



Building Peace in Mexico: Dilemmas Facing the López Obrador Government

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Headquarters

International Crisis Group

Avenue Louise 149 • 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 502 90 38 • Fax: +32 2 502 50 38

brussels@crisisgroup.org

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Principal Findings

What's new? Mexico's left-leaning president-elect, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, will take office on 1 December after a landslide win. He promises to fight graft and reverse the militarisation of public security. But he inherits record levels of criminal violence, intractable local conflicts and deeply rooted state collusion with organised crime.

Why does it matter? López Obrador vows to build peace through drug legalisation, amnesties, truth commissions and transitional justice. His platform could reduce bloodshed, but it lacks detail and faces obstacles ranging from reprisals from organised crime bosses against young people wanting to abandon crime to potential resistance from security forces.

What should be done? Mexico's new government should prioritise key reforms: pursuing justice in emblematic cases of alleged state involvement in atrocities; building the civilian police's capacity so it can reclaim its role from the military; and empowering, and involving victims in, truth commissions, to bolster the legitimacy of those commissions' local peacebuilding advice.

Executive Summary

The allure of sweeping change gave Andrés Manuel López Obrador, leader of the left-leaning National Regeneration Movement, a landslide win in Mexico's 1 July 2018 presidential vote. He vows to end, after taking office on 1 December, twelve years of conflict related to organised crime, during which some 120,000 people have died and 37,000 disappeared. He pledges to replace heavy-handed, military-led crime-fighting with reforms aimed at civil peace. He wants to promote equitable growth, along with amnesties for non-violent offenders, to get at the roots of organised crime recruitment. He promises to seek redress for victims, and to end corruption by setting an austere example at the pinnacle of the state. All these goals are laudable, but Mexico's new president should move cautiously lest his ambitious agenda provoke a backlash. He should curb expectations and emphasise key reforms, notably efforts to stop any police collusion with crime, empower truth commissions to propose peacebuilding policies, hold accountable those responsible for high-profile past state crimes and deter future abuses.

López Obrador has created such high hopes for swift results that public trust in state institutions could nose-dive if he fails to deliver. Yet neither he nor his team has fleshed out his proposals. There is no easy way out of Mexico's security crisis. In 2017, Mexico's homicide rate hit a twenty-year high; 2018 is on track to be even deadlier, while no one is held to account for at least 95 per cent of murders. Behind the dismal statistics lies a set of fragmented criminal conflicts that defy state authorities with their local characteristics and their resilience in the face of crackdowns.

Mexican organised crime no longer relies on drug trafficking as its sole source of revenue. Partly due to the past two administrations' targeting of criminal kingpins, larger organisations have splintered into dozens of small- and medium-sized bands pursuing territorial control and extorting civilians. In Michoacán, for example, one of Mexico's most violent states, criminal competition for turf and the opportunities for extortion and other easy profits drive cycles of revenge killing. In Guanajuato, national criminal organisations compete with local crime groups, threatening to overwhelm weak state institutions. Along Mexico City's edges, criminal newcomers have moved in to already troubled districts, fuelling competition and mayhem. In December, López Obrador will inherit a plethora of regional conflicts, each with its own pattern and requiring its own fine-tuned approach.

But the gravest challenge pertains to the state itself. Widespread reports of corruption and criminality suggest that those at least partly explain the ineffectiveness of the armed forces and police. At municipal level, where efforts to calm violence related to organised crime are most needed, security forces are at their weakest. For their part, federal forces stand accused by human rights groups of being implicated in enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings that in places have reached a scale that amounts to crimes against humanity. Commanders who allegedly conspire with criminals reportedly violate the law in policing operations, commit crimes themselves and coerce subordinates into complicity.

Reforming federal security forces will require a delicate balancing act. Moving too fast – attempting suddenly to punish officials responsible for serious crimes, for

example – could induce resistance, while the abrupt withdrawal of the armed forces from policing those states most afflicted by violence could prompt even greater instability. While the state must honour victims' demands for justice for any disappearances and killings involving security forces, the chronic weaknesses in criminal investigation and prosecution will hinder efforts to pursue all outstanding cases. López Obrador's administration should target emblematic cases of state crimes – particularly those involving the murder or disappearance of civilians – from the recent past while establishing robust safeguards and pledging immediate and implacable civil judicial responses to all future abuses.

It should strengthen and enforce mechanisms for civilian oversight of the security forces and restore, even if gradually, the civilian police as the sole providers of public security in Mexico. In this respect, Congress should repeal the Law of Internal Security, which cements the armed forces' role in public security. New independent oversight bodies within security forces should seek as a priority to protect junior officers from intimidation by their commanders. Overall improvement of working conditions through better wages and social benefits, and the professionalisation of forces through unified curricula at reformed police academies, are essential. A revised cooperation agreement with the U.S. should pave the way for financial support to these initiatives.

Meanwhile, López Obrador's flagship proposal for peacebuilding in Mexico's most violent states has yet to be defined in detail. His government-in-waiting has held a series of popular consultations, the National Pacification and Reconciliation Forums, throughout the country, with the aim of assembling a package of measures by late October. But the forums are thus far contentious, with tensions manifest between official expectations of forgiveness and civil society demands for full investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of violence.

To contain any potential popular disenchantment, López Obrador and his team should refrain from rushed, top-down solutions, and instead allow truth commissions to serve as spaces for public discussion aimed at identifying each region's sources of conflict and suggesting appropriate policy responses. His administration, assisted by UN agencies, should provide funds and operational support for these commissions, and seek to minimise risks posed to this process by crime bosses. In this respect, it could reconsider its refusal to allow such figures to benefit from partial amnesties if there is genuine support in the truth commissions for such a move, and offenders are willing to provide reparation and redress to victims.

The president-elect has attracted remarkable public support with his forth-right condemnation of state corruption and abuse of power. His ideas for addressing the country's rampant insecurity are designed to dismantle the logic and institutional apparatus of Mexico's "war" on drugs and crime of the past twelve years. Yet the success of this radical shift will depend above all on how it plays out in the micro-conflicts scattered across the country, and the measures his government takes against state complicity with crime across violence-torn districts.

Recommendations

To the incoming administration:

1. Establish truth commissions, led and defined by citizens and supported by experts in public security, to provide a platform for increased understanding of local insecurity and an open-ended conversation on pertinent remedies. Provide commissions adequate financing, logistical back-up, security and unhindered access to officials and state documents, as requested. Start by setting up truth commissions in a limited number of conflict-afflicted regions, such as parts of Guerrero, Michoacán and Veracruz; subsequently adjust and repeat in other areas blighted by high levels of violence.
2. Revisit the categorical exclusion of violent offenders, including higher- and mid-ranking organised crime members, from peacebuilding policies such as partial amnesties. Consider reduced sentences and other judicial benefits for these offenders but only if advised to do so by truth commissions and in exchange for full collaboration with the judicial system and reparation for victims, as a means to mitigate otherwise likely violent interference.
3. Pair truth commissions' peacebuilding efforts with employment and educational programs providing alternatives to organised crime and a path for members of gangs to demobilise.
4. Fund and support victims' collectives to search for disappeared persons and identify bodies. Guarantee collectives' access as plaintiffs in judicial investigations to internal state documents.
5. Propose to Congress the repeal of the Law of Interior Security.
6. Investigate and bring to justice any state forces involved in emblematic cases of murder and disappearance of civilians, such as the 2014 disappearance of Ayotzinapa teaching college students, to demonstrate commitment to providing justice to victims and reestablish faith in security institutions.
7. Gradually introduce robust independent oversight mechanisms, such as civilian ombudsmen with disciplinary powers, to curb any human rights violations by the armed forces, while ensuring that any participation by the armed forces in any future abuses will be subject to civilian justice.
8. Commit to gradually restoring civilian police forces as sole providers of public security. Dismantle any police command structures that are involved in coercion of their subordinates or criminality by introducing independent external oversight bodies with disciplinary and investigative powers and access to internal documents, aimed at safeguarding officers' well-being and basic rights against abuses by their commanders. Supply, where needed, witness protection and financial support for officers willing to speak out against abuses and corruption. Improve overall working conditions by raising wages and providing adequate social benefits. Institute requirements that all police officers, including local police, attend training in the national academy system.

9. Commit to prosecutorial independence by refraining from influencing the naming of the next attorney general. Instead, invite civil society and judicial experts to prepare a list of candidates for Congress to choose from. Strengthen state attorneys' offices' capacity to resolve disappearances by investing in politically independent forensic services.

To the U.S.:

10. Participate in efforts to mitigate insecurity in Mexico by supporting police reform, judicial independence and crime prevention under the umbrella of an overall security cooperation agreement.

To the UN and regional organisations:

11. Provide assistance to support police reform, prosecutorial independence and investigations into alleged crimes against humanity.
12. Offer assistance and technical support in the definition and implementation of peacebuilding instruments, particularly truth commissions.

Mexico City/Bogotá/Brussels, 11 October 2018

Building Peace in Mexico: Dilemmas Facing the López Obrador Government

I. Introduction

Hopes for change are high in Mexico after Andrés Manuel López Obrador, leader of the National Regeneration Movement (Movimiento Regeneración Nacional, MORENA), won the 1 July elections with over 53 per cent of the vote, 30 points ahead of the runner-up.¹ When he enters office on 1 December, it will be the first time in 89 years that a left political force other than the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) governs Mexico, and the first time ever that neither the PRI nor the centre-right National Action Party (PAN) rules the country. Trust in Mexican state institutions has eroded to historical lows after a twelve-year militarised campaign against organised crime, which presidents from both these parties championed.² More than 150,000 people have died or disappeared in the course of this campaign; meanwhile, the state has done little to address several high-profile cases of corruption.

López Obrador's flagship campaign promises were to fight corruption and restore peace. He pledged to end graft by remaining scrupulously honest himself and by stopping the opaque rigging of public contracts for the benefit of a few well-connected companies.³ The government would use the funds it saves through competitive bidding processes and an end to overcharging to stimulate economic growth and reduce the poverty and unemployment that fuel recruitment into organised crime. His core security proposal is to steer the country away from militarised policing toward measures like local truth commissions and amnesties for non-violent offenders.

But López Obrador has yet to detail how his government will overcome the array of obstacles standing in the way of a quick fix to either crime or corruption. First, organised crime in Mexico has mutated. At the start of the militarised campaign in late 2006, six major drug trafficking organisations competed for a handful of coveted drug production and transshipment zones and accounted for the bulk of lethal violence. As the government killed or captured many big crime bosses, these six cartels

¹ According to preliminary official results released by Mexico's National Electoral Institute.

² In 2006, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 43 per cent of respondents said they trusted the state. By 2016, the percentage had dropped to 28 points. See "Latin American Economic Outlook 2018, Rethinking Institutions for Development", OECD Development Centre, April 2018. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2017, 93 per cent of respondents in Mexico were dissatisfied with the way democracy worked in the country, and only 17 per cent trusted government institutions a great deal or somewhat. "Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy", Pew Research Center, 16 October 2017.

³ According to the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness, the state handed out 71 per cent of public contracts to less than 2 per cent of eligible private-sector service providers, without any public tendering procedures. See "Índice de Riesgos de Corrupción: el Sistema Mexicano de Contrataciones Públicas", Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad, April 2018. See also "MeTrOP: antídoto vs. la corrupción", México Evalúa, April 2016.

have splintered into dozens of smaller groups. Aggressively colonising new territories across the country, these groups have proven more harmful than their progenitors by engaging in extortion and kidnapping for ransom to generate income. In many regions, no single group is dominant, driving relentless cycles of violent competition that now underpin a patchwork of local conflicts. As a result, 2018 is on track to surpass 2017 as the year with the most homicides countrywide since authorities began collating data in 1990.⁴

Secondly, public safety in Mexico has become overwhelmingly dependent on the army and navy. Underfunded, understaffed and outgunned, municipal police forces have proven unable and at times unwilling to confront the advance of organised crime. A total of 152 individuals tied directly to political parties or campaigns, including 48 declared and undeclared candidates, were killed from September 2017 to election day on 1 July 2018 – more than in any other electoral season, and more than ten times the number during the previous campaign of 2011-2012. In the same period, 371 civil servants were also killed.⁵ These alarming figures point to an intensifying struggle to capture local state bodies for illicit gain. Yet outgoing President Enrique Peña Nieto made few attempts to strengthen the municipal police, prioritising the federal level and the armed forces in particular.

Thirdly, the fault lines of crime and conflict run deep inside the state, undermining the official view that the battle between state and organised crime, as well as internecine criminal feuds, are the only causes of violence. Corruption, including within armed forces and federal police, underpins state collusion with criminals. Human rights groups argue that the complicity of federal security forces in enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings reaches such levels that there is “undeniable” evidence they constitute crimes against humanity. This, combined with the lack of effective external oversight mechanisms, have undermined public trust in these forces and exacerbated violence.⁶ Within the security forces, meanwhile, the practice of coercing low-ranking officers into criminal collusion allegedly remains widespread.⁷

This report draws on research in Mexico City and the states of Mexico, Michoacán and Guanajuato, including dozens of interviews with representatives of international organisations, security analysts, current and former municipal and federal police officers, and high-ranking naval officers, as well as politicians from the municipal level up to López Obrador’s campaign team. Crisis Group also spoke to vigilantes and members of organised crime. It examines the evolution of crime and violence in Mexico, lays out the principal dilemmas facing López Obrador’s new government and offers ideas as to how it can chart a course through them.

⁴ Mexico’s National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) has compiled homicide data, based on medical examiners’ reports since 1990. The Secretariat of the Interior’s Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System has done so by compiling data from law enforcement since 1997.

⁵ See “Séptimo informe de violencia política en México 2018”, *Etellekt*, 9 July 2018.

