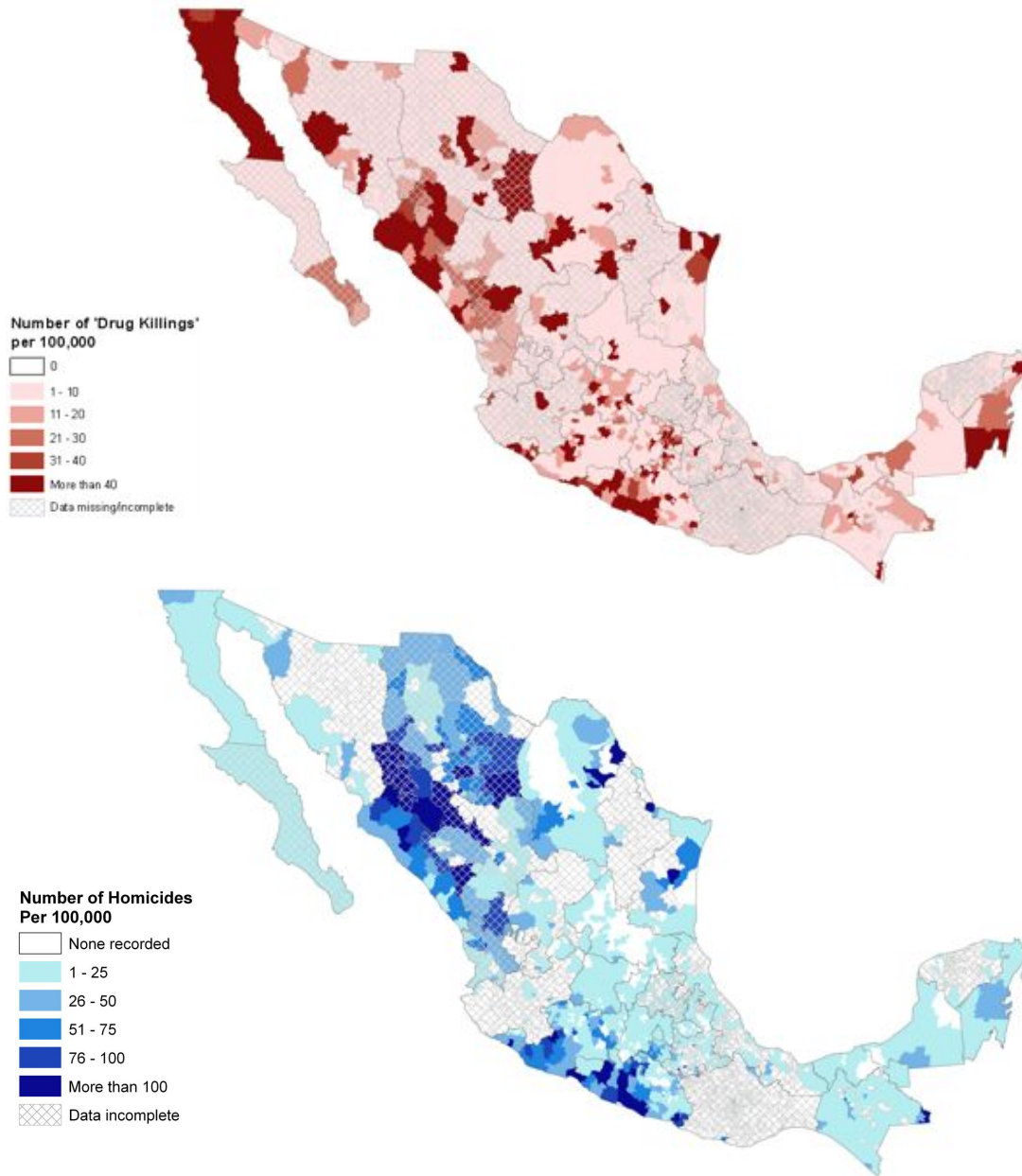
The maps in Figure 11 help to further illustrate the geographic proliferation of violence in Mexico after 2007 by showing the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants at the municipal level from 2005 through 2012, as reported by INEGI. Because INEGI data were not available for 2013 at the time that this report was released in April 2014, in Figure 12 the authors rely on the 2013 intentional homicide figures reported by SNSP. The maps below show the number homicides and rate per 100,000 inhabitants reported by SNSP so far for 2013 by municipality and using CONAPO population estimates for 2013. While SNSP has reported complete figures at the national level, the data available at the local level are incomplete for certain municipalities.

Figure 11: Geographic Distribution of Homicide Rate by Municipality, 2005-2012



Source: INEGI. Maps generated by Theresa Firestine.

**Figure 12: Geographic Distribution of Homicides (Red) and Homicide Rate (Blue) by Municipality in 2013**

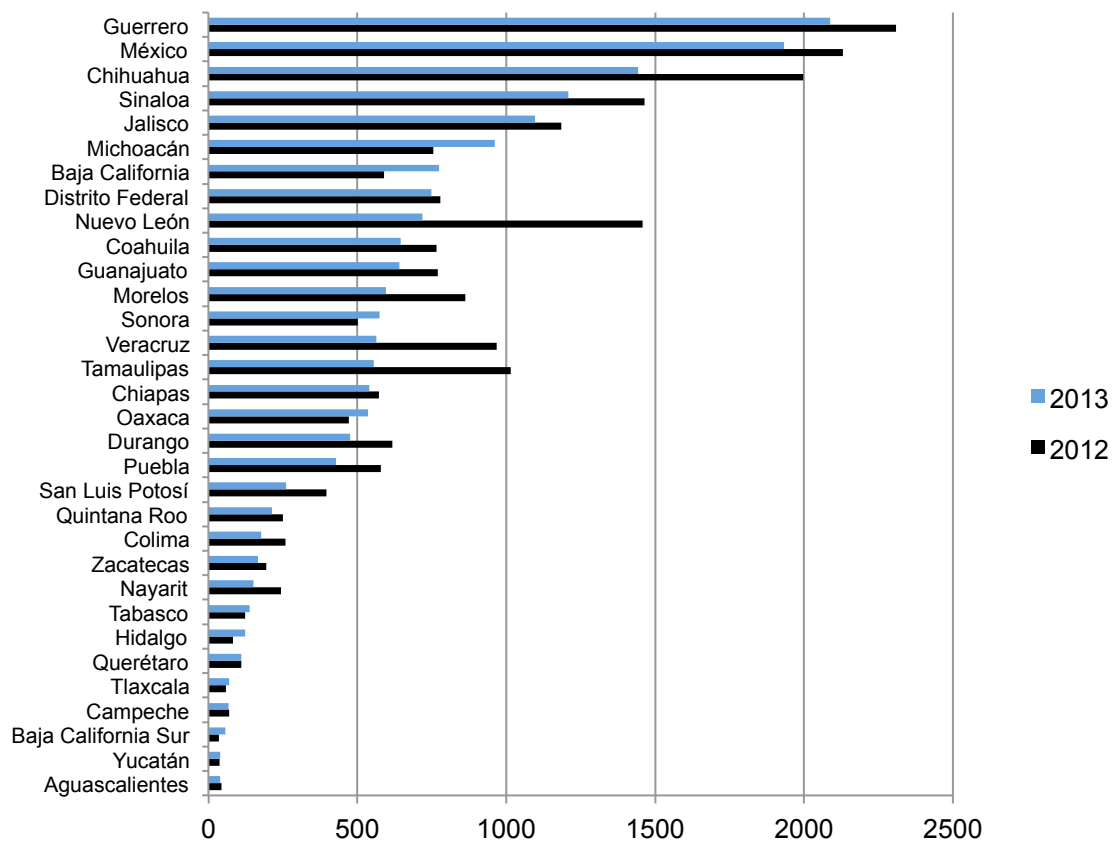


Source: SNSP and CONAPO. Maps generated by Theresa Firestine.

Taken together, these maps make apparent the geographic spread of intentional homicides to a greater number of municipalities after 2007, as well as the increase in the relative increase of such homicides per capita during that period. Especially after 2009, there was a significantly expanded geographic distribution of high per capita homicide rates, with at least 35 municipalities having more than 100 murders per 100,000 people, regardless whether the rate is calculated using INEGI or SNSP figures.

At the same time, these maps also show that violence has been regionally concentrated in certain areas of Mexico, particularly the northwest, the northeast, and the Pacific Coast. These three areas coincide with the major conflict zones for OCGs in recent years. 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.<sup>43</sup>

**Figure 13: Intentional Homicides by State, Comparing 2012 to 2013**



Source: SNSP.

