

2010 Mid-Year Report on Drug Violence in Mexico

By Angelica Duran-Martinez, Gayle Hazard, and Viridiana Rios

MID-YEAR REPORT

Trans-Border Institute

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About the Report:

This report was prepared for the Justice in Mexico Project (www.justiceinmexico.org) hosted by the Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego. Since 2002, this project has been a focal point for research, scholarly interchange, and policy forums to examine the challenges and prospects for the rule of law in Mexico. This project is made possible by the support of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Tinker Foundation, and the Open Society Institute. This report was prepared as an outgrowth of a recent closed-door roundtable conference titled *Drug Trafficking-Related Violence in Mexico*, which was hosted by the Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego on July 15, 2010. The authors also made multiple field visits to Chihuahua and Baja California, and conducted interviews with numerous authorities and non-governmental organizations from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border in an attempt to gain diverse perspectives. In addition to the above mentioned sponsors, this report benefited from research support provided to the individual researchers by their host institutions: Brown University, Harvard University, and the University for Peace in Costa Rica.

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Executive Summary

- **Recent headlines have regularly featured coverage of Mexico's ongoing drug related violence**, which authorities believe has resulted in 28,000 homicides since President Felipe Calderón took office in December 2006. The government claims that 90% of these homicides target individuals affiliated with drug trafficking.
- **There is a lack of access to reliable information and official statistics on the extent and distribution of this violence.** For this reason, over the past four years, the Trans-Border Institute's Justice in Mexico Project has been regularly monitoring and analyzing available data on drug related violence from various media outlets. The present document updates the Institute's findings to help document the disturbing patterns of drug related violence that have continued and accelerated over the course of 2010.
- **Available media sources suggest Mexico's drug violence in 2010 is on track to surpass previous annual levels of violence, which have increased significantly each year since 2004.** There were an estimated 6,587 drug related killings in 2009 in Mexico, an increase of about 20% over the previous year. With 5,775 drug related killings reported by *Reforma* in mid-year 2010, however, drug violence related deaths in 2010 are on track to exceed any previous year, perhaps even doubling the homicides of the last year.
- **While drug related homicides remains highly concentrated in a few states, 2010 saw a significant spreading of violence to other parts of the country.** Levels of drug related violence increased significantly in Chihuahua (1,665 killings by mid-year 2010 compared to 2,082 total in 2009) and Sinaloa (1,221 killings by mid-year 2010 compared to 767 total in 2009), but also in the states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Guerrero, and the State of Mexico.
- **Drug violence also appears to be affecting people more broadly and more publicly than in the past.** While the government estimates that 90% of drug violence impacts individuals involved in organized crime, in 2010 there has been a worrying tendency to target high-profile victims (including politicians and public officials), drug rehabilitation centers, and private parties. In this sense, Mexico's drug related violence is becoming a much wider societal phenomenon that engages wider sectors of the society.
- **New strategies, more access to data, and better analysis are needed to address Mexico's worrying trend toward greater drug related violence.** Mexico's extreme and dispersed violence represents a new challenge for the state, and therefore requires a rethinking of current strategies. In the meantime, more timely access to information on public security statistics is sorely needed to track and interpret recent violence.

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Introduction

Recent headlines have regularly featured coverage of Mexico's ongoing drug related violence, which has dramatically increased since 2008. However, one of the great challenges in understanding recent developments in Mexico is the lack of access to reliable information and official statistics on the extent and distribution of this violence. In late July 2010, Mexican authorities released information indicating that there have been over 28,000 drug related homicides since President Felipe Calderón took office in December 2006. However, authorities have not provided regular updates or detailed statistics to corroborate this official tally, leaving many experts skeptical about the reliability of government claims. Repeated requests for detailed information filed by the Trans-Border Institute and other non-governmental organizations have met with resistance from governmental agencies, which point to Article 16 of the Federal Code of Criminal Procedures as a rationale for restricting access to sensitive information. Such obstacles make it difficult to verify government claims about drug related violence, such as the claim that roughly 90% of these homicide cases target individuals affiliated with drug trafficking. Thus, María Marván Laborde from the country's national transparency institute, the Instituto Federal de Acceso a la Información (IFAI), stated recently that "I am convinced that if there was a policy of transparency and access to public safety information, there would be greater confidence from society in this fight against drug trafficking and in the efforts on which this administration has embarked."

