



HARARY SECURITY

HX-HARARY SECURITY

Mexico Intelligence Report – November 2023

Date: December 19, 2023

Overview

The security situation in Mexico continued to decline in November 2023, with high levels of violence and crime across the country. Several high-profile attacks against governmental authorities occurred, highlighting the brazenness of criminal groups. In one incident, the police chief of Fresnillo, Zacatecas, was gunned down in an ambush by sicarios. Attacks also targeted rank-and-file police officers in multiple states.

Organized crime clashes and battles for control of territories continued unabated in hotspot regions. States like Zacatecas, Michoacán, Guerrero, and Chihuahua saw regular violence between competing cartel factions. Cities like Culiacán, Celaya, Fresnillo, and Uruapan were particularly hard hit.

Violent crime also surged, with homicides above average levels for the year. At least 1,534 intentional homicides were recorded nationally in November, according to preliminary government figures. States with the highest per capita homicide rates included Colima, Zacatecas, Baja California, Sonora, and Guanajuato.

Other crimes like kidnappings, extortions, and highway assaults also remained problematic across vast areas of the country. Routes in areas contested by organized crime groups were hazardous for travel. Specific hotspots included parts of Jalisco, Michoacán, Veracruz, Tamaulipas, Sonora, and Sinaloa states.

While corruption has long plagued Mexico, allegations continued to surface in November 2023, implicating officials at various levels of working with criminal groups. In one case, US authorities accused a city official in Nogales, Sonora, of collaborating with the Sinaloa Cartel. As cartels become further entrenched, corruption enables their impunity.

On a more positive note, Mexican security forces achieved some high-level arrests over the month, including “El Nini” of the Sinaloa Cartel, “El CR” of the CJNG cartel, and a major target “El Padrino” of La Familia Michoacana cartel in Mexico City. Ongoing cooperation between US and Mexican agencies also led to new financial sanctions against networks tied to drug trafficking and money laundering. However, such actions have ultimately failed to curb worsening insecurity thus far, as Mexico is on pace for another record-violent year in 2023.

Attacks on Governmental Authorities

Attacks on police officers and other governmental authorities remained high in November. By the 26th of the month, at least 44 police officers had been killed nationwide, according to monitoring group Causa en Común.

The month was punctuated by brazen, high-impact attacks demonstrating the power of criminal groups over Mexican authority in various regions. On November 30, the police chief of Fresnillo, Zacatecas – Antonio Soledad Perez – was gunned down along with members of his security detail in a cartel ambush. Perez had been in the role for just six months prior to the attack in a city severely afflicted by organized crime violence. Similarly, on November 21, municipal police commander Octavio Miguel Lopez was executed in the streets of Apatzingán, Michoacán. And in Tabasco on November 27, an active state police investigator named Isidro was shot to death in front of his home.

Beyond targeting senior police officials, rank-and-file officers also faced persistent dangers. At least 19 state police were wounded or killed in confrontations with armed civilians across Mexico during November 2023.



