Rethinking ‘Feminicide’: The Role of Organized Crime Groups in Increased Rates of Feminicide in Mexico

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Rethinking ‘Feminicide’: The Role of Organized Crime Groups in Increased Rates of Feminicide in Mexico

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from William & Mary

by

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Abstract

Why has feminicide significantly increased in Mexico over the past two decades?

Previous feminicide research in Mexico has centered around the idea that the introduction of neoliberal politics changed family structures and increased the vulnerability of women as they entered the workforce. However, this explanation does not fully explain patterns of political violence against women in Mexico. I argue that Mexico’s War on Drugs and the intrinsic patriarchal ideologies and structures of organized crime groups (OCGs) reinforce gender hierarchies and increase the vulnerability of women. To evaluate my argument, I analyze state-level public government data on organized crime and feminicide rates, and develop two case studies focusing on Guanajuato and Querétaro. By focusing on the relationship between organized crime groups (OCGs) and feminicide in Mexico, this thesis deepens understanding of violence against women in understudied regions. It also reveals how OCGs fundamentally transform the nature of feminicide within the country and underscores the Mexican state's neglect in fulfilling its obligation to investigate offenses and safeguard its citizens' right to life.
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Introduction

“We fight today, so we don’t die tomorrow” (Abi-habib & Lopez, 2021). These were the words chanted by thousands of Mexican women during a Mexico City march on International Women’s Day, March 8, 2021. This protest is one of the many feminist protests that have taken place in Mexico since the inauguration of the country’s current president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO). The rise of these feminist movements and demonstrations among Mexican women are clear examples of a population’s demand for an end to violence and impunity. Data from Mexico’s Executive Secretariat of the Public Security National System (hereafter SESNSP) show that in 2020, an average of ten women were murdered every day (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2020, p. 32).

Feminicides, defined as the murder of women or girls on account of their gender, is considered the harshest form of gender-based violence. This thesis examines why femicides have increased in Mexico by exploring how the presence of organized crime groups affects violence against women. Specifically, this thesis asks whether and to what degree the presence of organized crime groups (hereafter OCGs) is associated with higher rates of femicide. Moreover, how do OCGs shape the nature of femicide?

This question is important because it helps contextualize the impact that impunity and organized crime groups have on the security of women. By turning attention to these issues, we gain better understanding of how the Mexican government has both enabled the impunity of OCGs and weakened the rule of law for women. These findings further underscore how the state has neglected its duty to investigate offenses and ensure its citizens’ rights to life. This has potential policy implications by showing how reducing the prominence and power of organized crime groups may result in reduced violence against women.
Prior research on feminicide in Mexico has largely centered on the 1990s feminicide cases of Ciudad Juárez. Scholars have argued that the introduction of neoliberal policies through the maquiladoras—factories in Mexico run by foreign companies that benefit foreign countries—increased the vulnerability of women by changing the city’s social structures, presenting new opportunities for violence. However, such work often overlooks the increasing presence of organized crime groups (OCGs) in Ciudad Juárez during the time of these feminicides. Additionally, there is not much feminicide research outside of the Ciudad Juárez cases. I thus seek to bridge the gap between feminicide research and organized crime research within Mexico by exploring the effect of OCGs on feminicide in Guanajuato and Querétaro. This thesis contributes to the existing literature by providing an updated explanation of the country’s current feminicide rates by approaching the study of violence against women through a focus on the influence of OCGs.

Another contribution of this thesis is to advance the conversation on the relationship between OCGs and violence against women by discussing existing theories regarding feminicide and violence against women in Mexico and the patriarchal structure of OCGs. Through this process, I provide a clear understanding of the existing literature’s theories regarding violence against women, specifically feminicide, as well as those regarding the influences of OCGs on the lives of women. Then, I expand upon my theory and hypotheses. Next, I present my research design and use data from two Mexican government agencies to establish two case study states with differing OCG presence in order to test the hypothesis. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the results and address avenues for further research.
Literature Review

In the following review, I begin by defining violence against women and feminicide. Then, I discuss the types of femicide and the criminal profile of feminicide perpetrators in Mexico. I then analyze the theories that developed from the Ciudad Juárez case—specifically, the effect of neoliberalism on violence against women and the role of the government’s impunity and victim blaming on the victim’s lack of justice. Finally, I examine how women’s lives are affected both directly and indirectly by the presence of OCGs, through an analysis of existing theories regarding how the organizations’ patriarchal structures reinforce misogynistic ideologies and increase women’s vulnerability.

The Origins of Feminicidio

Violence against women is “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women” (United Nations General Assembly, 1993). Femicide—“the intentional murder of women because they are women” (World Health Organization, p. 1)—is considered the harshest form of violence against women. The term femicide in English dates back to the early 19th century. John Corry first used the term in 1801 to denote the murder of a woman in A Satirical View of London at the Commencement of the Nineteenth Century (Russell, 2006, p. 75; Saccomano, 2017, p. 54). In 1827, William MacNish, the murderer of a young woman, titled his memoirs The Confessions of an Unexecuted Femicide; then, in 1848 femicide appeared in Wharton’s Law Lexicon as a punishable offense (Russell, 2006, pp. 75-76). In the 1970s the term was revived by feminists; however, they added the idea of misogyny to the original definition which defined it simply as the murder of women (Russell, 2006, p. 75). In 1976, feminist Diana Russell used this new
In her definition of femicide, Russell also considers the role of institutional and social practices that can produce the death of women; for example, she considers deaths caused by unsafe abortions, due to a lack of state recognition of women’s right to choose, as a case of femicide (2006, p. 85; Richaud Domínguez, 2022, p. 78).

When translating the term, Latin American feminists modified its theoretical definition to encompass the Latin American reality. The Mexican feminist activist and politician Marcela Lagarde decided to use the term feminicidio, instead of translating it into Spanish as femicidio, to add the elements of impunity, institutional violence, and lack of diligence in Latin America with respect to women to the definition (Lagarde, 2006, p. 223; Corradi et al., 2016, p. 982; Saccomano, 2017, p. 54). Thus, the term feminicidio (hereafter feminicide) originated in Mexico as an adaptation of the English term femicide. Feminicide, in this thesis, is defined as the killing of women because of their gender, and it also “involves abduction, sexual torture, rape, […] mutilation, and disappearance, which tends to be systematic; is exercised with misogynistic
malice and impunity; and has the complicity of the state” (Melgar, 2017, p. 164; Romero Mendoza et al., 2018, p. 12). This definition encompasses the emphasis on the government’s impunity and responsibility for the violent murders that is important for Latin American scholars—it implies that the government is failing to protect its citizens by facilitating the denial of human rights.

Types of Femicide

Diana Russell (2006) and Julia Monárrez (2006) distinguish between several types of femicide. Russell constructs four types of femicide, in which the perpetrator is always a male, based on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator (2006, p. 88; Iribarne 2016, pp. 207-208). According to Russell, intimate partner femicides are those in which the perpetrator had a romantic relationship with the victim, femicides of family members are those in which the perpetrator is any male relative, femicides of acquaintances are those in which the perpetrator has any other kind of link to the victim (e.g., friends of the family or the victim, male colleagues, male authority figures, and male dates (non-sexual), and stranger femicides are those in which the perpetrator and the victim are strangers (2006, p. 88; Iribarne, 2016, pp. 207-208). Monárrez distinguishes between three types of femicide: intimate femicide, femicide due to stigmatized activities, and systematic sexual femicide (2006, pp. 363, 372, 375). According to Monárrez, intimate femicide includes current and ex-partners as well as family members and subdivides into infantile femicide when the victim is a girl and familial femicide when the perpetrator is a relative (2006, p. 363). Femicide due to stigmatized activities is the murder of a woman because she is considered to be carrying out “bad woman” activity (e.g., servant sex, waitressing in bars, dancing in nightclubs, etc.) that authorizes her to be killed (Monárrez, 2006, p. 372). Systematic sexual femicide is conducted when the perpetrator is motivated by sadistic sexual impulses and
the victim becomes a sexual object—in these cases, the “torture and the disposal of the body are part of a sexualization and eroticization of the crime” (Monárrez, 2006, p. 375). A major difference between Russell and Monárrez’s definitions is that Monárrez contemplates the possibility that the perpetrator may be a woman (Monárrez, 2006, p. 363).