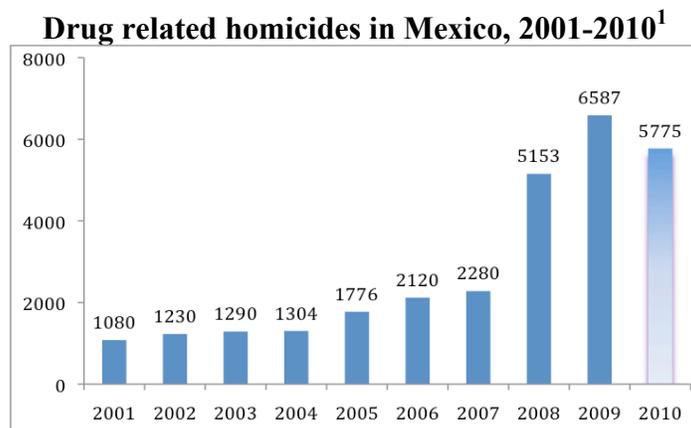
In an effort to track and analyze drug related violence in Mexico, in January 2010 the Trans-Border Institute's Justice in Mexico Project prepared a comprehensive study on the elevated levels of homicides and execution style murders attributed to drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) in Mexico over the last decade. The results, published as a report entitled *Drug Violence in Mexico, Data Analysis from 2001-2009*, analyzed official and media efforts to quantify drug violence. Based on these efforts, the report demonstrated that—despite a downward trend for many years—Mexico has experienced unprecedented levels of violence since 2005, with especially dramatic increases in homicides in 2008 and 2009. The present document is intended to update the findings of that report and to document the disturbing patterns of drug related violence that have continued over the course of 2010. The data presented here comes from both media sources and official reports from local Offices of the General Attorney (PGR). Media reports come from *Reforma*, a newspaper magazine distributed nationally in Mexico, which established a fairly reliable mechanism to classify a murder as drug related (see TBI 2010). Official numbers are those reported by INEGI (until 2008), and by local PGR for the following years.

As in the original *Drug Violence in Mexico* report, a general disclaimer about the data is needed. Although collected from sources genuinely committed to collect the best possible information on drug related violence, the data here presented should be evaluated with caution. Collecting information on homicides in Mexico is a complicated exercise subject to errors. The two main sources of violence data—official statistics and media reports—show similar trends, but differ in absolute numbers. The reasons for such discrepancies derive from the inherent difficulties

faced when trying to classify a homicide as “drug related.” Numerically counting “drug related” murders is effectively a subjective exercise, given the lack of a verifiably legitimate official database on murders. PGR and the Ministry of National Defense (SEDENA) have reported figures indicating that the Mexican federal government is currently performing its own effort to measure drug violence, yet these figures are not published regularly and detailed data are not widely available. In the sources used for this report, a homicide is attributed to drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) when some particular homicide protocols and characteristics traditionally used by DTOs are presented in the crime scene, such as high caliber weapons, decapitations, or “narco” messages. Of course, such characteristics are not necessarily limited to DTOs or may be imitated by amateur assassins, thereby calling into question the accuracy of the figures. Furthermore, not all homicide victims are properly identified, since authorities often fail to fully investigate drug related homicides and DTOs sometimes eliminate all evidence of murders.

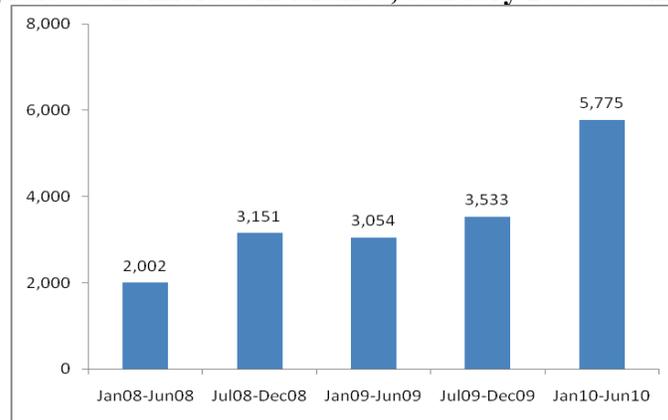
Major Trends in Drug related Violence in Mexico

