

# Spotlight on Insecurity in Mexico

By Kaitlen J. Cassell<sup>1</sup>

Crime and violence are pressing issues in Mexico. Crime persistently afflicts the country, and has increased in recent years: according to the AmericasBarometer Mexico survey, 24% of Mexican adults had been victimized by crime in the year prior to the 2014 survey, while 33% reported the same in 2019. Violence increased after 2006, when Mexico's military took a more active role in fighting drug cartels. The year 2018 was especially violent, marking the highest homicide rate in Mexico's recent history, with an average of 91 homicides per day.<sup>2</sup> Further, an unprecedented 132 political candidates were murdered during the country's 2018 elections.<sup>3</sup>

Does public opinion reflect this grim reality? Yes, according to the AmericasBarometer. In the early 2019 Mexico national survey, when asked about the country's most important problem, 52% of people mentioned security-related concerns.<sup>4</sup> Strikingly, this percentage more than doubled between 2017 and 2019, in line with the aforementioned increase in violence. While the majority identified security as Mexico's biggest problem in 2019, considerably fewer expressed the belief that the most important issue is economic (18.6%), political (10.5%), or something else (18.9%). This finding is even more notable given that a majority in Mexico consistently mentioned an economic issue as the most important problem in every previous AmericasBarometer survey—until 2019.

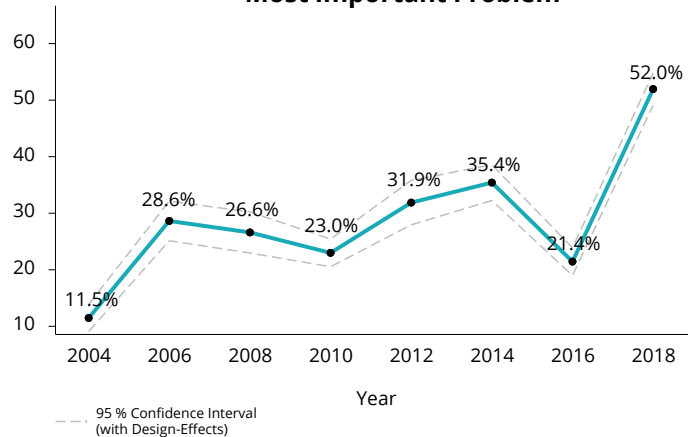
Who is more likely to report that security is the most important problem facing Mexico? Analyses of the 2019 data reveal that women and older people are more likely to identify security as Mexico's most important

problem. Individuals' opinions also appear to be shaped by evaluations of their own neighborhoods—those who feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods are considerably more likely to voice concern about the country's security. That said, crime victims are no more likely than non-victims to view insecurity as the paramount national concern.<sup>5</sup> It appears that not all individual experiences are factored into peoples' beliefs regarding the issue that should dominate the nation's agenda.

Interestingly, individuals who cite insecurity as Mexico's most critical problem do not stand out as voting for a particular presidential candidate, such as Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), whose successful 2018 campaign focused heavily on security issues. Nonetheless, it does appear that the public has granted AMLO a strong mandate to tackle security issues. On July 1, 2018, 53.19% of Mexico voted AMLO into office. AMLO won a plurality of votes in 31 of 32 states, while his closest competitor, Ricardo Anaya, won the remaining

state (and 22.27% of the national vote). Meanwhile, AMLO's party, MORENA, attained an electoral majority in both chambers of congress, granting AMLO significant authority to implement his agenda.<sup>6</sup> Though López Obrador has only been in office for less than a year, crime and violence represent two of the most significant challenges facing his presidency. Given that the public has placed these issues squarely at the top of the national agenda, we can assume that expectations are high that he can deliver safer times.

Percent who Report Security is the Most Important Problem



<sup>1</sup> Kaitlen J. Cassell is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University and LAPOP-affiliated researcher

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/23/687579971/mexico-reports-highest-ever-homicide-rate-in-2018-tops-33-000-investigations>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/27/americas/mexico-political-deaths-election-season-trnd/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> This question is open ended, and then coded into the field into a set of 30-40 categories; for the purpose of this analysis, those who stated crime/insecurity/violence concerns were coded as an affirmative response. The figure, then, shows the percentage who respond with a security-related issue, as opposed to any other issue.