**Criminal Profile of the Feminicide Perpetrator in Mexico**

The Mexican family structure has an extensive history of gender roles and gender oppression that dates back to the country’s culture and traditions before colonization (Richaud Domínguez, 2022, pp. 74-75). The native Mexican tribes had a hierarchy between genders in their communities—“females were often traded and gifted as objects by members of their own families” (Richaud Domínguez, 2022, p. 75). This situation worsened during the colonization era because native females “were kidnapped, tortured, raped and murdered, and were specifically used to reinforce the domination of colonizers over the indigenous groups” (Richaud Domínguez, 2022, p. 75).

These ideologies persist in the country’s modern society. The gender ideologies that existed during the era of the Mexican Revolution established a generalized misogynistic mentality among the Mexican public by validating the idea that men are naturally superior to women (Richaud Domínguez, 2022). During the Mexican Revolution, men banned female soldiers from the military, because they “considered their assistance as an obstacle more than an advantage” (Richaud Domínguez, 2022, p. 75). During this period, women were raped and kidnapped at such significant rates that they “were obligated to migrate to the United States, where they were caught in concentration camps and tortured to death” (Richaud Domínguez, 2022, p. 75). This period defined men as the strong, brave, and dauntless sex and women as the submissive, obedient, inferior, and domestic sex (Richaud Domínguez, 2022, p. 75). These
stereotypes became so embedded in Mexican society that women’s bodies became objects that men viewed as property. Women were passed on from their father’s domain to their husband’s domain, thus establishing the idea that women were only valuable if they had a connection with a man (Richaud Domínguez, 2022, p. 75). Because of this mentality, violence against women, especially in the domestic sphere, became normalized, and Mexico experienced a “growth in physical, economical, and sexual violence against women” (Richaud Domínguez, 2022, p. 75).

Although little research exists on the criminal profile of feminicide perpetrators in Mexico, it is important to consider the country’s history with misogynistic and patriarchal ideologies when analyzing cases of feminicide. Men raised in circles where these ideologies and patterns of violence are prominent are “often educated into violence, which inherently influences their views and beliefs regarding women and their bodies” (Richaud Domínguez, 2022, p. 82). Thus, Richaud Domínguez suggests that perpetrators adopt the mentality of male superiority, and “execute their murderous behavior when they want to prove their dominance, power, and control over a woman, whether it’s their partner or a random victim” (2022, p. 82).

Ciudad Juárez: Neoliberalism and Feminicide

The case of the Ciudad Juárez feminicides is widely discussed in existing literature. It is broadly viewed as the beginning of feminicide in Mexico. Many scholars attribute the rise of violence against women, specifically homicides, to the changes brought by neoliberalism (Lozano-Reich, 2018; Olivera & Furio, 2006; Rodriguez, 2016; Wright, 2017). Neoliberalist policies, such as the NAFTA agreement, accelerated the success of maquiladoras. Scholars argue that women were hired in these factories because they worked for lower wages and were “more easily controlled” (Lozano-Reich, 2018, p. 106). Because these women were seen as disposable workers that could be easily replaced, the owners of the factories often disregarded the security
of their workers (Lozano-Reich, 2018, p. 105; Wright, 2017, p. 265). One of the security faults pointed out by scholars is unsafe transportation. The factory buses did not drop women off at their homes, and the women often had to walk home in unlit areas leaving them vulnerable to attack (Wright, 2011, p. 712).

Additionally, scholars suggest that because more women joined the workforce than ever before, their changing status interfered with the patriarchal norms of Ciudad Juárez families. Because many women became the family breadwinners or earned more than their husbands, insecurities increased among their male counterparts which caused an increase in violence against women (Olivera & Furio, 2006, p. 109; Lozano-Reich, 2018, p. 106).

Although these theories are relevant, they fail to acknowledge the increasing role of corruption and OCGs in the lives of the women of Juárez. At the time of the feminicides, the maquiladora industries had been in Juárez for over 30 years without incidences of violence (Agnew, 2015, p. 432). Why, then, are they accredited with being the cause of increased violence? The timeline of the feminicides makes more sense when you consider that the “progression of Mexican drug cartel influence and power in Juárez grew significantly between the mid-1980s and early 1990s” which significantly increased violence in the area (Agnew, 2015, p. 436). Additionally, the neoliberalism theory does not explain the increase of feminicides across the country over the past two decades because not all states experienced the same increase in economic opportunities as a result of NAFTA.

Public Women and Victim Blaming

The case of Ciudad Juárez shows that Mexican journalists and political and corporate elites have historically resorted to victim blaming to dismiss the severity of femicide in the country. Previous studies on journalistic reports show that journalists exonerate the perpetrators
of feminicide by blaming women for “having transgressed the sex/gender system and female norms” and presenting them as “propitiatory victims for being prostitutes, drug addicts and infidels” (Alcocer, 2014; Tiscareño García et al., 2021, p. 71). These representations stigmatize the lives and deaths of the victims by justifying their deaths in an extension of patriarchal ideology (Tiscareño García et al., 2021, p. 71).

Additionally, previous research shows that political and corporate elites also contributed to these ideologies by using their power to disseminate the idea of “public women” among the Mexican public. The changing role of women due to the opportunities for work offered by the rise of neoliberalism allowed for the creation of this concept (Wright, 1999). Public women are “those who work outside of the home and, through this act, transgress normatively gendered spaces by spending work and/or leisure time in areas that are typically deemed male spaces” (Agnew, 2015, p. 431; Wright, 1999). Political and corporate elites used this argument to delegitimize the victims of feminicide and the political movement that sought to raise awareness of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez (Wright, 2006, p. 682). According to Wright, “the discourse of the public woman normalized the violence and used the victims’ bodies as a way to substantiate the politics based on patriarchal notions of normality,” meaning that “[n]ormal Mexican families, with normal, private women safely at home, had nothing to worry about” (2011, p. 713-714). Furthermore, the police reiterated and legitimized the idea of “public women” popularized by political and corporate elites by proposing that victims were living “double lives” and suggesting they were prostitutes when their families reported that the victims were missing (Wright, 2011, p. 714; Nathan, 1999, p. 26; Wright, 1999, p. 456).
War on Drugs, Hyper-militarization, and Increased Impunity

Past research has shown that the presence of OCGs negatively affects the security of women both directly and indirectly. The start of the War on Drugs in 2006, which increased the militarization of violent cities in Mexico, contributed to an increase in violence. Fondevila et al. state that “the militarization of drug-related crime prosecution and the increase in the number of confrontations of armed drug cartels can be seen as sources of the increase of national gender-biased homicide rates” (2020, p. 2). They attribute this notion to a “vulnerability that exists and grows in a violent environment dominated by men who sustain a rigid patriarchal structure” (Fondevila et al., 2020, p. 2). This means that increases in female homicide victimization are derived from both OCG confrontations and police and military intervention (Fondevila et al., 2020; Agnew, 2015). Because of hyper-militarization, there was a “dramatic increase in violence against women at the hands of these officials, who [perceived] themselves to be above the law” (Agnew, 2015, p. 441): Additionally, “the presence of violence, corruption, and impunity perpetuates this sort of behavior among officials to the extent that it becomes normative” (Agnew, 2015, p. 441):

Additionally, the increased power of OCGs coincides with increased government corruption and impunity, which lead to the weakening of security forces and the justice system (Ramos Lira et al., 2016, p. 672). This weakened system leads to an increase in violence since perpetrators are less likely to be punished for crimes (Toledo, 2009, p. 87; Richaud Domínguez, 2022, p. 82). This concept is especially important since Mexico has shown an unwillingness to prosecute cases of violence against women and feminicide (de Paula, 2018, p. 7; Richaud Domínguez, 2022, p. 82). By doing this, the country has painted these crimes as less important, thus contributing to the normalization of violence against women across the country (de Paula,
These critical claims suggest a need for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between violence against women and OCGs.

