

# Mexican Drug War

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The **Mexican Drug War** is an ongoing armed conflict between rival drug cartels fighting each other for regional control, and Mexican government forces. The government's principal goal has been to put down the drug-related violence that was raging between different drug cartels before any military intervention was made.<sup>[27]</sup> In addition, the Mexican government has claimed that their primary focus is on dismantling the powerful drug cartels, rather than on drug trafficking prevention, which is left to U.S. functionaries.<sup>[28][29][30]</sup>

Although Mexican drug cartels, or drug trafficking organizations, have existed for several decades, they have become more powerful since the demise of Colombia's Cali and Medellín cartels in the 1990s. Mexican drug cartels now dominate the wholesale illicit drug market by controlling 90% of the drugs that enter the United States.<sup>[31][32]</sup> Arrests of key cartel leaders, particularly in the Tijuana and Gulf cartels, have led to increasing drug violence as cartels fight for control of the trafficking routes into the United States.<sup>[33][34][35]</sup>

Analysts estimate that wholesale earnings from illicit drug sales range from \$13.6 billion<sup>[31]</sup> to \$49.4 billion annually.<sup>[31][36][37]</sup>

## Contents

- 1 Background
  - 1.1 Presidency of Vicente Fox
  - 1.2 Drug sources and use
    - 1.2.1 Use
    - 1.2.2 Sources
- 2 Mexican cartels
  - 2.1 Origin
  - 2.2 Major cartels
    - 2.2.1 Beltrán Leyva Cartel
    - 2.2.2 La Familia Cartel
    - 2.2.3 Gulf Cartel
    - 2.2.4 Juárez Cartel
    - 2.2.5 Knights Templar
    - 2.2.6 Sinaloa Cartel
    - 2.2.7 Tijuana Cartel

## Mexican Drug War

Part of the War on Drugs



Mexican Army soldiers during a confrontation in Michoacán in August 2007

<b>Date</b>	December 11, 2006 (when Operation Michoacan commenced) <sup>[1]</sup> –present (5 years, 10 months and 5 days)
<b>Location</b>	Mexican states of Baja California, Durango, Sinaloa, Guerrero, Chihuahua, Michoacán, Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Veracruz, Coahuila, Jalisco, San Luis Potosí, Nayarit, Zacatecas, Oaxaca, Morelos, and Sonora. <sup>[2]</sup>
<b>Status</b>	Ongoing

### Belligerents

 Mexico <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Mexican Army</li> <li>■ Mexican Air Force</li> <li>■ Mexican Navy</li> <li>■ Mexican Naval Infantry</li> <li>■ Mexican Federal Police</li> <li>■ Mexican state and municipal police forces</li> </ul>	<i>Rival drug cartels:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sinaloa Cartel</li> <li>■ Gulf Cartel</li> <li>■ Juárez Cartel</li> <li>■ Knights Templar Cartel</li> <li>■ Tijuana Cartel</li> <li>■ La Familia Cartel (disbanded)</li> <li>■ Los Zetas</li> <li>■ Beltrán-Leyva Cartel</li> </ul>
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## Background

*See also: Timeline of the Mexican Drug War*

Given its geographic location, Mexico has long been used as a staging and transshipment point for narcotics, illegal immigrants and contraband destined for U.S. markets from Mexico itself, South America and elsewhere. Mexico supplied alcohol to the United States throughout the duration of the prohibition of alcohol,<sup>[32]</sup> and the onset of illegal drug trade with the U.S. began when the prohibition came to an end in 1933.<sup>[32]</sup> Towards the end of the 1960s, the Mexican narcotic smugglers started to smuggle drugs on a major scale.<sup>[32]</sup> During the 1980s and early 1990s, Colombia's Pablo Escobar was the main exporter of cocaine and dealt with organized criminal networks all over the world. When enforcement efforts intensified in South Florida and the Caribbean, the Colombian organizations formed partnerships with the Mexico-based traffickers to transport cocaine through Mexico into the United States.<sup>[38]</sup>

This was easily accomplished because Mexico had long been a major source of heroin and cannabis, and drug traffickers from Mexico had already established an infrastructure that stood ready to serve the Colombia-based traffickers. By the mid-1980s, the organizations from Mexico were well-established and reliable transporters of Colombian cocaine. At first, the Mexican gangs were paid in cash for their transportation services, but in the late 1980s, the Mexican transport organizations and the Colombian drug traffickers settled on a payment-in-product arrangement. Transporters from Mexico usually were given 35% to 50% of each cocaine shipment. This arrangement meant that organizations from Mexico became involved in the distribution, as well as the transportation of cocaine, and became formidable traffickers in their own right. Currently, the Sinaloa Cartel and the Gulf cartel have taken over trafficking cocaine from Colombia to the worldwide markets.<sup>[39]</sup>

