

5-17-2017

Report Ranks Mexico Second in the World in Murders in 2016

Carlos Navarro

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

Recommended Citation

Navarro, Carlos. "Report Ranks Mexico Second in the World in Murders in 2016." (2017). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/6347>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Report Ranks Mexico Second in the World in Murders in 2016

by Carlos Navarro

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2017-05-17

Mexico ranked second in the world in terms of intentional homicides in 2016, according to a report issued by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) on May 9. The IISS Armed Conflict Survey (ACS) 2017 reported 23,000 such deaths in Mexico, ascribed primarily to violence perpetrated by criminal organizations. Only war-torn Syria ranked higher than Mexico last year, with 60,000 intentional homicides, said Antonio Sampaio, one of the authors of the report.

The murder totals in Mexico in 2016, in fact, surpassed those in two other war-torn countries: Iraq, at 17,000, and Afghanistan at 16,000, the ACS reported.

By putting Mexico in the same category as war-torn countries, the report implied that Mexico was also a country at war, an assertion that the Mexican government disputed.

The number of murders in Mexico reported by the ACS in 2016 surpassed the total for 2015 by almost 23% and almost doubled the number of drug-related murders recorded in 2010 through 2012, during the last three years of ex-President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) drug-interdiction campaign, which is blamed for a rise in violence in Mexico ([SourceMex, Jan. 16, 2013](#)).

The IISS data differs from information contained in most homicide reports, which generally present the number of murders per 100,000 people. Sampaio said the lack of accurate and reliable population data led his organization to measure homicides in absolute numbers. "We think absolute numbers are a good way of measuring intensity," he said. "Plus 23,000 [for Mexico] is a huge number; no doubt about that."

Mexican government questions report

The ACS 2017 drew criticism from the Mexican government, which called the conclusions in the report irresponsible and inaccurate but had no argument to counter the premise that the country's murder rate is very high. "Their conclusions do not hold up in the case of Mexico," said a statement from the foreign relations ministry (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, SRE), pointing out that the organization's definition of internal armed conflict does not match the situation in Mexico.

The SRE argued that the existence of criminal gangs and the use of the armed forces to maintain public order were not sufficient criteria to describe Mexico as a country at war. "Just because there are criminal groups isn't an adequate criterion to speak of an armed conflict," it said.

The SRE also rejected the argument that the use of the armed forces to maintain security meant that an armed conflict was taking place. The ministry also stated that "the total estimate for homicides on a national level has not yet been published by the national statistics agency [Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI)], so the origin of the figures used in the report is unknown."

Some observers criticized the Mexican government for downplaying the report. "We are very close to ranking first. Mexico is one spot away from becoming the leader in the most recent list of most

dangerous countries in the world,” columnist Yuriria Sierra wrote in the daily newspaper *Excélsior*. “The situation is not encouraging, regardless of what our leaders are saying about the actions they are taking to combat organized crime. Mexico ranks much higher than Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, and Turkey, where war-related conflicts are part of daily life.”

While analysts might draw parallels between conflicts among criminal organizations and actual armed conflict, there are major differences. “It’s not a war in the political sense of the word,” said Jacob Parakilas, an analyst at Britain’s Chatham House, a private think tank. “[The cartels] are not trying to create a breakaway state. ... There are no air strikes.”

The drug-related violence in Mexico is the result of territorial disputes among various cartels, including the Zetas, the *Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación* (CJNG), the Sinaloa cartel, the *Caballeros Templarios*, the *Beltrán Leyva* organization, and other smaller criminal organizations. Sometimes the disputes involve internal struggles, as has been the case with the Sinaloa cartel following the deportation of its leader, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera, in January ([SourceMex, Jan. 25, 2017](#), and [March 1, 2017](#)).

Cartels also wage war against state armed forces using their own military-grade weapons, paid for with untold riches—US \$19-\$29 billion annually according to the US Department of Homeland Security—gained through transnational drug trafficking.

Last year was the most violent since President Enrique Peña Nieto took office in December 2012, with a 22.8% increase in intentional homicides over 2015, according to a report by *Mexico News Daily*. And statistics for the first few months of 2017 show that the trend is worsening. *Semáforo Delictivo*, an organization that tracks crime, noted the murder rate in the first quarter of 2017 was up by almost 30% from January-March 2016. Using government data, the organization said 5,775 murders occurred in the first quarter of this year, compared with 4,460 in the first quarter of 2016.

Three out of every four homicides that occurred between January and March were committed by criminal organizations, *Semáforo Delictivo* reported in April. Santiago Roel, the organization’s director, said roughly 60% of those homicides were committed in the states of Guerrero, México, Baja California, Chihuahua, Veracruz, Sinaloa, Michoacán, Jalisco, and Guanajuato.

Human Rights activist murdered in Tamaulipas

While few of the victims in Mexico are known outside of their communities, at times high-profile individuals are murdered by criminal organizations, including journalists and human rights activists.