⁶ See, for example, “Undeniable atrocities: confronting crimes against humanity in Mexico”, Open Society Justice Initiative, 2016. In response to this report, the government affirmed that by far the greatest number of violent offenses are committed by criminal organisations, that the armed forces have protocols to ensure their actions respect human rights, and that the state is committed to investigating any reported abuses. “Responde México a informe Open Society”, *El Universal*, 7 June 2016.

⁷ See Sections II.B and II.C below.

II. Mexico's Mutating Conflict Landscape

Upon assuming the presidency in late 2006, Felipe Calderón charged Mexico's armed forces and militarised federal police with stamping out organised crime.⁸ He promised the swift reestablishment of formal state control across the country and deployed large numbers of troops to break cartels' territorial dominion as well as target kingpins with kill-or-capture operations. Despite early frustrations in Michoacán, where his government first rolled out the strategy, it replicated the campaign in other states, raising the number of soldiers and marines deployed in the fight against organised crime from 41,355 in 2006 to 56,704 by 2009.⁹

By the end of Calderón's presidency in 2012, security forces had killed or captured 25 of the 37 crime barons on the original most-wanted list.¹⁰ On assuming power, President Enrique Peña Nieto continued his predecessor's approach, despite having promised during his campaign to halt it, and increased the number of troops deployed to 69,476.¹¹ He claimed to have crossed 108 of the 122 names off his administration's own most-wanted list by early 2018.¹² Yet violence spiralled. The number of first-degree murders more than doubled from 10,253 in 2007 to 22,409 in 2011. After dropping to 15,520 in 2014, they again peaked in 2016 and 2017, with 20,547 and 25,340 cases registered, respectively.¹³ From January through April 2018, 8,900 murders were recorded, indicating a trend that would make this year deadlier still.¹⁴ In addition, as of 30 April 2018, the state had registered more than 37,000 people as disappeared.¹⁵

⁸ The Federal Police have been composed of up to 60 per cent of former military officers, including at the command level. Its Federal Forces division in particular has frequently engaged in anti-organised crime operations. See "SSP federal afirma que los efectivos de la PFP no son del Ejército ni la Marina", *La Jornada*, 10 September 2007; Daniel Sabet, *Police Reform in Mexico: Informal Politics and the Challenge of Institutional Change* (Stanford, 2012); Marcos Moloeznik and María Suárez de Garay, "El proceso de militarización de la seguridad pública en México (2006-2010)", *Frontera Norte*, 2012.

⁹ See "Injustificable, el Ejército en la seguridad pública", *Animal Político*, 10 September 2017. Rather than disintegrating due to the federal intervention in Michoacán, the Michoacán Family criminal organisation expanded its territorial, social and economic influence. The state did not arrest or kill its top leaders until years later.

¹⁰ See "Presume Calderón captura de 25 capos más buscados", *SIPSE*, 21 November 2012.

¹¹ See "Injustificable, el Ejército...", op. cit. Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Changing the Game or Dropping the Ball? Mexico's Security and Anti-Crime Strategy under Enrique Peña Nieto", Brookings Institution, November 2014.

¹² See "De sicarios, escoltas y choferes a capos de la droga: los nuevos líderes de los cárteles en México", *Infobae*, 21 January 2018.

¹³ "Cifras de homicidio doloso, secuestro, extorsión y robo de vehículos 1997-2017", Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, Secretariat of the Interior, 20 May 2018.

¹⁴ "Incidencia Delictiva del Fuero Común 2018", Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, Secretariat of the Interior, May 2018. Estimations as to how many homicides can be attributed to organised crime range from 29.7 per cent (National Institute of Statistics and Geography) to 46.9 per cent (Lantia Consultants). See Laura Calderón et al., "Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis Through 2017", Justice in Mexico Special Report, April 2018.

¹⁵ Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas, Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, Secretariat of the Interior, May 2018. Victims' organisations say the real number is significantly higher, as cases frequently go unreported due to a combination of

Partly as a result of the militarised approach to public safety, Mexican organised crime has undergone a major transformation, which is characterised by four ongoing trends:¹⁶

- ❑ The fragmentation of once-larger, vertically more integrated and relatively stable organisations. The six cartels dominant in 2006 became dozens of smaller bands.
- ❑ The diversification of criminal portfolios, moving from an exclusive focus on drug production and trafficking to extortion, kidnapping for ransom, oil siphoning and cargo theft, among other crimes, and the shifting of criminal groups' operational radius to exploit local resources, including civilian populations and local government budgets and institutions.
- ❑ The strong local concentration of armed conflict, which tends toward micro-territorial competition among criminal groups and away from competition for transnational drug production sites and trafficking routes.
- ❑ The spread of lethal, organised crime-related conflict into once peaceful areas.

In the wake of this mutation, criminal groups' presence, and the violence they mete out, varies greatly across the country. States such as Michoacán, Guerrero and Tamaulipas have been plagued for several years by levels and patterns of internecine fighting that are akin to armed conflict in terms of the intensity of violence and the role played by militarised criminal organisations. More recently, spikes of violence have brought extreme insecurity to states such as Jalisco, Colima and Guanajuato. Rather than fitting a single model, each region suffers violence rooted in different sets of criminal actors pursuing diverse strategies, with distinct roles for state actors in each case. The causes of this extreme violence are diverse, many of them reaching beyond simple feuding for control of illicit markets. Acknowledging and acting on this complexity will be crucial to the success of López Obrador's new security approach.

A. *Tierra Caliente, Michoacán*

The Tierra Caliente, or Hot Land, region in Michoacán has suffered drug trafficking and production, as well as the attendant violence, for at least the past half-century.¹⁷ The mutation of Mexican organised crime can be most clearly traced here. The Michoacán Family, among the "big six" criminal organisations at the start of the

fear, threats and a lack of confidence in authorities. See Crisis Group Latin America Report N°61, *Veracruz: Fixing Mexico's State of Terror*, 28 February 2017. The overall estimate is that 93.6 per cent of crime in Mexico goes unreported. See "Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública 2017", National Institute of Statistics and Geography, September 2017.

¹⁶ For an overview of these trends, see Viridiana Ríos, "Why did Mexico become so violent? A self-reinforcing violent equilibrium caused by competition and enforcement", *Trends in Organized Crime*, 2013; Bruce Bagley, "Drug trafficking and organized crime in the Americas: Major trends in the twenty-first century", Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, August 2012; Wil Pansters (ed.), *Violence, Coercion and State-making in Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Other Half of the Centaur* (Stanford, 2012).

¹⁷ For a thorough account of narco-trafficking and extra-legal governance in Tierra Caliente, see Salvador Maldonado, *Los márgenes del estado mexicano: territorios ilegales, desarrollo y violencia en Michoacán* (Zamora, 2010).

Calderón administration, imposed itself as an authority not only over criminal markets with the capacity to tax and control them, but also within local towns, where it put in place its own form of paternalistic social order.¹⁸ A hybrid criminal-political actor, it upended traditional forms of local governance, such as elected village representatives, and at the height of its power reportedly distributed local political positions.¹⁹

Lethal violence in Tierra Caliente peaked after a series of federal offensives, with police and army deployed in large numbers to the region following Calderón's decision to militarise anti-organised crime operations in 2006. From 2013, federal forces teamed up with vigilantes calling themselves "self-defence groups" (*autodefensas*) to fracture the Knights Templar, the Michoacán Family's successor organisation, which dominated the region at the time. Local informants assert that this exercise was successful primarily because criminal cells assisted the "legitimate" parts of the *autodefensas*. These cells allegedly included armed units of the Knights Templar that had turned against their former bosses. A second-in-command of one of the latter said it had been his and other such groups that "had done the dirty work" in the fight against the Knights Templar.²⁰

Following the disintegration of the Knights Templar and the imprisonment and partial disarmament of "legitimate" *autodefensa* groups, Tierra Caliente has emerged as a zone of conflict between a plethora of small to medium-sized groups, most of which split off from the Knights Templar.²¹ These organisations control patches of territory, engage in frequent armed clashes and drive the internal displacement of civilians.²² At 85.73 per 100,000 people, the 2017 homicide rate in the municipality of Apatzingán, centre stage of the worst fighting, was more than four times the national average of 20.51, making it the eleventh most violent town in Mexico.²³

These groups extort local residents and businesses and also produce and traffic in drugs, particularly crystal methamphetamine. Some of the lethal violence in Tierra

¹⁸ The other organisations were Los Zetas and the Sinaloa, Juárez, Gulf and Tijuana cartels. The website narcodata.animalpolitico.com traces the development of Mexican organised crime.

¹⁹ Unless otherwise stated, this section is based on Crisis Group research and interviews conducted on site in December 2017 and May 2018 with local civilians and current and former members of organised crime, including from the Michoacán Family and the Knights Templar, as well as vigilante groups.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Michoacán, May 2018. The federal government's envoy to the state at the time, Alfredo Castillo, has denied that the collaboration with the *autodefensas* happened. See "Registró y dio armas, pero lo niega", *Reforma*, 4 January 2016.

²¹ Local informants, including former *autodefensa* commanders, accuse the federal government of having first used these groups as a means to fracture the Knights Templar, and to have imprisoned a number of its members as they threatened to become too hard to control. See also "El exlíder de autodefensas José Manuel Mireles no está arrepentido", *The New York Times*, 5 March 2018.

²² Crisis Group telephone interviews, family member of displaced local civilians, April 2018. The source said entire families with kinship ties to one criminal group had been given 24 hours to leave the area before being killed, after it was taken over by a rival. He said 40 people under threat, including children, had fled to Tijuana and Mexico City. The World Bank estimated that, as of the end of 2015, there were 287,000 internally displaced persons in Mexico. See "Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced and Their Hosts", World Bank Group, June 2017.

²³ "La violencia en los municipios de México (2017): La reconfiguración del mapa de la violencia", Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y Justicia Penal, February 2018.

Caliente, however, is profoundly intimate, with communities and families pitted against each other due to decades-long cycles of revenge killings, which also target “uninvolved” family members. The recent fragmentation of the criminal landscape has exacerbated these longstanding vendettas.

“There are certain things that cannot be forgiven”, said a leader of a criminal cell still operating under the Knights Templar label. He called those who had switched sides *chapulines* [“grasshoppers”, ie, turncoats], and said “many of those who die ... have to because of their treason”, though they may no longer be involved in illicit activity.²⁴ In a similar vein, a former *autodefensa* commander with acquaintances and family members in several local crime groups said “they [those involved] all know each other”, which made it all the harder to interrupt the cycles of violence. He stated that he himself, when he returned to the region in 2013 after spending a decade outside the state, “wanted revenge ... after they [the Michoacán Family] killed [a family member]”, and had participated in a number of operations against alleged members of the Knights Templar.²⁵ These cyclical feuds in Tierra Caliente have been accentuated by the past twelve years of violent turf competition and the fallout of misguided state interventions.

B. *Salamanca, Guanajuato*

Salamanca, in the central state of Guanajuato, starkly demonstrates the transformation of Mexican crime and its increasingly lethal nature. Violence has spiralled upward in the state with the geographic spread and diversification of organised crime, while the erosion of local state institutions, the police foremost among them, has made it harder to stem the tide.

The municipality, the second most violent in the state, lies in a corridor for oil and gas pipelines. One of Mexico’s oldest refineries is located here.²⁶ Guanajuato recorded just 229 homicides in 2007. This figure rose to 604 by the end of 2011, and 1,096 in 2017.²⁷ From January to April 2018 alone, 768 murders were recorded.²⁸ Authorities believe competition among criminal groups over oil siphoning, called *huachicoleo*, is driving the spike in lethal violence, with the Guanajuato state attorney saying this illicit business explains 85 per cent of homicides in the region.²⁹ The state-owned energy company Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) recorded 10,363 clandestine taps into its pipelines nationwide in 2017 – up from 213 the previous year. Guanajuato accounted for 17.9 per cent of these taps, more than any other region.³⁰

Local inhabitants – including municipal employees and a taxi driver who described how colleagues and other locals commonly bought *huachicol* (siphoned gasoline)

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Michoacán, December 2017.

²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Michoacán, May 2018.

²⁶ See “Celaya, Salamanca y Silao, en el estado los más violentos”, *Periódico Correo*, 9 February 2018.

²⁷ “Cifras de homicidio doloso, secuestro, extorsión y robo de vehículos 1997-2017”, Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, Secretariat of the Interior, 20 May 2018.

²⁸ “Incidencia Delictiva del Fuero Común 2018”, Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, Secretariat of the Interior, May 2018.

²⁹ See “Asesinatos con arma de fuego en Guanajuato se triplican desde 2015”, *El Financiero*, 3 June 2018.

³⁰ “Tomas clandestinas tocan nuevo récord en el 2017”, *El Economista*, 4 February 2018.

from “clandestine gas stations” at a fraction of the market price – said both organised oil siphoning and authorities’ collusion in the practice went back “decades”. “Their [safe] houses”, said one, “are right next to the refinery, and everybody knows it”.³¹ Recruitment of young men by criminal groups, they added, had picked up steam at a time when job opportunities had dwindled due to cutbacks at PEMEX as part of the federal government’s energy sector reform.³² They added that the only other sizable employer in the area, a Mazda plant, was losing workers to gangs because its wages were lower.