Over time, the balance of power between the various Mexican cartels shifts as new ones emerge and older ones weaken and collapse. A disruption in the system, such as the arrests or deaths of cartel leaders, generates bloodshed as rivals move in to exploit the power vacuum.<sup>[40]</sup> Leadership vacuums are sometimes created by law enforcement successes against a particular cartel, thus cartels often will attempt to use law enforcement against one another, either by bribing Mexican officials to take action against a rival or by leaking intelligence about a rival's operations to the Mexican government or the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.<sup>[40]</sup> While many factors have contributed to the escalating violence, security analysts in Mexico City trace the origins of the rising scourge to the unraveling of a longtime implicit arrangement between narcotics traffickers and governments controlled by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which lost its grip on political power starting in the late 1980s.<sup>[41]</sup>

The fighting between rival drug cartels began in earnest after the 1989 arrest of Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo who ran the cocaine business in Mexico.<sup>[42]</sup> There was a lull in the fighting during the late 1990s but the violence has steadily worsened since 2000.

## Presidency of Vicente Fox

Violence increased from 2000 when President Vicente Fox sent troops to Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas to fight the cartels. It is estimated that about 110 people died in Nuevo Laredo alone during the January–August 2005 period as a result of the fighting between the Gulf and Sinaloa cartels.<sup>[43]</sup> In 2005 there was a surge in violence as La Familia Michoacana drug cartel established itself in Michoacán.

## Drug sources and use

Highest estimate of deaths: 99,667<sup>[24]</sup>

Total disappeared: 10,000<sup>[25]</sup>

Total displaced: 1.6 million<sup>[26]</sup>

## Use

With the increased role of Mexico in the trafficking and production of illicit drugs, the availability of drugs has increased locally since the 1980s.<sup>[44]</sup> In the decades before this period, consumption was not generalized – reportedly occurring mainly among persons of high socioeconomic status, intellectuals and artists.<sup>[44]</sup>

Often drug shipments are delayed in Mexican border towns before delivery to the U.S., which has likely contributed to the high rates of local drug consumption.<sup>[44]</sup> Following the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, coupled with stricter border control measures, less cocaine is exported to the U.S.<sup>[44]</sup> This has led to an over-supply of cocaine which has resulted in decreased prices as dealers attempt to unload extra drug along trafficking routes, especially in Mexican border areas. With increased cocaine use, there has been a parallel rise in demand for drug user treatment in Mexico.<sup>[44]</sup> The prevalence of illicit drug use in Mexico is still comparatively low as compared to Canada and U.S.A.<sup>[44]</sup>



Mexican Army

## Sources

Mexico, a major drug producing and transit country, is the main foreign supplier of cannabis and a major supplier of methamphetamine to the United States.<sup>[31]</sup> Almost half the cartels' revenue come from cannabis.<sup>[45]</sup> Although Mexico accounts for only a small share of worldwide heroin production, it supplies a large share of the heroin distributed in the United States.<sup>[31][46]</sup> Drug cartels in Mexico control approximately 70% of the foreign narcotics that flow into the United States.<sup>[47]</sup> The US State Department estimates that 90% of cocaine entering the United States transits through Mexico, with Colombia being the main cocaine producer,<sup>[48]</sup> followed by Bolivia and Peru.<sup>[49]</sup> Mexican drug traffickers increasingly smuggle money back into Mexico inside cars and trucks, likely due to the effectiveness of U.S. efforts at monitoring electronic money transfers.<sup>[50]</sup>

## Mexican cartels

*Further information: List of Mexico's 37 most-wanted drug lords*

## Origin

The birth of all Mexican drug cartels is traced to former Mexican Judicial Federal Police agent Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo ("The Godfather"), who founded the Guadalajara Cartel in 1980 and controlled all illegal drug trade in Mexico and the trafficking corridors across the Mexico-USA border throughout the 1980s.<sup>[51]</sup> He started off by smuggling marijuana and opium into the U.S.A., and was the first Mexican drug chief to link up with Colombia's cocaine cartels in the 1980s. Through his connections, Félix Gallardo became the point man for the Medellín cartel, which was run by Pablo Escobar.<sup>[52]</sup> This was easily accomplished because Félix Gallardo had already established an infrastructure that stood ready to serve the Colombia-based traffickers.