On May 10, a day after the IISS report was released, human rights advocate Miriam Rodríguez Martínez was murdered in her hometown of San Fernando in the northeastern state of Tamaulipas. San Fernando is the same community where the bodies of 72 migrants, mostly from Central America, were found buried in a mass grave in 2010. The Zetas reportedly carried out the murders because of the refusal or inability of the victims or their relatives to participate in an extortion scheme ([SourceMex, Sept. 8, 2010](#)).

Rodríguez Martínez founded the organization *Colectivo de Desaparecidos de San Fernando* to support the families of individuals who disappeared in her community and to seek information about the whereabouts of the victims. At the time of her death, her organization was supporting 600

families. She formed the collective in 2012 after her daughter Karen Alejandra disappeared without a trace. Through extensive investigation, Karen's body was found in a mass grave in 2014.

"Miriam became one of the most important figures in the search for people who have disappeared in Tamaulipas," said Carmen Aristegui, publisher of the online news site Aristegui Noticias. "She investigated and turned evidence over to the authorities."

According to Guillermo Gutiérrez Riestra, a member of Colectivo de Desaparecidos, Rodríguez Martínez's investigative work led to the arrest of 15 individuals implicated in the murder of her daughter. Among those detained was Enrique Yoel Rubio Flores, who was one of 29 prisoners who escaped from a state prison in March of this year.

"After learning about the escape, Miriam asked for protection, but authorities did not respond in a timely manner," Aristegui said. "She was murdered at her own home."

A spokesperson for the Tamaulipas attorney general's office (Procuraduría General de Justicia, PGJ) said a group of armed men targeted Rodríguez Martínez at her home. The gunmen called out to the victim by name, and then opened fire as she came out, hitting her about 12 times.

Authorities vowed that the murder would not go unpunished, although very few homicide cases are actually solved in Mexico. In a Twitter post, Tamaulipas Gov. Francisco Javier Cabeza de Vaca said he would "not allow the death of Miriam Rodríguez to be just another statistic."

Gunmen kill journalist in Sinaloa

A second prominent individual, award-winning journalist Jesús Javier Valdez Cárdenas, lost his life at the hands of organized crime on May 13. Valdez Cárdenas—co-founder of the weekly newspaper *Ríodoce* and a correspondent for the daily *La Jornada* and for the French news agency *Agence France Presse*—was murdered in the city of Culiacán in Sinaloa state.

Valdez Cárdenas and other reporters founded *Ríodoce* in 2003, focusing their coverage on issues of crime and corruption. Their work attracted retaliation from criminal organizations. In 2009, perpetrators firebombed the *Ríodoce* building after the newspaper published a series entitled "Hitman: La confesión de un asesino en Ciudad Juárez" ("Hitman: Confessions of an Assassin in Ciudad Juárez").

The journalist covered the Sinaloa cartel extensively, writing about the criminal organization in a column entitled *Malayerba*. "Through this column, Valdez described the drug trafficking culture in Sinaloa, where 'the drug traffickers not only have the protection of the government but of society at large,'" Aristegui Noticias reported.

At the beginning of May, Valdez Cárdenas wrote a piece about the power struggle in the Sinaloa Cartel in light of Guzmán Loera's extradition to the US. The piece, "El compadre de El Chapo, su peor enemigo" ("El Chapo's compadre, his worst enemy"), focused on Dámaso López Núñez, known as *El Licenciado*, who rose through the ranks after helping Guzmán Loera escape from the Puente Grande federal penitentiary in 2001 ([SourceMex, Jan. 24, 2001](#)).

Valdez Cárdenas also wrote several books on criminal organizations, including "Narcoperiodismo" ("Narcojournalism"), "Levantones" ("Kidnappings"), "Con una granada en la boca" ("With a Grenade in Your Mouth"), and "Huérfanos del narco" ("Orphans of the Drug Trade").

Because of his comprehensive coverage of the drug trade in Sinaloa and elsewhere in Mexico, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) recognized Valdez with the International Press Freedom Award in 2011.

“Practically every journalist in our country or from another country who wanted to know about Sinaloa consulted with him,” said Diego Enrique Osorno, a member of Ríodoce’s editorial staff.

Valdez Cárdenas, who was gunned down just blocks from his office, is the sixth journalist murdered in Mexico in 2017, following the assassinations of Cecilio Pineda in Guerrero, Ricardo Monlui in Veracruz, Miroslava Breach in Chihuahua, Maximino Rodríguez in Baja California Sur, and Filiberto Álvarez in Morelos. The murders thus far this year appear to follow the pattern of last year when, on average, a journalist was murdered every month in Mexico ([SourceMex, April 5, 2017](#)).

Sinaloa prosecutor Juan José Ríos Estavillo said his office is working with federal authorities to bring Valdez’s assassins to justice and to protect the victim’s family as well as other staff members of Ríodoce.

-- End --