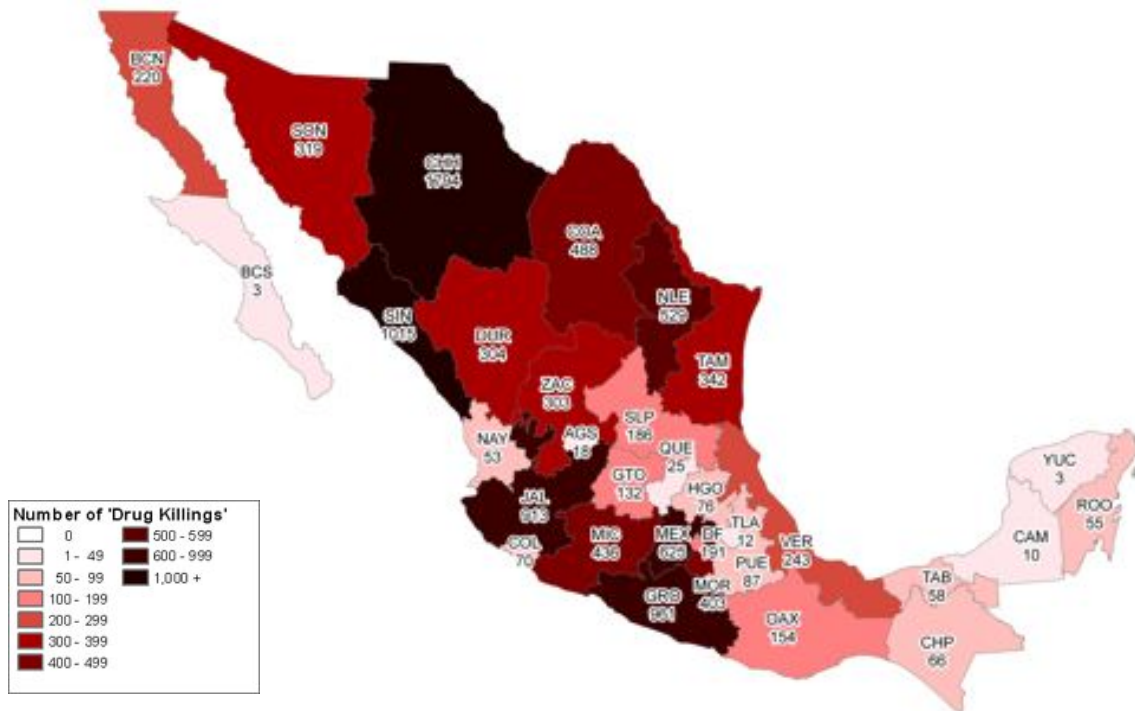
Indeed, using the data available from SNSP on homicides in 2013, it is clear that the states with the largest number of intentional homicides were Guerrero (2,087), México (1,932), Chihuahua (1,443), Sinaloa (1,208), and Jalisco (1,096), though these states all showed a decrease of about 10-20% in the number of murders compared to the previous year. The largest decreases in the number of intentional homicides were found in the states of Nuevo León (-50.7%), Chihuahua (-27.7%), Tamaulipas (-45.4%), Veracruz (-41.7%), and Morelos (-30.7%). The five states exhibiting the largest increases in intentional homicide were Michoacán (27.3%), Baja California (31.2%), Sonora (14.8%), Oaxaca (13.6%), and Hidalgo (49.4%).

<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting the slight geographic dispersion of homicides in Mexico's northeast in 2012, since this may reflect a shift in the violence in that area. However, these decreases were significantly, though not completely, offset by increases in homicides elsewhere.

## 2. Distribution of Organized-Crime-Style Homicides

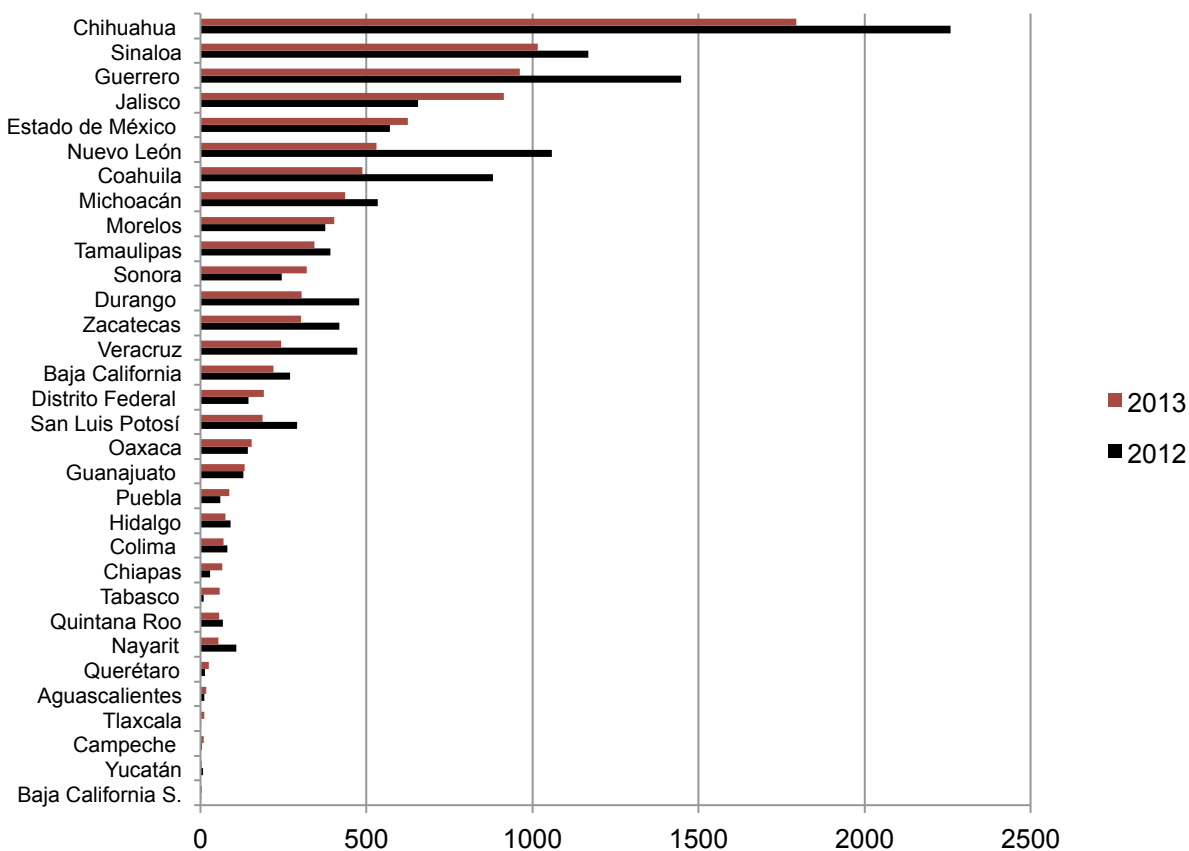
As noted earlier, while the Mexican government released figures on organized-crime-style homicides for part of 2013, the only data available for such homicides at the state level for the entire year comes from *Milenio*, which in 2013 reported a total of 10,095 homicide cases that appeared to involve organized crime. Almost half of organized-crime-style homicides were concentrated in the top five states: Chihuahua (1,794), Sinaloa (1,015), Guerrero (961), Nuevo León (529), and Coahuila (488). As in 2012, three of the top five states in Mexico were located along the U.S.-Mexico border. The states with the least organized-crime-style homicides were Aguascalientes (18), Tlaxcala (12), Campeche (10), Baja California Sur (3), and Yucatán (3). Since organized-crime-style homicides constituted a major share of all intentional homicides, as the authors explained earlier, the geographical distribution of such homicides illustrated in Figure 14 reflects a very similar pattern to that illustrated above.

**Figure 14: Organized-Crime-Style Homicide Map for 2013**



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

Figure 15: Organized-Crime-Style Homicides by State, Comparing 2012-2013



Source: *Milenio*.

A year-to-year comparison in Figure 15 using *Milenio*'s data shows that the number of organized-crime-style homicides diminished significantly in most states in 2013 compared to the previous year. There were roughly as many Mexican states (17) that saw a decrease in organized-crime-style homicides from the year before, as the number that saw an increase (15). However, among states that saw more violence, the total increase in 2013 (623) was significantly offset by the total decrease in organized-crime-style homicides in other states (-2,941). The five states that saw the largest decreases in organized-crime-style homicides from 2012 to 2013 were Chihuahua (-20.6%), Coahuila (-48.5%), Guerrero (-33.6%), Nuevo León (-50%), and Veracruz (-48.5%). The five states that saw the largest increases in organized-crime-style homicides were Jalisco (+39.2%), Sonora (+30.2%), Mexico State (+9.6%), Tabasco (+544.5%), and the Federal District (+32.6%).

Here it is noteworthy that while the northern Mexican border states of Chihuahua, Nuevo León, and Coahuila were among Mexico's states with the most OCG-style homicides, they also led the nation's decline in homicides in 2013. It is also worth noting that *Milenio* reported an 18.4% decrease in organized-crime-style homicides in the central Pacific state of Michoacán in 2013, even though SNSP reported that the state had the largest numerical increase in intentional homicides in 2013. This either indicates an increase in broader societal violence in Michoacán, or raises questions about whether *Milenio*'s count accurately reflects the activities of organized crime in that state. In the absence of comparable data from official or independent sources on organized-crime-style

homicides, it is difficult to evaluate which of these explanations is more likely. However, it seems possible that the rise of self-defense groups in Michoacán has produced a greater proportion of homicides that do not fit the criteria for identifying organized-crime-style homicide that is used by *Milenio*.

### 3. Significant Decreases in Local Centers of Violence

In recent years, the absolute number and relative share of violence in certain Mexican municipalities has varied greatly. From 2008 through 2011, the largest share of violence was concentrated in the border metropolis of Ciudad Juárez, but thereafter violence in that city declined significantly. In 2013, Ciudad Juárez moved from second to fourth place among the most violent municipalities in Mexico, according to SNSP intentional homicide statistics. Meanwhile, violence also decreased in Mexico's most violent municipality, Acapulco, to 883 homicides, or a rate of 129 homicides per 100,000 people. (See Table 3).