**Women and OCGs**

The structures of OCGs in Mexico mimic the patriarchal and misogynistic ideologies of the Mexican society emphasized by Richaud Domínguez (2022) by reinforcing gender hierarchies in their OCG culture. Honor, masculinity, and heterosexuality are all qualities valued by the male-dominated organized crime world in Mexico (Núñez-González & Núñez Noriega, 2019, p. 2). Violence is seen as an approach to masculinity, because in patriarchal societies, “a real man” can be identified by his willingness to engage in violent practices (Bengtsson, 2016; Núñez-González & Núñez Noriega, 2019, p. 11). Among OCG members, violence is used to show strength by challenging other men, threatening them, physically violating them, showing a willingness to confront, attacking their property, or murdering (Núñez-González & Núñez Noriega, 2019, p. 11).

Another practice used by members of OCGs to distinguish their masculinity and honor is the domination of women (Kaufman, 1989; Núñez-González & Núñez Noriega, 2019, p. 13). Women are seen as objects by male OCG members. Thus, members of OCGs exercise excessive control over the lives of the women in their lives by prohibiting them from attending public spaces and threatening or physically violating them by pulling, raping, abducting, or killing them (Núñez-González & Núñez Noriega, 2019, p. 13). Previous research shows that women in the social sphere of OCGs are used as decorative items to be exhibited and used for sex (Turati, 2011; Jiménez Valdez, 2014, p. 109). Women function as couriers between organization leaders, decorations at parties, and entities exchanged to secure deals or alliances with other OCGs (Jiménez Valdez, 2014, p. 111). Women’s bodies are also used during confrontations between
OCGs. The murder of women is used in a performative way, often through the public display of cadavers with written messages, to communicate with rivals, traitors, and government officials or to delimit territories (Agnew, 2015, p. 441; Hernández & Aída, 2019, p. 638; Ramos Lira et al., 2016, p. 660; Martínez, 2018, p. 297; Jiménez Valdez, 2014, p. 120; Mares, 2011, p. 5). Because of their objectification, women’s bodies become entities through which male OCG members communicate their success in terms of wealth and social power (Ovalle & Giacomello, 2008, p. 34; Jiménez Valdez, 2014, p. 109).

The patriarchal structure of OCGs is emphasized by the position of women within the groups themselves. Women in OCGs in Mexico often perform low-status jobs within the organization’s structure. They are often tasked with trafficking small amounts of narcotics because they are less likely to be associated with drug trafficking and can bypass security officers (Mares, 2011, p. 4). This job is often performed by swallowing pellets of drugs and then throwing them up at the destination (Mares, 2011, p. 4). This job poses a risk to women because, if they do not make it to the destination in time, the packet could disintegrate and cause an overdose leading to death (Mares, 2011, p. 4). Many of the women in these positions become part of the OCGs because of a lack of economic opportunities or because they are linked to the OCG through a loved one (Mares, 2011, p. 4; Jiménez Valdez, 2014, p. 117). For example, some women end up in OCGs because they are forced to take over as breadwinners after the death of their partners who took part in organized crime (Mares, 2011, p. 4; Jiménez Valdez, 2014, p. 112). These women have difficulty finding jobs elsewhere because they have little to no experience in the workforce or are uneducated (Mares, 2011, p. 4; Jiménez Valdez, 2014, p. 112).
Another notion that emphasizes the patriarchal structure of OCGs and the vulnerability of women within the groups is the overflow of women imprisoned for drug-related crimes. According to Mares, from 2007 to 2011, there was a four hundred percent increase in the number of women incarcerated in Mexico for activities related to organized crime (2011, p. 4). Currently, while there are more men than women in Mexican prisons, more women are imprisoned for drug-related crimes than men (Mares, 2011, p. 5; Jiménez Valdez, 2014, p. 119). Because OCGs are male-dominated organizations, this means that women are disproportionately represented in prisons with regard to drug offenses. These notions suggest that drug trafficking heightens the attitude that women are easily disposable, thus further reinforcing their vulnerability.

These are all aspects that previous feminicide research failed to mention in their theories even though there is a clear connection between women’s security and OCGs. The patriarchal structures of OCGs foster an environment where women’s vulnerability is increased due to a perceived lower status among male members of OCGs.

*Bridging the Divide*

Since previous feminicide research primarily focuses on the impact of neoliberalism in Ciudad Juárez and disregards the influence of OCGs in the city, this thesis aims to expand the feminicide literature by examining the effects of OCG influence in Mexico on feminicide. Previous case studies have shown that OCGs adopt patriarchal and misogynistic ideologies that negatively affect the security of women, but less has been said about their effect on feminicide rates. Additionally, previous research has not looked at state-level data on feminicide and OCG presence. By examining this relationship, this thesis presents a novel explanation for the increasing rates of feminicide and violence against women in Mexico and shows how OCGs fundamentally change the nature of feminicide.
Theory

Previous research has suggested a causal relationship between the weakening of security forces and the justice system as a result of the increased power of OCGs (Ramos Lira et al., 2016, p. 672). This institutional weakening has been shown to increase violence because perpetrators feel there is less risk in committing crimes since they are less likely to be punished for them (Toledo, 2009, p. 87). Additionally, previous research found that OCGs negatively affect the security of women because of the violence created by their intrinsic patriarchal structure (Fondevila et al., 2020; Agnew, 2015; Martinez, 2018; Jiménez Valdez, 2014; Mares, 2011; Núñez-González & Núñez Noriega, 2019).

In contrast to these works, I argue that to understand rates of feminicide, we need to unpack the phenomenon of “narco-feminicide,” which I define as the murder of women through the practice of OCG-led patriarchal violence. I aim to show how OCG’s are directly contributing to the increase in feminicide by murdering women for the sake of vengeance, thus establishing women’s bodies as sexual objects and instruments of revenge in their drug wars. In this sense, women have become weapons of war for OCG’s and increasingly used to harm rival OCG’s and other opponents, including politicians. Additionally, because OCG presence often leads to weakened security forces, many “narco-feminicides” remain unprosecuted, highlighting the impunity enjoyed by OCG groups.
Argument

This thesis presents a new explanation for the increased rates of feminicide in Mexico, a subject that is understudied in the context of OCGs. The goal of this study is to show that there is a relationship between the rates of feminicide in Mexico (the dependent variable) and the rates of OCG presence (the independent variables). Through the analysis of this question, this study also aims to show that the nature of feminicide is impacted by the presence of OCGs. My main hypotheses are as follows:

\( H_1: \) Rates of feminicide are higher in states with a larger presence of OCGs than those with low presence of OCGs.