In the last two years, local inhabitants and state personnel said, criminal cells operating under the label of the Jalisco Cartel New Generation had pushed into the area from neighbouring states, destabilising established arrangements between local state officials and criminal groups and using extreme violence.³³ These cells have ambushed municipal policemen, killing or abducting them.³⁴ On 18 August 2017, armed men believed to be part of Jalisco Cartel New Generation stopped three police officers, tortured them and then filmed them accusing police commanders of collusion with rivals. The video was broadcast on social media and the three officers were found dead the next day. A psychologist working for the municipality said this incident sent fear rippling among the local police, with dozens of officers resigning over the following days.³⁵ Shortly afterward, the municipal police force was dissolved altogether under reported pressure from the federal attorney general’s office, which had started an investigation into the matter.³⁶

Salamanca residents said the shake-up in the criminal landscape had made them feel less safe, because Jalisco Cartel New Generation was wiping out the comparatively harmless local crooks. “Before there was a [criminal] leader we all knew ... and who didn’t mess with us. Now comes the cartel. They don’t know us, and there’s panic”, one resident said.³⁷ The resident added that people in Salamanca had discontinued regular neighbourhood meetings because “unknown people had shown up”. Territorial takeovers elsewhere by Jalisco Cartel New Generation have involved extortion and kidnapping for ransom. There are few reports of these practices in Salamanca thus far, which may mean that public safety in the area has not yet hit rock bottom.

A particular concern is the breach of trust between local residents and state security forces. Guanajuato’s State Public Security Forces (Fuerzas de Seguridad Pública del Estado), militarised units which locals refer to as the “grey fury”, have taken over

³¹ Interviews and informal conversations with locals cited in this section were conducted on site by Crisis Group in May 2018.

³² See “Farmouts: Desinversión en Pemex”, *Oil and Gas Magazine*, 7 December 2017; “Salamanca: desastre laboral, pero el sindicato despilfarra en festejos”, *Proceso*, 30 March 2016.

³³ The Cartel Jalisco New Generation is considered the “winner” of Peña Nieto’s term, having rapidly grown in size and territorial presence. See “The brutal rise of El Mencho”, *Rolling Stone*, 11 July 2017.

³⁴ Through August 2018, 49 police officers were killed in Guanajuato, as compared to a total of 57 from 2007 through 2017. See “¿Por qué están matando a los policías de GTO?”, *Milenio*, 27 August 2018. One incident involved six unarmed officers gunned down in a routine traffic stop in Salamanca on 2 June. See “Asesinan a 6 elementos de Tránsito desarmados en Salamanca”, *Zona Franca*, 2 June 2018.

³⁵ Crisis Group interview, Guanajuato, May 2018.

³⁶ See also “Desmantelan policía de Salamanca”, *El Salmantino*, 15 September 2017.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Guanajuato, May 2018.

policing in Salamanca. These units, they said, “don’t know the area and don’t come to the hotspots”, adding that state police no longer answer their calls for assistance with burglaries and armed robberies – their main preoccupation. Instead, the “grey fury” are busy guarding thoroughfares and supermarket chains, allegedly responding to the business sector’s demands, instead of protecting regular citizens.³⁸

C. *Ecatepec, State of Mexico*

Ecatepec is the poorest municipality in Mexico City’s vast metropolitan area.³⁹ Long notorious for its high rates of crime and violence, during the Peña Nieto administration it ranked consistently high or highest among the country’s municipalities in cases of homicide, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, burglary, car theft and cargo theft.⁴⁰ Ecatepec is also one of the most dangerous places in the country to be a woman, with 383 murders of women registered from 2011 through 2016.⁴¹ With 92.3 per cent of its citizens reporting that they feel at risk of crime or violence, it ranks seventh among Mexico’s urban areas in public perceptions of insecurity.⁴²

A local activist working with at-risk youths in one of the main hotspots in Ecatepec, where criminal lookouts watch for outsiders and strange movements, said youth gangs were once the most violent actors here. According to the activists, those gangs have, however, been “finishing each other off, killing each other or going to jail”. From around the age of fourteen, Ecatepec youngsters now join locally rooted mafias that have replaced the less hierarchical gangs, running *tienditas* (“little shops”, or illegal drug retail points) and safe houses where kidnapping victims and stolen goods are kept. In this neighbourhood less than one square kilometre in size, he said, five such groups are jostling for turf: “The way you do it is by sowing terror. Say, if you, as a leader of one mafia, want to take over the territory of another, you start killing his people ... and his family members, so that he backs down”.⁴³

Inflaming these micro-turf wars are national criminal organisations such as the Michoacán Family and the Beltrán Leyva Organisation.⁴⁴ They have pushed into

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Guanajuato, May 2018. Guanajuato state Governor Miguel Márquez Márquez has repeatedly stated the “grey fury” was among the “best paid, prepared and equipped” police forces in Mexico. See “Policías Estatales son de las mejores pagadas, asegura Márquez”, *AM León*, 5 April 2018. His secretary of public security has highlighted advances in policing, but granted that “much remains to be done”. See “Conmemoran aniversario de FSPE”, *Artículo7*, 14 March 2018.

³⁹ See “Pobreza a nivel municipio 2010 y 2015”, National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy, December 2017. Pope Francis famously visited Ecatepec and addressed a congregation of 300,000 people during his trip to Mexico in February 2016. “Francisco clamó por un México de donde nadie tenga que emigrar”, *La Nación*, 15 February 2016.

⁴⁰ See “Incidencia delictiva del fuero común”, Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, Secretariat of the Interior.

⁴¹ See “La violencia feminicida en México, aproximaciones y tendencias 1985-2016”, UN Women, December 2017.

⁴² See “Encuesta Nacional de Seguridad Urbana”, INEGI, March 2018.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, state of Mexico, May 2018.

⁴⁴ The Michoacán Family split in half following an internal feud in 2010. The dominant faction rebranded itself as the Knights Templar, but cells operating outside of Michoacán, including in the state of Mexico, have kept the original name while cutting many ties with the Knights Templar.

Ecatepec in the past decade, striking alliances with local groups and imposing themselves as sole drug suppliers, as well as taking up lead roles in extortion. Here, too, alleged collusion with politicians and police, at both the municipal and state levels, has reportedly been instrumental to criminal colonisation and impunity.⁴⁵ As a result, Ecatepec has become another arena of violent competition for national organised crime groups, accentuating existing levels of lethal violence.⁴⁶ The municipality and surrounding areas now resemble a patchwork where a combination of low-level street crime and organised criminal incursions drive increasing levels of violence in a municipality that is already in the top ten in Mexico for numbers of homicides from 2011 to 2017.⁴⁷

Intensified criminal competition could lead violence to escalate further and wider. A prominent politician from a suburb next to Ecatepec said that oil siphoning has become more common in the past couple of years, adding that three well-identified local groups are behind it.⁴⁸ If new criminal competitors were to challenge these three for dominance, this area next to Ecatepec could soon resemble Salamanca. Local informants said larger crime groups are also well established in the same municipality, but use it primarily as an operational hub for cargo theft on the highways running into Mexico City and other commercial districts in the state of Mexico. While these groups currently do not target civilians for extortion or kidnapping for ransom, local inhabitants and officials express fear that they could soon take that predatory turn.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ For an overview of state-criminal ties in the state of Mexico, see Humberto Padgett, *La monarquía de la barbarie* (Mexico City, 2017). Eruviel Ávila, former municipal president of Ecatepec and governor of the state of Mexico, has repeatedly rejected accusations of corruption and collusion against him. See “Eruviel Ávila rechaza enriquecimiento ilícito y pide ‘no manchar’ el prestigio de la UAEM”, *Proceso*, 7 September 2017. He has also sued the Mexican journalist Humberto Padgett for defamation after Padgett referred to criminal acts allegedly committed by Ávila. See “Eruviel, vicecoordinador de campaña de Meade, demanda al periodista Humberto Padgett por 10 millones”, *Sin Embargo*, 1 May 2018. The case is pending.

⁴⁶ See Juliana Fregoso, “Cómo se (sobre)vive en Ecatepec, la ciudad más peligrosa de México”, *Infobae*, 30 July 2017. “What’s behind the violence in Ecatepec, Mexico City’s sprawling suburb?”, *InSight Crime*, 17 April 2017.

⁴⁷ See Kimberly Heinle, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira and David A. Shirk, “Drug violence in Mexico data and analysis through 2016”, Justice in Mexico Special Report, March 2017. “EPN enfocó 2017 en 50 municipios más violentos, y ni así: la mayoría tuvo cifra récord de homicidios”, *Sin Embargo*, 31 January 2018.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, state of Mexico, May 2018. In 2017, clandestine taps in the state of Mexico accounted for 9.4 per cent of the national total, placing it 6th in all Mexican states for this illicit activity. See “Tomas clandestinas tocan”, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interviews, state of Mexico, May 2018.

III. Obstacles to Security Reform

The local variations in Mexico's patterns of crime and conflict pose major challenges for any future federal government strategy. But the fate of López Obrador's plans to improve public security also hinges on whether he will be able to rein in Mexico's security forces – and rely upon them to fight crime. Corruption, collusion and authoritarianism in the police and the armed forces has undermined their adherence to the law and their operational effectiveness. Internal resistance to establishing a system of external oversight for these forces is entrenched.⁵⁰

A. *A Divided State*

Government officials tend to portray Mexico's violence as a symptom of the battle between the state and organised crime.⁵¹ By defining a clear enemy, officials use this diagnosis to justify extensive military involvement in public security. In reality, however, the boundaries between the Mexican state and organised crime are porous. This is especially true at the municipal level, the state's most embattled echelon. The progressive democratisation of Mexico from 1989 onward, and the rise of a genuine multi-party system from 2000, unsettled the pacts that had existed for decades between criminals and authorities in the PRI's one-party state.⁵² Electoral democracy exposed local politicians to lethal violence, either because they were associated with one side of a criminal feud or because they refused to engage with illicit actors at all. According to the National Mayors' Association, 121 current and former mayors were

⁵⁰ See "Undeniable atrocities: confronting crimes against humanity in Mexico", Open Society Justice Initiative, 2016; "Overlooking justice: human rights violations committed by Mexican soldiers against civilians are met with impunity", Washington Office on Latin America, November 2017. The U.S. State Department stated in 2017 that in Mexico the "most significant human rights issues included involvement by police, military, and other state officials, sometimes in coordination with criminal organizations, in unlawful killings, disappearances, and torture ... [and] arbitrary arrests and detentions", and highlighted "reports [by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission that] the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, often with impunity", as well as that "[o]rganized criminal groups also were implicated in numerous killings, acting with impunity and at times in league with corrupt federal, state, local, and security officials". See "Mexico 2017 Human Rights Country Report", U.S. Department of State, 2018. For the National Human Rights Commission's documentation, see eg "Informe especial de la Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos sobre desaparición de personas y fosas clandestinas en México", National Human Rights Commission, 2017. As mentioned above, the government responded to the Open Society report by saying by far the greatest number of violent offenses are committed by criminal organisations, that the armed forces have protocols to ensure their actions respect human rights, and that the state is committed to investigating any reported abuses. "Responde México a informe Open Society", *El Universal*, 7 June 2016.

⁵¹ In the words of one analyst, it is regarded a "cartel-state conflict in which drug-trafficking organizations fight ... the state itself". Benjamin Lessing, "Logics of Violence in Criminal War", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 59, no. 8 (2015), pp. 1486-1516.

⁵² See Richard Snyder and Angelica Durán-Martínez, "Does illegality breed violence? Drug trafficking and state-sponsored protection rackets", *Crime, Law and Social Change*, vol. 52, no. 3 (2009); Luis Astorga, *El siglo de las drogas: El narcotráfico, del Porfiriato al nuevo milenio* (Mexico City, 2005).

assassinated in the period 2006 to 12 April 2018, making “the role of mayor ... one of the deadliest and riskiest professional positions in the country”.⁵³

A cornerstone of Mexico’s democracy, decentralisation initially gave municipalities nearly unchecked autonomy. But there are no effective financial oversight mechanisms at the municipal level, nor sufficient resources to strengthen the workings of local institutions. One expert on state transparency pointed to a “complete abandonment of the municipality [by the federal government]”, allowing for the entrenchment of local networks of corruption, collusion and patronage.⁵⁴

A coordinator for an opposition party campaign in a state of Mexico municipality claimed such practices remained essential to the preservation of political power. “There is not a single party [here] that is not involved in vote buying”, he said.⁵⁵ He alleged that in some cases financial support for this purpose came – largely in cash and undeclared – from private interests such as construction companies, which would be handed benefits such as public contracts or land use permits in the event of the candidate’s victory.⁵⁶

Above all, the failure to curb these practices in Mexico’s most violent areas has provided organised crime with prefabricated means of state capture.⁵⁷ It has, in the words of a high-level UN representative, propelled a “vicious cycle of centralisation of public security and militarisation”. The poor local governance, he added, has led federal authorities to progressively strip municipalities of their security and policing responsibilities, but not work at staving off criminal infiltration or undertake systematic reform of these institutions.⁵⁸ Party loyalty is also crucial to determining whether the federal government subsidises municipal security budgets, with opposition-held municipalities frequently snubbed, exposing officials from these local authorities to higher risks of criminal violence.⁵⁹

Municipal police forces have suffered from this criminal takeover. From 1998 to early 2017, of the 2,220 police officers killed, 998 served at the municipal level.⁶⁰ At

⁵³ David Pérez Esparza and Helden De Paz Mancera, “Mayoral homicides in Mexico: A situational analysis on the victims, perpetrators and locations of attacks”, Rice University Baker Institute for Public Policy Mexico Center, June 2018. For the number of mayors killed, see “Violencia contra los alcaldes en México: más de 100 asesinados desde 2006”, CNN Español, 13 April 2018. See also Guillermo Trejo and Sandra Ley, “Municipios bajo fuego (1995-2014)”, *Nexos*, 1 February 2015; Laura Calderón, “An analysis of mayoral assassinations in Mexico, 2000-17”, Justice in Mexico Working Paper, January 2018.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, Jaime Hernández, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, Mexico City, 22 May 2018.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, state of Mexico, May 2018. On voter fraud and its connection to organised crime, see Leonardo Curzio, “Mexico: Organized Crime and Elections”, in Kevin Casas-Zamora, *Dangerous Liaisons: Organized Crime and Political Finance in Latin America and Beyond* (Washington, 2013), pp. 136-164. See also Luis Carlos Ugalde, “Democracia a precio alzado”, *Nexos*, August 2015 (Ugalde is the former head of Mexico’s electoral authority).