The two most immediately observable trends regarding drug related violence in Mexico are the growth of both the absolute number and rate of drug related violence (controlling for population). According to *Reforma*'s data, there have been roughly 23,000 drug related killings in Mexico since Calderón took office in 2006, with most of the killings concentrated from 2008 to present. Because authorities report a higher figure —28,000 drug related killings— *Reforma*'s data are generally considered to be a conservative estimate of the actual total. Because the Mexican government has failed to make its own data accessible, *Reforma*'s data are the basis of analysis for this report. In 2008, by *Reforma*'s count, the number of homicides doubled over those of 2007, increasing from 2,280 to 5,153 in just one year. Using the same measure, there were an estimated 6,587 drug related killings in 2009 in Mexico, an increase of about 20% over the previous year. With 5,775 drug related killings reported by *Reforma* in mid-year 2010, however, drug violence related deaths in 2010 are on track to exceed any previous year, perhaps even doubling the homicides of the last year.



¹ Data for 2010 is preliminary, includes number of deaths for the first half of 2010 only.

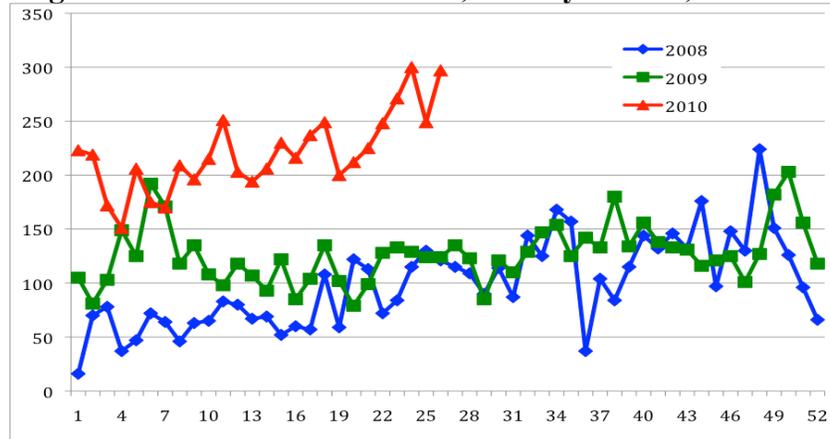
Drug related homicides in Mexico, January 2008 – June 2010



Recent drug related violence trends are better captured when we compare data in six-month increments, from January through June and from July through December. In the first half of 2008, there were 2,002 drug related killings in Mexico and 3,151 drug related killings over the last half of the year. There were 3,054 drug related deaths during the first half of 2009, and 3,533 drug related deaths during the second half of 2009. The first half of 2010 has seen 5,775 drug related killings, showing a drastic spike in drug related killings in this six month period as compared to each of the four six month periods of the previous two years. From the last half of 2009 to the last half of 2010 drug related homicides have increased by 63.5%.

Another interesting characteristic of violence in 2010 compared with previous years is that the number of drug related killings started high and moved steadily higher over the course of the year. Drug related killings during 2008 increased gradually over the course of the year, though important spikes were seen, such as the one experienced in the last week of November (week 48). The weekly trend in 2009 was much more stable: it was overall more violent than 2008 and the rate of change from week to week showed relatively little fluctuation, except for two spikes the first in the second week of February (week 7) and the second in December (week 50). The first half of 2010 started out with one of the bloodiest weeks on record, and saw a more dramatic rate of increase in violence than during any period so far: notwithstanding a significant dip in violence in February, the pace of drug related killings increased from roughly 200 per week to 300 from the first week of 2010 to the first week of July.