HARARY SECURITY

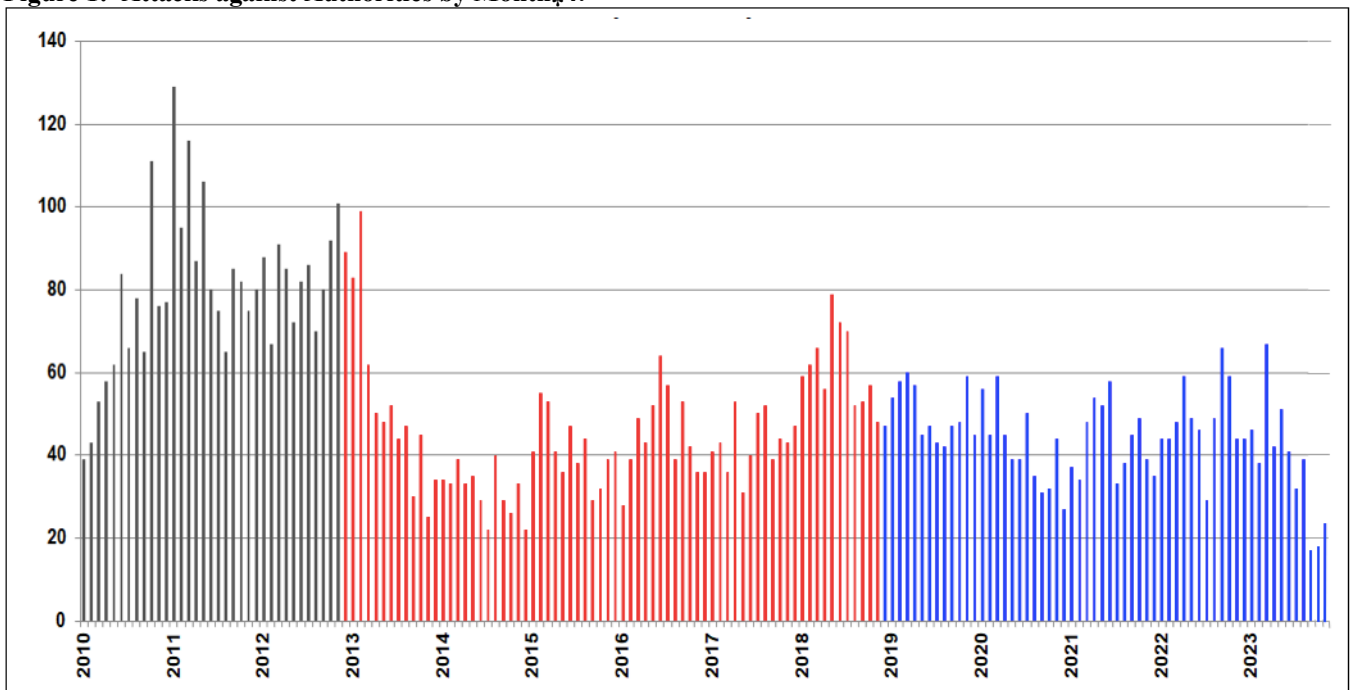
In Zamora, Michoacán, a November 15 shootout with presumed cartel gunmen left five local officers injured. In Chiapas on November 24, one officer was killed and another gravely wounded when armed assailants stormed and robbed a state police checkpoint near the capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

Oaxaca saw one of the more shocking attacks on November 27 with a daylight assassination of lawyer Teófilo Pérez just outside the courthouse in Jamiltepec. The distinct boldness of such an attack underscored the depth of impunity of violent groups in parts of Mexico.

Sadly, data shows 2022 was one of the deadliest years on record for police across the country, with 571 officers murdered. And this pace seems to be mainly continuing unabated in 2023 so far. As of October 2023, police murders were up over 17% nationally from the same period a year prior, according to Causa en Común.

Particularly hard-hit states included Guanajuato, State of Mexico, Michoacán, Veracruz, and Zacatecas. Unless more is done to protect officers and restore the rule of law in vulnerable regions, risks to personnel will remain severe in the year ahead.

Figure 1: Attacks against Authorities by Month[‡] ^λ



[‡] Note: These figures should be considered minimum counts as numerous incidents are not reported by the media or government officials.

^λ President López Obrador took office on December 1, 2018 (columns in blue).

Governmental Operations, Major Arrests & Deaths of Cartel Members

Mexican authorities landed some high-profile arrests in November, but many top organized crime leaders remain at large around the country.



HARARY SECURITY

On November 22, “El Nini” aka Nestor Isidro Perez Salas, was captured by federal forces in Culiacán, Sinaloa. Perez Salas was allegedly the head of security and top enforcer for the “Los Chapitos” faction of the Sinaloa Cartel. The US government had offered a USD 3 million reward for information leading to his arrest on drug trafficking charges.