**Table 3: Total Number and Rate (Per 100K) of Overall Homicides by Municipality, 2011-2013**

#	Name	2011	Rate	#	Name	2012	Rate	#	Name	2013	Rate
1	Juárez	1460	100	1	Acapulco	1271	184	1	Acapulco	883	129
2	Acapulco	1008	145	2	Juárez	850	58	2	Tijuana	492	27
3	Monterrey	700	62	3	Monterrey	685	61	3	Culiacán	479	58
4	Culiacán	649	79	4	Culiacán	471	57	4	Juárez	453	30
5	Chihuahua	554	66	5	Torreón	792	126	5	Ecatepec	312	18
6	Torreón	455	72	6	Chihuahua	587	69	6	Monterrey	266	24
7	Tijuana	418	25	7	Tijuana	320	18	7	Chihuahua	251	29
8	Ecatepec	325	19	8	Nuevo Laredo	544	132	8	Torreón	238	38
9	Mazatlán	307	71	9	Cuernavaca	270	73	9	Zapopan	217	16
10	Guadalupe	254	36	10	Ecatepec	533	30	10	Morelia	209	27

Source: SNSP and CONAPO.

Despite recent improvements, levels of violence in Acapulco still stood much higher in 2013 than five years ago. The number of homicides SNSP reported in Acapulco grew from less than 400 in 2010 to 1,008 in 2011, 1,271 in 2012, and 883 in 2013.<sup>44</sup> As Justice in Mexico reported last year, the number and rate of homicides in Acapulco appeared to plateau in 2012, which authorities attributed to Operation “Guerrero Seguro,” launched late in 2011.<sup>45</sup> 2013 brought the first decrease in the number of intentional homicides in Acapulco since 2007. Along with Acapulco, SNSP also reported

<sup>44</sup> Figures from SNSP are not publicly available at the municipal level prior to 2011. Last year's report included figures from INEGI. According to INEGI, the number of homicides reported in Acapulco was 70 in 2008, 150 in 2009, 370 in 2010, 1,008 in 2011, 1,170 in 2012, and 883 in 2013.

<sup>45</sup> President Felipe Calderón launched Operation Guerrero Seguro in October 2011 to control the escalating violence, particularly in the resort city of Acapulco. The military operation was intended to strengthen the public security force and their capacity to carry out operations, purge and re-institutionalize security agencies, strengthen the education sector, and reinstate social values. See: Justice in Mexico, “Data Shows Declining Violence in Guerrero Due to Military Operation,” <http://justiceinmexico.org/2011/10/26/data-shows-declining-violence-in-guerrero-due-to-military-operation/>

significant decreases in intentional homicide in 2013 in Ciudad Juárez, Ecatepec, Monterrey, Chihuahua, and Torreón.

Meanwhile, other municipalities saw significant increases in homicide in 2013. The most significant surge in intentional homicides among major municipalities in 2013 was seen in Tijuana, the first increase in three years. Tijuana had been celebrated for its success in reducing the number of intentional homicides, which many attributed to better police work and stronger civic responses to crime and violence. It should be noted that despite Tijuana's increase, the number of homicides remains at less than half the level seen at the peak in 2008. In addition to Tijuana, there were significant increases in the number of intentional homicides in Zapopan (adjacent to Guadalajara) and Morelia, though in both cases the number and rate of homicides was a fraction of that found in Mexico's most violent municipalities in recent years.

## D. Victim Characteristics

The characteristics of victims of intentional homicide in Mexico fit with some of the general patterns with homicides around the world. Intentional 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. First, related to the discussion above, is the pervasiveness of the problem. When asked in March/April 2013, when asked about the most frequent crimes that Mexican citizens (aged 18+) had knowledge of in their neighborhood, *homicidios* was listed among the top 10 by 15% of respondents nationwide. Moreover, with regard to the victims of organized-crime-style homicides, among the things that stand out are 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

Using the Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset, the authors found that the vast majority of victims of organized-crime-style homicides—at least 75%—were men, with just 9% of the victims identified as female. Surprisingly, the average age of the victims was 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 reported in the media, so these figures must be interpreted with consideration of the biases inherent in information gleaned from media reports.

Meanwhile, of the 4,380 homicide cases identified in our sample, there were over 680 victims (15.5%) 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: 11% mentioned the Zetas or its members, 2.9% mentioned the La Familia Michoacán Organization or Knights Templar Organization or their members, and 1.2% referred to the Sinaloa Cartel or its members.

## 2. Changing Modes of Violence

As the sheer number of organized-crime-style homicides declined significantly during 2013, the nature of this violence also appeared to change. According to *Reforma*'s data, the rate at which victims showed signs of torture declined to an estimated 8% of all *ejecuciones* in 2013, compared to 13.8% in 2012, 8.7% in 2011, and roughly 8% in the years 2008 through 2010.<sup>46</sup> The percentage of bodies *Reforma* reported as having a “narco-message” directed to government officials or rival cartels dropped to about 2%, down from 8.5% in 2012, roughly 7% in the years 2009-2011 and 4.6% in 2008. According to *Reforma*'s figures the decapitation of victims was down to roughly 2% of cases, compared to 5.7 cases in 2012, 4.8% of all cases in 2011, up from 2.8% in 2008-2009 and 3.4% in 2010. These figures appear to provide somewhat conservative estimates for the total number of cases involving the extreme forms of violence employed against organized-crime-style homicide victims.<sup>47</sup>

## 3. Mayors

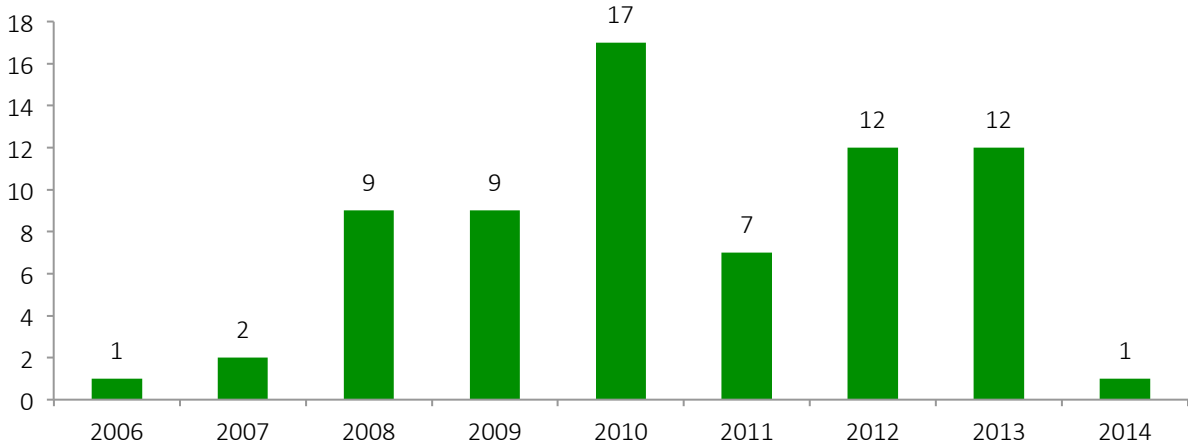
The *Memoria* dataset includes 70 mayors and former mayors killed from 2006 through 2013, including one additional case from 2014, many with characteristics bearing signs of organized crime. While the peak of violence in Mexico occurred during 2011, the year with the most killings of mayors was actually 2010, when 17 cases were reported, during the peak of the recent wave of violence in Mexico. Despite the reduction of the total number of homicides in Mexico in 2012 and 2013, both years still resulted in the killing of 12 mayors each. For the first time since 2008, in 2013 it was more life threatening to be a mayor than a journalist in Mexico.

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<sup>46</sup> As explained earlier, data from *Reforma* is not available for the first half of 2013, but for the last six months of the year torture was reportedly present in 295 cases (or in about 4% of *Reforma*'s estimated total number of OCG homicides for the year), decapitation in 72 cases (about 1% of its estimated total number of OCGs for the year) and 77 bodies were left with a “narco-message” (about 1% of its estimated total number of OCG homicides for the year). Given that available SNSP homicide figures and *Milenio* OCG-style homicide figures both show a significantly greater number of homicides in the first six months of 2013, the authors conservatively estimate that the proportions of cases involving torture, decapitation, and narco-messages are at least equal to the number reported in the second half of the year.

<sup>47</sup> Using an original dataset compiling more than 4,380 individual cases of organized-crime-style homicides that occurred from 2006 through 2013, the authors analyzed a variety of victim characteristics and circumstances surrounding these cases. That dataset, part of the *Memoria* project, provides a useful sample of the kind of violence perpetrated by OCGs. Of the available information for all years, the authors found torture was identified in 710 cases (16.2%), decapitation in 456 (10.4%), and dismemberment in 349 (8.0%).

