



COURTESY JESÚS VILLASECA PÉREZ

# "Mexico at Peace"... an Incomplete Approach

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Throughout former President Felipe Calderón's six-year term in office, Mexico experienced elevated levels of violence that will be difficult to forget and that will likely become a case study on how a government with a poor assessment of the situation launched an ill-conceived "head-on fight" against organized crime.

Beginning in 2008, violence in Mexico surged. Homicides rose from 8,867 in 2007 to 27,199 in 2011.<sup>1</sup> Within just two years, 2008 and 2009, the homicide rate matched that of 1991, the year with the highest number of homicides in the past two decades. Other crimes, such as kidnapping and extortion, also rose.<sup>2</sup>

Upon taking office in December 2012, President Enrique Peña Nieto found himself at the helm of a violence-ridden country with a damaged government structure, in which security forces faced off against each other and citizens had little confidence in the authorities' ability to address the serious situation.

In public statements, the new president committed to reducing crime levels with a strategy called "Mexico at Peace" (*México en Paz*). Along with this came an initial assessment that has shaped the way in which his administration is addressing violence.

More than a year after Peña Nieto took office, we seek to analyze the government's assessment and the accompanying security strategies it has implemented to decrease levels of violence. We draw from official statistics on the levels of violence at the beginning of Peña Nieto's presidency and the levels one year later, as well as the information in the National Development Plan (*Plan Nacional de Desarrollo*, PND) announced in mid-2013, the National Program for the Social Prevention of Violence and Crime (*Programa Nacional para la Prevención Social de la Violencia y la Delincuencia*, PNPSVD), and the government's first report and monthly reports from the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (*Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública*, SESNSP). We close with the conclusions and a series of recommendations for improving existing security policies.

### Official assessment of the violence

The federal government's assessment offers data from two main sources, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, INEGI) and the SESNSP. These figures offer a panorama of the security situation left by the outgoing administration. According to the SESNSP,

between 2007 and 2012 the annual number of reported intentional homicides (*homicidio doloso*) rose from 10,253 to 20,548.<sup>3</sup> The number of kidnappings reported during that same period increased from 438 in 2007 to 1,407 in 2012.<sup>4</sup> In addition, based on the 2012 National Survey of Victimization and Perception of Public Security (*Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública*, ENVIPE), the National Institute of Statistics and Geography estimated that between 2010 and 2011, the number of people who were victims of a crime rose from 17.8 million to 18.7 million.<sup>5</sup>

The incoming administration presented an assessment of the possible reasons for the increase in violence in recent years, identifying a variety of causes. Official documents established that "the factors that have had the greatest influence on the increase in violence include disputes within and between criminal organizations dedicated to drug trafficking, and the situation of young people as victims and perpetrators of violence, because in Mexico young people represent approximately one-third of the total population."<sup>6</sup>

It also attributed the increase in violence in part to the fact that the Calderón administration's strategy of directly combating organized crime left power vacuums that triggered more violence and led criminal groups to increase their recruitment.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, the Peña Nieto government stated that one of the causes of the high levels of violence was the fact that organized crime in Mexico had increased drug distribution nationwide and expanded into other activities, such as human trafficking, extortion of businesses, and kidnapping. These criminal groups have been recruiting aggressively in low-income communities.<sup>8</sup>

The government's assessment, however, states that the violence in the country is not generalized. Rather, it is concentrated in certain regions. Thus, according to the official analysis, it is possible to target efforts to combat high-impact crimes and design public security strategies that are tailored to the situation in each region.<sup>9</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the information presented by the government makes no clear distinction between different types criminal groups, it only notes that the groups shifted from exporting and distributing illicit substances to extorting or abducting the most vulnerable part of the population. Studies indicate that there are at least two types of

criminal groups: those that are mainly dedicated to the distribution and shipment of drugs to the United States and throughout Mexico and those that are dedicated both to exporting of drugs and to extracting payments from society through extortion, robbery, and kidnapping.<sup>10</sup>

This omission in official documents notwithstanding, the new administration has designed and begun to implement a security policy that, at first glance, is similar to the previous one in several ways. The next section outlines the strategies that have been recently proposed to decrease levels of violence.