Drug related Homicides in Mexico, Weekly Trends, 2008-2010*

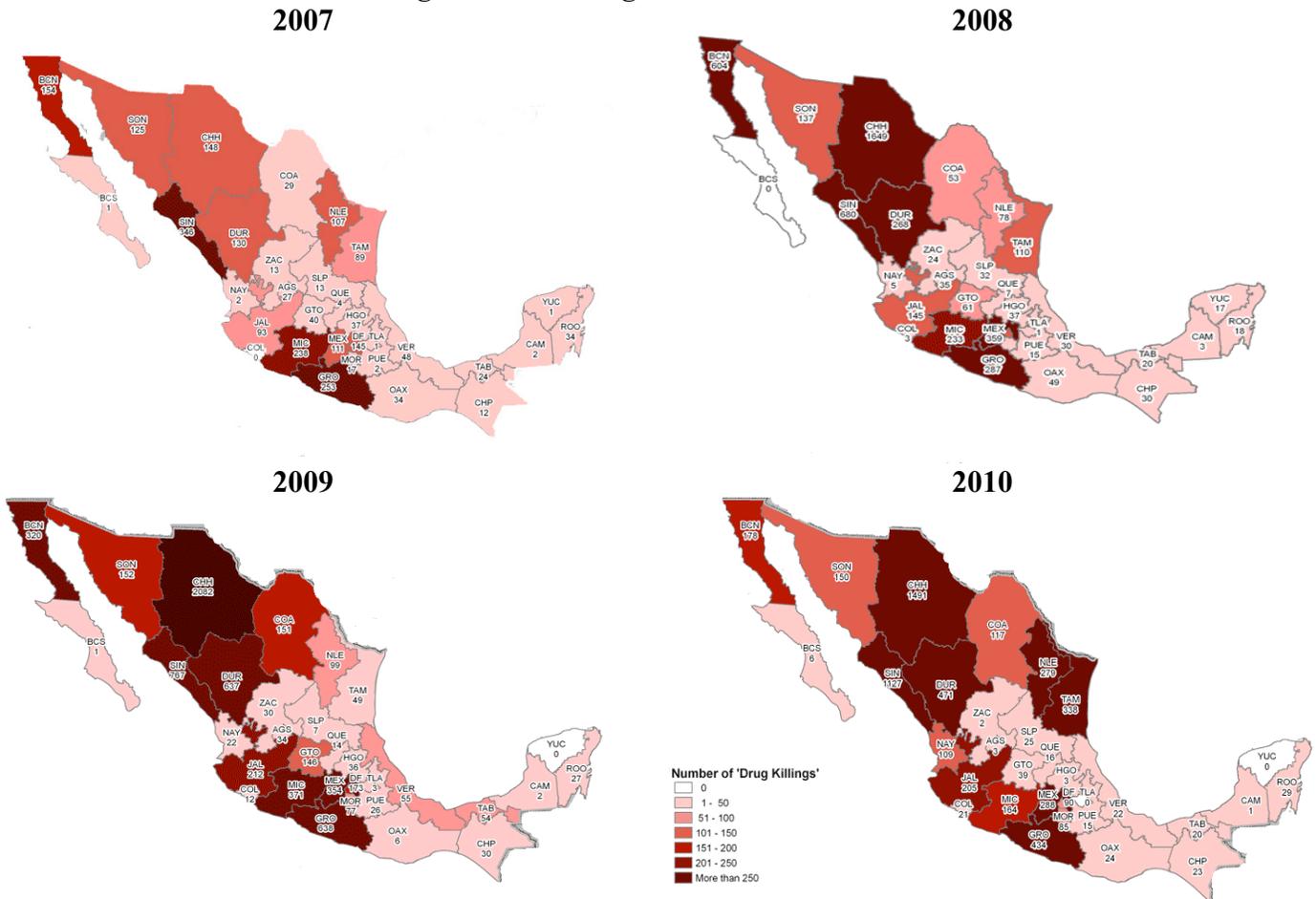


Geographic Distribution of Violence

There has been a significant variation in the distribution of violence in Mexico since the outset of the Calderón administration in 2006. Unlike previous years, during the first half of 2010, drug related violence was distributed more equally among a larger number of states, and not just concentrated in certain border and drug production states as had previously been the trend starting in 2008. This dispersion of violence could reflect greater public and media attention to the phenomenon throughout the country.