Another significant arrest came on November 25 with the detention of Juan Carlos "El CR" in Tapalpa, Jalisco. The suspect was identified as an alleged plaza boss for the *Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación* (CJNG) wanted in connection with various felonies including the recent kidnapping of an army colonel. In Mexico City on November 29, police arrested Alfredo "El Padrino," aka the leader of an active cell of the La Familia Michoacana cartel engaged in local drug sales and extortion. At least 13 others were arrested in related raids across Mexico City, and guns, crystal meth, and cocaine were seized.

Other arrests of note included the November 1st capture of Julio Cesar “El Kevin o El Orejas” Cervantes in Culiacán - a top lieutenant for Sinaloa capo Rafael Caro Quintero. On November 9 in Nuevo León, former Tamaulipas police officer turned Zetas cartel member Martin Rodriguez Barraza "El Pin" was arrested on organized crime charges.

Killings of cartel-linked targets also continued. On November 26 in Guadalajara, the CJNG regional boss Diego Armando Vazquez, aka “El Viejon”, was gunned down outside a barbershop in Zapopan. On November 20, a former municipal police officer named Enrique Camarena, was executed inside a state prison in Durango where he was serving time for homicide.

Among police and military casualties over the month, three soldiers were killed during a November 19 confrontation with gunmen in Teocaltiche, Jalisco. And in Fresnillo, at least five officers were wounded - several gravely - during a November 30 ambush that killed police chief Antonio Soledad Perez.

Street Battles

Clashes directly between rival organized crime groups and security forces erupted across Mexico over November. Hotspots included parts of Zacatecas, Michoacán, Guerrero, Chihuahua, Sonora, and Sinaloa states.

Northern Zacatecas saw fighting flare up in Fresnillo, where the local police chief was later killed in late November. At least ten armed clashes occurred in and around the city during the month, often involving convoys of sicarios using armored vehicles.

On November 10, gunmen shot one soldier that, triggered battles across parts of General Terán municipality in Nuevo León. The next day, local police repelled armed convoys also attempting intrusions from Tamaulipas state. Criminal infighting bled over into Jalisco state in early November when rival groups clashed, torched vehicles, and left several dead.

Western Michoacán collided with underworld conflicts across parts of adjoining Jalisco state. A series of clashes between November 15 and 17 left at least 15 gunmen dead after state forces confronted entrenched CJNG cells around municipalities like Ocotlán and La Barca.

In one politically symbolic episode on November 11, vigilantes in Totolapan, Guerrero, seized local government offices and disarmed police to protest organized crime influence locally. Twenty-four hours later, the town hall was back under government control only after a tense standoff with state forces.

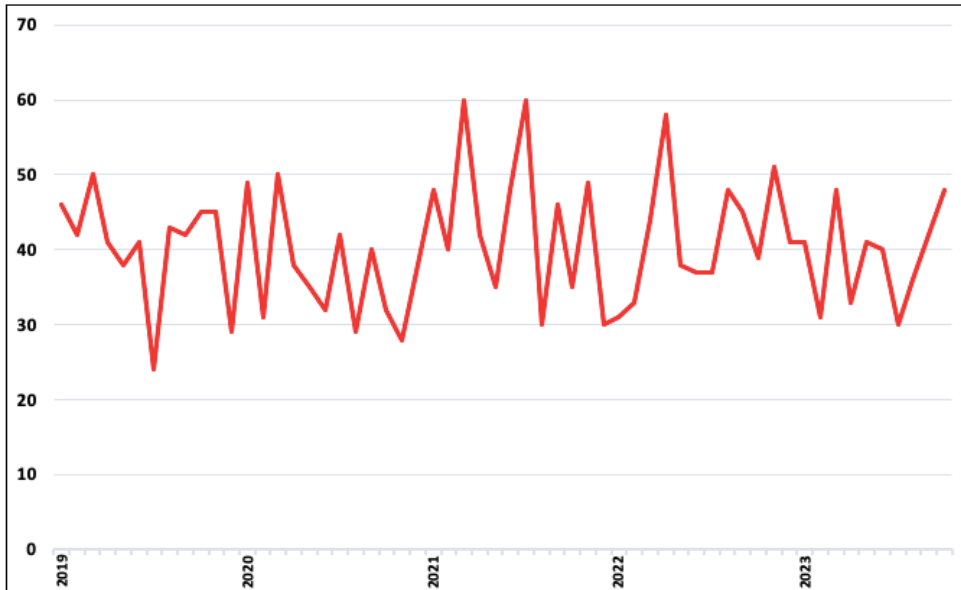
Sinaloa state saw several episodes of cartel-related violence as internal divisions continued inside the syndicate since “El Chapo” Guzman's arrest. Clashes related to a feud between brothers “El Chino” and “El Chapito” Isidro left ten people dead November 15-16 around Choix municipality near the Chihuahua border. While earlier in the month, at least six others were killed when gunmen attacked Villa Juárez village in Navolato county.