**Figure 16: Mayors & Ex-Mayors Killed in Mexico (January 2006-March 2014)**



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

**Figure 17: Map of Mayors & Ex-Mayors Killed in Mexico (January 2006-March 2014)**



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

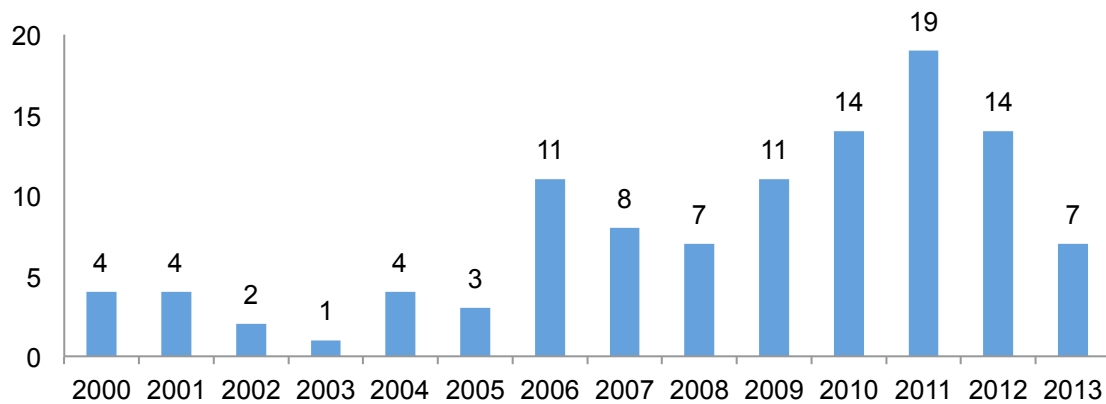
#### 4. Journalists

Over the last decade, 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 journalists 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 on cases where a murder was confirmed to have been committed in relation to the journalist’s profession. From 1992 through 2013, CPJ reported that there were 28 confirmed cases, 41 unconfirmed cases, and four media-support workers killed in Mexico. For 2013, the CPJ lists no confirmed cases, and three cases for which motive was unconfirmed.

Not limiting to cases where there is a confirmed motive associated with the journalist’s profession, the Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset identified 109 journalists and media-support workers who were killed between 2000 and 2013, with the vast majority of these deaths (91) 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 18).

**Figure 18: Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico, 2006-2013**

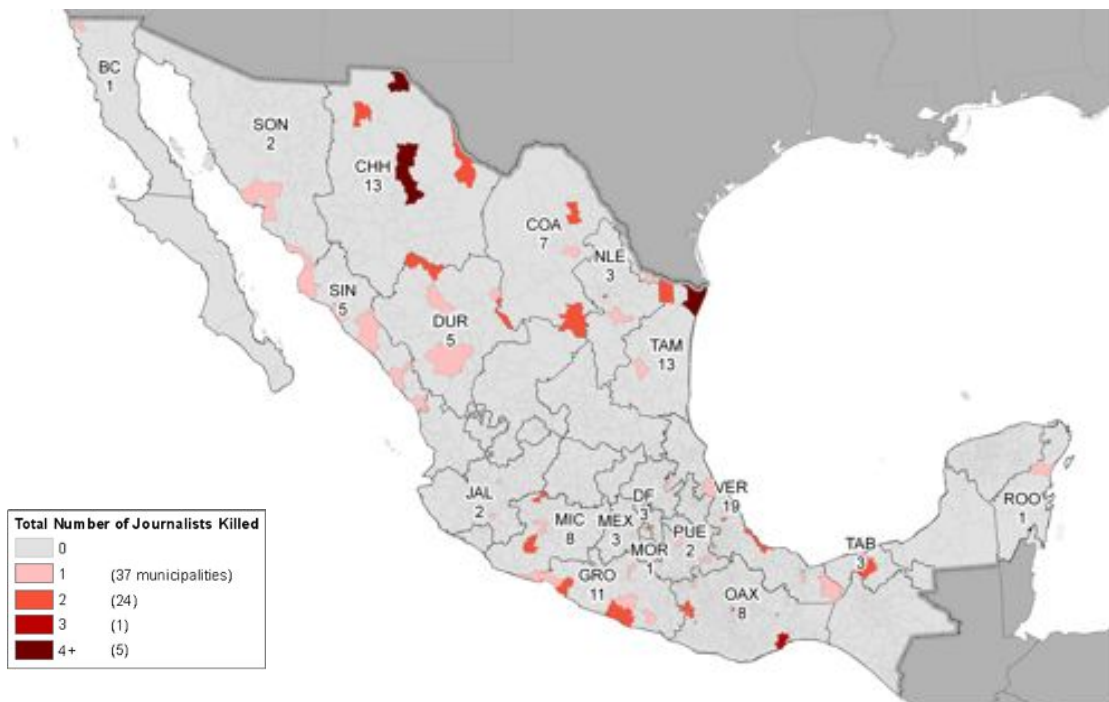


Source: Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset.

It is important to mention that while homicides against journalists this year were as low as in 2008, the lowest number since 2007, the organization *Article 19* published a recent report indicating that—when taking into consideration other types of violence such as kidnappings, beatings, threats and other types of aggression—2013 was the year during which the most violence has been directed against journalists since 2007.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> See: “Informe 2013.” Article 19 in <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2014/03/2013-el-ano-mas-violento-para-la-prensa-en-mexico-articulo-19/>

**Figure 19: Map of Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico, 2000-2013**



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

According to Justice in Mexico’s tally, on average, at least seven 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). In 2013, the journalists whose deaths were documented by Justice in Mexico included: *Televisa* reporter Alberto Angulo Gerardo (Angostura, Sinaloa), *El Ciudadano* reporter Mario Ricardo Chávez Jorge (Ciudad, Tamaulipas), former-*Hechos en Guerrero* news anchor Alonso De la Colina Sordo (Puebla, Puebla), *El Imparcial* reporter Alberto López Bello (Oaxaca, Oaxaca), *Vanguardia* photographer Daniel Alejandro Martínez Balzaldúa (Saltillo, Coahuila), and *Ojinaga Noticias* reporter Jaime Guadalupe González Domínguez (Ojinaga, Chihuahua).

#### 4. 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. According to *Reforma*, between July and December 2013, the figure stood at 75 police officers and six military personnel as victims of organized-crime-style killings. Even if the number of police and military victims was significantly greater than the total that *Reforma* was able to identify during the first half of 2013, which saw a much higher number of homicides overall, last year appears to have seen a considerable decrease in such killings from 2012.<sup>49</sup> That said, the ratio of police-to-military

<sup>49</sup> Again, since *Reforma*’s reporting of these figures was incomplete for the early part of 2013, Justice in Mexico was only able to tally the number of organized-crime-style homicides involving police and military personnel for the second half

personnel that *Reforma* reported killed in 2013 was fairly consistent with previous years, with police being killed at least 12 times more than military personnel.

Using the Justice in Mexico *Memoria* dataset, the authors identified 527 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. However, of the law enforcement personnel, 319 were local police (7.3%), 96 were Federal Police (2.2%), 65 were state police (1.5%), 18 were members of the now defunct Federal Investigative Agency (AFI) or its successor the Federal Ministerial Police (0.4%), and the remaining victims were agents from other state or local law enforcement agencies.

### C. Comparing Administrations

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 4).<sup>50</sup> 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.

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.

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of the year. As reported last year, there were around 420 police and 25 military victims of organized-crime-style homicides in 2012. In 2011, the same figures stood at 572 police officers and 48 military personnel, while in 2010 there were 715 police officers and 61 military personnel were killed. *Reforma's* data on police and military victims are unavailable prior to 2008.

<sup>50</sup> 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.

**Table 4: Estimated Homicides and OCG-style Homicides by Presidential Administration**

Data Source	Zedillo (1995-2000)	Fox (2001-2006)	Calderón (2007-2012)	Peña Nieto (2013)
INEGI Homicides	80,311	60,162	121,669	22,131
SNSP Homicides	n.a.	74,398	122,533	18,146
CNDH-OCG	n.a.	8,901	n.a.	n.a.
SNSP-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	65,988	11,392
Reforma-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	47,845	7,163
Milenio-OCG	n.a.	n.a.	54,087	10,095

Note: Figures in red reflect the authors' projections based on available data.

### III. ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENTS IN 2013

Mexico's security situation has seriously deteriorated on a wide range of measures over the last decade, especially those that affect vulnerable populations. Last year, there was some uncertainty about whether and how much the trajectory of violence had begun to change, and this report offered a note of cautious optimism that things could improve in the coming years. In fact, in 2013, there was some significant improvement according to the available measures of intentional homicide and organized crime discussed above. However, due to the large increases in violence in recent years, there is still considerable room for improvement. Whatever direction Mexico's security situation takes over the next few years, the credit or blame will likely fall on the country's new president, Enrique Peña Nieto, who took office on December 1, 2012 and will remain in office until December 1, 2018. Below we consider some of the developments that have characterized Mexico's security situation during President Peña Nieto's first year in office.