⁵⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, June 2018. See also Ugalde, “Democracia a precio alzado”, op. cit.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group telephone interview, Joel Ortega, expert on Mexican patronage, National Autonomous University of Mexico, 14 June 2018.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, Mexico City, May 2018.

⁵⁹ See “Municipios bajo fuego”, op. cit.

⁶⁰ See “En dos décadas, 2 mil 220 policías han sido asesinados”, *La Jornada*, 30 April 2017; “2017, también el año más violento para policías”, *El Universal*, 28 December 2017.

the same time, the dissolution or replacement of municipal police with federal or state police forces has become the standard response to alleged corruption and criminal collusion.⁶¹ Enhancing the municipal police's probity and professionalism in order to gradually restore their powers will be essential to improving local security across Mexico. Yet, with 27 of 32 federated entities and the majority of municipalities held by parties other than MORENA, the process of strengthening municipal police, and the risk of handing influence over these bodies to local political rivals, will raise dilemmas for the López Obrador administration. Controversy already surrounds the plan to appoint "state delegates", intended to act as the federal government's bridge-heads in each federated region, with various state governors and political opponents accusing the president-elect of seeking to centralise power, especially as these delegates would be given budget allocation powers.⁶²

B. *The Contradictory Roles of the Armed Forces*

Security provision has become overwhelmingly dependent on the armed forces.⁶³ But despite the widespread perception that the military is the only institution capable of confronting organised crime, as well as continued public and political support for its role, it has so far failed to deliver the expected results.⁶⁴ The flaws in the military-led approach include lack of planning for strengthening civilian state institutions in affected areas, as well as failure to address the spillover of criminal activity into adjacent districts following military deployment.⁶⁵

There are also questions as to the armed forces' operational effectiveness in the fight against organised crime, their coordination with other state bodies and their compliance with the law. A high-ranking naval officer, in charge of coordinating operations in one of Mexico's most embattled areas, said collusion between organ-

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Juan Salgado, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, Mexico City, 4 May 2018. For an overview, see "Mexico's police: many reforms, little progress", Washington Office on Latin America, May 2014; Sabet, *Police Reform*, op. cit.

⁶² See "Los coordinadores estatales de AMLO generan incertidumbre entre gobernadores", *ADN Político*, 2 August 2018; "Senadores y diputados del PRI van contra delegados de AMLO", *Milenio*, 23 August 2018.

⁶³ Since 2013, the Mexican armed forces' budget has increased by 35.86 per cent to 112.3 billion Mexican pesos (about \$5.6 billion). See "Aumentó 29,652 mdp presupuesto de fuerzas armadas", *El Economista*, 2 January 2018. As stated above, the number of troops deployed also went up.

⁶⁴ See "Necesitamos al Ejército porque estamos perdiendo el país: Mario Arroyo", *Vanguardia*, 21 December 2017. The navy, with 88 per cent public support, and the army, with 84.8 per cent, remain the most trusted Mexican institutions. See "Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública 2017", INEGI, September 2017. State governors have repeatedly asked for (an increase in the) deployment of armed forces. See "Pide Gobernador que Ejército tome control en los estados", *Multimedios*, 5 May 2017. "Piden presencia permanente de Fuerzas Armadas en Tamaulipas", *Excelsior*, 17 October 2017.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Mexico City, 4 May 2018. On this "balloon" or "cockroach" effect, see Bagley, "Drug trafficking", op. cit. According to Raúl Benítez Manaut, a military expert, "military action has achieved partial success in a few states and against certain crime groups, but it has not been able to prevent their expansion and fragmentation, which raises a lot of questions for different police bodies even in cities that had not endured narco-trafficking violence in previous years". "Los seis modelos policíacos en México y el debate sobre la seguridad pública", in Raúl Benítez Manaut and Sergio Aguayo Quezada (eds.), *Atlas de la seguridad y de la defensa 2016* (Mexico City, 2017).

ised crime and government was “common” and undermined inter-institutional trust and cooperation.⁶⁶ In particular, he said he had repeatedly been kept from acting on intelligence tips, such as the whereabouts of criminal leaders. He said he had been unwilling, on a number of occasions, to risk the physical well-being or legal standing of his own personnel “for nothing”.⁶⁷

Allegations of military complicity in organised crime are not uncommon, either, despite repeated dismissals of these claims by high-level Mexican authorities.⁶⁸ A former high-ranking federal security officer claimed that “[poppy] crops in Guerrero are being looked after by the army”. He added that organised crime and the army engage in “delimitation of spaces”, with designated poppy fields “given up” for eradication every once in a while. “It’s a publicity game. You’ve got to give something to the police, the armed forces, to make them look good, to make national security politics look good”, he said.⁶⁹

Mirroring these allegations, the coordinator of a criminal group competing over the Tierra Caliente region in Michoacán said buying information from local military commanders had been crucial to his group’s survival. Such information allowed him to anticipate attacks by either state or rival criminal forces and to gather intelligence on competitors. In return, he said, he also fed information about the latter back to the same commanders, who allegedly acted on the tips.⁷⁰

Political pressure to show results has also reportedly driven the military to violence and unscrupulous behaviour. Human rights and other civil society groups have accused the military of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings on a scale that amounts to crimes against humanity.⁷¹ On 11 June 2018, a number of these groups presented a document before the International Criminal Court detailing armed forces’ alleged involvement in such acts.⁷² On 30 May 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said there were “strong indications” that “federal

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, high-ranking naval officer, June 2018. See also Anabel Hernández, *Los señores del narco* (Mexico City, 2012). For an historical account, see Luis Astorga, *Seguridad, traficantes y militares* (Mexico City, 2007).

⁶⁷ The armed forces often complain about the lack of legal certainty and political support, as well as the risk of being accused of human rights violations. See, for example, “Reprocha Cienfuegos falta de apoyo de Segob: ‘no estamos a gusto persiguiendo delincuentes’, dice”, *Proceso*, 8 December 2016. The Mexican military, as well as President Peña Nieto, have repeatedly denied accusations that the armed forces are involved in illegal violence, forced disappearances or collusion with criminal groups in Guerrero. See “Asegura comisionado de la SEDENA que militares no son responsables de la violencia”, *SDP Noticias*, 15 March 2018; “Ejército, sin responsabilidad en Ayotzinapa: EPN”, *El Financiero*, 17 February 2015.

⁶⁸ For the military’s denials of such activities, see footnote 69.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, May 2018. On the historical continuity of corruption and collusion within Mexico’s armed forces, see Astorga, *Seguridad, traficantes y militares*, op. cit.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Michoacán, December 2017. As mentioned above, the military and President Peña Nieto have repeatedly denied such accusations.

⁷¹ See “Undeniable atrocities: confronting crimes against humanity in Mexico”, Open Society Justice Initiative, op. cit.

⁷² See “Comunicación de acuerdo con el artículo 15 del Estatuto de Roma de la Corte Penal Internacional sobre la presunta comisión de crímenes de lesa humanidad en Chihuahua, México entre 2008 y 2010”, International Federation for Human Rights et al., June 2018.

security forces” were behind “a wave of disappearances in and around the city of Nuevo Laredo” in Tamaulipas on the U.S. border.⁷³

The armed forces’ alleged participation in criminal acts extends to a number of unresolved high-profile cases such as the disappearance of 43 students from Guerrero’s Ayotzinapa teaching college and the killing of 22 persons, at least twelve of them execution-style, in Tlatlaya, state of Mexico, both in 2014.⁷⁴ These cases form part of an overall increase in violence in areas where the armed forces confronted criminal groups.⁷⁵ Scholars also argue the military’s abuses have further weakened Mexican state institutions, alienating locals and allowing criminals to acquire social control and legitimacy.⁷⁶

C. *Crime and Impunity in Federal Security Forces*

To date, federal security forces have resisted external oversight. A recent report found that Mexico’s attorney general’s office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) obtained convictions in just 3.2 per cent of the investigations it undertook into the armed forces’ human rights abuses between 2012 and 2016. The report highlighted techniques of obstruction employed by officers in the security forces, including false testimonies and alteration of crime scenes, adding that “the PGR has not shown the political will to undertake serious and thorough investigations”.⁷⁷

The Federal Police, which has about 40,000 members, operates in all 32 Mexican states. Former President Calderón made them the spearhead of his anti-organised crime campaign. A coercive regime in the police reportedly compels lower-ranking officers to comply with illegal practices. According to a former senior officer in the

⁷³ “Zeid urges Mexico to act to end wave of disappearances in Nuevo Laredo”, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 30 May 2018. The government has confirmed that the disappearances will be investigated. “Gobierno indagará versión de desaparecidos en Nuevo Laredo”, *Excelsior*, 30 May 2018.

⁷⁴ On the first incident, see Crisis Group Report, *Disappeared: Justice Denied in Mexico’s Guerrero State*, op. cit.; “Informe Ayotzinapa II”, Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes, Interamerican Human Rights Commission, Organization of American States, 2016. On the second, see “Recomendación No. 51/2014, Sobre los hechos ocurridos el 30 de Junio de 2014 en Cuadrilla Nueva, Comunidad San Pedro Limón, Municipio de Tlatlaya, Estado de México”, National Human Rights Commission, 21 October 2014. Enrique Peña Nieto, who was president when the disappearances took place, has repeatedly underlined the existence of “clear evidence” that the students were abducted and “incinerated” by a criminal group. See “Peña Nieto insiste: ‘tengo la convicción de que los 43 normalistas de Ayotzinapa fueron incinerados’”, *Proceso*, 29 August 2018.

⁷⁵ See Laura Atuesta, “Las cuentas de la militarización”, *Nexos*, 1 March 2017.

⁷⁶ See Diane Davis, “Non-State Armed Actors, New Imagined Communities and Shifting Patterns of Sovereignty and Insecurity in the Modern World”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2009); Wil Pansters, “Drug Trafficking, the Informal Order and *Caciques*: Reflections on the Crime-Governance Nexus in Mexico”, *Global Crime*, 18 May 2018 (online); Wil Pansters et al. (ed.), *Beyond the Drug War in Mexico: Human Rights, the Public Sphere and Justice* (New York, 2018).

⁷⁷ “Overlooking justice”, op. cit. The government responded to the report by saying it would investigate “diligently” the alleged crimes against civilians committed by the armed forces, while underlining the Mexican public’s “trust and appreciation” of the military. “Gobierno mexicano defiende FF AA tras informe que denuncia delitos e impunidad”, EFE, 8 November 2017. The PGR’s lack of independence is reported to be one reason for Mexico’s impunity epidemic. See “Perpetuar la impunidad o deconstruir la PGR”, *Animal Político*, 14 April 2017.

Federal Police's internal human rights unit, the types of retribution range from labour rights violations such as withholding vacation time to physical punishments such as beatings with wooden paddles.⁷⁸ Non-compliant officers are deployed to areas where attacks by organised crime are frequent or which authorities have "given up" – meaning "either that organised crime kills you or that [the police] frame you for a crime you didn't commit".⁷⁹ Fear of repression, officers' ignorance regarding their own rights and an institutional culture that militates against whistleblowing, as well as the absence of independent, external oversight, all keep officers from reporting these abuses, the former senior officer said. He added that "if you stick to the idea of doing things the clean way, you'll never make it to a commanding position", meaning that accountability is often sacrificed for personal career advancement.⁸⁰

These conditions, he said, allowed "generalised corruption" within the Federal Police to continue unabated, with "different subcultures of corruption" prevalent in each division. In the Regional Security division (Seguridad Regional), in charge of policing highways, he said, illicit money flowed from "turning a blind eye to transporters", including drug traffickers, and selling protection to them. According to a consultant involved in efforts to professionalise the Federal Police during the Calderón administration, parts of the Regional Security division resisted reform so doggedly that it was eventually abandoned. "At one point", he said, "they simply threatened to overtly switch to the other side [organised crime] altogether".⁸¹

Because lower-ranking officers get so little backing and are routinely scapegoated when external pressure dictates, they often turn to crime themselves.⁸² Renewed efforts to reform the police must aim as a priority to break down the coercive and hierarchical systems that sustain corruption and collusion, and should prioritise the protection of junior officers against abuses by senior commanders. Gradually restoring civilian police forces as the providers of public security, rather than the armed forces, also requires improving working conditions by raising wages and providing adequate social benefits, as well as professionalising the police through mandatory participation in national academies aimed at training members of all forces, including municipal police. Given the current plight of municipal police forces, the government should run pilot reform projects in a limited number of localities so as to learn from and adapt these initiatives before extending them across the country.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, former senior police officer, Mexico City, 4 May 2018. In response to various reports denouncing torture and other crimes by the military and police, the Mexican government last year admitted to the "challenges it faces in terms of human rights" and reiterated its "unwavering commitment to respond to each of them". "Los policías, soldados y marinos torturan en México con toda impunidad: EU, ONU y Amnistía", *Sin Embargo*, 4 March 2017.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Two internal documents speak of regular corruption and rights abuses within the Federal Police, including the Regional Security division. One was prepared by the Federal Police's Internal Affairs division, the other by the internal General Adjunct Direction of Human Rights. See "Exhiben abusos dentro de la Policía Federal", *Reforma*, 27 May 2017; "Policía Federal: sus 'asuntos internos'", *Contralínea*, 17 September 2017.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, former police consultant, Mexico City, 4 May 2018.