\( H_2: \) The presence of OCGs fundamentally transform the nature of feminicide, resulting in a higher likelihood of victims being killed by firearm, their bodies being publicly displayed, and their perpetrators being unknown.
If these hypotheses are valid, the scope of feminicide in Mexico goes beyond the changing structures of family relationships proposed by the neoliberal theories of the Juárez studies. In fact, an implication of this research is that OCG presence facilitates feminicide by weakening security forces and the justice system and reinforcing patriarchal and misogynistic societal structures. Whether the feminicides are committed by the victim’s partner or family member, a corrupt officer, or a member of an OCG, this institutional weakening makes it easier for perpetrators of feminicide to get away with homicide because of the lack of investigations and police reports. We should thus expect to see that states with high levels of OCG influence will have higher rates of feminicide when compared to states with less OCG presence. Additionally, we should see that the nature of feminicide changes in the presence of OCGs.

**Methodology**

To evaluate the relationship between OCGs and feminicide, I used observational data. Because of the number of states and observations, it is unfeasible to conduct detailed case studies for every Mexican state. Therefore, in order to further explore the causal relationships of my independent (OCG presence) and dependent variable (feminicide), I choose two case studies: the first shows a state with high levels of OCG presence, and the second case shows a state with low levels of OCG presence. These cases allow for the realization of a more in-depth analysis of feminicide within different contexts.

To select my case studies, I mapped the average intentional homicide (Figure 2) using data from Mexico’s Executive Secretariat of the Public Security National System’s (SESNSP) *Statewide Crime Incidence Statistics, 2015-February 2023* and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography’s (INEGI) *Census of Population and Housing 2020* datasets. First, I combined
the instances of intentional homicide (with firearm, with a sharp weapon, with another weapon, and not specified) and organized them based on year and state. I then created a variable that encompassed the average rate of intentional murders for the five-year period. I chose to represent OCG influence through intentional homicides because OCG influence is a difficult measure to count because of the uneven records for the wide range of crimes—e.g., kidnapping, drug trafficking, assault, extortion, etc.—that are perpetrated by OCGs (Yashar 2018, p. 7). Furthermore, most of these instances go unreported because of limited confidence in local and state institutions (Yashar 2018, p. 7). In agreement, Micheal Carvallo claims that “[w]hile government and expert estimates vary, it is agreed that somewhere between 70-80% of homicides in Mexico are related to organized crime conflict” (2023). Because of these notions, methodologically, intentional homicides are the most reliable and best existing record of violent acts of OCG violence at this point (Yashar 2018, p. 7).

Once each state had a variable for the average intentional homicide for the 2015 to 2020 period, I used Mexico’s National Institute of Statistics and Geography’s (INEGI) Census of Population and Housing 2020 dataset to create a new variable that represented the population in each state. I then used this “population” variable and the “average intentional homicide” variable for each state to create a new variable that encompassed the ratio of average intentional homicides per 100,000 people for each state for the 2015 to 2020 period. Finally, I mapped the new “ratio of average intentional homicides” variable for each state (Figure 2).
After reviewing the nationwide map, I determined that Guanajuato and Querétaro would be the two focus case studies because of the stark differences in their intentional homicide rates (Figure 3). Additionally, it is important to note that these are contiguous states, which helps limit any geographical differences that may influence either feminicide or OCG presence. Once I established my case study states, I began my own data collection by creating a dataset to categorize newspaper reports of feminicide in Guanajuato and Querétaro based on their respective penal codes. Additionally, I noted the victim’s relationship to the perpetrator and the status of the perpetrator (whether they had been detained, remained free, or their status was unknown). It must be noted that the availability of data for this study relies on incidents that were documented and subsequently published on the internet. It is plausible that assaults were covered by regional newspapers or word of mouth but not published. These newspaper articles were collected through two main sources: María Salguero’s (2020) “Feminicidios en Mexico Map” and Frida Guerrera’s (2023) El Blog de Frida, both encompassing feminicide articles from 2016.
to 2020. Both women created platforms to document and denounce feminicides across the country, relying primarily on newspaper articles and testimonials. It must be noted that data for 2015 was limited because of article deletion on behalf of the newspapers. It is unknown whether this article deletion was deliberate and attacked cases of feminicide and homicide or whether it was a logistical choice by the companies to manage the content on their website and make space for more content on their servers. The data collected for the year 2015 encompasses the articles that were still available on the websites of local newspaper from both states when the study was conducted. This notion could result in a lower count of collected feminicide than what occurred in reality; however, this should not be a cause for concern since the goal of this study is to look at the nature of feminicide as a whole and not individual years. Using these newspaper articles and interviews with locals of the states, I conduct two in depth case studies in the following section.

Figure 3. Average intentional homicides per 100,000 people, Guanajuato and Querétaro

By collecting my own data on feminicide and comparing it to SESNSP official government data, I address the overall trend of underreported crime across the country,
especially among crimes against women and crimes perpetrated by OCGs, which is a main concern for data collection in this study. To further account for underreporting, instead of focusing on just one year of reports, this study looks at feminicide and organized crime in each state over currently available years (January 2015-March 2020). The start date of January 2015 was selected because government reporting of feminicide as a crime began in 2015. Although the reason for the government’s decision to begin categorizing the crime of feminicide in 2015 has not been confirmed, it could be due to the issuing of Tesis Aislada 1a. CLXI/2015 (10a.) by Mexico’s Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation. Through this Tesis Aislada, the court established that all violent deaths of women should be investigated through a gender perspective under the country’s feminicide protocol, until there is reason to rule out the crime of feminicide and report it under another category. Thus, this could have led to the create of the category of feminicide as a crime in SESNSP. The end date of March 2020 was selected because this was the month before Mexico started implementing COVID restrictions and quarantines, which could change the dynamic of feminicide and violence against women based on periods of quarantine.

Overall, the lack of adequate data in Mexico suggests that this is an area that needs to be addressed. By addressing the insufficient data collection, this study raises awareness of both Mexico’s feminicide and OCG problem and the underreporting of crimes caused by institutional corruption and civilian distrust.

**Case Studies**

The following section discusses the contemporary history of organized crime for the states of Guanajuato and Querétaro and offers a closer look into the role of security forces in the institution of impunity, feminicide laws, and this study’s findings in terms of feminicide development and categorization.
Guanajuato

The state of Guanajuato was chosen for this case study because it is considered to have a high level of organized crime influence according to SESNSP data on intentional homicides. In the past decade, Guanajuato’s reputation as one of the most peaceful states in Mexico has been tainted by its recent invasion by the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG) and its conflicts with the local Cartel Santa Rosa de Lima (CSRL). Guanajuato is now considered one of the most violent states in Mexico (Micheal Carvallo, 2023). Just this year, the state’s cities of Celaya, Irapuato, and Leon were ranked as the 6th, 13th, and 38th most dangerous cities in the world according to a report from the Citizen’s Council for Public Safety and Criminal Justice (Bustamante, 2023). The following sections further discuss the history of OCG presence in the state, the status of feminicide, and the status of security forces and impunity.

The Evolution of Organized Crime in Guanajuato

The culture of organized crime in Guanajuato demonstrates the impact that the 2006 drug war had on the structure of OCGs in Mexico. The kingpin strategy enforced by a Mexico-United States bilateral security initiative yielded the takedown of multiple leaders through their capture and extradition (Micheal Carvallo, 2023). Instead of improving the condition of organized crime, this approach broke many large OCG alliances as the subordinates of the former leaders fought for control of the organization causing the larger organizations to break into smaller groups (Micheal Carvallo, 2023). For example, the 20 groups that allegedly operated within the country in 2007 splintered into just under 200 a decade later (Esberg, 2022; Micheal Carvallo, 2023).