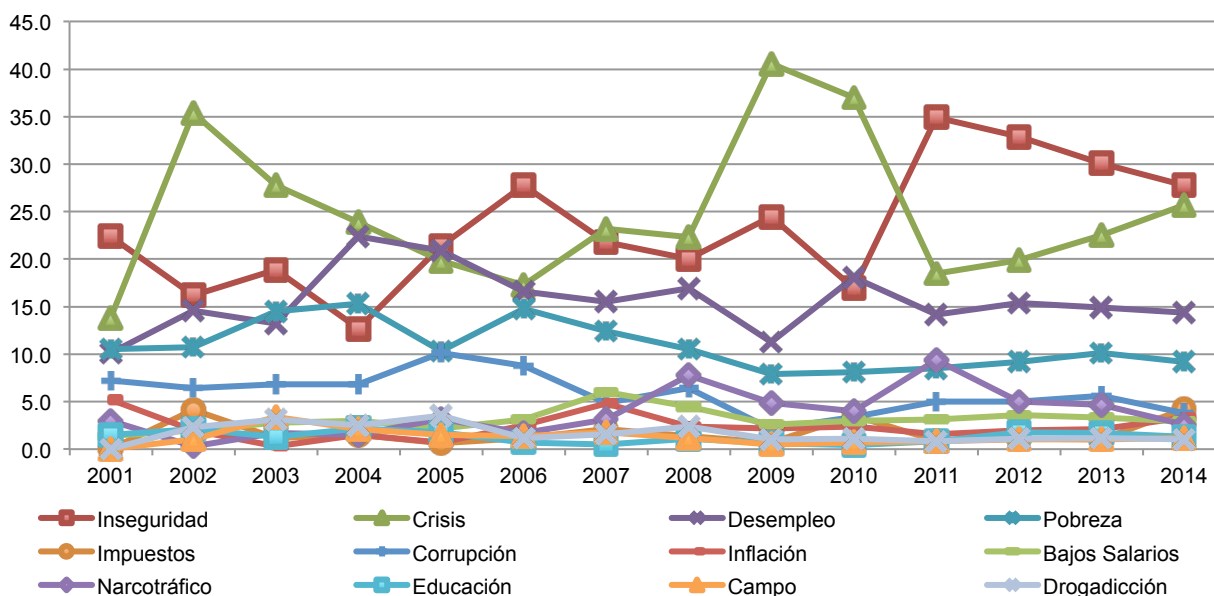
#### A. Promises, Preoccupations, and Expectations in Peña Nieto's First Year in Office

President Peña Nieto hails from the party that dominated Mexican politics for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). His victory in the July 2012 presidential election was seen by many as a condemnation of Mexico's 12-year experiment with political change under the National Action Party (PAN), which had elected two successive candidates to the presidency starting in 2000. For both presidents Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), security was an area where there were arguably some successes but also many failures.

Security will therefore be one of the major issues that will determine public support for President Peña Nieto and his party looking forward to the country's 2015 midterm elections and beyond. Yet, according to Alejandro Hope, the director of Security Policy at the Mexican Competitiveness Institute (IMCO), during his first year in office, Peña Nieto made a deliberate effort to divert the narrative away from problems of crime and violence, largely by limiting commentary and access to public information on security matters.<sup>51</sup> Whereas the Calderón administration was obsessed with security, Peña Nieto has been obsessed with making the country not obsessed with security.

<sup>51</sup> Hope, Alejandro. "Menos ruido, misma furia." *Nexos*. July 1, 2013. <http://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=15373>

Figure 20: Top Policy Concern Among Mexicans, 2001-2013



Source: Consulta Mitofsky. “¿Cuál es el problema principal del país?” (What is the principal problem of the country?). In order from left to right, the answers are: Insecurity, Economic Crisis, Unemployment, Poverty, Taxes, Corruption, Inflation, Low Wages, Drug Trafficking, Education, Rural Development, and Drug Addiction.

Even so, in recent years, public preoccupation with security has been very high (Figure 20). While on the campaign trail in 2012, Peña Nieto had made several bold promises and pledged that he would make a clear break from the Calderón administration in order to restore citizen security in Mexico. Specifically, Peña Nieto promised to reduce violence by 50%, draw down on the use of the military in the streets, create a National Gendarmerie, improve coordination in security efforts, and focus more on improving security conditions for ordinary citizens than on taking out major organized crime figures.<sup>52</sup> Arguably, while none of these promises were fulfilled, the Peña Nieto administration made progress toward a number of these objectives.

In the meantime, public concern about security has gradually receded since the peak of the violence in 2011, while concerns about economic issues have increased. This appears to be largely because the trajectory of violence had already begun to shift by the time Peña Nieto took office. The rate of intentional homicides was already considerably lower by the second half of 2012 than at its peak in 2011. Still, the average monthly tally of intentional homicides during Peña Nieto’s first year in office was 1,535, about 15% less than the average of 1,812 homicides a month during Calderón’s last year in office, according to SNSP. The roughly 16% decline in homicides fell far short of the new president’s stated goal of decreasing homicides by 50%, but constituted the largest decrease in homicides that Mexico has experienced since 2007.

## B. Counter-Drug Efforts

Peña Nieto made it clear that he would break from the Calderón administration’s focus on drug-trafficking, in order to turn toward promoting citizen security in areas that directly affect ordinary

<sup>52</sup> [http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/2013\\_december\\_news\\_monitor.pdf](http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/2013_december_news_monitor.pdf)

Mexicans, notably homicide, kidnapping, and extortion.<sup>53</sup> In one sense, this has been the case: the Peña Nieto administration has clearly reined in its efforts to combat drug trafficking. Not since President Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) have levels of drug seizures been lower for opium, cocaine, and cannabis than under Peña Nieto (See Table 5). Moreover, in the two categories where the Peña Nieto administration has made some significant drug seizures—heroin and methamphetamine—there have been enormous increases in Mexico’s productive capacity for these drugs. Finally, the focus on heroin and methamphetamine appear to link closely to the government’s efforts to target the Knights Templar Organization, which traffics heavily in these drugs.

**Table 5: Average Annual Drug Seizures By Mexican Presidential Administrations, 1989-2013**

	<i>SALINAS</i>	<i>ZEDILLO</i>	<i>FOX</i>	<i>CALDERON</i>	<i>PEÑA NIETO</i>
<b>Seizures</b>	(1989-1994)	(1995-2000)	(2001-2006)	(2006-2012)	(2013-)
Opium (kg)	0.16	333.33	314.83	615.67	235.50
Heroin (kg)	0.16	221.17	326.00	284.67	240.50
Cocaine (mt)	40.67	25.85	23.83	17.57	3.70
Cannabis (mt)	417.15	1,162.17	1,837.83	1,613.67	598.20
Methamphetamine (kg)	0.00	286.00	715.50	10,356.17	7,300.00

Source: INL.

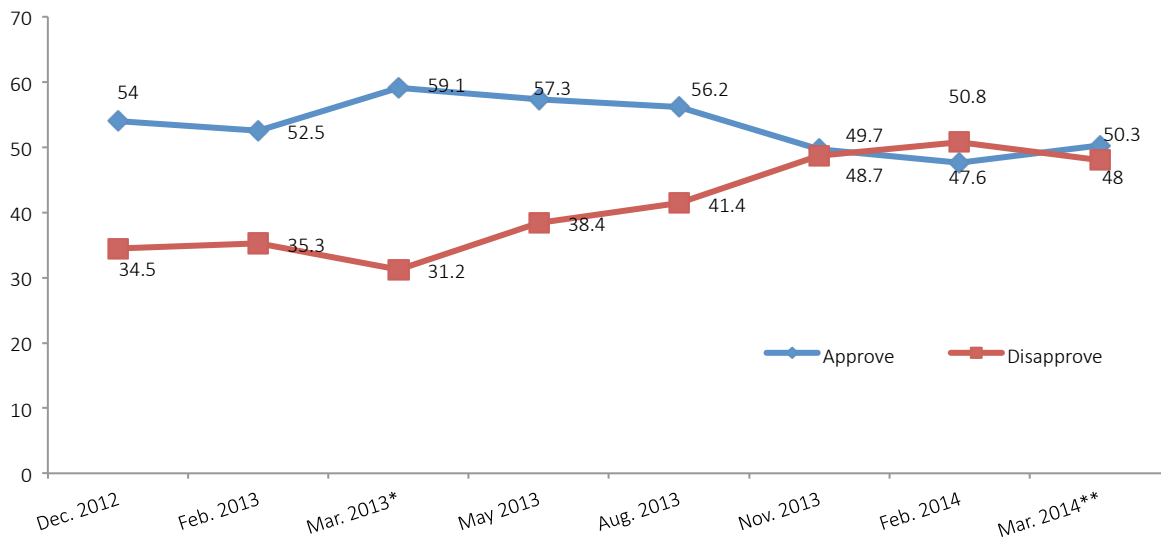
As part of his shift away from counter-drug efforts, Peña Nieto also promised a break from the Calderón administration’s “kingpin strategy” of targeting high-level cartel leaders. Here the result was very different. More than one year after publicizing the change in strategy, the Peña Nieto administration has continued past administrative practices in this regard. While crimes that affect ordinary Mexicans appear to be on the rise, as we discuss below, there have been a number of significant blows to cartel leadership in several high profile, notorious, and powerful organizations, results that are more in line with Calderón’s kingpin strategy.

Perhaps most important of these kingpin takedowns was the February 2014 arrest of the most wanted drug trafficker in the Western Hemisphere, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera, the head of the Sinaloa Cartel. Wanted in Mexico and the United States for charges of drug trafficking and ties to organized crime, Guzmán was one of the world’s best-known drug traffickers, and was frequently cited by Forbes magazine as one of the richest men in the world. Guzmán had been associated with the Guadalajara Cartel, the country’s most powerful organized crime group of the 1980s, and was first arrested in 1993 in Guatemala and sent to Mexico. Guzmán escaped from prison in 2001, and succeeded in forging alliances that made the Sinaloa Cartel Mexico’s dominant drug trafficking organization. Guzmán’s arrest led to a 3% boost in the approval rating for President Peña Nieto, a 10% increase in the public’s belief that the President “has control of the country,” and a 6% increase in the number of Mexicans who think the security situation is getting better (see Figure 21).<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Fausset, Richard. “Peña Nieto team decries past drug cartel strategy.” *Los Angeles Times*. December 21, 2012. <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/dec/21/world/la-fg-mexico-kingpin-20121222>

<sup>54</sup> Consulta Mitofsky. “México: Evaluación de Gobierno Enrique Peña Nieto.” Año XI No. 520. March 2014. <http://www.consulta.mx/web/index.php/estudios-e-investigaciones/evaluacion-de-gobierno/519-mexico-enrique-pena-nieto-evaluacion-presidencial-efecto-chapo-guzman>

**Figure 21: Public Approval of President Enrique Peña Nieto by Percentage, December 2012 through March 2014**



Note: \* indicates the period in which Elba Esther Gordillo was arrested. \*\* indicates the period in which Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán was arrested.  
 Source: Consulta Mitofsky, “México: Evaluación de Gobierno Enrique Peña Nieto,” Año XI No. 520, March 2014.  
<http://www.consulta.mx/web/index.php/estudios-e-investigaciones/evaluacion-de-gobierno/519-mexico-enrique-pena-nieto-evaluacion-presidencial-efecto-chapo-guzman>

Earlier blows to the Sinaloa Cartel in 2013 included some that resulted from coordinated efforts with U.S. intelligence and security officials, included the arrests of Serafín Zambada Ortiz, the second son of Sinaloa Cartel’s other leader, Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada García, to face criminal charges in the United States; José Rodrigo Aréchiga Gamboa, a high-ranking lieutenant in the Sinaloa Cartel, who also faces criminal charges in the United States; El Mayo’s chief of security, known as “El 19”; and Marcelino Ticante Castro, a high-ranking member of the Sinaloa Cartel.