### The new administration's security policy

Based on its assessment, the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto announced a security policy that is part of the PND. It established that the strategic objectives for security for President Peña Nieto's term are: reducing insecurity and violence; combating the crimes that most affect society, such as homicide, kidnapping, and extortion; and reestablishing peace in the country by strengthening the social contract, building confidence in the government, and encouraging public participation in civic life. To do so, the government developed an action plan consisting of 10 strategies:

1. Crime prevention and reconstruction of the social fabric.
2. Effective criminal justice.
3. Professionalism and strengthening of the police force.
4. Transformation of the penitentiary system.
5. Promotion and coordination of civic participation.
6. International cooperation.
7. Information that is useful to citizens.
8. Coordination among authorities.
9. Regionalization.
10. Strengthening of intelligence.

For the purposes of this paper, two measures stand out: first, the proposal for new mechanisms for coordination, and second, direct interventions to rebuild the social fabric throughout the country.<sup>11</sup>

With regard to the first of those measures—coordination among authorities at all three levels of government (federal, state, and local)—the strategy creates a system for coordination and cooperation led by the Ministry of the Interior. This involves monthly meetings of the government's Security Cabinet, with

state governors and the mayor of the Federal District, and weekly meetings involving all state governors, the mayor of the Federal District, and the Security Cabinet's delegates in all 32 federal entities (31 states and the Federal District.)

However, more than a year into the new administration it is apparent that, although there have been changes and relations between the local and federal governments are less tense—partly because of the centralization of security-related budgets and authority—there is still no medium- or long-range plan that would institutionalize the responsibility for the coordination of police forces. Rather, coordination still depends on the political will of authorities, or, in some cases, is a response to outbreaks of violence in certain regions of the country, such as Michoacán, which since October 2013 has had the highest homicide rate of the past 15 years.<sup>12</sup>

This is cause for concern, since one of the previous administration's main problems was a lack of coordination between the federal ministries and the three levels of government. The current degree of coordination among authorities is inadequate for addressing violence in Mexico.

Regarding the second of those measures, direct interventions for rebuilding the country's social fabric, the government created the National Plan for the Social Prevention of Violence and Crime (*Plan Nacional para la Prevención Social de la Violencia y el Crimen*). Its overall purpose is "to establish objectives, priorities, principles, guidelines, action areas, and programs that link the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of public policies for the prevention of violence and crime at all three levels of government and to integrate the participation of the social sector, to build communities that are more secure, cohesive and inclusive."<sup>13</sup> The plan has 32 inter-agency commissions, one in each federal entity. The National Crime Prevention Program (*Programa Nacional de Prevención del Delito*), which helps implement the plans mentioned above, stems from the National Plan for the Social Prevention of Violence and Crime. According to official documents, this program will promote community cohesion, a culture of peace, and respect for the law, as well as policies for prevention and assistance to priority groups in selected jurisdictions.<sup>14</sup>

The program guidelines, published on February 12, 2013, established a budget of MXN\$2.5 billion

(approximately US\$192 million) for actions outlined in the plan. The selection of 57 jurisdictions and the distribution of resources from the program were based upon three criteria: geographic coverage (GC), crime rates (CR), and population (P).<sup>15</sup> These jurisdictions represent 31.7 percent of Mexico's total population. The

following table<sup>16</sup> shows the amounts allocated for each municipality, its population, and the criterion on which selection was based.

It is striking that of the 57 jurisdictions chosen, 30 were selected because of their crime rate, 20 because of their geographic coverage, and 7 because

*TABLE 1. Jurisdictions Benefiting From The National Crime Prevention Program 2013.*

ENTITY	MUNICIPALITY	ALLOCATED AMT. [1]	INHABITANTS	CRITERION
Aguascalientes	Aguascalientes	29,817,705	797,010	GC
Baja California	Tijuana	58,715,355	1,559,683	CR
Baja California	Mexicali	40,365,510	936,826	CR
Baja California Sur	La Paz	20,381,789	251,871	GC
Campeche	Carmen	20,964,873	221,094	GC
Campeche	Campeche	20,632,036	259,005	GC
Chiapas	Tuxtla Gutiérrez	28,053,659	553,374	CR
Chiapas	Tapachula	24,828,205	320,451	CR
Chihuahua	Juárez	79,815,436	1,332,131	CR
Chihuahua	Chihuahua	53,142,595	819,543	CR
Coahuila de Zaragoza	La Laguna (Metropolitan Area)	54,432,022	746,789	P
Coahuila de Zaragoza	Saltillo	32,671,217	725,123	CR
Colima	Colima	22,168,523	146,904	CR
Colima	Manzanillo	21,350,002	161,420	GC
Durango	La Laguna (Metropolitan Area)	53,193,111	469,028	P
Durango	Durango	35,305,453	582,267	CR
Federal District	Iztapalapa	51,769,057	1,815,786	CR
Federal District	Gustavo A. Madero	39,634,704	1,185,772	GC
Guanajuato	León	49,142,864	1,436,480	CR
Guanajuato	Celaya	29,543,039	468,469	CR
Guerrero	Acapulco de Juárez	99,152,587	789,971	CR
Guerrero	Chilpancingo de los Bravo	25,966,064	241,717	CR
Guerrero	Zihuatanejo de Azueta	23,222,649	118,211	CR
Hidalgo	Pachuca de Soto	20,539,839	267,862	GC
Hidalgo	Tulancingo de Bravo	19,003,247	151,584	GC
Jalisco	Guadalajara	129,379,844	1,495,189	P
Mexico	Ecatepec de Morelos	53,645,372	1,656,107	CR
Mexico	Nezahualcóyotl	38,619,286	1,110,565	CR

