

Security Risks Report – Mexico

November 2025

Executive summary

The assassination on 2 November 2025 of Uruapan's mayor, Carlos Manzo – a vocal critic of federal inaction against drug cartels – underscores growing tensions in Michoacán, where cartels are fighting for territorial control of the state.

- His assassination sparked public outrage, and further instability in Michoacán is likely.

A key part of the problem in Michoacán is that cartels' extortion of agricultural producers, notably lemon and avocado farmers, has intensified, severely impacting farm margins.

- The murder of leading lemon producer Bernardo Bravo in October highlighted the lethal sanctions deployed against those seeking to resist these extortion demands.

In response to the rising extortion, the government has revised extortion laws, harmonising sanctions for, and definitions of, this crime at the federal and state levels.

- Controversy surrounds a reduction in penal sanctions for civil servants who fail to report extortion, which has been seen by critics as a move to protect political figures linked to the ruling party.

The legislative revision aims to curb the extortion epidemic, which could be costing Mexican enterprises some MXN77m (USD4.16m) daily.

The internal dynamics of cartel power are shifting, with increased use of drones in conflicts – particularly in the ongoing cartel war in Sinaloa between *La Chapiza* and *La Mayiza*.

- Most indications are that *La Mayiza* is winning the war, and that *La Chapiza* is experiencing a stream of defections.
- Rumours of a potential alliance between *La Chapiza* and Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG) have gathered strength.
- If *La Chapiza* is indeed severely weakened, its alliance with CJNG could eventually result in the former's absorption into the latter.
- In any case, ongoing cartel conflicts and shifts in power dynamics between these groups will continue to shape the socio-economic landscape in Mexico.

The Mexican federal authorities, in tandem with US priorities, have focused on dismantling CJNG's growing influence; this has been evident in a series of large-scale operations and high-profile arrests both in Mexico and in the US.

- However, the cartel remains the only one with a significant presence in all of Mexico's states.



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A LA MUJER SIN RAZÓN,
SIN VER QUE SOIS LA OCASIÓN
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JUANA DE ASBAJE

Review of recent developments

As the drug cartels have come under greater pressure from the administration of Claudia Sheinbaum – herself under pressure from the US – political violence has been on the increase.

On 2 November, the mayor of Uruapan (Michoacán State), Carlos Manzo, was gunned down at a festival connected with the *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), one of Mexico's most important annual holidays.

- Apparently believing he would be safe surrounded by people, mainly families, the mayor had not been wearing a bulletproof vest.
- Over the last year, Michoacán has become a hotspot of cartel violence, most prominently between Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG) and La Nueva Familia Michoacana (LNFM), but also involving other groups (see **Recent organised crime news**).

Manzo had been a leading and vocal figure in the fight against organised crime, and repeatedly criticised the federal government for a lack of action against drug cartels in Michoacán. Although he stood as an ally of the ruling Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (Morena) in the 2021 parliamentary elections, he was elected mayor of Uruapan in September 2024 as an independent.

- In May, he authorised the police to neutralise criminals by any means possible – against the “hugs, not bullets” policy of former president Andrés Manuel López Obrador.
- In September, seemingly dissatisfied with the federal government, he warned that the people of Uruapan might be forced to take up arms themselves. In an interview, he declared, “I am also very afraid, but I have to be brave because we don't have a choice”.

Manzo was very popular in Michoacán for his hardline stance against the drug cartels. His critics, conversely, compared him to El Salvador president Nayib Bukele.

- At Manzo's funeral, angry residents of Uruapan shouted at and mobbed Michoacan governor Alfredo Ramírez.
- Hours later, a crowd broke into the government house in the state capital, Morelia, and had to be dispersed by riot police.

Violence in Michoacán is likely to escalate further as the population runs out of patience. For instance, a new self-defence movement has emerged, calling itself *Ejército Purépecha de Libertad Michoacana* (ELPM), led by a man known as Comandante Arango.

- The new group threatened to attack the governor during Independence Day celebrations on 15 September. In the event, the day passed without incident, albeit with a heightened security presence.
- Instead, in early October, the Michoacán Attorney General said that Comandante Arango had been arrested, and linked ELPM to criminal groups.
- According to local media, Comandante Arango turned out to be the council secretary of Jiquilpán, a small town in Michoacán.