A number of other cartels were targeted by the Peña Nieto administration, including several high-profile takedowns of the Knights Templar Organization in the last year with the death of leader Nazario “El Chayo” Moreno González and Enrique “Kike” Plancarte in March 2014; and the arrests of leader Dionicio “El Tío” Ioya Plancarte; KTO top enforcer Jesús “El Toro” Vázquez Macias in an operation that netted 37 other presumed KTO members; and KTO’s alleged leader of the La Huacana zone in Michoacán, Joaquín “El Allegretti” Negrete. Outside of the Sinaloa Cartel and the KTO, other notable arrests in the last year include that of Zeta’s leader Miguel Ángel “Z-40” Treviño Morales; Gulf Cartel (Cartel del Golfo, CDG) leader Mario Armando Ramírez Treviño, known as “X-20” or “El Pelon”; Javier Torres Félix and Manuel Aguirre Galindo of the Arellano Félix Organization (AFO); Rubén “El Menchito” Oseguera González, son of Jalisco’s New Generation Cartel (Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG) leader Nemesio “El Mencho” Oseguera Cervantes; and unaffiliated, but well-known drug trafficker Tirso Martínez Sánchez, “El Doctor” or “El Futbolista,” among others.

All in all, well more than half of the Peña Nieto administration’s list of 122 most-wanted drug capos have been arrested or killed since taking office. In a document released by the Mexican government at the end of 2013, it was reported that 69 out of 122 capos captured. The Zetas were the most affected, with 23 arrests and four killed, followed by the little-known Cartel del Poniente, which operates primarily in the northern states of Coahuila and Durango, and that saw 17 of its members

detained.<sup>55</sup> The Sinaloa Cartel followed with seven arrests and two killed. This does not take into account any of the arrests or killings recorded in the first three months of 2014.

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, during 2013, Peña Nieto's arrests of top drug traffickers apparently did not produce large spikes in violence. Why, compared to previous years, did the Mexican government's arrests of the heads of the Zetas, Sinaloa, and Knights Templar organized crime groups not follow this pattern? One explanation may be the long-awaited effect of government efforts to break up the cartels, as the dwindling size of Mexican criminal organizations reduces their capacity to fight one another to take over new territories. While some criminal groups still have a substantial presence in Mexico, years of arrests and disruptions may have depleted their organizational capacity, as intended by advocates of the kingpin strategy. At a minimum, reducing the number of rival organizations may be helping to stifle the competition over drug production and trafficking routes that has previously fueled conflicts among traffickers. Or perhaps, as expert Mark Kleinman has advocated, the Mexican government has succeeded in sending a message to the cartels that violence would no longer be tolerated.

An alternative explanation is that some criminal organizations have been able to maintain their operations intact and fend off possible interlopers despite the arrest of top leaders. A case in point is the arrest of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, whose criminal organization appears to have experienced a smooth transition given that his alleged partner, Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada García, remains at large. Given Zambada's continued leadership role in the organization, this has possibly helped to suppress internal rifts and infighting, and prevented rival organizations from encroaching on Sinaloa's turf.<sup>56</sup> The same could be argued about the Knights Templar Organization who has lost three of its four leaders in the first three months of 2014. With the fall of KTO leaders Dionicio "El Tío" Ioya Plancarte, Nazario "El Chayo" Moreno González, and Enrique "Kiki" Plancarte, only Servando "La Tuta" Gómez García remains, and at the time of this report held full control of the organization.

### C. The Military, the National Gendarmerie, and the Judicial Sector

Because Mexican police are under-trained, poorly motivated, and highly corruptible, the federal government has been highly dependent on the armed forces as a key component of Mexico's national security strategy for several years. Over the last year, this heavy reliance on the military has continued, despite Peña Nieto's promises otherwise. Media reports were conflicting as to the number of federal deployments in 2013, with figures suggesting that the number of military deployments were as low as 30,000 and as high as 76,000 soldiers and placed the number of Federal

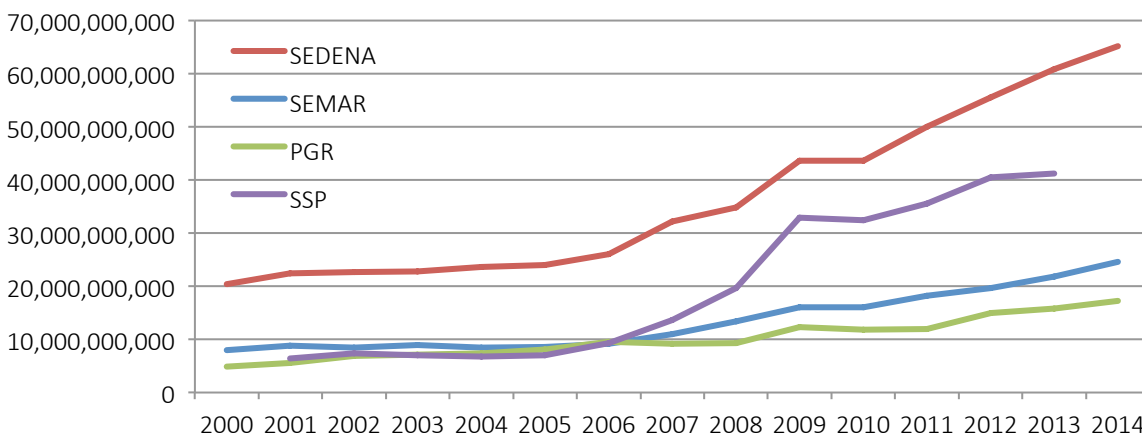
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<sup>55</sup> "December 2013: News Monitor." *Justice in Mexico*. December 2013. See also: "Los Zetas, el cártel más golpeado con Peña Nieto: PGR." *Proceso*. December 19, 2013. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=360795>

<sup>56</sup> In fact, InSight Crime's Patrick Corcoran points out that El Chapo's deep personal feuds both within and outside of the Sinaloa Cartel, may actually reduce violence, since Zambada can now work to calm the waters and get back to business. Corcoran, Patrick. "Testimony of 'El Chapo's' Secretary Reveals Cartel's Inner Workings." *InSight Crime*. April 2, 2014. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/testimony-of-el-chapos-secretary-reveals-sinaloa-cartels-inner-workings>

Police (*Policía Federal*, PF) at around 40,000.<sup>57</sup> Budgets for security have clearly risen, though the dissolution of the Federal Secretariat for Public Security transferred that agencies functions to the Interior Ministry. (See ). In January 2014, an additional 9,000 Mexican army troops were deployed to the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán to combat rising violence and extortion efforts run by the Knights Templar.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the military, one of the most trusted institutions among Mexican civilians, has retained its high public approval rating. Following the arrest of Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán in March 2014, a *Consulta Mitofsky* poll showed 83% of the public supporting the use of the military to combat organized crime. Meanwhile, of those who believe that the Peña Nieto security strategy differs from Calderón’s (a subset that jumped from 37% agreeing in January to 51% in March 2014), 75% preferred the Peña Nieto strategy against organized crime to his predecessor’s.<sup>59</sup>

**Figure 22: Security Sector Budgets in Mexico, 2000-2014**



Source: Presupuesto de Egresos de la Federación.