While DTO violence in 2009 was primarily concentrated in Chihuahua (31%), Sinaloa (12%), Guerrero (10%), and Durango (10%), during the first six months of 2010 the contribution of these states to the overall death rate has decreased (with the exception of Sinaloa from 12% to 19%) because of an increase in violence in other states, such as Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Guerrero, and Mexico State. The overall number of drug related killings has increased primarily due to the sharp increase in drug related violence in Chihuahua (1,665 killings by mid-year 2010 compared to 2,082 total in 2009) and Sinaloa (1,221 killings by mid-year 2010 compared to 767 total in 2009), and the dispersion of violence among the aforementioned states: Tamaulipas (with an increase from 0.08% to 5.95% of the national total of drug related killings from 2009 to mid-year 2010), Nuevo León (with an increase from 1.09% to 4.77% of the national total of drug related killings from 2009 to mid-year 2010), Guerrero (from 2.99% to 7.23% of the national total of drug related killings from 2009 to mid-year 2010), and Mexico State (from 2.89% to 4.84% of the national total of drug related killings from 2009 to mid-year 2010). The Southern states of Chiapas and Oaxaca –although they still represent a very small proportion of national drug related deaths (0.40 and 0.42 respectively)– have experienced a fourfold increase in the number of killings witnessed in the first half of 2009 compared to the first half of 2010 (from 6 to 23 in Chiapas and from 5 to 24 in Oaxaca).

Drug Related Killings in Mexico 2007-2010²



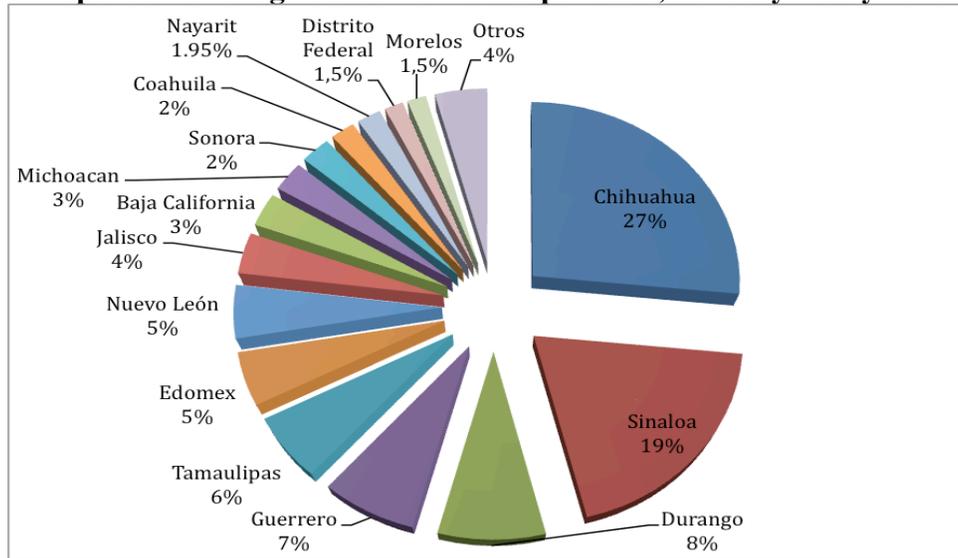
Maps produced by Theresa Firestone and available at www.justiceinmexico.org.

Chihuahua and Sinaloa accounted for 46% of all drug related deaths during the first half of 2010, a three percent increase compared to the same period in 2009, when these two states represented 43% of all drug related deaths. With Chihuahua's rate decreasing from 31% to 26.58% of all drug related killings from 2009 to the first half of 2010, it might seem that the level of drug related killings is decreasing in the state. However, the amount of drug related killings in the state of Chihuahua remains on the rise. During the first half of 2009, there were 659 drug related killings in the state of Chihuahua, with an increase to 972 drug related killings during the second half of the year. In the first half of 2010, there have been 1,665 drug related killings, significantly surpassing the first halves of 2008 and 2009. Similar trends can be seen in the states of Durango (which was responsible for 10% and 637 of the total drug related killings in 2009, decreasing to 8% of the total drug related killings but increasing to 509 victims by the first half of 2010) and Guerrero (which was responsible for 10% and 638 victims of the total drug related killings in 2009, decreasing to 7% of the total drug related killings but increasing to 453 victims by the first half of 2010).

² Data for 2010 is preliminary, includes number of deaths for the first half of 2010 only.

It must be noted that violence has not increased in all states. When comparing the first half of 2009 and the first half of 2010, states such as Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, Michoacán and Tabasco have experienced decreases in the number of drug related murders. The most striking case is Guanajuato, which had 87 killings from January to June 2009, and just 39 in the same period of 2010; Michoacán decreased from 203 to 164.