Michoacán is of interest to the cartels because it is a strategic hub for both North-South routes and imports from China through the port of Lázaro Cárdenas.

- Additionally, drug cartels have “discovered” the agricultural sector: lemons and avocados are known as “green gold”, and producers of these fruits are now struggling under pressure from the cartels (see **In focus: Agricultural extortion**).

Other types of extortion are also rife – as Convex has noted before, extortion has been one of the fastest-rising types of crime in Mexico in recent years.

- Official statistics are not completely reliable, as it is thought that some 95% of extortions are not reported to the authorities.
- According to Mexico's leading business association, Coparmex, daily extortion costs to Mexican enterprises amount to around MXN77m (USD4.16m) a day.



The rise and spread of extortion has led the government to review extortion laws over the course of 2025, and on 29 October, parliament approved new legislation to harmonise the sanctions covering different variants of this crime, as well as its definition at the federal and state levels.

- The law targets not just extortionists but also any accomplices or facilitators.
- However, one controversial change made by Morena at the last minute was a reduction in penal sanctions for civil servants who knowingly fail to report an extortion. Critics of the party described it as an attempt to protect Hernán Bermúdez, former Secretary of Public Security in Tabasco.

Hernán Bermúdez, Secretary of Public Security in the state of Tabasco in 2019-2024, has been accused of founding and leading a criminal group known as *La Barredora*. He is alleged to have acted as an operative for CJNG under the alias *El Comandante H*.

Investigations into him began in 2022-2024, and he was formally linked to crimes including criminal association, extortion, and kidnapping. In September 2025, he was arrested in Paraguay and extradited to Mexico, where he remains under detention. He was expelled from Morena in October 2025.

The scandal has once more raised questions about corruption in law enforcement and political accountability.

As an example of these changes, a practice known as *montachoques* is now comprehensively covered across states under the new legislation.

- Criminals use one car to deliberately engineer a road accident where the other vehicle can be blamed. A second car usually comes up behind to box the targeted driver in.
- The criminals, acting in a friendly and helpful manner, will seek to get the driver of the targeted vehicle to “settle” in cash rather than involve any insurance companies. More sophisticated operators reportedly check online databases specifically to target uninsured vehicles.
- The scam can become more complex; if the targeted driver refuses to settle in cash, the criminals can also impersonate insurance personnel, or suggest that both drivers go to a repair shop – also run by the criminal group.
- The police and other authorities recommend that drivers lock themselves in their cars in the event of an accident. Victims should immediately call the police and their insurance company, as these incidents can often turn violent.





In focus: Agricultural extortion

The cartels' extortion of lemon producers in Michoacán has intensified over the past months. The so-called *cobro de piso* – a protection racket – has reportedly risen from roughly two pesos per kilo to as much as four pesos per kilo, collected weekly or per truckload.

- This burden eats directly into already thin farm margins and has prompted temporary shutdowns of packing houses and transport stoppages.
- Extortion is also distorting supply, causing short-term price spikes at retail even while producers receive a shrinking share of the final price.

Beyond the direct economic pressure, the extortion campaign has been enforced with threats, targeted killings and terror.

- In October 2025, the body of Bernardo Bravo, president of the Apatzingán Valley Citrus Growers Association in Michoacán, was found after he had publicly denounced the systematic extortion of lemon growers. He had been shot in the head.
- Bravo was killed as he was organising a massive protest of lemon producers. His killing was seen by reporters and growers as a warning against denouncing criminal levies.
- Growers say that the violence and reprisals are a key reason some packing houses and intermediaries briefly closed in August amid fears for workers and drivers.

Michoacán's Attorney General has issued a search warrant for César Sepúlveda ("El Botox"), alleged to be the mastermind behind Bravo's killing. Sepúlveda is a leading figure in *Los Viagras*, a very violent group under the aegis of *Carteles Unidos*, which is in turn affiliated with CJNG.

- *Carteles Unidos* was designated a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) in February 2025.
- *Los Viagras* itself is also under sanctions by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

Cartel interest in agricultural products is unlikely to abate. Extorting farmers is a less complex and risky business than the drug trade, as it does not require imported inputs (such as precursor chemicals for fentanyl), facilities for processing the raw materials, or dangerous border crossings.