⁸² Numerous recent cases point to collusion between police and organised crime. See "Corporaciones mafiosas en BC", *Zeta*, 15 February 2016; "El sacrificio de ser policía", *Animal Político*, 22 February 2017; "México: desintegraron a un cuerpo policial de élite por vínculos con el crimen organizado", *Infobae*, 1 August 2018.

IV. The President-elect's Policy Proposals

López Obrador's core proposals for security policy would mark a major and welcome change from the past twelve years' approach. Critics decry their vagueness, however, as well as the president-elect's vows to effect sweeping and rapid change while downplaying the complexity and severity of Mexico's security challenges and the difficulties in enacting reforms. According to one prominent political commentator, "the problem is, of course, not only in that 'what' but in the 'how'. Behind a large part of López Obrador's vows lies the faith in a personalised act of magic. The person is the method: the solution is none other than López Obrador himself".⁸³

The incoming administration would be well advised to allow a broad and open discussion about navigating the obstacles to security reform so as to prevent a backlash that would further erode citizen trust in government and democracy. Proceeding this way would demonstrate a spirit of transparency uncommon in recent Mexican governments and foster civil society participation in reforms. It would also help alert the public to the potential pitfalls ahead.

A. Economy and Corruption

López Obrador's flagship campaign promise to end Mexico's extreme insecurity rests in large part on his plan to tackle root causes of crime and organised crime recruitment: "Halfway into the term there will be no more war. We will have a totally different situation ... as there will be economic growth and generation of employment. As social programs are implemented, crime will go down in the country".⁸⁴ Equitable economic growth, the president-elect says, will be essential to reducing socio-economic inequality and absolute poverty, as well as improving legal job opportunities for young people who are the cohort most vulnerable to recruitment by organised crime and to lethal violence.⁸⁵ Repeating the motto "*becarios sí, sicarios no* [scholarships yes, hitmen no]", he has vowed to provide 2.3 million young people who are currently neither studying nor employed with monthly stipends of 3,600 Mexican pesos (roughly \$180).⁸⁶ López Obrador and his economic advisers have also promised to double the minimum wage, now 88 Mexican pesos (roughly \$4.60) a day,

⁸³ "La magia de López Obrador", *El Universal*, 4 June 2018.

⁸⁴ See "AMLO promete, y hasta pone fecha: 'A mitad de sexenio se acabó la guerra en México'", *Sin Embargo*, 2 January 2018.

⁸⁵ INEGI data show a homicide rate for 15 to 24-year-olds of 9/100,000 in 2007 and 24/100,000 in 2016. In 2016, this group accounted for 21.3 per cent of total homicides, whereas 15 to 34-year-olds accounted for 50 per cent. Estimates for underage members of organised crime range from 30,000 to 75,000 (Mexican NGO Cauce Común). See "Violencia, niñez y crimen organizado", Inter-American Court for Human Rights, November 2015. "75 mil jóvenes forman el 'brazo armado' del narco, sostiene ONG", *La Jornada*, 6 September 2011. While the degree to which they drive organised crime and lethal violence remains debatable, and findings vary across regions, both inequality and absolute poverty are widely considered contributing factors. See "Citizen Security with a Human Face: Evidence and Proposals for Latin America", United Nations Development Programme, November 2013. Bandy X. Lee, "Economic correlates of violent death rates in forty countries, 1962-2008: A cross-typological analysis", *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, vol. 19, no. 6 (November 2014).

⁸⁶ See "'Becarios sí, sicarios no', ¿qué hacer con los 'ninis'?", *Newsweek en Español*, 16 April 2018.

along the U.S.-Mexico border in 2019 and nationwide by 2024.⁸⁷ His transition team has announced a first increase to 101 Mexican pesos for 2019.⁸⁸

Both measures represent important steps forward, but whether they make a dent in organised crime recruitment will depend in large part on whether, and how quickly, the incoming government stimulates overall economic growth. The specifics of its economic policy are, as in other fields, yet to be defined, but planned measures include:

- ❑ Large-scale infrastructure projects, such as cargo train lines and ports, to increase Mexico's competitiveness;
- ❑ Reactivation of the oil industry through large-scale investment in existing refineries and the construction of two new ones;⁸⁹
- ❑ Stimulating the growth of small and medium-sized firms, and innovation, through public-private funds;
- ❑ Reducing Mexico's external dependence, particularly vis-à-vis the U.S., the destination of 74 per cent of exports and the origin of 49 per cent of imports,⁹⁰ by increasing and diversifying exports, stimulating the agricultural sector to foster self-sufficiency and guaranteeing prices for basic crops;⁹¹
- ❑ Spurring internal consumption and regional economic growth.⁹²

Parts of the private sector have raised concerns that financing these measures could increase public debt and undermine macroeconomic stability.⁹³ But López Obrador has said the state will generate funds in large part by extirpating corrupt practices, and revising and cancelling public contracts when fraud is detected.⁹⁴ Corrupt, cartel-

⁸⁷ See "Salario mínimo será suficiente en 2019 y al final del sexenio estará tasado al doble: Gerardo Esquivel", *El Sol de México*, 7 August 2018; "AMLO: el salario mínimo se duplicará en la frontera en 2019", *Nación* 321, 7 August 2018.

⁸⁸ See "López Obrador elevará el salario mínimo a 101 pesos en 2019, dice Esquivel", *Expansión*, 14 August 2018.

⁸⁹ See "Busca AMLO construcción de dos refinерías y modernizar las seis existentes", *El Universal*, 7 July 2018.

⁹⁰ Data through 2016 from the Observatory of Economic Complexity.

⁹¹ See "Incremento de la producción y autosuficiencia alimentaria, los enfoques para 'rescatar al campo': AMLO", *Proceso*, 16 August 2018.

⁹² See "Pejenomics: hacia una economía para todos", López Obrador campaign paper, May 2018.

⁹³ See "Fundamental mantener la estabilidad macroeconómica: sector privado", *El Economista*, 5 August 2018; "Sector privado pide que la propuesta del paquete económico 2018 sea realista y transparente", *El Economista*, 26 August 2018.

⁹⁴ See "Revisar contratos y acabar con la corrupción, ofrece AMLO a Cárdenas", *Proceso*, 24 May 2018. There are no exact studies as to what percentage of Mexico's GDP might be lost to corruption. Estimates range from .4 to 10 per cent. See "Verificado.mx: ¿La corrupción cuesta 9% del PIB en México?", *Animal Político*, 4 April 2018. Scholarly studies highlight a negative relationship between corruption and economic growth: see, for example, Raymond Fisman and Jakob Svensson, "Are Corruption and Taxation Really Harmful to Growth? Firm Level Evidence", *Journal of Development Economics*, vol. 83, no. 1 (2007). Yet the portion of proposed spending on social programs that could be covered by curbing corruption appears to be small. For youth support, for instance, the state has earmarked 108 billion Mexican pesos (roughly \$5.75 billion) for 2019 alone. See "Tres propuestas económicas de AMLO que ya cambiaron", *Expansión*, 19 September 2018. This amount dwarfs the 7.67 billion Mexican pesos (roughly \$410 million) embezzled in fiscal years 2013 and

like practices benefiting a small circle of well-connected enterprises, against which judicial authorities have routinely failed to act, are common and one of the main constraints on the country's growth, according to the World Bank.⁹⁵

Market analysts have raised doubts about the feasibility of López Obrador's economic proposals and underscored their potential to destabilise Mexico's economy and currency, chiefly due to the country's dependence on international trade flows. The rating agency Fitch said it expects greater state intervention and public spending under López Obrador, as well as slower energy-sector reform, which it said could lead to volatility in financial markets and slower growth.⁹⁶ López Obrador has attempted to soothe these concerns by promising "republican austerity", which includes laying off staff in the bureaucratic apparatus and enforcing a constitutional article establishing the president's salary as the ceiling for all public officials. He pledges to cut his own monthly pay in half to about \$3,500 after tax.⁹⁷ The president-elect has also rebuffed claims that he would sever trading links with other countries and gradually backed away from earlier plans that ruffled the private sector's feathers.⁹⁸

As for ending fraudulent public-private contracts, López Obrador has not specified the nature of the independent oversight mechanisms that could carry out this job. Furthermore, the president-elect has not promised to support a truly independent attorney general's office but said instead he will propose three candidates for attorney general for Congress to choose from, a move that, according to some critics, opens the door to political influence over the appointment.⁹⁹ As for ingrained corruption in

2014 through fraudulent public contracts, the most serious case uncovered so far. See "La estafa maestra, Graduados en desaparecer dinero público", *Animal Político*, 5 September 2017.

⁹⁵ See Santiago Levy and Michael Walton (eds.), *No Growth without Equity? Inequality, Interests and Competition in Mexico* (Washington, 2009). For a thorough investigation of practices of corruption, impunity and the embezzlement of public funds through public contracts, see "La estafa maestra", op. cit.

⁹⁶ See "Fitch ve más intervención estatal y mayor gasto fiscal si gana AMLO", *El Financiero*, 16 March 2018. CitiBanamex, Citibank's Mexican subsidiary, has advanced a similar analysis.

⁹⁷ See "AMLO adelanta que su salario mensual será de 108 mil pesos", *El Universal*, 15 July 2018; "López Obrador anuncia nuevos recortes a la burocracia y centralización de funciones", *Proceso*, 21 August 2018.

⁹⁸ See "AMLO promete plan de austeridad republicana", *Excelsior*, 13 May 2018. The earlier plans include pledges to reverse the partial privatisation of the energy sector and cancel construction of a new Mexico City airport. The transition team announced a referendum on the second matter. See "Las 4 promesas de campaña que López Obrador está replanteando", *Nación 321*, 23 August 2018.

⁹⁹ "Designación del fiscal general, desacuerdo entre AMLO y Coparmex", *El Financiero*, 17 May 2018. Suffering from a lack of funds, staff, professional skills and political independence – its head is appointed by the president – the PGR is considered a leading cause of Mexico's impunity rates. It stands accused of refraining from prosecuting high-level corruption and properly investigating the alleged role of state actors in crimes against humanity. See, for example, "La PGR se resiste a dar avances de investigación en caso Odebrecht pese a exhorto del SNA", *Proceso*, 17 April 2018; "México: exculpan a Peña Nieto por el caso 'Casa Blanca'", BBC Mundo, 21 August 2015; "Mission unaccomplished: Mexico's new criminal justice system is still a work in progress", Washington Office on Latin America, July 2016. "Informe especial sobre recomendaciones en trámite", 8 May 2016; "Report on Mexico of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment", A/HRC/28/68/Add.3, 29 December 2014.

state institutions, López Obrador has not strayed beyond his campaign assertion that leading by example will trigger the desired resurgence of ethical propriety.¹⁰⁰

A quick economic fix appears improbable in the areas of Mexico most afflicted by conflict, where extreme poverty has gone hand in hand with drug trafficking for decades. Tierra Caliente, for instance, saw a major state-led effort to boost agriculture in the 1960s and 1970s, though the investment petered out without generating an economic transformation.¹⁰¹ Locals remain sceptical: they routinely see their sons find a career path in organised crime while others subsist on the margins of the economy. In the same vein, a former high-ranking member of the Michoacán Family said: “None of this [the conflict] will end until poverty is resolved”.¹⁰²

B. *Peacebuilding in Active Conflicts*

Aside from economic reform, López Obrador’s main strategy for mitigating Mexico’s violence is a package of peacebuilding measures including transitional justice, truth commissions and amnesties. Key members of López Obrador’s transition team have also said they would seek to work with the International Narcotics Control Board as the responsible UN body “to make more flexible a treaty as rigid as the one we signed in the ‘70s”, in reference to the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs signed in 1961 and amended in 1972.¹⁰³ They say they plan to “depenalise, not legalise” marijuana cultivation and consumption, in the short term, as well as poppy cultivation to supply the domestic pharmaceutical industry “in the future”. Both the peacebuilding measures and the less draconian stance on drugs would aim to make crime less rewarding in areas such as Guerrero, the main poppy-producing region in Mexico and one of its most violent.¹⁰⁴

In theory, a more effective crime-fighting initiative would be to fully legalise marijuana production and consumption and to legalise poppy cultivation for pharmaceutical uses. Yet, as highlighted above, Mexican organised crime has been gravitating toward local, predatory rackets and away from drug production and trafficking. Organised crime has adapted to state offensives by splitting into smaller groups, some of which are cut off from transnational trafficking routes.¹⁰⁵ Whether or not legalisation would reduce criminal violence would hinge on the incoming government’s success in breaking organised crime’s grip upon local economies and populations. Otherwise, state-regulated drug markets could fall prey to extortion and become another source

¹⁰⁰ See “AMLO: Acabar con la corrupción”, *Proceso*, 3 March 2018.

¹⁰¹ See Maldonado, *Los márgenes*, op. cit.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, Michoacán, December 2017.

¹⁰³ See “Plantaremos a ONU despenalización de drogas: Sánchez Cordero”, *Excélsior*, 22 August 2018. The Convention and its ensuing Protocol prohibit any non-medical and non-scientific use of Schedule 1 substances, including marijuana. The Convention imposes no limitations on the state-controlled cultivation and processing of these substances for medicinal and scientific purposes, requiring only that the International Narcotics Control Board be provided with quarterly reports.

¹⁰⁴ See “El próximo gobierno de México propondrá ante la ONU la despenalización de las drogas”, *Infobae*, 23 August 2018.