*TABLE 1. Jurisdictions Benefiting From The National Crime Prevention Program (2013) (continued)*

ENTITY	MUNICIPALITY	ALLOCATED AMT. [1]	INHABITANTS	CRITERION
Mexico	Toluca	32,348,555	819,561	CR
Michoacán de Ocampo	Morelia	35,597,036	729,279	CR
Michoacán de Ocampo	Uruapan	23,725,656	315,350	CR
Morelos	Cuernavaca (Metropolitan Area)	61,227,478	365,168	P
Morelos	Cuatla	24,929,611	175,207	CR
Nayarit	Tepic	26,649,214	380,249	GC
Nuevo León	Monterrey	135,254,872	1,135,550	P
Oaxaca	Oaxaca de Juárez	23,707,649	263,357	GC
Oaxaca	San Juan Bautista Tuxtepec	21,488,574	155,766	GC
Puebla	Puebla	44,173,001	1,539,819	CR
Puebla	Tehuacán	26,887,464	274,906	CR
Querétaro	Querétaro (Metropolitan Area)	68,659,857	801,940	P
Quintana Roo	Benito Juárez	35,345,777	661,176	CR
Quintana Roo	Othón P Blanco	21,671,918	244,553	GC
San Luis Potosí	Ciudad Valles	19,310,251	167,713	GC
San Luis Potosí	San Luis Potosí	30,125,642	772,604	GC
Sinaloa	Culiacán	62,305,574	858,638	CR
Sinaloa	Ahome	30,404,206	416,299	CR
Sonora	Hermosillo	29,340,377	784,342	CR
Sonora	Cajeme	24,277,811	409,310	CR
Tabasco	Centro	28,651,781	640,359	GC
Tamaulipas	Nuevo Laredo	40,370,927	384,033	CR
Tamaulipas	Victoria	28,891,247	321,953	CR
Tlaxcala	Tlaxcala	17,814,713	89,795	GC
Tlaxcala	Calpulalpan	17,383,782	44,807	GC
Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave	Veracruz (Metropolitan Area)	47,504,736	552,156	P
Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave	Xalapa	26,157,383	457,928	GC
Yucatán	Mérida	29,571,173	830,732	GC
Zacatecas	Zacatecas (Metropolitan Area)	40,358,863	138,176	P
Zacatecas	Fresnillo	20,408,827	213,139	GC
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57 jurisdictions<sup>17</sup></b>	<b>2,250,000,000</b>	<b>32,018,707</b>	

of population. It is also worth noting that the program makes no clear distinction about what kinds of crime most affect certain populations, nor does it differentiate between places that would need targeted assistance programs and those that would need crime prevention. The only distinction is found in the program's guiding principles,<sup>18</sup> which focus on the strategies that the program will employ, rather than the assessment made in each selected jurisdiction.

This section has described the principle security measures designed by the federal government to reduce insecurity in the country. We highlighted two: coordination between authorities and the National Plan for Prevention of Social Violence and Crime. The next section will describe the initial results of the implementation of those strategies.

### Initial outcomes of the security strategy

More than a year has passed since the National Crime Prevention Program was unveiled. This section will assess whether the measures the federal government has implemented have decreased the levels of violence. We performed a comparative study of the rates of three crimes: kidnapping, robbery, and homicide. These were chosen because they allow a comparison of violence from different perspectives and because they have been examined in various academic works, as well as in the Pan-American Health Organization's special report on the creation of a system of indicators of peaceful coexistence and citizen security that can be used for comparisons among countries.<sup>19</sup> The following graphs compare results in the jurisdictions mainly targeted by the program.