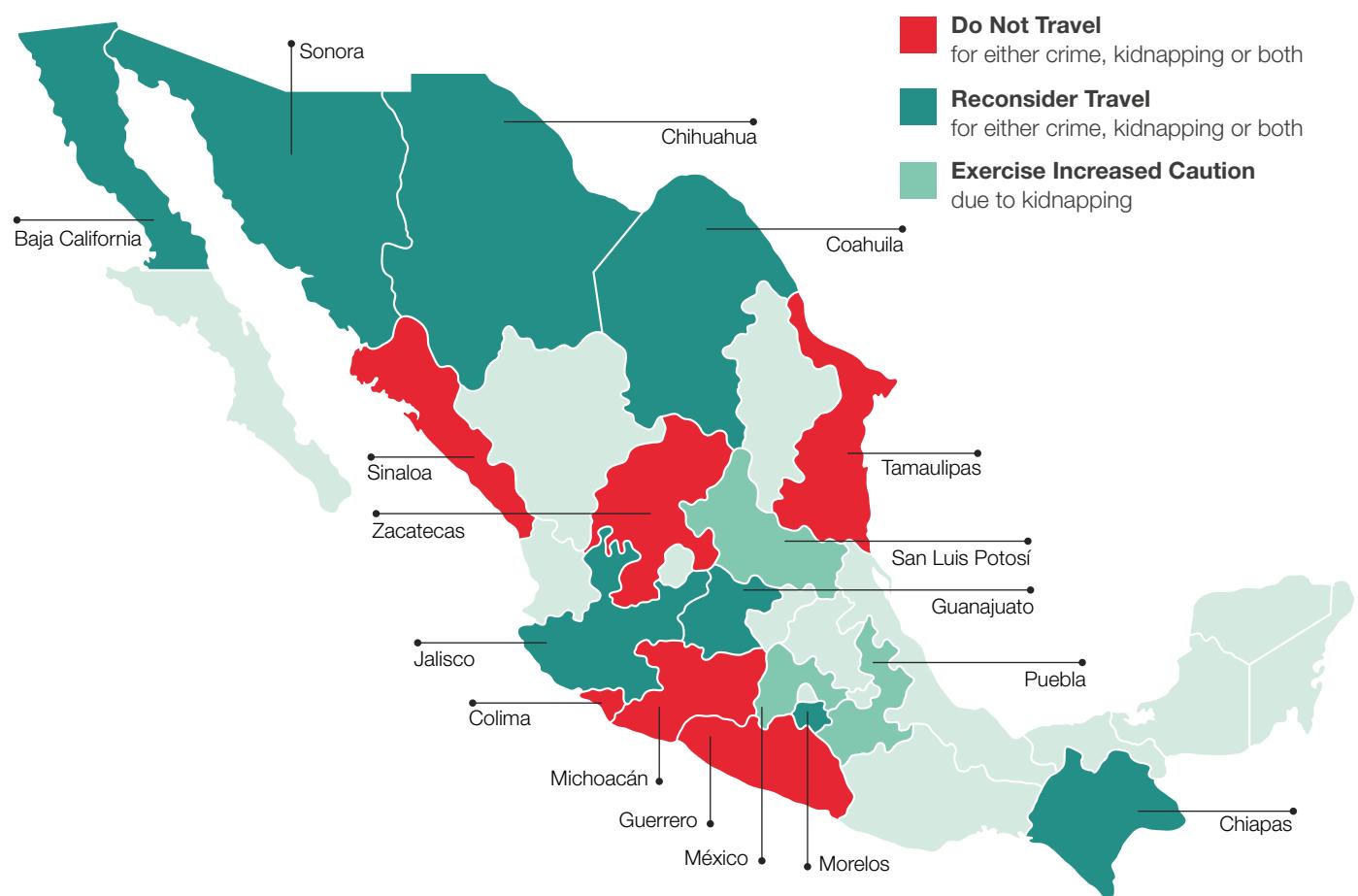
Lemons and avocados are a key business, but a range of other food products have attracted the interest of the cartels, such as eggs, milk and tortillas.



US State Department advice

The US State Department Travel Advisory added a terrorism risk to Mexico in August 2025, reflecting the designation of several drug cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTOs). The whole country is classified at Level 2 – Exercise increased caution.