With this fragmentation, came not only an increase in homicides, but also the ultimate diversification of markets for the OCGs (Micheal Carvallo, 2023). Whereas the original small group of OCGs depended primarily on drug cultivation and trafficking for their growth of power
and income, today’s groups have diversified their involvement in criminal markets through their participation in activities like drug production, domestic drug retail, extortion, and fuel theft (Micheal Carvallo, 2023). Through this diversification, OCGs have been able to expand into larger areas of the country, thus violent turf wars have taken over many once peaceful states (Micheal Carvallo, 2023). This is the case in Guanajuato where much of the violence seen during the 2015-March 2020 period of this study was fueled by the fight between CJNG and CSRL’s fight for control of Guanajuato’s Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) pipelines and the state’s expanding market of synthetic drugs (Micheal Carvallo, 2023; Domínguez Cornejo, 2021).

According to an investigation by Borderland Beat, before officially entering the state of Guanajuato in 2017, the CJNG had been quietly establishing criminal cells and avoiding conflicts with existing actors (Redlogarythm, 2021; Carvallo, 2023). In 2015, El Mencho, the leader of CJNG, attempted to negotiate an alliance with the local criminal group Union de Leon, but they rejected the proposal, sparking an armed conflict between the two groups that spread across the state from Leon to Irapuato by 2017 (Redlogarythm, 2021; Micheal Carvallo, 2023). Two years later, in January 2017, El Mencho sent his nephew to negotiate with the leader of CSRL, El Marro, to gain control of the trafficking routes and replace Los Viagras as the OCGs primary methamphetamine supplier (Micheal Carvallo, 2023). Instead of negotiating, El Marro killed El Mencho’s nephew further raising tension between the two organizations (Reyes Rodriguez, 2017; Micheal Carvallo, 2023). A few months later, in October, El Marro released a video standing in front of armed CSRL members and sending message threatening the CJNG and ordering them to leave Guanajuato (“VIDEO: ‘El Marro’ amenaza al cártel de Jalisco”, 2017; Micheal Carvallo, 2023). That year, according to INEGI records, homicides almost doubled from 1,232 in 2016 to 2,285 in 2017 demonstrating the degree of violence caused by the conflict
between the two cartels (Micheal Carvallo, 2023). Over the next few years, the conflict between these two cartels continued to spread across the state, rapidly increasing homicide rates over the five-year period (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Annual intentional homicides in Guanajuato, 2015-2020

Civilian (Dis)Trust: Security Forces and Impunity

According to the 2019 National Survey on Government Quality and Impact (ENCIG), 47.2% of the population of Guanajuato above the age of 18 believed that the police forces would help them if they needed their assistance. Additionally, only 27.6% of that same population claimed the police created a feeling of safety in their states. Furthermore, only 25.6% of the population claimed they were very satisfied or satisfied by the service provided by the police in their state. Most importantly, only 37.6% claimed they trusted the police. This data demonstrates a general distrust toward police forces among citizens. This notion is not shocking considering the known corruption of police forces within the state, primarily local forces. For example, in
recent years, both Celaya and Leon have dismissed police officers because of their links to organized crime after “revealing their involvement in providing intelligence, sabotaging law enforcement operations” (Micheal Carvallo, 2023).

According to an interview conducted with Dr. Rocio Rosas Vargas from the University of Guanajuato, this distrust can have a negative effect on the justice process of feminicide since the homicides can be easily ignored by grouping them into the overwhelming cases of homicides related to organized crime (personal communication, March 14, 2023). By doing so, local officials and security forces create an atmosphere where they are no longer incentivized to seek justice for the victims, thus invisibilizing many cases of feminicide. In addition, this lack of trust further promotes feminicidal violence because of lower rates of crime reported by victims. For example, women are less likely to report domestic violence if they do not trust that authorities will investigate these instances. As a consequence of this distrust, many women remain in dangerous situations of domestic violence that eventually lead to feminicide. Additionally, if a woman is being threatened by an OCG, and they know that this group has infiltrated the police force, they are less likely to report such threats because of fear of retribution on behalf of one or both organizations.

The involvement of security forces that are meant to protect citizens and prevent crimes, such as feminicide, in OCG groups further increases the vulnerability of women by creating an environment of impunity where crimes can be committed without consequences for the perpetrators. In this environment, some victims of feminicide are invisibilized because they are associated with OCG violence. Along with improper categorization, this could explain why official reports vary drastically from my collected data in this state.
**Feminicide Law**

Each Mexican state has their own interpretation of the federal feminicide law, thus Guanajuato’s feminicide law varies from the federal law. Although the laws vary in wording, the two are conceptually identical. According to federal and state penal codes, the federal and Guanajuato state feminicide law states the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Federal Penal Code</strong></th>
<th><strong>Guanajuato Penal Code</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARTICLE 325. The crime of feminicide is committed by anyone who deprives a woman of her life for reasons of gender. It is considered that there are gender reasons when any of the following circumstances concur:</td>
<td>ARTICLE 153. There will be feminicide when the victim of the homicide is a woman and the deprivation of life is committed for reasons of gender, considering that such reasons exist when any of the following events occur to the victim’s degradation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. The victim shows signs of sexual violence of any kind;</td>
<td>I. That she has been deprived of contact with others;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The victim has been inflicted with infamous or degrading injuries or mutilations, prior or subsequent to the deprivation of life or acts of necrophilia;</td>
<td>II. That she has been sexually assaulted;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. There are antecedents or evidence of any kind of violence in the domestic, work or school environment committed by the perpetrator against the victim;</td>
<td>III. That she has been harassed;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. A sentimental, affective, or trusting relationship has existed between the perpetrator and the victim;</td>
<td>IV. That she has been inflicted with infamous or degrading injuries or mutilations, even with respect to the corpse;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. There is evidence that establishes that there were threats related to the criminal act, harassment, or injuries of the perpetrator against the victim;</td>
<td>V. That there have been threats, harassment, injuries, or violence in the domestic, work or school environment, or any other that implies domination or subordination of the perpetrator against the victim;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. The victim was deprived of contact with anyone, regardless of the time prior to the deprivation of life;</td>
<td>VI. That there is or has been an intimate relationship of cohabitation, trust, courtship, kinship, or marriage with the perpetrator; or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. The body of the victim is exposed or exhibited in a public place.</td>
<td>VII. That her body is exposed or thrown in a public place.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whoever commits the crime of feminicide shall be sentenced to forty to sixty years of imprisonment and a fine of five hundred to one thousand days. The person responsible for feminicide shall be sentenced to thirty to sixty years of imprisonment and a fine of three hundred to six hundred days.
In addition to the penalties described in this article, the perpetrator shall lose all rights in relation to the victim, including inheritance rights.

If femicide is not accredited, the rules of homicide shall apply.

The public servant who maliciously or negligently delays or hinders the prosecution or administration of justice shall be sentenced to three to eight years’ imprisonment and a fine of five hundred to one thousand five hundred days and shall also be dismissed and disqualified for 3 to 10 years from holding another public employment, position or commission.

If it concurred with the same or another crime, the penalties imposed for each shall be cumulative. The term of imprisonment may not exceed seventy years.

Figure 6. Comparison of federal and state penal codes for femicide, Guanajuato

The differences between the two interpretations can be seen in the specification of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator in section IV of the federal law and VI of the state law. Additionally, at the state level, Guanajuato adds the notion of previous harassment under section III. Overall, however, the two law encompass the same general ideas behind the crime of femicide.

Narco-feminicide and *Motosicarios*: The Climate of Femicide in Guanajuato

Using the Guanajuato penal code, I categorized newspaper articles that depicted femicide. When compared to official reports of the crime, my data demonstrates significant underreporting and improper categorization of the crime (Figure 7). According to this data, the deadliest years for women in Guanajuato were 2017 and 2018, which coincides with the official introduction of CJNG into the state and the start of its conflict with CSRL. The data shows that
the year that CJNG invaded the state feminicide nearly doubled from 89 to 173 from 2016 to 2017.