¹⁰⁵ See Alberto Díaz-Cayeros et al., “Living in fear: the dynamics of extortion in Mexico’s criminal insurgency”, Stanford Center for International Development Working Paper no. 557, February 2015; June S. Beittel, “Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations”, U.S. Congressional Research Service, July 2018.

of criminal income.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, a push by the López Obrador administration to legalise drugs would strain U.S.-Mexico relations. In July, U.S. President Donald Trump's spokesperson, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said, "we would not support the legalization of all drugs anywhere and certainly wouldn't want to do anything that would allow more drugs to come into this country".¹⁰⁷

The most controversial of López Obrador's security proposals are arguably amnesties and transitional justice, which did not feature in his campaign manifesto, "Nation Project 2018-2024". One senior official in charge of implementing these measures in the incoming government said the initial intent had been to detail the amnesty proposal only after the election, but López Obrador's mention of the idea at an event in Guerrero in late 2017 drew media attention to the proposal and forced it to speed up the planning.¹⁰⁸ The team is now set to announce specifics in November, after a series of so-called National Pacification and Reconciliation Forums. Held in several of the most violence-ridden Mexican regions, these events are meant to provide victims, civil society, church congregations and interested citizens with a platform to voice their concerns. Alfonso Durazo, López Obrador's appointee for public security secretary, assured participants in one of the forums, held in August in Morelia, Michoacán, "we will not deviate one millimetre from your demands", many of which have centred on redress and recognition for the victims of crime.¹⁰⁹

The new government's focus on reconciliation and victims' rights marks a recognition of the importance of Mexican victims' movements and the urgency of healing fractured and resentful communities. López Obrador's promise to allow victims' groups and civil society to participate in the design of truth commissions could, if done properly, enable better understanding of local conflicts and the ways in which security policy could respond.¹¹⁰ Most importantly, truth commissions could provide spaces for citizens, civil society groups, victims and perpetrators to engage in a broad and open-ended conversation about acceptable measures to mitigate violence.

With technical support from the UN High Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the new government should invite civil society and victims' groups, alongside church congregations and experts, to form regional truth commissions. These bodies would explore crimes committed, analyse the respective conflicts and give advice to local and federal state bodies and legislatures on shaping peacebuilding measures, including the use of amnesties. At

¹⁰⁶ See Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Why legalization in Mexico is not a panacea for reducing violence and suppressing organized crime", Brookings Institution, 23 September 2010; Beau Kilmer et al., "Reducing drug trafficking revenues and violence in Mexico: would legalizing marijuana in California help?", The RAND Corporation, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ See "White House won't back 'legalization of all drugs' in Mexico or 'anywhere'", *The Washington Examiner*, 18 July 2018.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, Mexico City, May 2018. See also "Distorsionaron mi propuesta de amnistía, son muy perversos: López Obrador", *Proceso*, 5 January 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group participation in National Pacification and Reconciliation Forum, Morelia, Michoacán, 14 August 2018.

¹¹⁰ Amid the past decade's violence, a number of victims' organisations have been formed in Mexico, such as by families of the disappeared. These groups pressure the state to end high rates of impunity and are often vociferous in their criticism of alleged official inaction. For an overview see Estelle Tarica, "Victims and counter-victims in contemporary Mexico", *Política Común*, 2015.

the same time, to satisfy the core demand for truth, the new government should give victims' groups searching for disappeared persons funding and operational support. It is paramount, in this regard, to professionalise and guarantee the independence of state attorneys' offices and forensic services.

Transparent moves in this direction would mark a major break with past governments' unwillingness to tackle impunity. Yet the reach of truth commissions and amnesties will necessarily be limited by the backlog of thousands of dormant cases of homicide and disappearance.¹¹¹ One senior López Obrador aide called curbing impunity and providing justice for victims a "titanic task that cannot be completed in six years [one presidential term]", adding that "not all cases will make it".¹¹² The government-elect should err on the side of dampening overblown expectations of the proposed peacebuilding instruments, lest public disenchantment undercut broad civil participation.

Meanwhile, the forums themselves are off to a bumpy start. In spite of their commitment to an open-ended process, López Obrador and his team have repeatedly called on victims to "forgive, but not forget" as a requirement "to construct the pacification process".¹¹³ A number of forum participants, some of whom were offended by the premise of "forgiveness", have voiced criticism of the incoming government's plans. Participants in the Morelia forum stated they felt pressured into prematurely forming an opinion about the possible amnesties; they also dismissed the five-hour timeframe of each forum as insufficient to discuss their concerns in proper depth.

Most said "truth" – clarity about the crimes committed and the status of disappeared persons – was most important for them. Some, including prominent activists, rejected the notion of forgiveness altogether and called for the punishment of perpetrators.¹¹⁴ Others, including former and current members of armed "self-defence" groups and neighbourhood watches, said they did not fully trust López Obrador to end collusion and corruption in security forces and would thus keep taking matters into their own hands.¹¹⁵ The forum's format – nominally a "secure space for all" including officeholders – also provoked tensions, with the Michoacán public security secretary booed off the stage amid accusations of colluding with criminals

¹¹¹ According to calculations made by journalists on the basis of INEGI data, solving homicides alone would take 124 years, at the current rate of 1.8 resolved cases per officer and with a nationwide average caseload of 227 cases per officer. See "Esclarecer un homicidio en México es una excepción y no la regla: tomaría 124 años resolver los casos impunes", *Animal Político*, 19 June 2018.

¹¹² Crisis Group interview, Mexico City, May 2018.

¹¹³ See "Es necesario el perdón jurídico para el proyecto de pacificación: Alfonso Durazo", *Aristegui Noticias*, 8 August 2018.

¹¹⁴ Following his participation in the Morelia forum, Hipólito Mora, a former armed "self-defence" group leader, said he was unprepared to forgive the assassins of his son. See "Yo no otorgo el perdón, esa 'chambita' se la dejo a Dios: Hipólito Mora", *El Financiero*, 14 August 2018.

¹¹⁵ A plethora of vigilante groups have emerged across Mexico due to the state's inability to provide security and its collusion with criminals. For an overview, see Patricio Asfura-Heim and Ralph Esbach, "The Rise of Mexico's Self-Defense Forces: Vigilante Justice South of the Border", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 4 (July-August 2013); Daniel Zizumbo-Colunga, "Explaining support for vigilante justice in Mexico", *Americas Barometer Insights*, 2010.

and being responsible for four civilian deaths during an April 2017 state police operation. He denies any wrongdoing.¹¹⁶

As this and other peace forums have demonstrated, Mexican society is still far from reaching a consensus on peacebuilding measures. Aware of these divisions of opinion, members of López Obrador's transition team have sketched out a number of limits upon transitional justice, including that amnesties will be offered exclusively to "vulnerable social groups" such as "co-opted youngsters" and farmers growing illicit crops such as marijuana and opium poppy. Violent offenders, crime bosses, politicians, police and soldiers will be categorically excluded from the amnesty program, according to one senior official. Under certain circumstances, eligibility for amnesty "could be broadened" to include low-ranking members of organised crime and security forces who were coerced into violent acts.¹¹⁷

The stated aim of the proposed amnesty is to spur withdrawal from organised crime and/or drug production. Offenders would be granted judicial and other reprieve conditional upon full cooperation with a truth commission, in the form of a "complete and detailed description of crimes committed", as well as testimony "against people that do not fulfil the requisites for amnesty", enabling investigation and prosecution of those individuals. Those granted amnesty would also have to take part in social reintegration programs.¹¹⁸ Testimonies before the truth commission would aim to support the "recognition of victims" and their "right to the truth".¹¹⁹

As it stands, however, the framework leaves a number of questions unanswered. It is not clear how many truth commissions there would be, how large and well-funded they would be and what mandates they would have. Olga Sánchez Cordero, López Obrador's prospective interior secretary, says the president-elect has given her "a free hand ... to pacify the country".¹²⁰ She has said regional truth commissions will be created alongside others dedicated to emblematic cases such as the disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa teaching college. She has also said the search for disappeared persons could be a priority integrated into the truth commissions' tasks.¹²¹ But the discussion within the transition team may not easily be resolved. A senior transition official rejected the notion of regional truth commissions, for example, pointing to security concerns and the fact that "we would lose control if the states get involved".¹²²

Perhaps the most serious concern over the commissions is their deployment in active conflicts. At present, eligibility is restricted to non-violent offenders. But violence is part and parcel of belonging to organised crime in Mexico; one either perpetrates it or aids and abets it. Those offenders who do not qualify for amnesty will in principle be prosecuted with the full force of the law, according to the senior López

¹¹⁶ See "Comuneros de Arantepacua exigen renuncia de Juan Bernardo Corona a la SSP", *Contramuro*, 11 July 2017; "Falsas, acusaciones de 'El Gordo Viagra': Silvano", *Cuarto Poder*, 21 March 2018.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Mexico City, 21 May 2018. See also "La campaña de López Obrador explica la amnistía", *El País*, 24 April 2018.

¹¹⁸ "La propuesta de amnistía de AMLO: algunas precisiones", *Nexos*, 16 May 2018.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Mexico City, May 2018.

¹²⁰ See "Las desapariciones rebasaron al Estado: Olga Sánchez Cordero", *Proceso*, 4 August 2018.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Crisis Group interview, Mexico City, May 2018.

Obrador aide.¹²³ Yet proceeding down this path risks creating incentives for upper-echelon members of criminal groups to save themselves from prosecution with violence. Those willing to testify would be exposed to reprisal, as leaving organised crime, let alone providing information to the authorities, is commonly considered betrayal punishable by death.¹²⁴

To mitigate this threat, the López Obrador administration could consider softening its stance on the categorical exclusion of upper-echelon members of criminal groups from the possible benefits of peacebuilding policies, so long as the offenders are not responsible for crimes against humanity. Benefits could include partial amnesties in the form of reduced sentences in exchange for types of collaboration, such as a full confession of crimes and reparations for victims. Such steps should only be taken if recommended by the truth commissions themselves, once those bodies have consolidated their legitimacy and so long as there is no evidence that criminal groups have coerced the commissions' members. Political costs, both domestic and vis-à-vis the U.S., could be significant, with the government potentially accused of being soft on or even colluding with organised crime likely to arise.¹²⁵ Yet unless local crime bosses see some benefit to the truth commissions' work, those commissions are unlikely to function safely and those cooperating are likely to face reprisals. This is particularly true in areas suffering the worst violence.

More broadly, the issues of how to deal with active middle- and upper-echelon crime leaders, and how to balance continuing criminal investigation and prosecution with efforts at peacebuilding, are sure to be lasting headaches for the new administration. A heavy-handed approach to the threats posed by organised crime, as suggested by the senior aide, would represent the continuation of the past twelve years' militarised anti-organised crime operations, with all its pitfalls. An overly lenient approach to violent offenders, on the other hand, risks tarring the new administration with suspicions of complicity with organised crime and acquiescence in future illicit activity. Any moves toward more lenient judicial treatment of crime bosses should be carefully phased and selective, apply only to regions suffering the worst violence and be rooted in the legitimacy provided by truth commissions that give an advisory opinion on the issue to state and federal bodies.

C. The Risks of Reforming and Replacing Mexico's Armed Forces

The dilemma of reforming federal security forces, and the armed forces in particular, is also likely to bedevil López Obrador. Security provision is now overwhelmingly dependent on the military, and both Alfonso Durazo, López Obrador's prospective public security secretary, and the campaign manifesto speak of the "gradual retreat"

¹²³ According to a López Obrador aide, past administrations had "all made pacts with them [organised crime groups]". Crisis Group interview, Mexico City, May 2018.

¹²⁴ Members of the Knights Templar said recruits could leave the group during a two-month trial period but were subject to violent reprisal afterward. Crisis Group interview, Michoacán, December 2017.

¹²⁵ After amnesties were suggested as means for conflict mitigation during López Obrador's campaign, he was attacked by certain media outlets, commentators, and political opponents of seeking to strike pacts with organised crime groups. See "Prepara AMLO 'pacto con el narco', alertan PAN y PRD", *El Financiero*, 5 April 2018.

of the armed forces from public security tasks.¹²⁶ Durazo has stated the goal is a 30 to 50 per cent drop in the homicide rate, as well as replacement of the armed forces with civilian police in public security tasks within three years, and has underlined that police reform will be essential to reaching this end.¹²⁷ But the transition team has thus far released scant details as to how the police could be strengthened.¹²⁸ Furthermore, both Durazo and López Obrador recently said police were so ill equipped that the armed forces might have to “remain in the streets” for an undefined period of time.¹²⁹ While no one thinks that military responsibilities in public security can be jettisoned overnight, it is also evident that only resolute and sustained police reform efforts can prevent the perpetuation of army and navy patrols in Mexico’s most violent areas.

Although current proposals point to essential improvements in training, intelligence and working conditions, one key issue that has yet to be treated in any detail is how lower-ranking police officers will be protected from abuse by their commanders. The introduction of independent external oversight boards, comprising civilian experts able to use both investigative and disciplinary powers, would be an important first step toward guaranteeing officers’ basic rights. Where needed, judicial authorities should provide witness protection and financial support for officers willing to speak out against abuse and corruption.

Meanwhile, even if police reform proceeds smoothly, the armed forces will likely be reluctant to cede the power and revenue streams they have accumulated over the past decade. According to one expert on the military, “the war against narco-trafficking has been very positive for the armed forces. They have had few casualties and it has given them a lot of financial and political power. They have a strong interest in carrying on”.¹³⁰

López Obrador has insisted that his personal daily oversight of and communication with security forces will prevent “torture, massacres and human rights violations, and ensure that neither the army nor the navy are used to repress the people”.¹³¹ But

¹²⁶ See “López Obrador no utilizaría Ley de Seguridad”, *El Economista*, 4 January 2018.

¹²⁷ See “Mexico’s new president has a radical plan to end the drug war”, *Vox*, 15 August 2018.