Only two states, Campeche and Yucatan, are classified at Level 1 – Exercise Normal Precautions.



Organised crime in Mexico

The National Intelligence Centre (CNI) has in recent years considered the **Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación** (CJNG) and the **Sinaloa Cartel** (also known as the Pacific Cartel) to be the dominant groups in Mexico's drug trade. However, the consensus in Mexico now is that the Sinaloa Cartel is finished, at least in its past incarnation, as it has fractured into two main factions that are not expected to reconcile:

- **La Chapiza** is led by "Los Chapitos", four of the twelve sons of former cartel leader Joaquín Guzmán Loera ("El Chapo"), currently in US custody. Los Chapitos are two pairs of half-brothers:
 - The Guzmán López brothers, Joaquín and Ovidio ("El Ratón"), also both currently in US custody
 - The Guzmán Salazar brothers, Iván Archivaldo and Jesús Alfredo, leading *La Chapiza* in Mexico.
- **La Mayiza** was led by former Chapo lieutenant Ismael Zambada García ("El Mayo") until his arrest in July 2024, when he was betrayed by *Los Chapitos*. *El Mayo* is now in US custody, and *La Mayiza* is led by his son, Ismael Zambada Sicairos ("El Mayito Flaco").

Two main questions remain: which faction will win the war, and what winning will mean. The war is draining both sides, sucking resources into the epicentre in Sinaloa and pulling them away from other regions. This, in turn, is weakening the old cartel's hold on those regions and leading smaller groups to make a bid for control. CJNG, in the meantime, appears to be mostly biding its time, although it appears to be making small plays for power in specific areas (see **State of Play**).

Operating alongside and within these two cartels, there are an estimated 150 criminal groups of varying sizes in the country; higher estimates can also be found in the media, of around 175 groups. The sub-groups allied to each large cartel can range in nature from significant paramilitary forces to small criminal street gangs.

Periodically, one of these subgroups will gather enough strength to splinter off and eventually become a rival cartel, resulting in increasing levels of violence as the newcomer seeks to establish itself. This process is in evidence now, with the collapse of the Sinaloa Cartel. At other times, fragmentation has been the result of successful government operations to capture a cartel's top leadership, making the war against drugs akin to fighting a hydra.

There is also the risk of new entrants from abroad, most notably the Venezuela-based **Tren de Aragua**, which is said to be gaining ground in Ciudad Juárez. It would appear that this organisation, which "specialises" in human trafficking and migrant smuggling, has entered Mexico through its networks in the US.

Further complicating the fight against crime, collusion between organised crime and the authorities is endemic, especially at local level.

State of play

In February 2025, the US State Department designated the following cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTOs) and Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs):

- Sinaloa Cartel
- CJNG
- Northeast Cartel
- *La Nueva Familia Michoacana*
- Gulf Cartel
- United Cartels
- *Tren de Aragua* (Venezuela)
- *Mara Salvatrucha* (El Salvador)

The list appears to be somewhat out of date, even leaving aside the fracture of the Sinaloa Cartel.

- The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) acknowledges in its 2025 *National Drug Threat Assessment* (NDTA) that the **Gulf Cartel** "is no longer a united cartel, having split into multiple factions"; similarly, the Northeast Cartel is described as "a large network of compartmentalised cells".
- Conversely, in the same report, the DEA describes two of the other listed entities – **La Nueva Familia Michoacana** and **United Cartels** – as part of one umbrella group, **La Familia Michoacana**.

The war between *La Chapiza* and *La Mayiza* is expected to continue unabated until one side is clearly victorious. As of early November, most indications pointed to a *Mayiza* victory: according to some media reports, by mid-October this faction controlled around 90% of the Sinaloa Cartel's old territory.

The power struggle has also led to the emergence of factions that had previously been either quiescent or flying below the radar.

- One is led by Aureliano Guzmán Loera ("El Guano"), El Chapo's elder brother and the uncle of Los Chapitos. This faction is known as **Cartel del Guano** (CDG).
- Two other factions to watch are those led by the brothers José Luis, Felipe and Alejandro Cabrera, and by Fausto Isidro Meza ("El Chapo Isidro").

