

Mexico Violence Resource Project launch



UC San Diego Mexico Violence Resource Project Goes Beyond Cartels to Study Drug War

by Christine Clark | [UC San Diego News](#)

The [Mexico Violence Resource Project](#)—a new initiative from the University of California San Diego’s Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies—was recently launched to provide policymakers and journalists analysis and information to better understand the complicated escalation of violence in Mexico. As part of the effort, the project is providing new insights of the chaos that erupted in Culiacán one year ago when Sinaloa cartel gunmen successfully thwarted the government’s attempt to arrest one of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán’s sons.

Violence in Mexico has been on the rise, and it is increasingly difficult to understand. In addition to providing reliable statistics to study the issue, the initiative will facilitate nuanced analysis to better assess the facts on the ground. Though popular portrayals of the bloodshed depict it as a product of cinematic-type conflicts between cartels, experts involved the project now recognize that the drivers of violence are more nuanced.

“As expert understandings of criminal activity have evolved, media portrayals and public debate have often retained a static conception of the causes and consequences of violence,” said Rafael Fernández de Castro, director of the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies (USMEX) at UC San Diego’s School of Global Policy and Strategy.

With information surrounding violence often siloed, the initiative aims to counter the limitations of researchers or institutions focusing on specific issues by facilitating binational collaborative efforts to contextualize issues such as gender violence or money laundering. The aim is to give policymakers, journalists and scholars the tools to develop deeper understandings and smarter solutions.

Led by USMEX staff members [Cecilia Farfán Méndez and Michael Lettieri](#), the project’s website serves as a [reliable database](#), maintaining facts and statistics surrounding violence, sourcing information from civil society, government and academia. Critical statistics include the number of homicides, missing persons, costs of violence, judicial records, fire arm information and more, which all are now easily accessible to scholars, journalists and policymakers.

Another major important component is the project’s efforts to provide original interviews and perspectives from a range of thoughtful voices to illuminate specific causes of violence, and also document citizen responses to explore strategies for building peace.

The [examination of the events of Oct. 17, 2019](#) in Culiacán is the first such endeavor. After Mexican government forces detained Ovidio Guzmán, one of the sons of famous narco-trafficker Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, members of the Sinaloa Cartel took to the streets with high-powered weapons, forcing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to release Guzmán. Many observers proclaimed the events a catastrophic defeat for the government and a momentous change in the country’s security dynamics; however, the project suggests that these interpretations were misguided.

“To truly understand the impact of the events we need to listen to the victims,” said Michael Lettieri, senior fellow for Human Rights at USMEX. “This can then illuminate how communities respond to trauma, fear and victimization, both independent of policy interventions and as a reaction to them.”

The innovative hybrid model of applied scholarship, integrating journalism and

academic knowledge is designed to make timely insights accessible to a broad audience. It will help further the projects aim to provide information, analysis, research and resources for understanding violence in Mexico.

“Ultimately, it matters a great deal how we tell stories about violence in Mexico,” said Cecilia Farfan-Mendez, head of Security Research Programs at USMEX. “Listening to those on-the-ground allows us to understand why most attempts to solve the problem have failed.”

The Mexico Violence Resource Project is housed at UC San Diego’s Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies and a sister initiative of the [Noria Research Mexico & Central America Program](#) and the [Repositorio de Violencia y Paz](#) at El Colegio de México.

For more information or to get involved, go to the [project’s website](#).