Figure 1 shows an increase in number of kidnappings in the majority of the jurisdictions chosen for implementation of the program, going from a total number of 1,123 reported kidnappings in 2012 to 1,415 in 2013.<sup>20</sup> It illustrates that, despite the creation of and an increase in budget allocations for crime prevention, kidnappings increased considerably in more than half of the priority municipalities.<sup>21</sup> In addition, of the 10 municipalities with the highest budget allocations, only four reported fewer kidnappings between January and August of 2013, compared to the same period in 2012. It is important to note, however, that although these crimes are serious, the reported information must be viewed cautiously because it is very difficult to obtain reliable statistics; it is estimated that the rate of crimes that go unreported (*cifra negra*)<sup>22</sup> for

kidnappings is approximately 80 percent.<sup>23</sup>

Figure 2 shows the information available about reports of common robbery.<sup>24</sup> In general, the information available for the program's 57 priority municipalities shows a slight decrease (six percent) in the number of all reported crimes, from 344,025 in 2012 to 324,925 in 2013. Since the program has only been in operation for a year, it could be the case that the program may be beginning to show positive results for these types of crimes, which occur frequently but are not high-impact and do not cause the greatest harm to the population. It is important to note that although Puebla shows a decrease in the incidence of common robbery, it still has substantially higher rates than other jurisdictions with similar populations, such as León, Guanajuato State, or Nezahualcoyotl, in the State of Mexico.

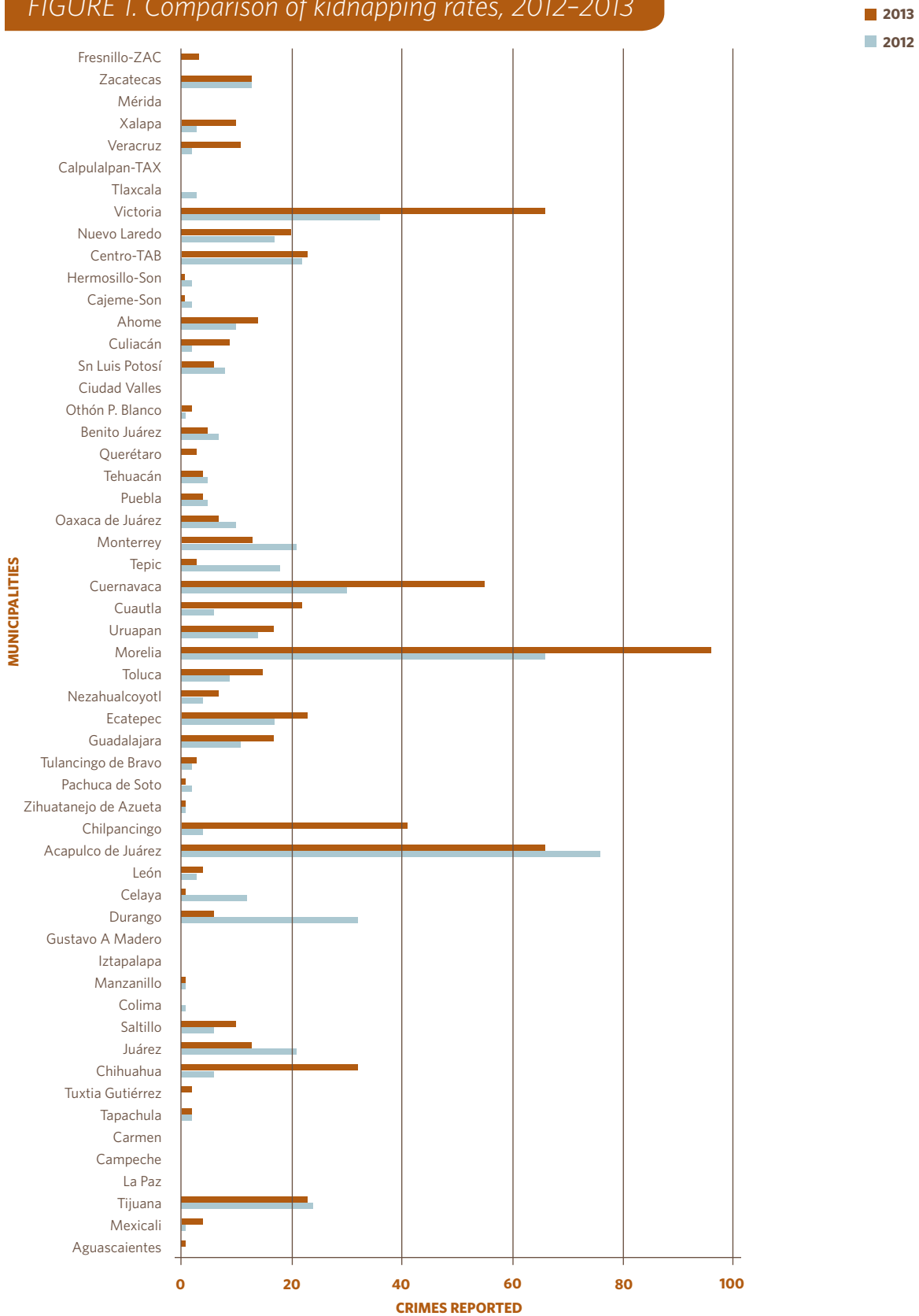
Figure 3 shows information about homicides reported between January and August in 2012 and 2013.<sup>25</sup> The homicide rate is one of the most effective indicators of violence reduction for two reasons: first, there is generally a high reporting rate for this type of crime, and second, it is one of the crimes that causes the most harm to the population. According to the data obtained, of the 10 municipalities that received the most resources,<sup>26</sup> nearly all showed slight decreases in homicide rates. Two exceptions were Tijuana and the metropolitan area of Querétaro, where rates increased.

