

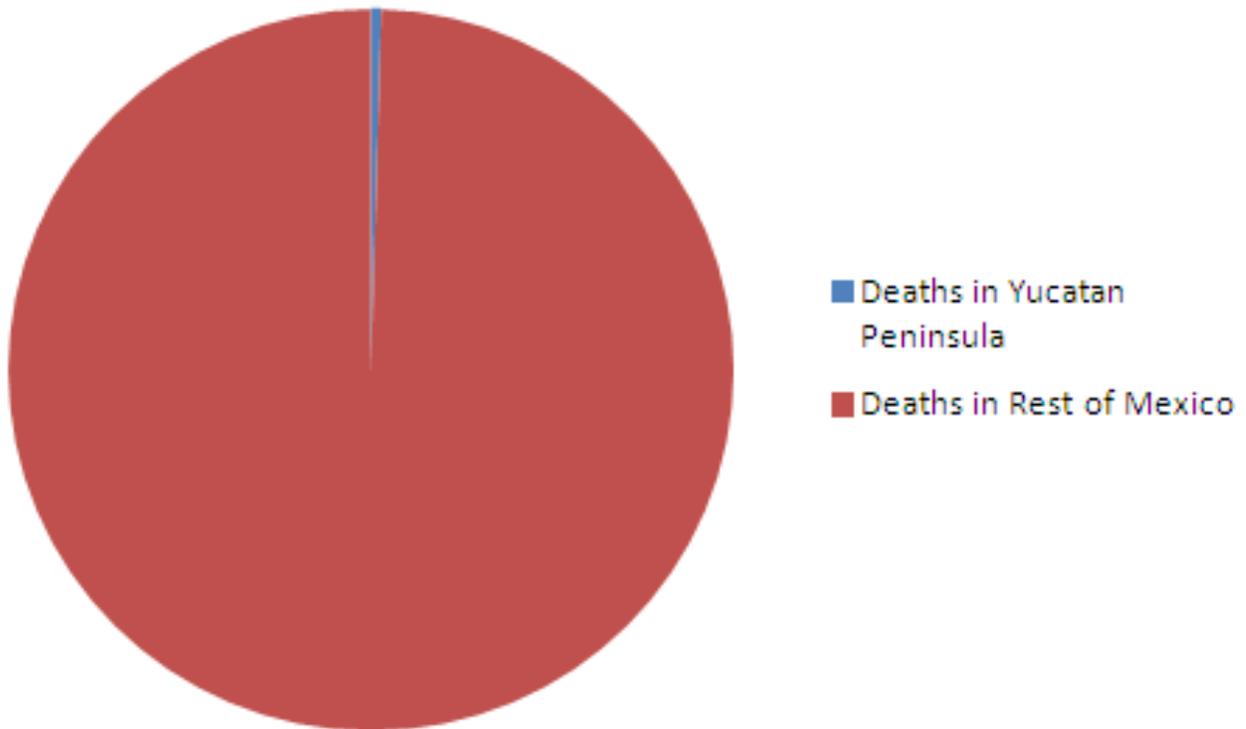
Note from Friends of Accion:

After reviewing this article's reference to a Mexican government website that tallies all of the murders related to the drug war, only 0.5% were from the three states that make up the Yucatan PENINSULA during the first 3/4 of 2011. In the Yucatan STATE, there was only one drug related murder and it occurred in the city of Tizimin.

Of the murders in the Yucatan PENINSULA, 57% were from the dangerous part of Cancun and another 13% were from Carmen, Campeche which isn't close to where any of our teams go.

Acción is committed to keeping a close watch on safety in Mexico, so we want to pass along news articles like this one that provide information. Despite the scary title of this article and the alarming data about drug violence in Mexico as a whole, the Yucatan Peninsula remains safe and largely unaffected by drug cartels.

Graph of Deaths in Mexico due to Drug Violence



The New York Times

January 18, 2012

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/19/world/americas/mexico-drug-war-bloodies-areas-thought-safe.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print

Mexico's Drug War Bloodies Areas Thought Safe

By **RANDAL C. ARCHIBOLD**

MEXICO CITY — The Mexican drug war that has largely been defined by violence along the border is intensifying in interior and southern areas once thought clear of the carnage, broadening a conflict that has already overwhelmed the authorities and dispirited the public, according to analysts and new government data.

Last week, two headless bodies were found in a smoldering minivan near the entrance to one of the largest and most expensive malls in Mexico City, generally considered a refuge from the grisly atrocities that have gripped other cities throughout the drug war.

Two other cities considered safe just six months ago — Guadalajara and Veracruz — have experienced their own episodes of brutality: 26 bodies were left in the heart of Guadalajara late last year, on the eve of Latin America's most prestigious book fair, and last month the entire police force in Veracruz was dismissed after state officials determined that it was too corrupt to patrol a city where 35 bodies were dumped on a road in September.