And in Chihuahua state itself, once relatively peaceful parts of Cuauhtémoc saw three separate armed attacks on November 22 alone that left several people wounded. Citizens blamed factions connected to “Gente Nueva” versus “La Linea” networks in the renewed fighting.



HARARY SECURITY

Figure 2: Major Street Battles Reported by the Media



Hazardous Overland Travel

Travel along stretches of roads in 6 Mexican states were impacted by criminal threats and activity in November. Affected routes were typically strongholds fought over fiercely by cartels and gangs to control smuggling corridors or staging areas.

Michoacán led again in incidents during the month, with around a dozen blockades or road spikes placed and numerous robberies of motorists reported. Hotspots centered in Lázaro Cárdenas, Apatzingán, Zamora, Aguililla and parts of the state's central Tierra Caliente district.

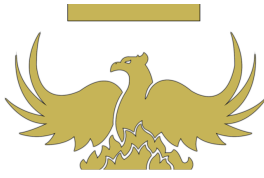
In Zacatecas, blockades went up after security operations in Fresnillo, Jerez, and other municipalities as gangs lashed out against intervening authorities. While in Tamaulipas, gunmen coordinated serial carjackings along key highways like those connecting Reynosa, Matamoros, and Ciudad Victoria.

Parts of Veracruz were severely affected as well. On November 11 alone, a string of at least seven different blockades nearly paralyzed stretches of roads running to Poza Rica city from Pánuco through Tempoal, Platón Sánchez, and Naranjo's towns.

Highway travelers also confronted risks in Guanajuato, Morelos, and Oaxaca states during November 2023. Hot routes for express kidnappings, robberies, and carjackings included those connecting Dolores Hidalgo to San Miguel de Allende in Guanajuato. And highways around Cuautla city, including those running from Izúcar de Matamoros to Telixtac in Morelos state.

In total, for the month, at least 176 blockades and road spikes were deployed by gangs primarily intended to hamper authorities or enable other criminal activity. At the same time, motor vehicle theft remained elevated, with more than 3,200 trucks, cars, and motorcycles stolen at gunpoint or through violence nationally in November 2023, according to insurance industry data.

These ongoing realities continue placing burdens on trade, travel, and the economy across vast areas of Mexico impacted by organized crime.



HARARY SECURITY

Criminal Violence

Mexico suffered extensive violence in November, with homicides and femicides holding above-average monthly levels for the year. Disappearances and discoveries of human remains around clandestine graves also continued plaguing states around the country.

At least 1,534 intentional homicides were recorded nationwide last month, according to preliminary government figures. This translated to around 51 people murdered daily on average in Mexico – equal to more than two new victims per hour.

Geographically, violence has remained concentrated in a cluster of western and northern states driven by warring organized crime cartels and gangs plus corresponding weakened rule of law institutions.