Proportion of drug related homicides per state, January – July 2010



Drug related homicides in border and non-border states of Mexico.

	2008	2009	Jan-Jun 2008	Jan-Jun 2009	Jan-Jun 2010
Border	2652 51%	2853 43%	944 47%	1250 41%	2553 44%
Non-Border	2567 49%	3734 57%	1058 53%	1804 59%	3222 56%
Total	5219 100%	6587 100%	2002 100%	3054 100%	5775 100%

Data compiled by Trans-Border Institute research assistants Judith Dávila and Nicole Ramos from *Reforma* newspaper weekly tallies.

Number, Proportion and Rate of Drug related Homicides Per State

	Absolute Number of Drug Related Killings Identified (by six month increments)					Proportion of National Total		Rate Per 100,000 Inhabitants	
	Jan08-Jun08	Jul08-Dec08	Jan09-Jun09	Jul09-Dec09	Jan10-Jun10	All 2009	Jan10-Jun10	Jan09-Jun09	Jan10-Jun10
AGS	13	22	18	16	3	0.5%	0.1%	1.58	0.26
BCN	161	443	146	174	178	4.9%	3.1%	4.9	5.62
BCS	0	0	1	0	6	0.0%	0.1%	0.18	1.06
CAM	0	3	2	0	1	0.0%	0.0%	0.25	0.13
COA	45	8	108	43	117	2.3%	2.0%	2.53	2.59
COL	0	3	10	2	21	0.2%	0.4%	1.66	3.49
CHP	14	16	6	24	23	0.5%	0.4%	0.34	0.87
CHH	587	1062	896	1186	1491	31.6%	25.8%	28.66	43.9
DF	69	68	95	78	90	2.6%	1.6%	1.14	1.01
DUR	112	156	343	294	471	9.7%	8.2%	22.7	30.37
GTO	27	34	87	59	39	2.2%	0.7%	1.96	0.77
GRO	134	153	313	325	434	9.7%	7.5%	10.73	13.81
HGO	17	20	15	21	3	0.5%	0.1%	0.62	0.12
JAL	60	85	86	126	205	3.2%	3.5%	1.35	2.92
EDO	144	215	177	177	288	5.4%	5.0%	1.31	1.94
MIC	99	134	203	168	164	5.6%	2.8%	6.31	4.13
MOR	14	12	14	63	85	1.2%	1.5%	0.84	5.07
NAY	2	3	17	5	109	0.3%	1.9%	1.75	11.24
NLE	43	35	29	70	279	1.5%	4.8%	0.81	6.27
OAX	39	10	5	1	24	0.1%	0.4%	0.14	0.67
PUE	3	12	16	10	15	0.4%	0.3%	0.32	0.26
QUE	2	5	5	9	16	0.2%	0.3%	0.29	0.92
ROO	10	8	14	13	29	0.4%	0.5%	1.07	2.2
SLP	14	18	5	2	25	0.1%	0.4%	0.2	1
SIN	247	433	294	473	1127	11.6%	19.5%	11.69	42.48
SON	53	84	45	107	150	2.3%	2.6%	1.79	5.97
TAB	8	12	35	19	20	0.8%	0.3%	1.71	0.97
TAM	55	55	26	23	338	0.7%	5.9%	0.85	10.58
TLA	0	1	0	3	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0
VER	13	17	29	26	22	0.8%	0.4%	0.49	0.3
YUC	4	13	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0
ZAC	13	11	14	16	2	0.5%	0.0%	1.45	0.14
Total	2,002	3,151	3,054	3,533	5,775	100.0%	100.0%	3.08	5.36

Data compiled by Trans-Border Institute research assistants Judith Dávila and Nicole Ramos from *Reforma* newspaper weekly tallies.