The spreading violence, believed to largely reflect a widening turf war between two of the biggest criminal organizations in the country, has implications on both sides of the border, putting added pressure on political and law enforcement leaders who are already struggling to show that their strategies are working.

“It is a situation ever more complicated and complex,” said Ricardo Ravelo, a Mexican journalist who has written several books on criminal organizations.

“Resources are and will be stretched to deal with this.”

American officials here acknowledge that the mayhem is unpredictable but contend that they have a way to help tackle it, spreading word that the \$1.6 billion Merida Initiative, Washington's signature antidrug program, will step up training and advising

for the Mexican state and local police and judicial institutions this year, rather than emphasizing the delivery of helicopters and other equipment.

In a year in which President Felipe Calderón's party, in power since 2000, may struggle to hang on to the presidency in July elections, the expanding violence is giving political rivals, all promising a more peaceful country, much to run on.

Discerning patterns of violence in the drug war can be perilous; it is often like a tornado skipping across terrain, devastating one area while leaving another untouched.

But government statistics released last week showed a surge in deaths presumed to be related to drug or organized crime in Mexico State, which surrounds the capital and is the nation's most populous state, in the first nine months of last year. The government data also show that violence has now afflicted 831 communities nationwide, an increase of 7 percent.

Although questions have emerged about the government's tally, many analysts agree that the violence is widening.

"There has been a definite shift of violence away from the border and back to the interior states," said David A. Shirk, director of the Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego, who closely tracks drug crime.

In a way, he said, the shift is a stark reversal of the trend of six years ago, when violence exploded in more southerly states and migrated north along drug-trafficking routes, accelerating a drug war that has now left more than 47,000 people dead, according to the government.

In response, the Mexican government deployed its military and the federal police, arresting and killing more than two dozen cartel leaders and splintering or dismantling several groups. Their push has been backed by American aid in the form of helicopters, remotely piloted drones and the deepening involvement of American drug agents in investigations and raids.

The violence slackened in many areas along the border, including Ciudad Juárez, the bloodiest city, where homicides have been declining. Mexican officials say the decrease is proof that they are making headway, but analysts say it may have more to

do with one rival group's defeat of another, reducing competition and the bloodshed that comes with it.

As for the violence in other areas — Acapulco, in the south, is now the second most violent city — that, too, may reflect the shifting contours of the fights between criminal organizations.

The drug war, Mr. Shirk and other analysts say, is increasingly coming down to a fight to the death between the Sinaloa cartel, a more traditional drug-trafficking organization widely considered the most powerful, and Los Zetas, founded by former soldiers and considered the most violent as it expands into extortion, kidnapping and other rackets in regions far off the drug route map. A third, the Gulf Cartel, remains well armed and rises to attack from time to time.

Many of the clashes have been in central or more southern areas where the two main rivals have not previously fought each other so violently, analysts say. George W. Grayson, a longtime researcher of Mexican violence and co-author of a coming book on Los Zetas, said the group had spread to 17 states from 14 a year ago.

Though experts have said that Mexico City's size, complexity and police force, considered better trained than many others, make it unlikely to fall into the mayhem of other locales, there have been alarming signs that violence is encroaching on the capital.

At the mall where the bodies were found, a banner proclaiming it was the work of the Sinaloa cartel appeared nearby, though experts say the killings could have been carried out by any number of offshoots operating in the region.

The murders were not the first in or near the capital to bear the signature of a cartel; in October two human heads were found on a busy road near the Defense Ministry headquarters.

But as the government, buttressed by United States drug agents and military advisers, deploys its armed forces and the federal police to dismantle criminal organizations and causes them to splinter, it has grown difficult to determine which criminal group is doing exactly what.

The conflict has undergone “Zetanification,” as all manner of criminal outfits copy the cartel’s brutal tactics and claim its name, said Mr. Grayson, a professor at the College of William and Mary.

Mexican officials continue to assert that they are getting the upper hand. In Washington last week, Mexico’s public safety secretary, Genaro García Luna, warned that violence would probably not decrease significantly for five more years. But he insisted that progress was being made, saying the rate of increase in homicides believed related to organized crime was showing signs of slowing. “You have to give the process more time to measure its efficiency,” he said.

At the mall in Mexico City, in the high-end Santa Fe district, known for its financial buildings and apartment towers, shoppers said they were worried but growing accustomed to gruesome violence in the country.

“We are living in a terrible situation,” said Jasia Grinberg, 65, who runs a hair salon at the mall, Centro Santa Fe, “and meanwhile, we are getting used to it.”

Damien Cave and Karla Zabudovsky contributed reporting.