¹²⁸ Police reform measures proposed by López Obrador include boosting intelligence capacities, basing police training on respect for human rights and raising wages, all features of previous reform efforts. The Calderón administration, for instance, pursued an approach based on the “Mando Único”, which sought to establish a sole command structure, and better coordinate state and municipal police forces in each of Mexico’s 32 federated regions. At the same time, officers were to be provided with better professional training and working conditions, as well as clear and transparent roles and career paths, while police and institutions were to be purged of corruption and criminal collusion. Many of these plans have continued under Peña Nieto. Yet progress is negligible, due to a combination of “zero political will”, “practices of simulation and corruption”, and the “absence of supervision ... by the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System”. See Carlos Barrachina Lisón, “Las trampas de la seguridad: el gasto en seguridad pública 117 en municipios y entidades federativas mexicanas, 2008-2015”, in Manaut and Quezada, *Atlas*, op. cit., p. 117.

¹²⁹ See “Ejército y Marina seguirán en las calles, Policía Federal no está preparada para suplirlos: AMLO”, *Animal Político*, 24 August 2018.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, 18 May 2018.

¹³¹ “Llama AMLO a los de la mafia del poder que se seren en, porque ‘no vamos a caer en ninguna provocación, serenos morenos’”, lopezobrador.org.mx (López Obrador campaign webpage), 23 March 2017.

such dependence on the incoming president's resolve has raised doubts even among members of his own campaign team.¹³² Their concern is heightened by López Obrador's own vagueness regarding the military's role. In particular, he has not expressed a clear position on the Law of Interior Security, which Congress approved in late 2017, a state court temporarily suspended in May 2018 and a federal court restored in September 2018 and on which the Supreme Court could still make a final decision.¹³³ The law would put the deployment of the armed forces in public security tasks on a permanent legal footing for the first time (thus far they are deployed on the basis of presidential decisions responding to a perceived state of emergency).¹³⁴ Critics in civil society organisations and UN agencies argue that it allows the discretionary use of force outside civilian command structures. They have also attacked the law for weakening external oversight and access to information.¹³⁵

López Obrador's campaign manifesto and his advisers' comments are no clearer about the future of the law.¹³⁶ The "Nation Project 2018-2024" speaks of the Law of Interior Security as "necessary" if "the Mexican army is to continue [to be] in the streets". Durazo has said that the law, if it is upheld in court, "would not be a resource that the next government would use".¹³⁷ Another security policy adviser has said it should be annulled.¹³⁸ Sánchez Cordero, López Obrador's prospective interior secretary, herself a former Supreme Court judge, has said she believes the law to be unconstitutional but that the incoming government will await the pending Supreme Court decision before deciding whether to propose changes to it.¹³⁹

Opinions within López Obrador's team also differ as to how the incoming government should treat criminal behaviour by members of the armed forces. Certain members of the president-elect's inner circle reportedly fear the destabilising effects of prosecuting senior army and police commanders for their involvement in alleged crimes against humanity. But another senior official said the state should take punitive action so as to "cleanse [the armed forces] from top to bottom", and set up special

¹³² Crisis Group interview, Mexico City, 21 May 2018.

¹³³ See "¿Cómo va impugnación de Ley de Seguridad Interior en la Corte?", *La Silla Rota*, 30 May 2018; "Revocan suspensión contra ley de seguridad interior", *Aristegui Noticias*, 25 September 2018.

¹³⁴ Article 21 of the Mexican constitution stipulates that public security tasks fall exclusively under the aegis of the civilian police.

¹³⁵ See "México: Proyecto de Ley de Seguridad Interior supone riesgo para los derechos humanos y debe ser rechazado, advierten expertos y expertas de la ONU", Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 14 December 2017; "CIDH expresa preocupación por proyecto de la ley sobre seguridad interior en México", Inter-American Court for Human Rights, 4 December 2017; "Posicionamiento de la CNDH sobre la eventual aprobación de una ley en materia de seguridad interior", National Human Rights Commission (Mexico), 29 November 2017. Mexico's defence secretary, army general Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda, said "we did not ask for a Law of Interior Security. We asked for a legal framework, whichever one". He highlighted a supposed international tendency for police and armed forces to work hand in hand in matters of public security. See "Ejército no pidió Ley de Seguridad Interior: Cienfuegos", *La Jornada*, 28 March 2018.

¹³⁶ See "La convivencia de AMLO con la Ley de Seguridad Interior", *Animal Político*, 21 December 2017.

¹³⁷ See "López Obrador no ...", *op. cit.*

¹³⁸ See "En 3 años se sacaría al Ejército de las calles: asesor de AMLO", *El Universal*, 25 June 2016.

¹³⁹ See "El gobierno de AMLO no vetará la Ley de Seguridad; esperará resolución de la Corte: Sánchez Cordero", *Animal Político*, 14 August 2018.

groups of prosecutors to this end.¹⁴⁰ López Obrador himself, in contrast, has repeatedly stated that “soldiers and sailors have nothing to worry about. On the contrary, we will raise their salaries”.¹⁴¹ He has also said he would consult senior army and navy officers on the appointment of the next commanders, and respect their “internal culture” (*usos y costumbres*) in that only active officers would be considered.¹⁴²

One military expert who works closely with the armed forces characterised them as tight-knit, with an *esprit de corps* that clamours for self-governance and rejects outside advice. Their passive resistance to the prosecution of commanders for human rights violations or other abuses of power could bring public security provision dangerously close to paralysis. Any reform will become a delicate balancing act between the need for external oversight and accountability as a means to halt corruption and collusion in violent crime, on one hand, and the threat of further destabilisation in regions wracked by violence, on the other. The López Obrador administration should push the armed forces to gradually open up to civilian oversight through the introduction of ombudsmen with disciplinary powers and the application of civilian justice to any future violation of human rights carried out by military personnel, while making punishments of commanders for proven crimes against humanity a non-negotiable part of these efforts and a means of deterring them in the future. Given the weaknesses of its prosecution system, Mexico would likely have to focus on a few emblematic cases and rely on the support of international judicial bodies to give teeth to such an exercise.

D. U.S. Relations

The already troubled relationship between Mexico and the U.S. will remain vulnerable to deterioration under López Obrador. The Peña Nieto administration, while publicly critical of the Trump White House’s vows to make its southern neighbour pay for its promised wall along the Mexico-U.S. border, used Mexico’s importance to U.S. national security as leverage in ongoing negotiations about the future of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Mexico’s de facto role as an operating arm of U.S. immigration control along the southern border with Guatemala, where its military has acted as a buffer against Central American migration, offered a powerful argument in negotiations with the U.S.¹⁴³ During the NAFTA negotiations, Mexican officials said cooperation in the fields of migration control and security, the latter primarily pertaining to the fights against organised crime and drug trafficking, might be “seriously affected” were the U.S. to act on repeated threats to pull out of the trade agreement.¹⁴⁴

A tentative agreement – which the White House describes as “preliminary” and not yet a new NAFTA – was announced on 28 August, alleviating fears that bilateral

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, May 2018.

¹⁴¹ See “Envía AMLO mensaje a Fuerzas Armadas”, *El Sur*, 24 June 2018.

¹⁴² See “Designación en Semar y Sedena con visto bueno de actuales mandos, prevé AMLO”, *ADN Político*, 20 August 2018; “AMLO y los titulares de Sedena y Semar: ¿quiénes suenan?”, *Político.mx*, 17 September 2018.

¹⁴³ See Crisis Group Latin America Report N°66, *Mexico’s Southern Border: Security, Violence and Migration in the Trump Era*, 6 May 2018.

¹⁴⁴ See “Versión de la sesión ordinaria del 10 de Octubre de 2017”, Senado de la República, 11 October 2017.

trade would collapse. This deal has since been extended to Canada to create the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which will now have to be ratified by the parliaments of each country.¹⁴⁵ The agreement, however, does not resolve outstanding trade disputes, such as over tariffs the Trump administration imposed on steel and aluminium imports, including from Mexico. The agreement also obliges each country to review the text in six years, meaning that trade could become a regular part of bilateral relations and frictions, including on security and migration.¹⁴⁶ Uncertainty will remain part and parcel of U.S.-Mexico relations beyond trade, as indicated by Trump's reiteration that "the wall ... will ultimately be paid for by Mexico" the day following announcement of the new agreement with Mexico.¹⁴⁷

Military and intelligence cooperation between the two countries has been growing since the Mérida Initiative, a U.S.-backed program to strengthen and modernise Mexico's security forces and judiciary, was signed in 2007. Officials from both countries have stressed that transnational inter-institutional cooperation has intensified since Trump assumed office, notwithstanding tensions at the highest political level.¹⁴⁸ A military expert observed that ties are particularly strong between the two nations' armed forces.¹⁴⁹ In line with López Obrador's new security policy, the U.S. government should offer to create a new cooperation agreement that matches the incoming government's priorities and gives particular support to police reform and crime prevention. López Obrador's plans to recast Mexican security policy might nevertheless lead to a clash with the Trump administration, which has recently stressed that drug eradication and interdiction are the twin pillars of security cooperation.¹⁵⁰ In this vein, the perception that Mexico is, through the proposed amnesties, going "soft" on organised crime could fuel the Trump administration's rhetoric depicting Mexico as a threat to U.S. national security, one that requires reinforced border control.

¹⁴⁵ "U.S., Canada and Mexico just reached a sweeping new NAFTA deal. Here's what's in it", *The Washington Post*, 1 October 2018. The deal modifies NAFTA by increasing the percentage of a given vehicle's parts that would need to be fabricated in North America (including Mexico) from 62.5 to 75 per cent for it to be tariff-exempt. It also stipulates that 40 to 45 per cent of labour input come from workers being paid at least \$16 per hour. López Obrador has lauded the agreement as "a step giving economic and financial stability ... [and] manifesting that Mexico is a sovereign country", suggesting the Mexican Congress's approval is likely. See "López Obrador celebra acuerdo del TLCAN; confía en que Canadá se sume", *Excelsior*, 27 August 2018.

¹⁴⁶ See "President Donald J. Trump is Keeping His Promise to Renegotiate NAFTA", White House Fact Sheet, 27 August 2018. See also "My three winners, three losers in Trump's, Peña Nieto's 'new Nafta'", *Forbes*, 29 August 2018.

¹⁴⁷ See "Mexico denies it will pay for border wall after Trump repeats claim", *Politico*, 28 August 2018.

¹⁴⁸ See "The U.S.-Mexico relationship has survived and thrived under Trump", *Foreign Policy*, 22 March 2018.

¹⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Mexico City, 22 May 2018.

¹⁵⁰ See Clare Ribando Seelke, "Mexico: Background and U.S. Relations", U.S. Congressional Research Service, January 2018.

V. Conclusion

Simmering frustration with past governments' inability to tackle Mexico's most pressing concerns – violence and corruption – and López Obrador's track record in denouncing these ills and promising sweeping change handed him and his party an overwhelming victory. But the incoming president's ambitions are not matched by plans for how he will achieve his goals. He vows to eradicate – not merely curb – corruption, and to terminate what he calls Mexico's "war" in as little as three years.¹⁵¹ Yet the entrenched realities of state corruption, criminal collusion and authoritarianism within the security forces, as well as the mutating national security crisis, will make reform a painstaking process. Though afforded an absolute majority in both chambers of Congress, López Obrador will face obstacles in wielding power. Opposition parties hold 27 of the 32 federated regions and the majority of municipalities; they are likely to raise stumbling blocks. A number of major institutions have defied attempts to establish external oversight. Powerful business interests may well perceive his economic reforms as a threat.

The incoming administration faces three core dilemmas as it seeks to pacify the country and cleanse its institutions. It aims to withdraw the military from crime patrols and reestablish the police as the sole provider of public security, while knowing that the police forces are weak and past efforts to reform them have repeatedly run aground. It wishes to provide redress for victims of Mexico's wars on drug and crime, including those killed or disappeared in state crimes, but lacks the judicial capacity to investigate these atrocities and confront powerful institutional interests. And it seeks to bring peace to regions afflicted by criminal violence, potentially compelling it to calibrate accountability for the high echelons of organised crime and thereby risk the fury of victims.

Bestriding these dilemmas are concerns regarding the character of the future government and the pace of reform. Concentrating powers in the presidency would bode ill for Mexico's democracy, much as it might tempt the new chief executive.¹⁵² Pushing too hard and without consultation for reforms or redress for victims of the "war on drugs" could provoke adverse and even violent reactions, especially from the armed forces, the economic elite and Washington. Yet if the new president takes the more likely tack of negotiating change with powerful actors, his progress would slow, probably postponing aspirations for justice for atrocities, as well as prospects for accountable government, a more effective judicial system and a more equitable economy. A backlash in the form of further erosion of trust in the state and rule of law could arise, and citizens might turn to alternatives, including already burgeoning vigilantism or demands for the *mano dura* – more draconian – anti-crime policies familiar in other parts of Latin America.

Mexico's high hopes now need to be tempered by a realistic conversation about the depth and complexity of the challenges facing the country and the tenacity a successful reformer will need to exhibit. Phased reforms targeting the coercive command structures in the police forces, prosecution of emblematic state crimes and a peace-building strategy rooted in the legitimacy of transparent, participatory regional truth

¹⁵¹ See "AMLO promete acabar guerra contra el narco en 3 años", *Milenio*, 2 January 2018.

¹⁵² See Alberto Olvera, "¿Fin de régimen en México?", *El País*, 18 June 2018.