One of the most observable shift from the 2009 findings to the mid-year 2010 findings is that drug related violence is escalating in terms of an overall scale in Mexico, with a slight shift from 2009 to mid-year 2010 in the proportion of drug related deaths between border states to non-

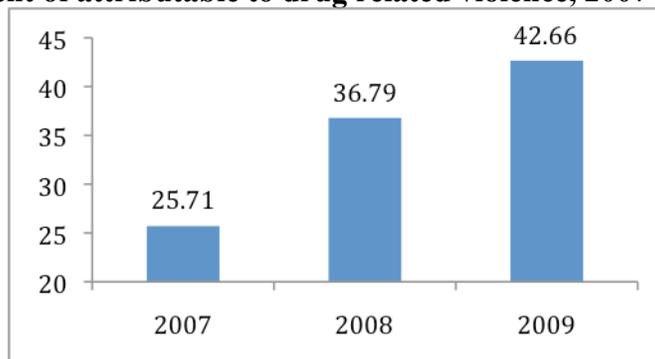
border states. In 2009, 43.3% of drug related killings took place in border states, as opposed to 56.69% of drug related killings taking place in non-border states. By mid-year 2010, the number of drug related killings has shifted slightly, with 44.4% of drug related killings taking place in border-states, and 55.25% of drug related killings taking place in non-border states. This small shift can be attributed to the continued large amounts of violence in Chihuahua, in addition to an increase in violence in the border states of Nuevo León, Sonora and Tamaulipas.

Homicide and Drug related Homicide Comparisons

Another way to measure violence is to use official statistics of intended homicide (“homicidio doloso” as classified by INEGI). Using official data does not allow us to differentiate between casualties linked to illegal drug trafficking and those that are products of other non-organized violence. Yet a broad analysis of the data is still useful to complement our overall understanding of homicide trends in Mexico. Homicide rates in Mexico were on a fairly constant decline from the 1950s until 2007. In fact, 2007 was the year of the decade in which the fewest number of homicides were committed. However, a sharp increase in homicides was seen in 2008, jumping from a rate of 8.2 per 100,000 inhabitants to 13.1 per 100,000.

The rate of drug related homicides presents a similar trend to that of homicides. In 2008, the rate of drug related homicides per 100,000 inhabitants increased from 2.2. to 4.8; from 2008 to 2009 the rate increased by about 50% to 6.1 per 100,000 inhabitants. While we do not have the full year’s estimates for 2010, there is a very high probability that the rate will continue to increase in 2010. During the first six months of 2010, the rate was 5.8 per 100,000 inhabitants –an amount already higher than the total of 2008 and nearly the same level seen in 2009.

Percent of attributable to drug related violence, 2007 – 2009



By comparing official homicide rates with drug related killings, we can begin to estimate the proportion of violence that is attributable to the current war on drugs. The proportion of homicides that can be attributed to drug trafficking appears to have grown from 25.7% in 2007, to 36.8% in 2008, and to 42.7% in 2009. This is a staggering shift. While certainly significant problems with both official homicide data and media accounts, the overall trend appears to be a significant reversal of Mexico’s long declining rate of homicide. This is a development that presents serious concerns for policy makers and the Mexican public at large.

Conclusion

This brief mid-year report was prepared in an effort to provide a preliminary analysis on the levels and trends of drug related violence in Mexico in 2010 for a broad array of audiences. Considering the caveats already offered, available data allow us to identify general tendencies and offer some tentative conclusions about the course of drug related violence in 2010. The most observable trends regarding drug related violence in Mexico were (a) an absolute growth and a relative increase in the number of drug related homicides, (b) increase in the rate of drug related violence, and (c) a greater dispersion of violence throughout Mexico. The first half of 2010 has emerged with the highest rate of drug related homicides in Mexico to date. With 5,775 drug related killings reported by mid-year 2010, drug violence related deaths in 2010 are on track to exceed any previous year, perhaps even doubling the number of such homicides in 2009.

In relative terms, the proportion of homicides that can be linked to Mexican drug trafficking operations has elevated from 25.7% in 2007, to 36.8% in 2008, and to 42.7% in 2009. Three years ago, only about a quarter of all homicides appeared to be connected to drug trafficking organizations but during the first half of 2010, this proportion grew to the equivalent of more than two-thirds of all officially registered homicides. The first half of this year has also seen the fastest growth rate in drug related violence to date; from the first week of 2010 to the first week of July, drug related homicides tripled in quantity, increasing from 100 per week to 300 per week. Furthermore, drug related violence was distributed among more Mexican states, and it was not just concentrated in border and drug production states, as had previously been the trend from at least 2008 onward. The overall number of drug related killings has increased primarily due to the sharp increase in drug related violence in Chihuahua and Sinaloa, and the dispersion of violence to Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Guerrero, and Mexico State. Other notable increases were seen in the southern states of Chiapas and Oaxaca; although they still represent a very small proportion of national drug related deaths.