These comparisons confirm that there was a slight decrease in 2013 in the number of homicides reported in the municipalities where the program was implemented. The decrease amounts to five percent since the beginning of the new administration; however, if the graph were to be expanded to include the murder rate from 2011, it would show that the decrease began that year; the cumulative figures show a drop of about 20 percent in the murder rate in 2012.<sup>27</sup> The same is true for other crimes, such as common robbery.

Another important point concerns the prevalence of the selected crimes in 2012 and 2013. When the program was first implemented, the percentage of common robberies committed in the selected jurisdictions was 49 percent; in 2013, it showed a slight decrease, to 48 percent. For kidnapping, the percentage increased by two points, from 38 percent in 2012 to 40 percent in 2013.

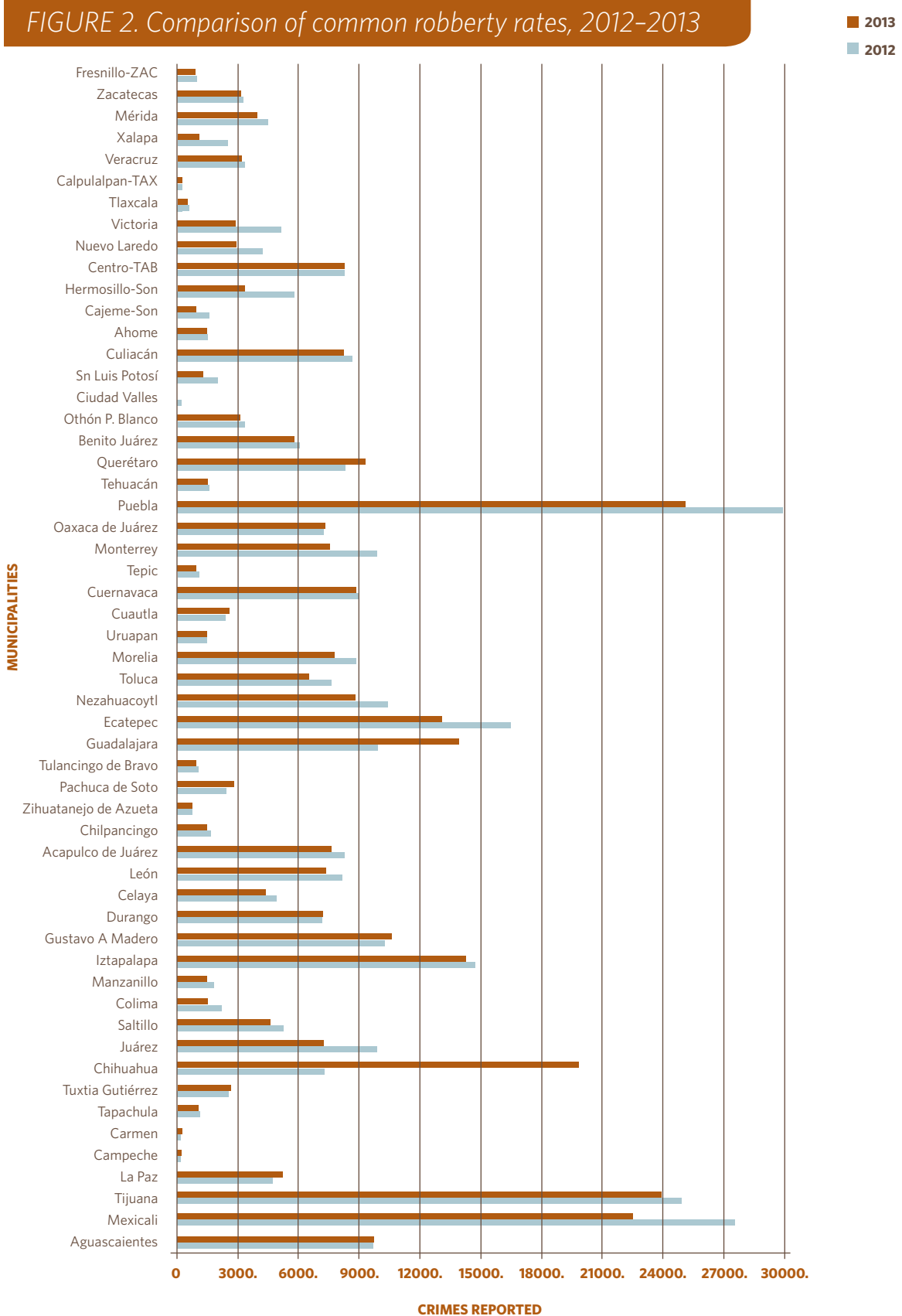
When the program began, homicides in the selected jurisdictions represented 34 percent of the national