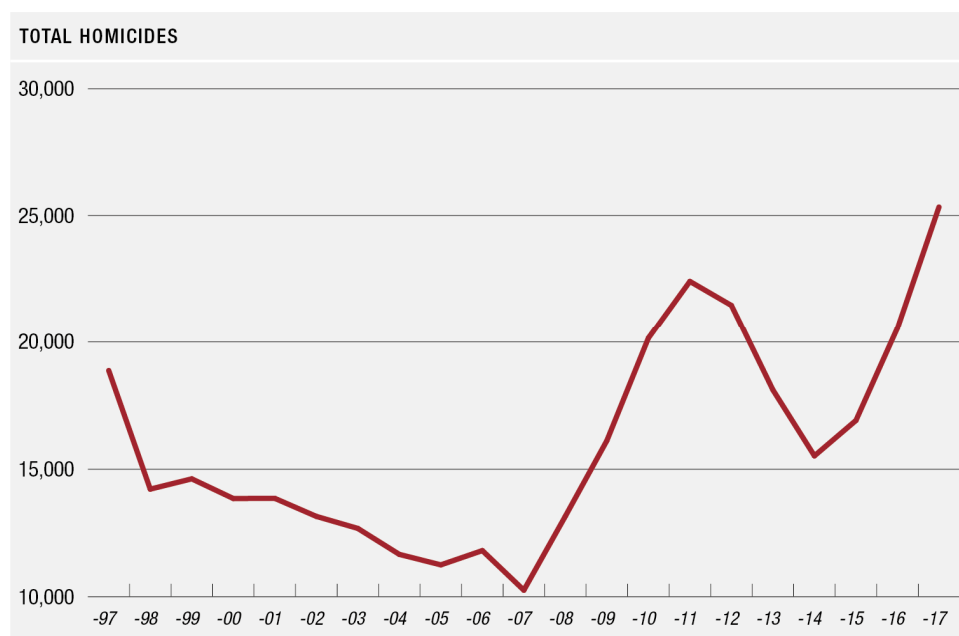
commissions would all help the new president navigate the dilemmas he faces. In the same vein, López Obrador should tone down pronouncements that his pioneering, personal leadership alone will induce these changes, and commit himself instead to rebuilding institutions strong enough to outlast his six-year term.

Mexico City/Bogotá/Brussels, 11 October 2018

Appendix A: Map of Mexico

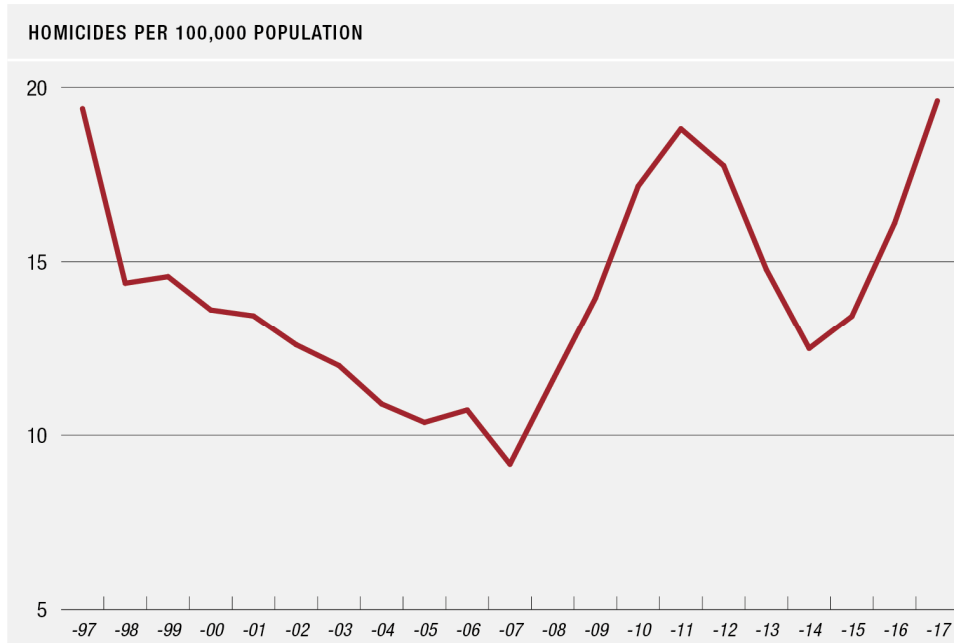


Appendix B: Total Homicides in Mexico, by Year



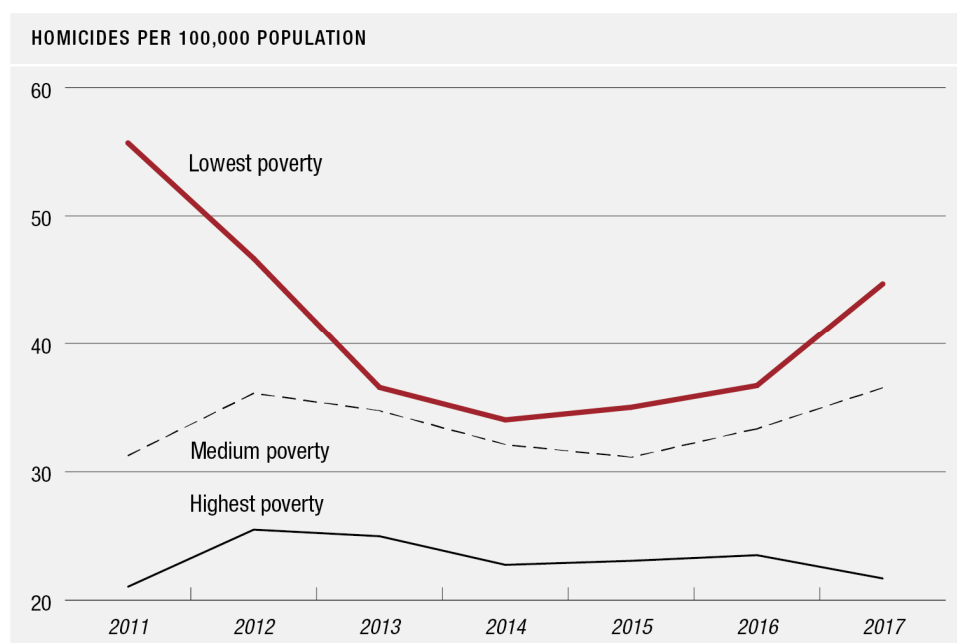
Crisis Group, October 2018. Source: Executive Secretariat of the National System of Public Security, Secretariat of the Interior.

Appendix C: Homicide Rate in Mexico, by Year



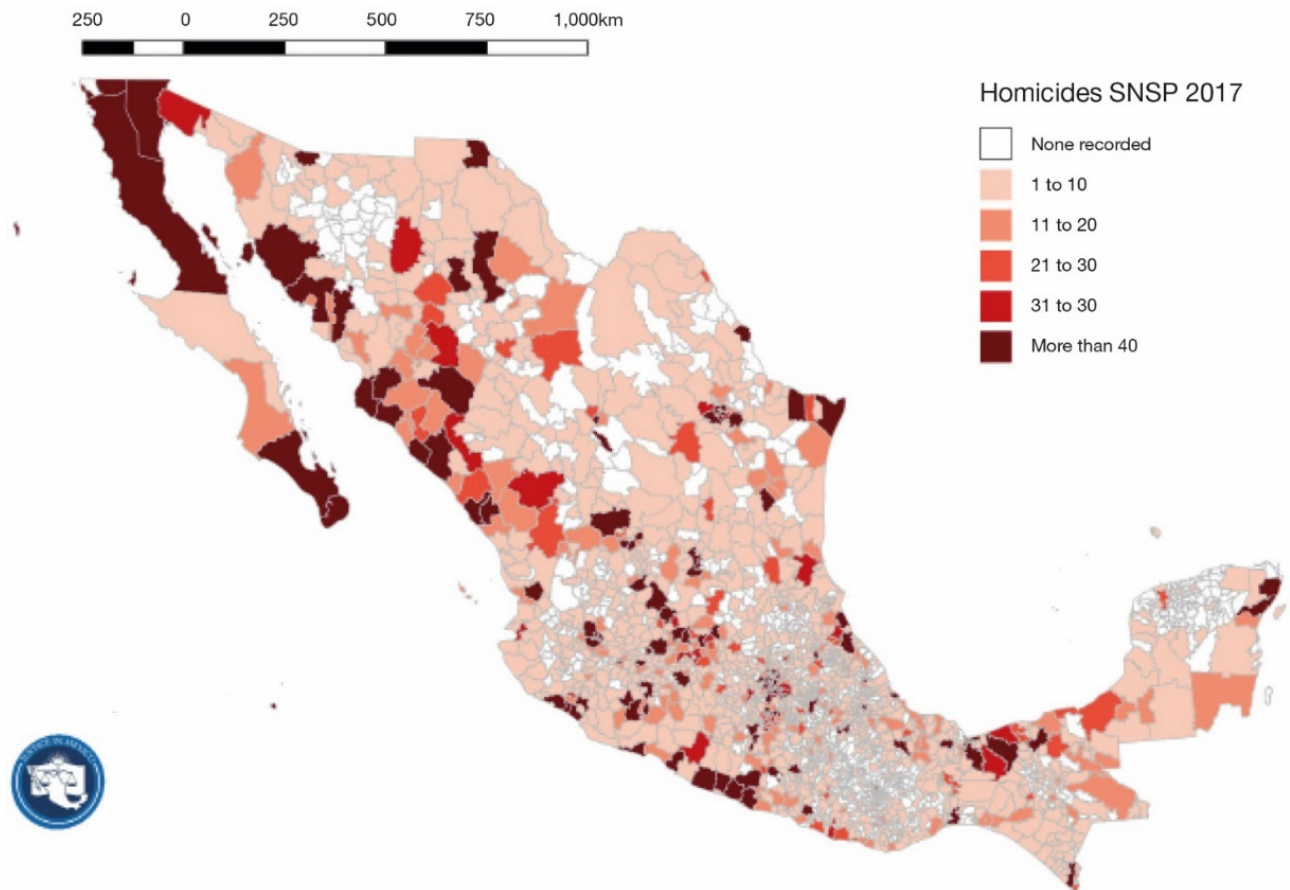
Crisis Group, October 2018. Source: Executive Secretariat of the National System of Public Security, Secretariat of the Interior; World Bank.

Appendix D: Average Homicide Rates in Low, Medium and High Poverty Municipalities in Mexico



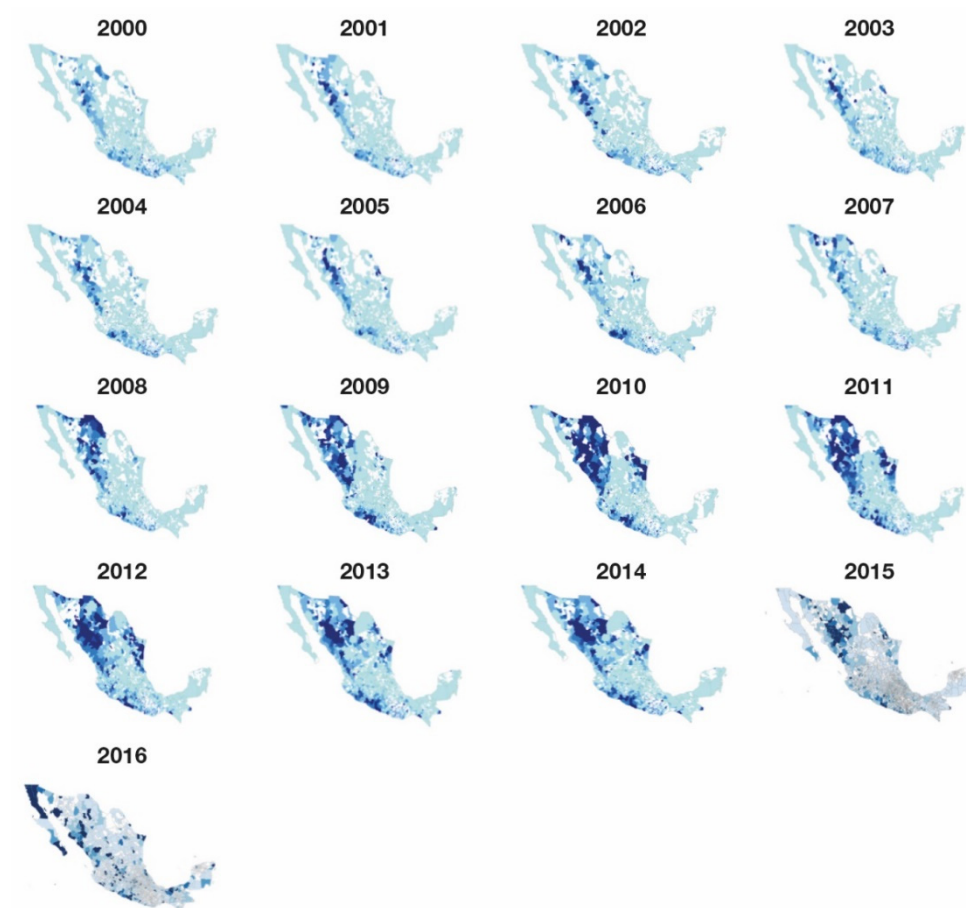
Crisis Group, October 2018. Source: Executive Secretariat of the National System of Public Security, Secretariat of the Interior; National Council for Evaluating Social Development Policy.

Appendix E: Homicide Rate by Mexican Municipalities in 2017



Map generated by Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, using data from the National System of Public Security and the National Population Council (CONAPO). Courtesy of Justice in Mexico, University of San Diego.

Appendix F: Distribution of Homicide Victims in Mexico 2000-2016



Maps generated by Theresa Firestone and Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, using data from National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI). Courtesy of Justice in Mexico, University of San Diego.

Appendix G: About the International Crisis Group

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Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

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The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

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Mexico's Southern Border: Security, Violence and Migration in the Trump Era, Latin America Report N°66, 9 May 2018 (also available in Spanish).

Risky Business: The Duque Government's Approach to Peace in Colombia, Latin America Report N°67, 21 June 2018 (also available in Spanish).

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