Like the Sinaloa Cartel, CJNG is at risk of internal strife because its leader, Nemesio Oseguera ("El Mencho"), is said to be 58 years old and in poor health. There have been repeated rumours of his death, most recently in mid-2023, but they are unconfirmed, and indeed the US believes him to be alive: in December 2024, the DEA raised its reward for information leading to his capture from US\$10m to US\$15m.

El Mencho's wife, Rosalinda González, has a son, Juan Carlos Valencia, who was adopted by *El Mencho* and has been tipped as his likely successor. The lack of clarity surrounding *El Mencho*'s succession raises the risk of another power struggle similar to that now raging within the Sinaloa Cartel.

- Juan Carlos can likely count on the backing of a key group within CJNG, "**Los Cuinis**". These are his mother's siblings, reportedly numbering either 12 or 18: seven sisters and five or more brothers. The group's leading brother, Abigael González ("El Cuin"), was one of the 26 extradited in August 2025.
- *Los Cuinis* is said to be the "banking" arm of CJNG, dedicated primarily to money laundering. The US considers this grouping as a separate cartel, and some local journalists report that it has begun to work for other cartels as well as CJNG.

The war within the Sinaloa Cartel has sparked pre-existing rivalries and fuelled competition for control over territory, especially where Sinaloa has been weakened by the war.

- CJNG is fighting *La Nueva Familia Michoacana* / *La Familia Michoacana* for control of Edomex, Guerrero and other central states where the latter group is strong. As noted, the DEA considers *La Nueva Familia Michoacana* to be part of the broader *La Familia Michoacana* organisation.
- CJNG is also trying to establish control in Mexico City and Guanajuato.

Even though fragmentation diminishes the operational reach of a cartel, it does not necessarily eliminate or weaken its impact on the population. A case in point is the Gulf Cartel and its enforcement offshoot, **Los Zetas**, composed of former soldiers.

- The Gulf Cartel was very powerful in the 1980s and 1990s, but, despite its listing as an FTO, it has effectively disappeared as an entity – as acknowledged by the DEA.
- Its enforcers, *Los Zetas*, initially rose as the Gulf Cartel waned, but in the 2000s they lost out in a major conflict with the Sinaloa Cartel.
- Unlike the Gulf Cartel, however, *Los Zetas* has found a form of subsistence as a range of splinter groups bearing that name.

According to leaked SEDENA documents, 13 main cartels operate in Mexico City, the main ones reportedly being **La Unión Tepito** and their rivals, **Fuerza Anti-Unión** (which has allied itself with CJNG).





Recent organised crime news

The fighting in Sinaloa has acquired a new dimension as the cartels have begun to deploy drones in greater numbers. In September and October drone attacks increased, seemingly focused on La Tuna, a farm in Badiraguato (Sinaloa State), which belongs to members of the Guzmán family.

- As Convex has noted, in the summer of 2025 *La Mayiza* took over Badiraguato, *El Chapo*'s birthplace and historically a *Chapiza* stronghold.

La Mayiza's territorial expansion appears to be fuelling defections from *La Chapiza*.

- Whereas in mid-2025 *El Guano* was thought to support his nephews, in October there were reports that he had switched sides to *La Mayiza*.
- Reportedly, this was not the only “betrayal”, with several other factions also jumping ship from *La Chapiza* to *La Mayiza*.

Rumours that *La Chapiza* have sought an alliance with CJNG have continued to spread; reportedly, top *El Mencho* lieutenant Audias Flores (“*El Jardinero*”) has taken responsibility for the security of the two remaining *Chapitos* at large, Ivan Archivaldo and Jesús Alfredo.

- If the reports pointing to a weakening *Chapiza* are true, the alliance of *La Chapiza* with CJNG could result in the former's eventual absorption into the latter.

The federal authorities have arrested several CJNG regional leaders in several states – the spread of locations in itself reflects the growing influence of CJNG across the whole of Mexico; it is the only cartel with a significant presence in all 32 states (including Mexico City).

- The Mexican authorities' focus on CJNG may reflect US priorities, as they appear to be targeting the cartel: in September, the DEA launched a five-day operation that resulted in 670 arrests and large-scale drug and asset seizures in the US.

A double assassination dominated the news cycle in September, as the case showed the links between the music industry and transnational drug networks. The case remained under investigation as of early November.