FIGURE 1. Comparison of kidnapping rates, 2012-2013



Source: Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, 2013.

Note: The La Laguna Metropolitan Area and San Juan Bautista Tuxtepec, Oaxaca, are excluded from this table.

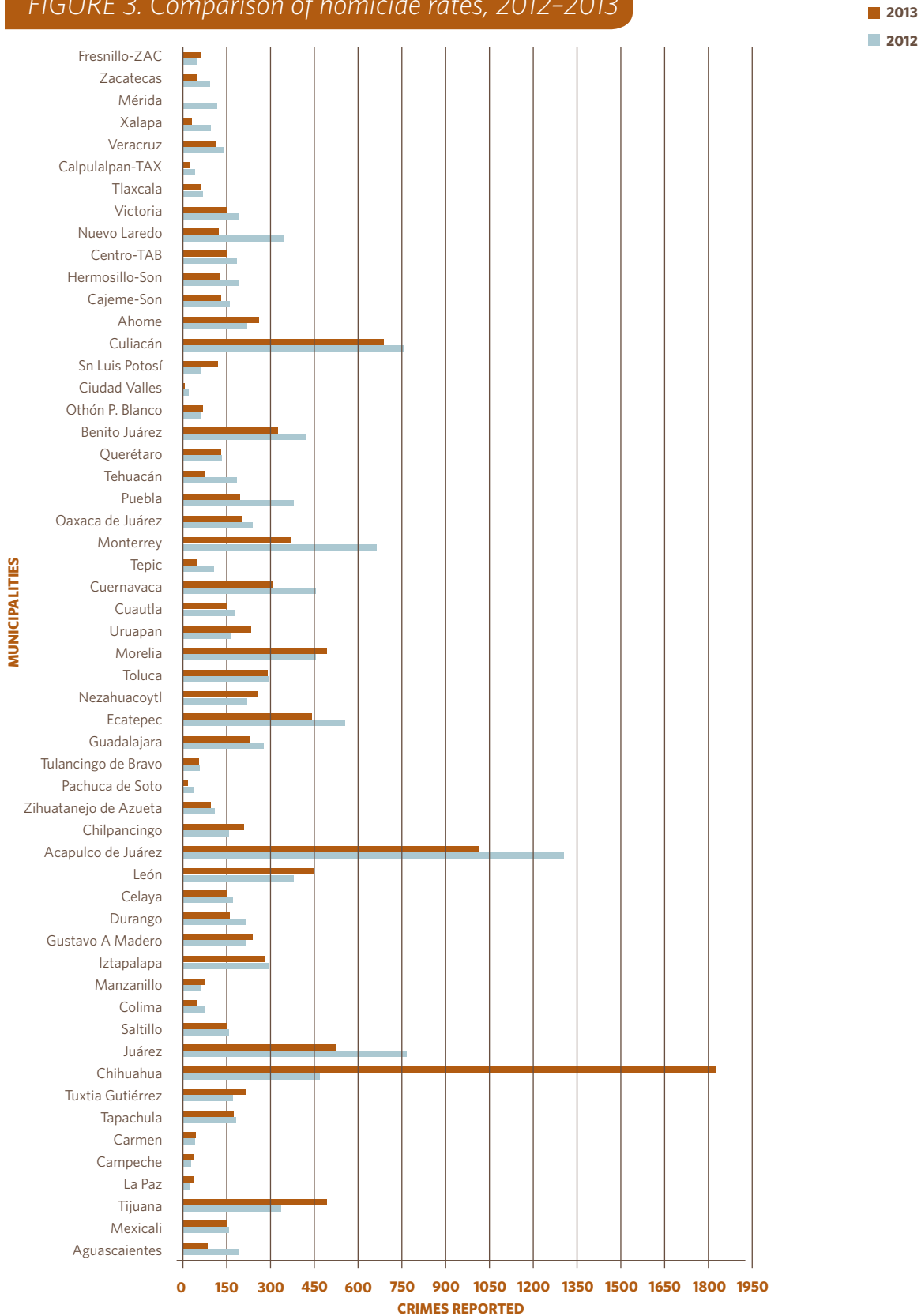


Source: Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System

Note: The La Laguna Metropolitan Area and San Juan Bautista Tuxtepec, Oaxaca, are excluded from this table.



FIGURE 3. Comparison of homicide rates, 2012-2013



Source: Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System

Note: The La Laguna Metropolitan Area and San Juan Bautista Tuxtepec, Oaxaca, are excluded from this table.

*TABLE 2. Selected crimes in jurisdictions where program was implemented, as percentage of national total, 2012–2013.*

2012	COMMON ROBBERY	KIDNAPPING	HOMICIDE
In selected jurisdictions	344,025	538	13,104
National total	698,926	1,407	38,052
% represented by selected jurisdictions	49.22%	38.24%	34.44%
2013	COMMON ROBBERY	KIDNAPPING	HOMICIDE
In selected jurisdictions	324,924	679	12,479
National total	666,166	1,695	34,643
% represented by selected jurisdictions	48.78%	40.06%	36.02%

total, and in 2013 that increased by nearly two points, to 36 percent, even though the national total showed a slight decrease in homicides. The above table<sup>28</sup> shows a breakdown of this data.

Those percentages suggest that, as noted above, the program could be having an impact on lesser crimes, while kidnapping and homicide rates (as a percentage of the national total) increase, even though the program was implemented in specific areas. This would confirm that the measures implemented in those jurisdictions are not having the expected impact on more serious crimes or are insufficient.

It should also be noted that the first report by the Peña Nieto administration documented a prison population of 246,226, although the system's capacity is 200,100 inmates.<sup>29</sup> The country's prison population is therefore more than 20 percent above capacity, making it impossible to comply with laws and international treaties on human rights. If this trend continues, it will be difficult for the government to meet the goals it has set.

The information obtained confirms that the policies implemented so far are inadequate for addressing the serious crime problem in the country, because a slight decrease does not mean that violence is being contained. In sum, the strategy has shown that slight changes in security policies will not produce vastly different outcomes. The trends in the data lead us to believe that if the situation continues, it will again be impossible to meet the federal government's security targets. One reason could be that, although the government tried to include new approaches to social and community prevention in its assessment, these