Figure 7. A visual comparison of official government reports and my own collected data on feminicide in Guanajuato

In terms of the nature of the feminicides, the detained vs. unknown ratio suggests an impunity problem within the state of Guanajuato. Out of the 698 instances of feminicide collected, only 58 women and families received justice through the prosecution of the perpetrators. This means that only 8.3% of feminicide victims received justice during the study period, while 91.7% of cases remained unprosecuted. Of the cases where the perpetrator was detained, 74.1% involved a perpetrator that knew the victim because they were related or held an intimate relationship. Furthermore, 76.2% of the victims in the cases where the perpetrator was
detained were murdered through strangulation, wounds caused by a sharp weapon, fatal blunt force trauma to the head, or were beaten to death.

Conversely, out of the 604 cases where both the status of the perpetrator and their relationship with the victim were unknown, 451 (74.7%) women were shot using a firearm. The use of a firearm could point to OCGs, since many of these reports reported the use of high caliber firearms, such as AK-47s, which are difficult for average citizens to within acquire in the country, especially because of gun laws and restrictions. Because Mexico’s only gun store where you can legally purchase a weapon, the Directorate of Commercialization of Arms and Ammunition (DCAM), is located in Mexico City and primarily sells low caliber weapons, OCGs smuggle these high caliber weapons from the United States.

Out of all the feminicide cases in Guanajuato, 90.7% were categorized as either narco-feminicides (36.8%) or unsure (53.7%), while only 9.3% cases depicted evidence that they were not related to organized crime. Intriguingly, among the narco-feminicide cases, 82.5% of the victims were killed by firearms. Additionally, 97.1% of the narco-feminicide cases in Guanajuato remained unprosecuted. The data further emphasize the impunity problem by demonstrating that most feminicides go unprosecuted, especially if they are linked to OCGs.

My findings reveal several noteworthy trends in the state’s cases of narco-feminicide: the use of *narco-mantas* (narco-banners) and women’s bodies to deliver messages to rival OCGs, mass shootings by OCGs in clubs and bars which resulted in mass feminicides, and most remarkably *motosicarios* (motorcycle hitmen). In 13 cases, women’s bodies were found next to narco-banners which aimed to deliver messages to rival OCGs or local authorities, thus suggesting the use of bodies as visuals of violence by the OCGs to deter interference with their organization’s businesses. Additionally, in 28 cases, feminicide were committed in bars, with 6
instances of shootings resulting in multiple feminicides. For example, in August of 2018, three waitresses working at a bar in the municipality of Abasolo were murdered by a group of armed men using high caliber firearms (“Mueren acribilladas tres meseras…”, 2018). Similarly, in March of 2020, two women and three men were shot using high caliber firearms and one woman was kidnapped after a group of men entered a in a bar in Celaya and fired their weapons nearly one hundred times (Guardiola, 2020). Unofficial reports linked the perpetrators to CJNG (Guardiola, 2020).

Finally, a trend that was seen in Guanajuato but not in Querétaro is the use of *motosicarios* by OCGs. In most of these cases, women performing daily tasks in public settings were murdered by men on motorcycles who then fled the scene. For example, a 15-year-old girl named Romina was attacked and killed by two men on a motorcycle near her home in the El Tolento neighborhood of Pénjamo in 2019 (“El ataque ocurrió la noche del domingo…”, 2019). Romina was described as having no bad acquaintances and being close to her family (“El ataque ocurrió la noche del domingo…”, 2019). In a similar incident, 35 year old Anabel was shot and killed by an armed man on a motorcycle in the Silao, Guanajuato (“Motosicario’ ultima a mujer”, 2019). Anabel was sitting outside her house when she was shot (“Motosicario’ ultima a mujer”, 2019). In Guanajuato, 14.7% of the narco-feminicide cases included the use of a *motosicario*. This means that the woman was attacked either in a public setting (86.1%) or their own home (13.9%) by a hitman on a motorcycle who would ultimately receive no consequence for the murder. Only one out of the 36 cases that included a *motosicario* resulted in an arrest.

In terms of the geographical locations of feminicide, the municipalities with the greatest number of feminicides were Leon, Celaya, Irapuato, Salamanca, and Pénjamo (Figure 8).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Count of Feminicide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celaya</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irapuato</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salamanca</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pénjamo</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8. The count of top five municipalities with the highest number of feminicides in Guanajuato

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Count of Narco-feminicides</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celaya</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irapuato</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salamanca</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pénjamo</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. The count of top five municipalities with the highest number of narco-feminicides in Guanajuato

These five municipalities coincide with a map published by Diego Saucedo (2019) that depicts the presence of OCG in the state (Figure 10). The five municipalities are marked as “combat zones with the highest intensity”. Similarly, these five municipalities account for the highest number of narco-feminicides in the state (Figure 9). This further supports the theory that there is a link between the prominence and influence of OCGs and the prominence of violence, in this case feminicide. Considering the majority of the cadavers of the victims of narco-feminicides were found in public spaces, this also suggests that women are being used by these groups as objects to send messages of deterrence by making themselves known to their rivals. Thus, these victims have become weapons of war for OCGs and a way for them to show off their power to not just the rival OCGs, but also the government and the local communities.
Overall, trends in Guanajuato suggest that the crime of feminicide is underreported and improperly categorized by officials. What is most disturbing is the impunity revealed by the collected data. After the start of the conflict between CJNG and CSRL, Guanajuato saw an alarming increase in the crime of feminicide with concerning rates of impunity. This could suggest that women in this state are being used as objects of war between the two OCGs to send messages to rival members; however, it also suggests that men outside of the organized crime sphere are using the impunity promoted by the presence of these groups to commit feminicide, since the perpetrators remain unprosecuted in approximately 43.9.5% of cases where the perpetrator had a known relationship with the victim.

**Querétaro**

As opposed to Guanajuato, Querétaro was chosen as the second case study because of its low OCG influence. Although intentional homicide rates are steadily rising there have not been any alarming increases in this crime, unlike Guanajuato where this crime has continued to grow significantly over the past decade. In the following section, I discuss the status of organized
crime in Querétaro, trust of security forces, feminicide law, and the climate of feminicide in Querétaro.

The Status of Organized Crime in Querétaro

Historically, the state of Querétaro has had a reputation as a relatively safe state, especially since the state’s average rate of intentional homicide is one of the lowest when compared to the national average (Russo, 2020). From 2016 to 2017, the state experienced its highest jump in intentional homicide by going from about 4.98 to 7.34 intentional homicides per 100,000 people. From 2017 to 2020, the average number of intentional homicides per 100,000 people remained in the 7 range. Despite this increase in intentional homicides rates, Querétaro is not a prominent contributor to the national average—the intentional homicides in the state make up less that 2% of both male and female homicides at the national level.

Local authorities claim that the increase in homicide rates originates from the conflict in neighboring states, such as Guanajuato; however, INEGI found no statistical evidence of a pattern of diffusion or contagion (Russo, 2020). Similarly, when discussing the topic of organized crime in an interview with a local lawyer in the Santiago de Querétaro municipality, I found that there is a light presence of organized crime; however, there are no major cartels attempting to take over territories of the state (Anonymous, personal communication, March 26, 2023). Therefore, there is no prominent OCG conflict within the state. There is little information available regarding OCG presence in the state during the period of this study; however, it is known that in June 2019, the CJNG announced its arrival in Querétaro and has since spread to the municipalities of Corregidora, Pedro Escobedo, El Marques, San Juan del Rio and Querétaro, pushing aside cells that were previously held by Los Caballeros Templarios, according to federal authorities (Espino, 2020).
Documents leaked in 2022 from the Mexican Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA) reveal that CSRL and a local San Juan del Rio criminal group also operate in the state; however, because of the release date of this information, it is difficult to say whether any of these three groups were influential during the timeframe of this study (“Querétaro es un área de confort…”, 2022). Furthermore, these leaked documents suggest that Querétaro represents an area of comfort and refuge for members of the various criminal endeavors at the national level (“Querétaro es un área de confort…”, 2022). OCG members in Querétaro tend to invest in real estate and in the business sector in order to launder money but adopting “a low profile” in order not to attract the attention of local and federal authorities (“Querétaro es un área de confort…”, 2022). This could explain why generally, Querétaro seems to remain relatively safe and continues to maintain low crime rates related to organized crime.