Guanajuato retained its mantle as Mexico's most violent state again in November based on total homicides – a title it has held for four consecutive years now since 2018. With at least 234 murder victims last month, that figure has pushed the death toll to over 2,750 lives lost so far this year.

The industrial city of Irapuato suffered one of Guanajuato's largest single massacres of 2023 when gunmen stormed a private residence on Guanajuato's "Night of the Dead" holiday on November 2, leaving ten people shot dead.

Other especially hard-hit states last month included Baja California, Chihuahua, State of Mexico, Michoacán, and Zacatecas. In Baja California's fractured Tijuana, an average of around eight homicides occurred daily, mainly driven by retail drug sales and underworld conflicts. Sinaloa's Culiacán saw at least 75 people murdered in November, putting the city back on pace to potentially exceed 1,000 homicides for a third year straight. And in Zacatecas' Fresnillo, the month ended notably with city police chief Antonio Soledad Perez assassinated by cartel sicarios.

Areas witnessing resurgences of homicidal violence in 2023 versus last year include Sonora, Coahuila, and Nuevo León states. All three had seen violence drop through 2021-2022, but this improvement has reversed recently, primarily around main urban centers.

Murders of women also continued, with hundreds of probable femicides recorded in November. At least 2,950 women have now been slain in Mexico over just the first ten months of 2023. If femicides continue at the monthly average pace on a linear trajectory, the country could end 2023 with nearly 3,540 women murdered, marking a new record high for the nation and the 4th consecutive annual increase over the past six years of available data.

In Veracruz specifically, more women were murdered this September alone than during the entire preceding years of 2015 or 2016, according to the state attorney general. And November 2023 saw disturbing cases like the corpse of an unidentified woman found brutally tortured and beheaded along a rural road near Tempoal in Veracruz's citrus-growing northern region.

Beyond homicides, discoveries of human remains across hidden graves and dumping sites persisted, indicating clandestine body disposal by criminal groups. Several hundred additional vestiges were located over the month, hinting at the actual toll of total unsolved disappearances nationally, which already number likely over 100,000 victims according to government data.

And on November 25, Mexico's head Interior Ministry human rights official publicly admitted for the first time that near-total impunity reigns around the country's endless stream of homicides and disappearances. Current 92% - 93% impunity rates leave "almost no possibility" for victims receiving justice, she acknowledged, while there are calls for greater accountability or strategy changes from the current administration.



HARARY SECURITY

Kidnappings

Kidnapping remained an ongoing threat for residents across areas of at least 20 Mexican states in November. Government data documented that 614 victims fell into various categories of abductions nationally last month. Though given high levels estimated to go unreported overall, the reality could be multiples higher according to monitoring groups.

Geographically, kidnapping incidents were concentrated in central Mexico, encompassing parts of Mexico City plus states like State of Mexico, Morelos, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, and Puebla. But worrying hotspots have also persisted down Mexico's eastern gulf areas, including Veracruz's capital, Xalapa, tourist hub Poza Rica, plus cities like Coatzacoalcos, Minatitlán, and Acayucan.

A notorious case in central Guanajuato state saw 13 tactical gunmen pull fireman Alberto Chaparro from his ambulance at gunpoint in Irapuato on November 9. And brazen express kidnappings for quick cash extortions continued plaguing urban zones like Chihuahua City, Mexicali, Culiacán, Acapulco, and Cuernavaca.

Abductions tied to human trafficking networks stayed active as well. In Puebla state, 13 Guatemalan migrants, including three children, were rescued on November 18 near Izúcar de Matamoros after being captive for over a week. While in Veracruz 24 hours earlier, 68 Indigenous migrants, mainly from Guatemala, were freed from a house doubling as an underground migrant stash location.

Unfortunately, 2023 remains on track to tally the 3rd consecutive record for annual kidnapping victims since current levels began being tracked over two decades ago in 1997.