Another Peña Nieto campaign promise that has thus far fallen short is the proposal for the creation of a National Gendarmerie (*Gendarmería Nacional*). The Gendarmerie—a civilian commanded police force staffed with elite military troops that will focus only on crime in municipalities—was a key element in President Peña Nieto’s proposed crime strategy.<sup>60</sup> Not only has the proposal of 40,000 agents been dramatically scaled down, but its proposed launch at the end of 2013 was delayed until July 2014, although former National Security Commissioner Manuel Mondragón y Kalb announced in December 2013 that some forces were operational in several municipalities and tourist areas in

<sup>57</sup> Redacción. “Con Peña Nieto aumentó en 50% el número de soldados que realizan tareas contra el narco: investigación.” *Sin Embargo*. December 1, 2013. <http://www.sinembargo.mx/01-12-2013/832208>

<sup>58</sup> AFP. “Mineras financian a autodefensas.” *El Economista*. February 19, 2014. <http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2014/02/19/mineras-financian-autodefensas>

<sup>59</sup> Consulta Mitofsky. “Encuesta Nacional Sobre Percepción de Inseguridad Ciudadana en México.” Año XI, No. 522. March 2014. <http://mucd.org.mx/recursos/Contenidos/EncuestaMitofskydePercepcinCiudadanasobrela/documentos2/NAMUCD2014mzoRoy.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> Meyer, Maureen and Clay Boggs. “One Year into Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto’s Administration.” *Washington Office on Latin America*. November 27, 2013. [http://www.wola.org/commentary/one\\_year\\_into\\_the\\_enrique\\_pena\\_nieto\\_administration](http://www.wola.org/commentary/one_year_into_the_enrique_pena_nieto_administration)

the country.<sup>61</sup> However, Mondragón's unexpected resignation in March 2014 casts uncertainty on the future of the National Gendarmerie.<sup>62</sup> Mondragón had just completed his first year as National Security Commissioner, and President Peña Nieto has since nominated his replacement, high-ranking national security official Monte Alejandro Rubido García.<sup>63</sup>

In the long run, improving Mexico's judicial sector—not merely reshuffling police agencies—is the key to better law enforcement. When prosecutors are held to account for the evidence they bring to court, there is greater pressure on police to do their job with a high degree of professionalism. This is why Mexico's ongoing criminal procedural reforms are extremely important. In March 2014, Peña Nieto approved a uniform code of criminal procedure in all 31 states and the Federal District (Distrito Federal, DF), in an effort to harmonize Mexico's judicial system nationwide. There are many questions about whether a single code is the best approach to deal with Mexico's widely varying state and local legal contexts, but perhaps the most significant benefit of moving to a uniform code is that it will ensure that all state governments in Mexico move forward toward implementation more quickly than has been the case.

#### D. Citizen Security Concerns: Kidnapping and Extortion

Unfortunately, improvements in the homicide rate did not entail universal improvements in citizen security. As Eduardo Guerrero, director of the public policy consulting group Lantia Consultores, makes clear in an article in *Nexos* magazine, violence increased dramatically in certain categories and certain parts of the country in 2013.<sup>64</sup> Kidnapping and extortion are a growing concern (see Figure 23 and Figure 24). However, as UNAM professor Octavio Rodríguez Araujo argued in March 2014, the link between Mexico's counter-drug strategy and these kinds of activities is unclear: “The more [the government] breaks up organized armed groups, the more others proliferate, seemingly without organization or control, choosing the easiest option: kidnapping or robbing anyone who happens to be passing or who isn't paying attention, and using this as a way to make money.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> “Gendarmería opera ‘de facto’ desde estas vacaciones: Mondragón y Kalb,” *Vanguardia*. December 26, 2013.

<http://www.vanguardia.com.mx/gendarmeriaoperadefactodesdeestasvacacionesmondragonykalb-1909859.html>

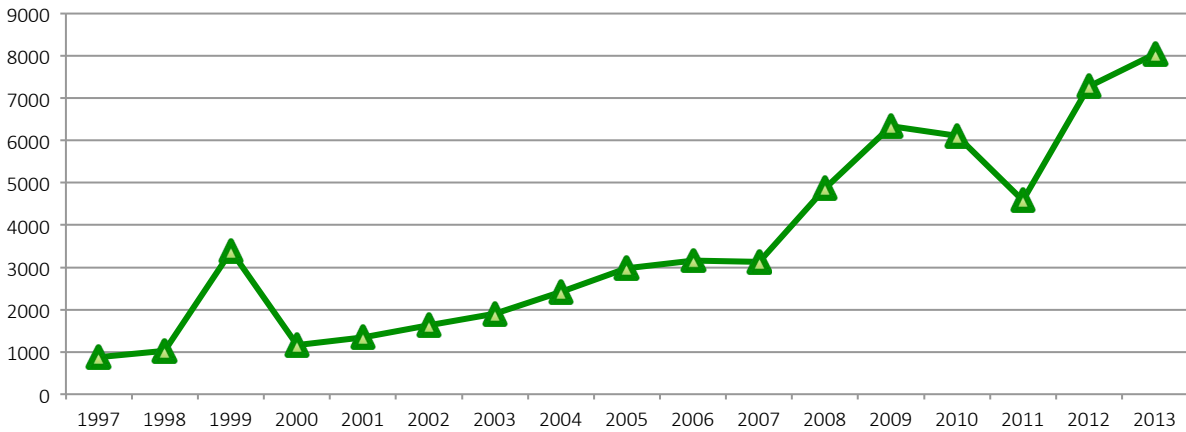
<sup>62</sup> At a forum in which Justice in Mexico participated in Mexico City in early 2014, representatives from the Peña Nieto administration involved in the training of the Gendarmerie explained that the first several hundred members of the agency were in training and would become operational in the coming year or so. However, this visit occurred a few weeks before Mondragón's resignation.

<sup>63</sup> Mondragón's resignation was not only the second turnover of the National Security Commissioner position in just over a year; it was also the second resignation of a security official in Mexico in 2014. General Oscar Naranjo, Peña Nieto's chief domestic security consultant, resigned in late January to return to his home in Colombia.

<sup>64</sup> Eduardo Guerrero, “Después de la Guerra,” *Nexos*. December 1, 2013. <http://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=15586>

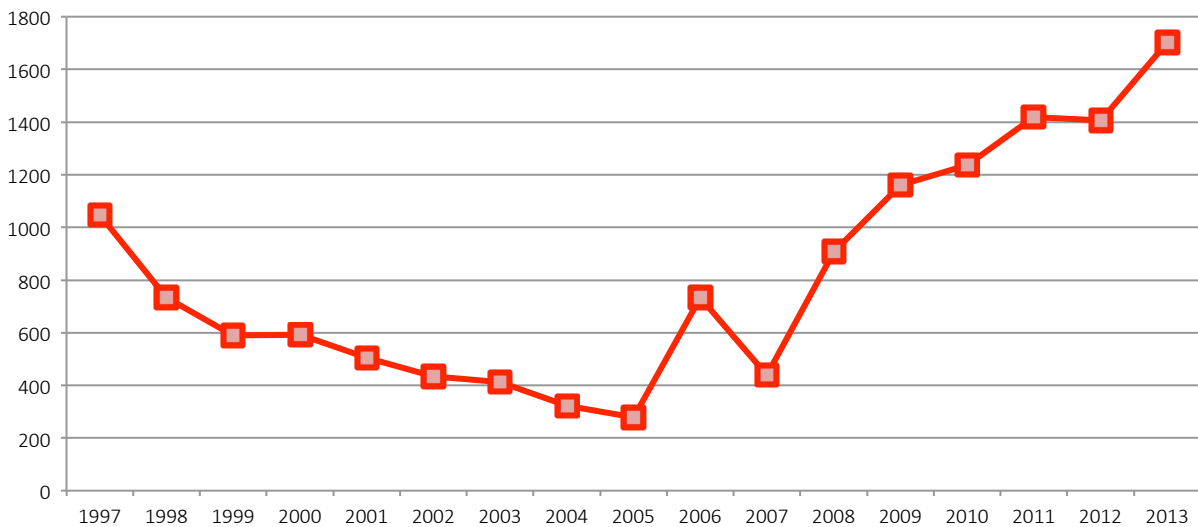
<sup>65</sup> Octavio Rodríguez Araujo, “De secuestros y robos,” *La Jornada*, Thursday, March 27, 2014. Translated by Catriona McDermid for MexicoVoices.com on March 30, 2014.

Figure 23: Number of Reported Extortion Cases



Source: SNSP.

Figure 24: Number of Reported Kidnapping Cases



Source: SNSP.

## E. The Rise of Self Defense Forces

Arguably the most pressing security issue the Peña Nieto administration has had to deal with since taking office has been the dynamic and dangerous situation in Michoacán. In just one year, the state has seen the increase of significant violence and criminal activities; the emergence, evolution, and internal struggles of self-defense groups (*grupos de autodefensa*); and the federal government's efforts to regain control, particularly in the state's Tierra Caliente region. This three-sided front continues to unfold as the criminal organizations, self-defense groups, and government have positioned themselves in Michoacán.

Self-defense groups have been detected in at least 13 Mexican states, but most notably in Michoacán and Guerrero. The groups are largely found in relatively poor, rural areas where state and federal authorities have little or no presence, and municipal police forces are weak and/or susceptible to corruption from organized crime. In Michoacán, the groups emerged in February 2013 as a response to the increasing violence and insecurity caused primarily by the Knights Templar. Seemingly frustrated with the government's inability or lack of effort to step in and quell the violence, self-defense groups (or community police forces) banded together to fill the void, patrolling the streets, establishing check points on the towns' outskirts to monitor drug trafficking, and detaining and turning over suspects to authorities. The evolution of these groups in the year since their inception has seen their presence expand into at least 29 of Michoacán's 113 municipalities, their access to firearms and equipment increase, and their ability to assist authorities in securing their towns develop to a greater level.<sup>66</sup> According to self-defense group spokesman Estanislao Beltrán, the groups also receive financial support from the state's mining sector, which was reportedly extorted for years by the Knights Templar.

Despite Michoacán Governor Fausto Vallejo Figueroa's initial stance against the self-defense groups, as violent outbreaks continued the groups grew large enough—blurring the line between legal and illegal, formal and informal—that the federal government finally had to formally recognize, institutionalize, and regulate the groups' activities. On January 27, 2014, 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's security apparatus to form the "Rural Defense Corps," which would operate under the authority of the Mexican Army. The eight-point document specified that the corps would be temporary, would require the groups' leaders to provide the government with a registry of all of their members, and would require members to register their weapons.