- Two Colombian artists, Bayron Sánchez (“B-King”) and Jorge Luis Herrera (“DJ Regio Clown”), travelled to Mexico for a series of performances in early September.
- On 17 September, their bodies were discovered in the municipality of Cocotitlán (Edomex) on the Mexico–Cuautla highway, reportedly dismembered and bearing signs of violent death.

The investigation linked the case to the drug trade, with *La Unión Tepito* as the main cartel under suspicion, despite a message at the scene purporting to be from *La Familia Michoacana* – seen by the authorities as a decoy.

- La Unión Tepito* is thought to control synthetic drugs in Mexico City and its surrounding zones.
- As of early November, the investigation had led to the arrest of 16 people in total (10 of them from Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba and Spain).



Kidnapping and extortion: overview



Perpetrators

- Drug cartels often perpetrate abductions of public officials, usually ending with the death of the victim. The intention is to challenge the authorities and demonstrate control over territory.
- Among the sub-groups within each cartel, kidnap for ransom is an established practice, together with extortion. The perpetrators are usually street gangs, low down in the hierarchy of the cartels.



Targets

- Victims of kidnapping and extortion can be random individuals, but most often the targets are local small and medium entrepreneurs known to have the resources necessary to pay the sums demanded in either crime.
- Migrants on their way to the US – legally or illegally – have also become primary targets of kidnapping in recent years, although the policies of the Trump administration have put this source of revenue under pressure.
- Foreign individuals from developed countries are rarely deliberate targets of kidnapping, owing to the media attention these cases attract. An exception to this is express kidnapping (mainly in major urban centres), which involves forcing an individual to extract cash from an automated cash machine and affects victims more randomly.
- A separate social issue is the specific kidnapping of women, linked to sexual assault or human trafficking. The targets are local women or immigrants from other Latin American states.



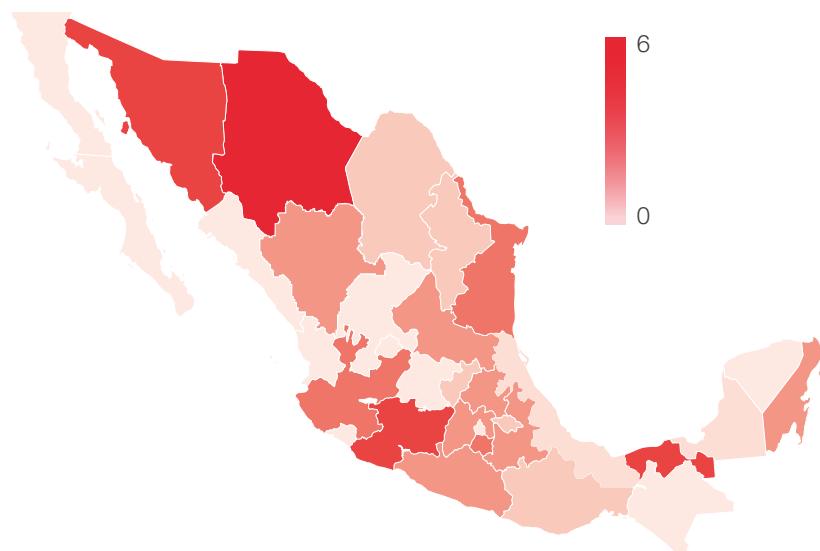
Statistics

- Crime statistics in Mexico are highly unreliable owing to significant under-reporting; estimates suggest that only one in five kidnappings is reported to the authorities, but the actual discrepancy is likely to be even higher.
- The main source for statistics on crime is the Secretary General of the National Public Security System (SESNSP).

Kidnap
Five-year average



Sept 2025



Extortion

Five-year average



Sept 2025



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crisisresponsemanagement@convexin.com



Principles of security

There are seven fundamental principles of security:



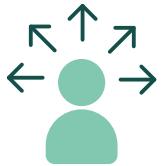
Layers of security



Planning



Communication



Situational awareness



Profile



Routine



Information security

These principles are applicable in any environment, however they are most relevant in unfamiliar surroundings or in areas with high levels of crime, terrorism or civil unrest. In terms of kidnap prevention, experience shows that given the relatively opportunistic nature of many kidnaps adherence to these principles can reduce the likelihood of someone becoming a victim of kidnapping.