Extortion

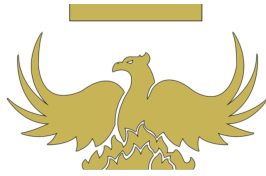
No comprehensive data exists to accurately depict the pervasive realities around extortion by organized crime and gangs afflicting vast areas of Mexico. Essentially, it is an underreported crime with victims reluctant to risk retaliation for noncompliance or for filing complaints without solid expectations of repercussions against perpetrators either way.

But based on notable cases and admissions from government sources, at least hundreds of thousands of individuals and businesses have fallen victim over the years.

Recent instances over November offered reminders of these crimes' far-reaching nature and critical severity. On November 2 in Mexico City, for example, police captured members of a dangerous gang known as "Los Mazos" who admitted extorting street vendors at a fair in Gustavo A. Madero borough for permission to allow them to work.

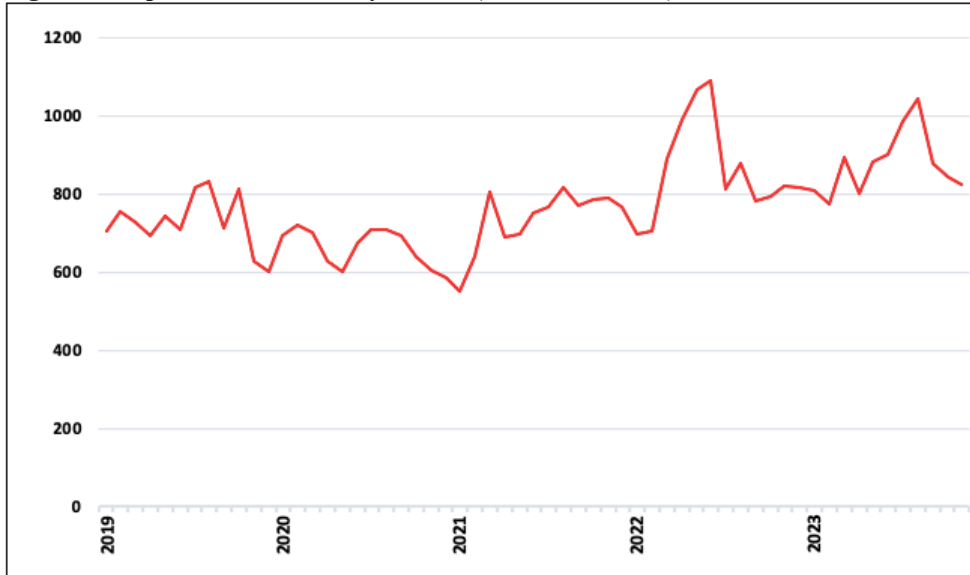
While in Veracruz's important petrochemical hub of Minatitlán, at least 60 local businesses shuttered on November 14 in unified protest after a wave of extortions, including sophisticated telephone scams targeting owners and employees. In Oaxaca, bands of armed criminals continued extracting payment by force from lime orchard owners and farmer cooperatives across the state's vulnerable coastal lowlands.

However, perhaps nowhere symbolized the immense challenges better than the events on November 21 in Puebla's tiny rural Indigenous municipality of Coyomeapan. An entrenched local crime family named the Celestino Rosas, who've dominated the town for over a decade, sent a convoy of masked gunmen to confront residents. They wounded several people, kidnapped three others, killed livestock, and left more threats unless the community acquiesced to their demands.



HARARY SECURITY

Figure 3: Reported Extortions by Month (Source: SEGOB)



Armed Robbery

Armed robbery remained a consistent crime for communities across Mexico in November. Official statistics reported nearly 9,000 incidents nationally, though actual rates are certainly even higher considering unreported cases, especially across more remote areas.

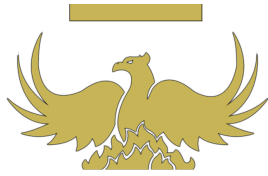
Geographic patterns around robbery have flowed largely concurrent with regions fighting heavy organized crime presence. States witnessing the highest numbers of cases in November included Mexico City, State of Mexico, Veracruz, Jalisco, and Guanajuato.