While the federal government touted the pact as a significant step forward in resolving the security crisis in Michoacán, some security experts expressed concern that legitimizing groups that have illegally armed themselves is fundamentally incompatible with a viable rule of law. The crisis also raises questions about why the government has been unable to restore order in Michoacán, where Calderón first deployed troops in 2006. The state faces long-standing social and economic challenges that many experts argue require more than a brute force solution. To address such issues, the Peña Nieto administration launched a social development program called "Plan Michoacán" in February 2014, a social development effort to target the state's insecurity and volatile situation. Modeled at least in part after former President Calderón's "We Are All Juárez" (*Todos Somos Juárez*) program, Plan Michoacán will focus on five key areas: economic development, education, infrastructure and housing, public health, and social development and sustainability.

Meanwhile, the self-defense groups must deal with public controversies, loss of leadership, internal ruptures, and the threat of drug cartel infiltration. Most notably, the leader of the La Ruana group, Hipólito Mora Chávez, was arrested on March 11, 2014, for his alleged involvement in the murder of two members of his group, one of whom, Rafael "El Pollo" Sánchez Moreno, was one of the group's founders. While it is premature to predict the future of the self-defense groups, it is nevertheless clear that Michoacán's security situation continues to be dynamic, precarious, and unsettling.

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<sup>66</sup> Macías, Verónica. "Autodefensas toman un nuevo municipio." *El Economista*. March 25, 2014. <http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2014/03/25/autodefensas-toman-nuevo-municipio>

## F. U.S.-Mexico Security Relations

A somewhat unexpected change under Peña Nieto with just over a year in office has been the degree of continuity in the U.S.-Mexican security relationship across administrations. Under President Calderón, U.S.-Mexico security cooperation appeared to be at a high water mark. Calderón negotiated the three-year 1.4 billion Mérida Agreement with President George W. Bush, as both argued that the United States had a shared responsibility to support Mexico's counter-drug efforts. The program continued at a similar rate of annual funding under President Barack Obama, and developed a new framework based on four main areas or "pillars" of collaboration: 1) combatting organized crime, 2) judicial sector reform, 3) improved border security, and 4) promoting community resilience. Among other things, the program bolstered U.S.-Mexican intelligence sharing to dismantle organized crime groups, Mexican judicial and law enforcement capacity, southbound inspections to detect illicit bulk cash and arms shipments, and investments in crime prevention programs. Thanks to the program, U.S. officials regularly expressed great praise and admiration for President Calderón, frequently emphasizing his courage in the fight against organized crime.

Stronger security ties with the United States goes against the grain of traditional Mexican nationalist sentiments, attributable to multiple U.S. encroachments on Mexico's sovereignty in the past. Yet, despite such sentiments, large numbers of Mexicans hold the United States in high regard and many actively supported the idea of greater U.S. involvement in the drug war in Mexico. Thus, while the Peña Nieto administration insisted that U.S.-Mexico security cooperation would be reined in, many aspects of cooperation have continued. Early in his term, administrative officials asserted that U.S.-Mexico security relations would now be more centrally managed through the "single window" (*ventanilla única*) of Mexico's interior ministry.<sup>67</sup> This is in part because of the close ties and tremendous interdependence that have developed between U.S. and Mexican law enforcement agencies working toward common objectives. Indeed, such cooperation helped Peña Nieto take down the leaders of the powerful Sinaloa Cartel and the notoriously violent Zetas as well as key leaders in the Gulf Cartel.

## G. Emphasis on Coordination and Centralization

It is important to recognize, however, that despite shortcomings on several of Peña Nieto's touted campaign promises, there have been several very perceptible and consequential shifts in his approach. For one, Peña Nieto has tried to greatly re-centralize control over security policy. When he entered office, the president promised more coordination of security matters with state governors than under his predecessor. With two-thirds of Mexican governors coming from the PRI the president's own party, that was a relatively easy promise to keep. The question that many have posited is whether that coordination implied a return to the "bad old days" when PRI governors coddled drug traffickers and "controlled" organized crime by lining their own pockets with bribes. It may be too soon to tell, but this question was underscored by an early December 2013 U.S. indictment of former-PRI governor of Tamaulipas Tomás Yarrington (1999-2004) on charges of complicity with the Gulf Cartel.

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<sup>67</sup> U.S. officials were previously able to interface directly with their Mexican counterparts at various Mexican agencies and at both the national and subnational level, generally without having to obtain explicit approval from Los Pinos.

In evaluating the achievements and shortcomings of Peña Nieto's security strategy the past year, it is critical to understand that the country has been faced with an unprecedented security crisis that has arguably affected the government's security in unanticipated ways. Instead of being able to draw down the number of deployed troops on the street, the government has been forced to deploy thousands of more soldiers to secure Michoacán. And while the government strives to centralize power, it finds itself legitimizing and authorizing an armed self-defense group, albeit one that has now been brought under the state's watch. Such challenges distract and prevent the government from focusing on its own original security strategies and priorities and force the government to adapt to an ever-changing and still volatile situation.<sup>68</sup>

## IV. CONCLUSION

There are few issues of greater concern to ordinary Mexicans than the problems of crime and violence that have been widespread in many parts of the country for over a decade. Homicide—and especially drug killings and other organized crime-style homicides—are a major manifestation of this violence. Ultimately, the main question that will be of greatest concern to ordinary Mexicans is whether the current government's efforts have actually been accompanied by a decrease in violence.

Unfortunately, in 2013, there have been significant problems with the availability and credibility of some of the data that can help to answer this question. The Mexican government has made a concerted effort to shift the narrative away from the topic of crime and violence, and there are some concerns among non-governmental observers about the possible manipulation of crime statistics for political purposes. Access to information is exactly what is needed to monitor and evaluate progress, and the Mexican government's efforts to control information flows therefore seem to do more harm than good.

Meanwhile, whether because of the lack of information flowing from the government or because of threats against journalists, some media organizations have followed the government's lead by reporting on crime and violence very differently than in the past. For example, the fact that one of the main independent sources monitoring violence in Mexico—*Reforma*—reduced its reporting on organized-crime-style homicides made it more difficult this year to evaluate the figures reported by the Mexican government and other sources on violence.

That said, as noted in this report, there appears to have been a significant decrease in intentional homicides and organized-crime-style homicides in 2013. The decrease in the number of homicides in Mexico appears to be most attributable to changing dynamics among drug-trafficking and organized crime groups, though the dismantling and fractionalization of these groups has led to an increase in other forms of crime and violence.

Meanwhile, Peña Nieto's declaratory strategy of reducing the country's dependence on the military, restructuring the civilian security apparatus, and focusing on citizen security has yet to become a reality. The focus of his administration has been to continue to target major kingpins, rely heavily on

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<sup>68</sup> It is interesting to note that only 43% of Mexicans polled in March 2014 agreed with the use of self-defense groups, while 45% rejected the idea of "taking justice into your own hands." Consulta Mitofsky. "Encuesta Nacional sobre Percepción de Inseguridad Ciudadana en México."

the military, and respond to problems—like the turmoil in Michoacán—on an *ad hoc* basis. If there are to be any lasting gains over the course of his administration, it will be important for President Peña Nieto to refocus his attention toward strengthening the country’s capacity for law enforcement and crime prevention measures, such as promoting job growth, investing in education, and fostering social development programs (e.g., afterschool sports programs). To this end, the Peña Nieto administration did launch *Plan Michoacán* in February 2014, a social development initiative to target the state’s insecurity and volatile situation. Continued emphasis on such efforts is essential and will hopefully prove decisive in the long-term effort to restore the rule of law in Mexico.

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## Acknowledgements:

This report was made possible by the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for Justice in Mexico. Portions of this report stem from research presented in seminars and briefings at the U.S. Northern Command, the U.S. Southern Command, Birmingham-Southern College, University of California-Los Angeles, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). In the past year, Justice in Mexico has also partnered with the Guggenheim Foundation to host a research project to examine the latest data and analysis on drug violence in Mexico. The authors are deeply indebted to the colleagues and various sponsoring organizations that contributed valuable insights to this report through these exchanges. The authors depended heavily on the contributions of Cory Molzahn, and are also very grateful for the useful comments and recommendations provided by John Bailey, Roderic Camp, Matt Ingram, Chris Kyle, Topher McDougal, and Joel Wallman, as well as the research assistance and support provided by Laura Calderón, Tiana Carriedo, Jorge Lison, Maritza Rodríguez, Diana Sánchez, and Susan Szakonyi. Justice in Mexico research associate Theresa Firestine generated most maps for this report. Numerous students and volunteers contributed over the last year to building the *Memoria* dataset, including Christian Abrego, Stephen Acker, MacKenzie Allen, Zully Barrientos, Val Chou, Leticia Corona, Nancy Cortes, Larry Duran, Marie Eyboullet, Brian Fernandez-Oquendo, Carlos González, Paola Guzman, Armando Leyva, Justin Liberatore, Brittany Lonero, Jesus Lopez, James Mitchell, Aleister Montfort, Luis Munoz, Anthony Nguyen, Ruben Orosco, Carolina Pérez Feuerstein, Alicia Pina, Lais Ribeiro, Haydee Rojas, Jake Schurmeier, Michael Seese, Sara Sharif, Marianne Silva, Amanda Strobel, Rafael Tovar y Lopez, Mauricio Villaseñor, Jessica Yah Lira, and Jeremiah Young. The authors are solely responsible for any errors, omissions, and opinions in the report.



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