**Feminicide Law**

Similar to Guanajuato, feminicide laws in Querétaro differ in wording from the federal penal code; however, the laws remain essentially identical in terms of content. The federal and state penal codes are the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Federal Penal Code</strong></th>
<th><strong>Querétaro Penal Code</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ARTICLE 325. The crime of feminicide is committed by anyone who deprives a woman of her life for reasons of gender. It is considered that there are gender reasons when any of the following circumstances concur: | ARTICLE 126 BIS  
Whoever deprives a woman of her life for reasons derived from her gender, shall be sentenced to 20 to 50 years imprisonment and a fine of five hundred to seven hundred and fifty days. |
| VIII. The victim shows signs of sexual violence of any kind; | Gender-based reasons shall be deemed to exist in any of the following circumstances: |
| IX. The victim has been inflicted with infamous or degrading injuries or mutilations, prior or subsequent to the deprivation of life or acts of necrophilia; | I. The victim presents signs of sexual violence of any kind; |
| X. There are antecedents or evidence of any kind of violence in the domestic, work or school | II. The victim has been inflicted with infamous injuries or mutilations or degrading marks, prior or subsequent to the deprivation of life or acts of necrophilia; |
environment committed by the perpetrator against the victim;  

XI. A sentimental, affective, or trusting relationship has existed between the perpetrator and the victim;  

XII. There is evidence that establishes that there were threats related to the criminal act, harassment, or injuries of the perpetrator against the victim;  

XIII. The victim was deprived of contact with anyone, regardless of the time prior to the deprivation of life;  

XIV. The body of the victim is exposed or exhibited in a public place.

Whoever commits the crime of feminicide shall be sentenced to forty to sixty years of imprisonment and a fine of five hundred to one thousand days.

In addition to the penalties described in this article, the perpetrator shall lose all rights in relation to the victim, including inheritance rights.

If femicide is not accredited, the rules of homicide shall apply.

The public servant who maliciously or negligently delays or hinders the prosecution or administration of justice shall be sentenced to three to eight years’ imprisonment and a fine of five hundred to one thousand five hundred days and shall also be dismissed and disqualified for 3 to 10 years from holding another public employment, position or commission.

III. There is evidence that establishes that there were threats, harassment, or injuries by the perpetrator against the victim;  

IV. The body of the victim has been exposed, deposited, or thrown in a public place or unpopulated place or exhibited by any means;  

V. There are antecedents of any type of violence, in the domestic, work, school or neighborhood of the perpetrator against the victim;  

VI. The victim has been deprived of contact with others, regardless of the time prior to the deprivation of life;  

VII. There is evidence that the victim suffered physical violence exercised by a person with whom the victim is related by blood, affinity or civil relationship, marriage, cohabitation, courtship or friendship, or a relationship of subordination or superiority that implies trust.

In addition to the penalties described in this article, the perpetrator shall lose all rights in relation to the victim, including those of an inheritance.

If femicide is not accredited, the rules of homicide shall be applied.

The public servant who maliciously or negligently delays or impedes the administration of justice shall be sentenced to imprisonment for 3 to 8 years and a fine of five hundred to seven hundred and fifty days; in addition, he shall be dismissed and disqualified for 3 to 10 years from holding another public employment, position, or commission.

Figure 11. Comparison of federal and state penal codes for feminicide, Querétaro.

Again, the differences between the three laws lie in the wording and added specifications in the Querétaro version. When comparing the imprisonment time for the crime, all three penal
codes have varied—the federal code suggests 40 to 60 years, the Guanajuato code suggests 30 to 60 years, and the Querétaro code suggests range of 20 to 50 years.

Civilian (Dis)Trust: Security Forces and Impunity

According to the 2019 ENCIG, 60.9% of the population of Querétaro above the age of 18 believed that the police forces would help them if they needed their assistance. Additionally, 41.4% of that same population claimed the police created a feeling of safety in their states. Furthermore, only 36.1% of the population claimed they were very satisfied or satisfied by the service provided by the police in their state. Most importantly, 46.1% claimed they trusted the police. When compared to Guanajuato, this data demonstrates that there is slightly more trust toward police forces among citizens in Querétaro. The most difference can be seen in the belief that the police forces would help them if they needed their assistance—60.9% of Querétaro’s citizens claimed that the police would help them, but only 47.2% of Guanajuato’s citizens believed the same.

Despite this slightly higher perception of trust and safety, there is still underreporting by official data indicators. Similar to Guanajuato, a lawyer from Querétaro who litigates feminicide trials suggested that the low official rates for feminicide in the state could be due to a lack of proper categorization of feminicide cases (Anonymous, personal communication, March 26, 2023). This shows that despite having a more trustworthy police force in comparison to Guanajuato, Querétaro experiences underreporting because of improper categorizations. This in turn may contribute to the state’s levels of impunity for these crimes.

The Climate of Feminicide in Querétaro

Although the differences are not as shocking in terms of numbers as is the case with Guanajuato, when compared to the official government feminicide reports, the data collected for
this study demonstrates a similar pattern of underreporting and improper categorization for cases of feminicide in the state of Querétaro (Figure 12). As opposed to the case of Guanajuato where the official and collected rates vary by large margins, in Querétaro the two variables seem to be closer to the reported data with the exception of the years 2016 and 2017 where the government only reported one feminicide per year. Even considering the collected data, feminicide cases remain relatively low when compared to Guanajuato.

Comparison of Official Government Reports and Collected Data on Feminicide in Querétaro

Figure 12. A visual comparison of official government reports and my own collected data on feminicide in Querétaro.

The general nature of feminicide in Querétaro is different from that of Guanajuato. For example, in Querétaro, the perpetrator was prosecuted in 41.0% of the cases—this is different
from Guanajuato where only 8.3% of victims received justice. Out of those cases where the perpetrator was detained, 75% of the feminicides were committed by a person who was related or held an intimate relationship with the victim. In 91.7% of these cases, the victim was murdered through either strangulation, wounds caused by a sharp weapon, physical beatings, or methods other than firearms.

In terms of the categorization of the cases as narco-feminicides, only 7 (9%) out of the 78 cases had confirmed links to OCGs, while 39 (50%) cases were categorized as unsure and 32 (41%) were not linked with organized crime. Out of those considered narco-feminicides, 71.4% were murdered using firearms, while 84.4% of women in cases not considered narco-feminicides were murdered using methods other than firearms.

With regard to the municipalities with the most feminicides, Santiago de Querétaro, San Juan del Rio, Tequisquiapan, El Marques, and Landa de Matamoros are the top five municipalities with the highest recorded instances of the crime according to the collected data (Figure 13). Similarly, these top two municipalities account for the majority of narco-feminicides in the state (Figure 14). This finding coincides with a document released in the SEDENA leaks from 2022 which suggest that Santiago de Querétaro and San Juan del Rio are among the municipalities with the most OCG presence in the state, along with Corregidora, Huimilpan, and Pedro Escobedo (“Los carteles en Querétaro”, 2022). These documents suggest that CJNG and CSRL are both present in these municipalities and have the biggest influence in organized crime within these localities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Count of Feminicide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santiago de Querétaro</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Juan del Rio</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tequisquiapan</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Marques</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landa De Matamoros</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13. The count of top five municipalities with the highest number of feminicides in Querétaro.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row Labels</th>
<th>Count of Narco-Feminicide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santiago de Querétaro</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Juan del Rio</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corregidora</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Marques</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14. The count of top five municipalities with the highest number of narco-feminicides in Querétaro.