Along with these dramatic increases in drug related violence, there has been a worrying tendency to target high profile victims, drug rehabilitation centers, and private parties. The murder of the leading PRI candidate for governor in the border state of Tamaulipas, Rodolfo Torre, that took place on June 28, 2010, and the attack against the Minister of Public Security in Michoacán, Minerva Bautista, on April 24, 2010, both show that high profile politicians and governmental officials are being singled out by Mexican drug traffickers. The killings in drug rehabilitation centers, such as the 19 killed in the Faith and Life Center in Chihuahua on June 11, 2010, in addition to the shootings at private parties, such as the 14 teens shot and killed at a birthday party in Juárez on January 31, 2010, demonstrate that the drug traffickers have spread their violence into new realms of the public sector. Although it is difficult to interpret these acts as signs of a growing trend, they illustrate the tremendous variety of violence Mexico is experiencing, and the diversification of strategies and perhaps a change in the scale of organized crime groups. Some acts of violence may indeed suggest reactions or attacks against the actions of the state; others reflect confrontations between cartels for power or markets. While still others, like the Juárez killings, may be attributed to either confrontations between organizations or even some dynamics of social cleansing.

Efforts to stop the violence in Mexico need to adapt to the changes that have taken place since President Calderón launched the military-led offensive against DTOs. Drug related violence is no longer limited to intra-DTO power struggles. Violence is now becoming a much wider societal phenomenon that engages wider sectors of the society (women and youth reflect a growing number of drug related victims) and new actors such as street gangs and street level drug dealers seem to be gaining a more prominent place. This extreme and dispersed violence represents a different challenge for the state and thus requires the restructuring and rethinking of the strategy in light of these constantly changing dynamics. In the meantime, much better data and analysis is sorely needed to document and interpret recent violence, which means that Mexican authorities should make a greater effort to provide greater and timely access to information on public security statistics related to drug related violence.

About the Authors:

Angelica Duran-Martinez is a doctoral candidate in Political Science at Brown University. She holds a B.A. in Political Science from Universidad Nacional de Colombia and completed an M.A. in Latin American and Caribbean Studies at New York University thanks to a Fulbright Scholarship. She has been a Fulbright Fellow at the United Nations Secretariat in New York and a consultant for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the UN Development Program, and Global Integrity. In Colombia she worked for the Foundation Ideas for Peace (Ideas para la Paz) and participated in several research projects about armed conflict at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Her dissertation research compares the relation between drug trafficking and violence in Colombia and Mexico and is funded by the USIP Randolph Jennings Peace Scholarship and the Social Science Research Council.

Gayle Hazard is a Masters degree student at the University for Peace in Costa Rica and a visiting scholar at the Trans-Border Institute. After completing her undergraduate degree in Spanish Literature and International Relations at the University of San Diego in 2007, she relocated to Chile to volunteer her time teaching English through the United Nations Development Program, then relocated again to Costa Rica. In the nearly three years she spent in Costa Rica, she taught home school to a family of three, worked as an intern in the outdoor adventure school Outward Bound, and completed her coursework for her Masters degree in Media, Peace and Conflict Studies at the UN-Mandated University for Peace. After completing her classes at the University for Peace, she took a month-long independent research trip from Costa Rica to San Diego. Ms. Hazard is a third generation San Diego native with a passion for traveling, particularly in Latin America.

Viridiana Rios is a doctoral candidate in Government at Harvard University and a doctoral fellow in Inequality and Criminal Justice at the Kennedy School. She studies drug trafficking, corruption and organized crime structure in Mexico. Her dissertation uses formal modeling and journalistic accounts to show how changes in the internal structure of drug organization and in the extension of illegal-drug markets are the main cause behind recent spikes in drug related violence in Mexico. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in Political Science at the top of her class in the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM) in Mexico City. After graduating, she worked for SEDESOL, USAID, the World Bank Mexico, and as intern in the United Nations. She is currently a visiting scholar at the Trans-Border Institute and a 2010-11 Fellow at the Center for Mexican U.S.-Studies at the University of California-San Diego.