- **Layers of security:** there is no single measure that enhances personal security, instead the focus should always be on applying several layers of mitigation involving physical, procedural and behavioural measures, as well as adopting a generally proactive attitude towards security.
- **Planning:** individuals can reduce risk simply by making an effort to understand the general security environment in their location and then pre planning appropriate security precautions (for example insurance, airport pick-ups, security escorts and/or other local support).
- **Communications:** identifying in advance key points of contact in emergencies (for example local office, hotel, police, embassy, security providers) and have a back-up method of communications in the event a phone does not work locally for network or other reasons. In higher threat environments share itineraries with others in advance and consider establishing lost contact plans involving periodic 'check ins'.
- **Situational awareness:** being aware of your general surroundings at all times but particularly with regards to regular routines (for example arriving or leaving at home, the office, schools, or restaurants or shopping malls). Be aware of higher risk areas along routes you travel and be alert to unusual or suspicious incidents, behaviours, people or other occurrences in your vicinity. Avoid situations where you could become isolated and, above all, always trust your instincts.
- **Profile:** kidnappers – and criminals in general – normally target their victims because that individual has come to their attention for some reason. It is therefore important that individuals adopt a low profile in high kidnap threat environments. This should involve minimising overt displays of wealth, not unnecessarily sharing unnecessary details of itineraries or business trips, and ensuring personal information such as home addresses, phone numbers and email address and family information are not easily accessible.
- **Routines:** kidnappers are most easily able to target and abduct victims who have a predictable routine. It is important therefore in higher threat kidnap environments to avoid setting predictable patterns of behaviour, particularly regarding places you regularly visit. Most kidnaps occur at the beginning or end of journeys, so it is critical to be alert during these phases.
- **Information security:** to reduce vulnerability to both kidnapping but also extortion it is important individuals and their families regularly undertake periodic reviews of their online profiles – including all corporate and social media – to enable an assessment of what personal information is easily accessible and could be utilised by criminals.

Kidnap and Extortion

INITIAL ACTIONS

IF YOU SUSPECT YOU ARE THE VICTIM OF A KIDNAP OR THREAT EXTORTION

DO

- ✓ Start a log of calls, events and any actions taken.
- ✓ Form a small family crisis cell/company crisis team.
- ✓ Preserve any physical evidence carefully (e.g. letters or parcels received).
- ✓ If possible record any telecommunications with the kidnapper/extortionist, or carefully note all details of what is said.
- ✓ Note details of all demands, deadlines or threats received.
- ✓ **If you are a Convex client call the 24/7 Response Helpline and ask to speak to the Convex Crisis Response Duty officer.**

DON'T

- ✗ Agree to anything, make any offer or start negotiating.
- ✗ Acknowledge, agree to or self-impose any deadlines (e.g. "I can get that for you in an hour").
- ✗ Discuss the incident with anyone who does not need to know about it or, if it is not yet publicly known, report the incident without first receiving advice.
- ✗ Make any decisions until advised by Convex Crisis Response.

If a kidnapping

Prepare for a possible first call from the kidnappers by:

- Identifying someone (not a decision maker) to act as a 'Communicator' to speak on behalf of the family/company.
- Identifying anyone who could potentially receive a call from kidnappers and brief them on how to respond if they are contacted (to say and promise nothing and direct the caller to the Communicator's number).

If communication from someone claiming to hold the victim is received the Communicator should:

- Listen carefully to what is said and ask the caller to repeat anything that is unclear.
- Reassure the caller you wish to cooperate.
- Explain that you are not authorized to make any decisions as you have to consult other family or company members.
- Ask to speak with the victim to confirm that they are alive and well, or ask for other evidence of their well-being (e.g. the answer to a question that only the victim(s) can answer).
- If you do speak with the victim(s) reassure them you are doing everything you can to secure their release and that their family(s) are being looked after.
- Stay calm in the face of threats, these are normal, but challenge threats of violence towards the victim(s) (e.g. 'We want to resolve this without anyone getting hurt').
- If possible arrange a time for a call back.
- Stall for time pending the arrival of the Convex Crisis Response consultant.



REMEMBER

If in doubt call the Convex Crisis Response Helpline – we would rather help you prevent an incident than help you respond to one.





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