Overall, the trends in Querétaro seem to be more geared toward the “typical” feminicide cases where the perpetrator is a person close to the victim rather than a person linked to an OCG. In terms of impunity, Querétaro appears to have an issue in prosecuting the crime of feminicide, though not to the degree of Guanajuato, since 46 (59%) of the cases collected remain unprosecuted. There were also fewer narco-feminicides found in this state, which could suggest that there is less involvement of OCGs in this crime, thus these organization pose less of a threat to the security of women in this state.
Discussion

The following section discusses the case studies in terms of the differences and similarities of organized crime influence, citizen perspective of safety and trust of security forces, and the nature of feminicide.

*High vs Low OCG Presence*

The nature of organized crime in Guanajuato and Querétaro is different. Guanajuato has experienced significant violence due to the fragmentation of OCG alliances following the 2006 drug war, leading to a diversification of criminal markets and turf wars between OCGs. In contrast, Querétaro has historically been a relatively safe state with a low rate of intentional homicide and a low presence of organized crime. However, the official arrival of CJNG in 2019 has brought about a new challenge for the state. It is important for local authorities to monitor the situation closely to prevent the escalation of violence and the spread of organized crime in the state.

*Trust and Distrust: Differences in Civilian Relationships with Security Forces*

The citizen relationships with police forces in Guanajuato and Querétaro show significant differences in terms of levels of trust, safety perception, and satisfaction with the services provided by police forces. The comparison of the two states indicates that there is a higher level of trust toward police forces among citizens in Querétaro than in Guanajuato.

The data from the 2019 ENCIG revealed that only 37.6% of the population of Guanajuato claimed they trusted the police, while in Querétaro, 46.1% of the population claimed they trusted the police. The difference in trust is also seen in the belief that police forces would help citizens if they needed their assistance. In Querétaro, 60.9% of citizens believed that police forces would help them, while in Guanajuato, only 47.2% of citizens believed the same.
Despite the higher level of trust toward police forces in Querétaro, the state still experiences underreporting of feminicide cases due to a lack of proper categorization. This similarity with Guanajuato highlights the need for proper categorization of feminicide cases to reduce impunity for these crimes.

In both states, the involvement of security forces in organized crime groups has created an environment of impunity, where crimes can be committed without consequences for the perpetrators. This situation further increases the vulnerability of women to feminicidal violence, as many victims are associated with organized crime violence and are therefore invisibilized.

Therefore, the comparison of the citizen relationships with police forces in Guanajuato and Querétaro shows that despite differences in levels of trust, both states experience underreporting of feminicide cases due to improper categorization. The involvement of security forces in organized crime groups further exacerbates the vulnerability of women to feminicidal violence and perpetuates an environment of impunity. Proper categorization of feminicide cases and addressing police corruption and involvement in organized crime are necessary steps to reduce the levels of impunity and violence against women in both states.

Differing Nature of Feminicide

Guanajuato is shown to have an alarming rate of feminicide, with significant underreporting and improper categorization of the crime. The study found that the deadliest years for women in Guanajuato were 2017 and 2018, coinciding with the official introduction of CJNG into the state and the start of its conflict with CSRL. The data shows that feminicide nearly doubled from 2016 to 2017 when CJNG invaded the state. Additionally, Guanajuato demonstrates an impunity problem where only 8.3% of feminicide victims received justice during the study period, while 91.7% of cases remained unprosecuted.
In terms of the nature of feminicides in Guanajuato, the study found that in the majority of cases both the status of the perpetrator and their relationship to the victim were unknown. In cases where both the status of the perpetrator and their relationship with the victim were unknown, 74.7% of women were shot using a firearm, suggesting the involvement of organized crime groups (OCGs) since the high caliber weapons are difficult for average citizens to acquire in the country.

In Querétaro, the study found a similar pattern of underreporting and improper categorization of feminicide cases. However, the differences in official and collected rates were not as shocking as in the case of Guanajuato. The study did not find evidence of a major increase in feminicide rates in Querétaro following the introduction of CJNG into the state. Moreover, Querétaro did not show an impunity problem as severe as in Guanajuato, with a higher percentage of cases resulting in the prosecution of perpetrators.

The comparative analysis of Guanajuato and Querétaro shows that the nature of feminicide varies significantly between different states in Mexico. While Guanajuato has an alarming rate of feminicide with a worrying rate of impunity and involvement of OCGs, Querétaro shows a relatively lower rate of feminicide with a higher percentage of cases resulting in the prosecution of perpetrators. These findings suggest that different factors, such as the presence of OCGs and law enforcement effectiveness, may play a role in the prevalence and nature of feminicide in different states.

**Conclusion and Avenues for Further Research**

Overall, the collected data suggests that there is a link between OCG presence and the nature of feminicide. As tensions rose between CJNG and CSRL in Guanajuato, so did the rates of feminicide. On the other hand, in Querétaro where OCG-related violence remained relatively
low, feminicide cases remained low as well. This suggests that OCGs have an impact on the vulnerability of women because their bodies are used as symbols of violence and deterrence to other OCGs and civilians. This vulnerability is further exacerbated by the impunity that comes with OCG presence which makes women less likely to report crime and, therefore, increases their risk of feminicide because the perpetrator may see the environment of impunity as an opportunity to commit the crime.

The results of this study show that OCGs fundamentally transform the nature of feminicide: Victims are less likely to know their killers; they are more likely to be killed with a firearm; and their bodies are more likely to be placed on public display. Furthermore, feminicides are much less likely to be reported in states where OCGs have an influential and prominent presence. Similarly, in these contexts, feminicides are less likely to be solved. Thus, by degrading security forces, OCGs undermine the prospects for recognition and posthumous justice for victims.

Although it is difficult to make a generalized conclusion about the links between OCG presence and cases of feminicide based on one comparative case study of two states, my findings illustrate the potential of this area of research. Future research should further explore the connections between organized crime and feminicide, specifically at other contiguous states within Mexico that have similar conditions to Guanajuato and Querétaro in terms of OCG influence. Additionally, further research could compare the nature of feminicide within Mexico, considering the role of OCGs in feminicide rate in Guanajuato, to that of another Latin American country with similar rates to see if there is a difference in the categorization and prosecution of feminicide.
Although there were differences in the nature of feminicide in each state, two observations were made in both case studies: general trends of underreporting and improper categorization. In both cases, there was a general distrust of the police, which could explain the trend of underreporting on behalf of the victim. Improper categorization of feminicide by officials further impairs these issues by contributing to underreporting of feminicide, which can result in a lack of accountability for the perpetrators and a failure to provide justice for the victims and their families. If cases of feminicide are not properly categorized and investigated, they may be treated as ordinary homicides, domestic violence cases, or organized crime-related homicides, which can result in lower penalties or impunity for the perpetrators and a failure to recognize the gender-based nature of the crime.

It is important to note that proper categorization of feminicide is essential for ensuring justice for victims and their families, holding perpetrators accountable, and developing effective policies and interventions to prevent and address these crimes. Therefore, accurate categorization of feminicide is necessary for developing effective policies and interventions to prevent and address these crimes. Without accurate data on the prevalence and nature of feminicide, it is difficult to design evidence-based interventions that address the root causes of this type of violence.
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