have remained vague plans and have not been fully included in the government's actions. As noted above, this has resulted in a slight decrease in the statistics—in other words, modest changes yield modest outcomes, resulting in partial control of the serious situation of violence.

### **What should be done?<sup>30</sup>**

The first lesson to be learned from this analysis is that although it is almost impossible to prevent security crises like the one that began during the previous administration and which continues today, it is possible to contain their effects by reforming the institutions responsible for the administration of justice.<sup>31</sup>

The current administration should take the problem of persistent violence seriously and make profound changes to its security strategy to correct mistakes made by previous administrations.

The federal government should undertake an in-depth assessment as soon as possible to distinguish between the two main types of violence involving organized crime: violence connected with drug trafficking and competition between groups, and violence related to extortion and other illegal activities.

The federal government must also make an explicit assessment of violent groups, so as to properly identify them and act appropriately. One problem that could worsen is that by studying and addressing violence regionally, as has done up to this point (without reliable data), one is unable to know the true reach of the violent groups, how they act, and whether their forms of operation vary from region to region.

One example of this tendency to regionalize the

analysis of criminal groups is in the section on security in the Peña Nieto administration's first annual report, which presented isolated data about criminal groups. It only provided information about 88 alleged criminals from different criminal organizations, identified the modus operandi of the "Knights Templar" (*Caballeros Templarios*), noted that efforts were made in Chihuahua and Sinaloa to identify criminal structures, and reported the detention of 68 people connected with the criminal organization "La Familia" on charges of kidnapping.<sup>32</sup>

This highlights the need to clarify the situation of criminal groups and obtain more and better information about the number of criminal groups, in order to measure their relative strength and of territorial control, as well as their sources of financing and their ties with communities and local criminal structures.