Mexico City's Iztapalapa, Gustavo A Madero, and Cuauhtémoc boroughs dealt with frequent muggings daily. Active hotspots included areas like Constituyentes Avenue, Ermita-Iztapalapa, San Juanico Nextipac, Juventino Rosas, and Eje Central corridors. Armed motorcycle robberies stayed extremely common as bands of thieves robbed victims stopped in traffic or walking on sidewalks.

State of Mexico municipalities near the capital, like Nezahualcóyotl, Chimalhuacán, and Ecatepec, also saw continuous, ongoing incidents. Robbery gangs continued targeting Metro riders, bus passengers, and taxi users across sprawling urban transportation hubs.

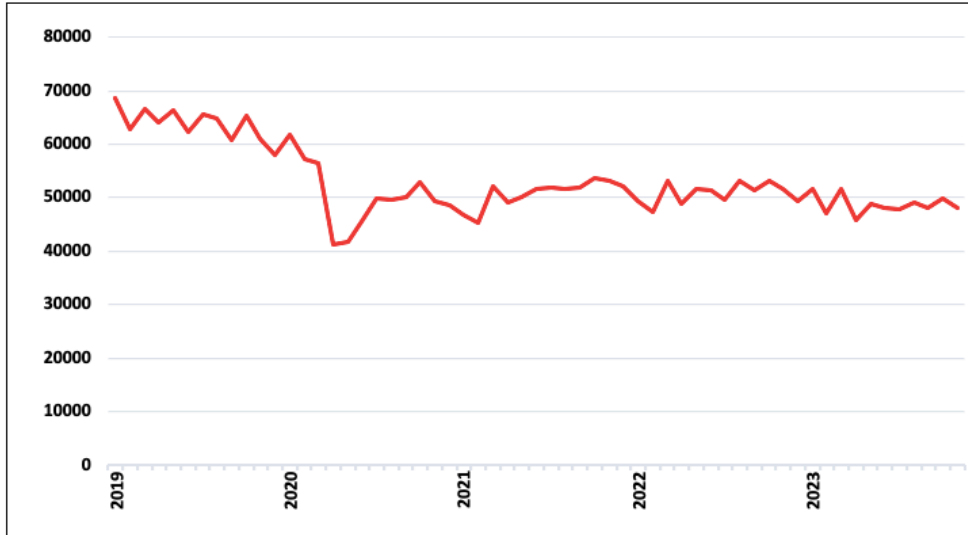
Bank clients and tourists encountered criminals around cosmopolitan zones like Guadalajara City, Puerto Vallarta, and Cancún in Quintana Roo state. While truckers and motorists navigating isolated highways bore risks of vehicle theft and hijackings at the hands of thieves in realms like Michoacán's vigilante-dominated Tierra Caliente district.

More positively, robbery overall had been trending down between 2018 and 2021 across Mexico before worsening again last year.



HARARY SECURITY

Figure 4: Total Reported Robberies by Month (Source: SEGOB)



Solutions

For over 25 years, our firm has been a trusted partner to businesses seeking responsible expansion in Mexico. Our in-country team provides customized guidance and support to help clients capitalize on Mexico's immense economic potential.

We aim to enable sustainable growth built on strong local relationships. Our services include conducting assessments to help secure opportunities for positive impact, training visiting personnel, and offering ongoing advisory services so clients can integrate into the fabric of Mexico's society.

With the right partnership, companies can find strong possibilities. We strive to facilitate connections, protect and train workforces, partner in finding economic development, and help ensure businesses and communities prosper.

Ultimately, we aim to unlock Mexico's promise to fuel secure, inclusive growth for all. We see ourselves as partners in progress, not just providers of services. Let us advise you on how to chart your company's course best so you can leverage Mexico's future.

See map below.



HARARY SECURITY

Attacks on Authorities (November 2023)