This requires consistency and strict oversight of state and federal crime data to allow comparisons between regions and in-depth assessments of the situation in each location. The information presented by SESNSP is updated monthly, but the last report shows that only four states were current in reporting data, while some information was pending in the remaining 28.<sup>33</sup>

It is also crucial for the federal government to ensure close institutional coordination among federal police forces, the Mexican army, other federal ministries, and state and municipal authorities, based on assessments and clear strategies with indicators for evaluating the results of coordination. Past experience in other countries shows that initiatives are successful when all state agencies participate and when there is clarity about the direction of the strategy—in other words, coordination is not an end in itself, but rather a tool for implementing strategies. If the problems of crime and violence are addressed only through political operations and the monitoring of agreements, outcomes will remain limited.

Another important point is that the recent reform to the Fiscal Coordination Law (*Ley de Coordinación Fiscal*), which allows federal funds granted to state

governments (and to the government of the Federal District) to be used for a variety of infrastructure projects and can also be extended to projects to improve security, will probably increase the effectiveness of local programs in those entities.

We also believe that a series of long-term strategies should be designed in relation to structural changes in security policy, such as legislative reforms that aim to establish periodic evaluations of police institutions (and not just of their personnel), or the 2008 reforms to the judicial system, which are far from becoming reality. Profound changes are needed to increase people's trust in the judicial system, decrease the alarming rates of impunity, and eliminate practices that violate human rights. (Reforms to the penitentiary system must also continue in order to ensure respect for human rights.)

Finally, the comprehensive policy so widely publicized by the incoming government will only be effective if the government successfully develops clear criteria for the application of social prevention programs and police action. That would make it possible to identify the types of situations in which it is worth allocating funds for prevention and those which require a focus on violence, so the distribution of these resources is not only based on levels of violence and territorial coverage, as was done for the National Crime Prevention Program analyzed in this paper.

Although some indicators of insecurity and violence have decreased, that does not mean the violence is being eliminated. One indication of this is the state of Michoacán, which recently has been on the verge of collapse on both political and security fronts. Statistics showing decreased crime rates must be viewed cautiously, because proclaiming a premature victory would be as serious as repeating the mistakes of previous administrations, in which it would seem a policy of amnesia and lack of institutional memory formed the centerpieces of the security strategy. The changes that Mexico needs to decrease persistent violence should be handled with the greatest possible responsibility and transparency by all responsible authorities.

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## ENDNOTES

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- 3 Gobierno de la República, "Plan Nacional de Desarrollo," Mexico, 2013, p.33. It should be noted that according to data from the executive secretariat of the National Public Safety System (*Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública*) updated as of December 2013, the number of homicides reported in 2012 was 21,728, not 20,548, as reported by the federal government in its National Development Plan.
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- 5 Gobierno de la República, "Plan Nacional de Desarrollo," Mexico, 2013.
- 6 Gobierno de la República, "Bases del Programa Nacional para la Prevención Social de la Violencia y la Delincuencia e Instalación de la Comisión Intersecretarial," February, 2013.
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- 8 Gobierno de la República, "Plan Nacional de Desarrollo," Mexico, 2013.
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- 12 Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, "Incidencia delictiva mensual," Mexico, 2013.
- 13 Gobierno de la República, "Primer informe de gobierno," Mexico, 2013.
- 14 Such as prevention and assistance for domestic and gender violence, comprehensive assistance to victims of violence and crime, police-society reconciliation, community-oriented policing models, comprehensive assistance for youth, sexual and reproductive health, capacity building, social reinsertion and assistance to youth in conflict with the law, prevention and comprehensive assistance for addictions, denaturing of violence, direct and indirect victims of violence and crime, incarcerated population and their families, migrants, migrants in transit and internally displaced people, civic coexistence and community management, etc.
- 15 For the crime rate criterion, the program measured the number of homicides in each jurisdiction.
- 16 Compiled by authors with information from the National Crime Prevention Program, February 2012, and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography 2010 Population and Housing Census, Mexico, 2010.
- 17 The La Laguna Metropolitan Area in the states of Coahuila and Durango is considered one jurisdiction.
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- 30 Some of the recommendations that follow were taken from a meeting of experts held by WOLA and CIDE at the end of last year in Aguascalientes, Mexico, to develop effective proposals for reducing violence in Mexico. The authors of this paper participated in that discussion.
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