There were no cartels at that time in Mexico. Félix Gallardo was the lord of Mexican drug smugglers. He oversaw all operations; there was just him, his cronies, and the politicians who sold him protection.<sup>[53]</sup> However, the Guadalajara Cartel suffered a major blow in 1985 when the group's co-founder Rafael Caro

Quintero was captured, and later convicted, for the murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena.<sup>[54][55]</sup> Félix Gallardo afterwards kept a low profile and in 1987 he moved with his family to Guadalajara city. According to Peter Dale Scott, the Guadalajara Cartel prospered largely because it enjoyed the protection of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), under its chief Miguel Nazar Haro, a CIA asset.<sup>[56]</sup>

"The Godfather" then decided to divide up the trade he controlled as it would be more efficient and less likely to be brought down in one law enforcement swoop.<sup>[57]</sup> In a way, he was privatizing the Mexican drug business while sending it back underground, to be run by bosses who were less well known or not yet known by the DEA. Gallardo convened the nation's top drug traffickers at a house in the resort of Acapulco where he designated the *plazas* or territories.<sup>[57]</sup> The Tijuana route would go to the Arellano Felix brothers. The Ciudad Juárez route would go to the Carrillo Fuentes family. Miguel Caro Quintero would run the Sonora corridor. The control of the Matamoros, Tamaulipas corridor—then becoming the Gulf Cartel—would be left undisturbed to its founder Juan García Abrego.

Meanwhile, Joaquín Guzmán Loera and Ismael Zambada García would take over Pacific coast operations, becoming the Sinaloa Cartel. Guzmán and Zambada brought veteran Héctor Luis Palma Salazar back into the fold. Félix Gallardo still planned to oversee national operations, as he maintained important connections, but he would no longer control all details of the business.<sup>[57]</sup>

Félix Gallardo was arrested on 8 April 1989.<sup>[58]</sup>

## Major cartels

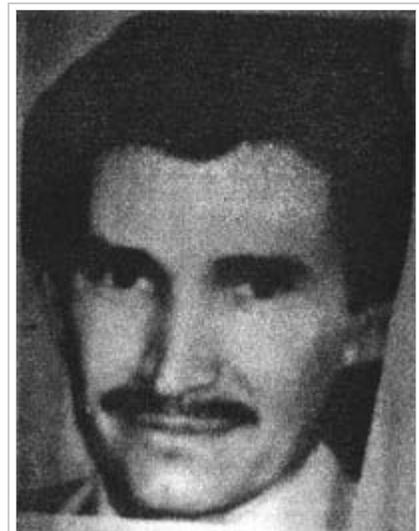
Alliances or agreements between drug cartels have been shown to be fragile, tense and temporary. Mexican drug cartels have increased their co-operation with U.S. street and prison gangs to expand their distribution networks within the U.S.<sup>[37]</sup>

### Beltrán Leyva Cartel

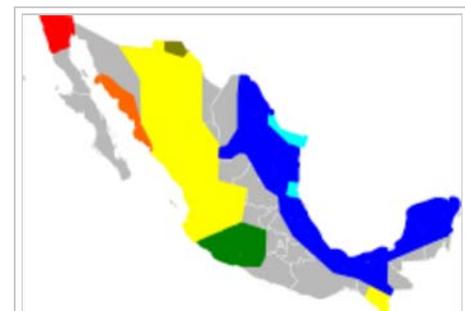
*Main article: Beltrán Leyva Cartel*

The Beltrán Leyva Cartel was a Mexican drug cartel and organized crime syndicate founded by the four Beltrán Leyva brothers: Marcos Arturo, Carlos, Alfredo and Héctor.<sup>[61][62][63][64]</sup> In 2004 and 2005, Arturo Beltrán Leyva led powerful groups of assassins to fight for trade routes in northeastern Mexico for the Sinaloa Cartel. Through the use of corruption or intimidation, the Beltrán Leyva Cartel was able to infiltrate Mexico's political,<sup>[65]</sup> judicial<sup>[66]</sup> and police institutions to feed classified information about anti-drug operations,<sup>[67][68]</sup> and even infiltrated the Interpol office in Mexico.<sup>[69]</sup>

The Mexican Federal Police considers the cartel to have been disbanded,<sup>[70][71]</sup> and the last cartel leader, Héctor Beltrán Leyva, apparently has



Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, the "godfather" of Mexican drug cartels.



Map of Mexican drug cartels based on a May 2010 Stratfor report.<sup>[59][60]</sup>

- Tijuana Cartel
- Beltrán Leyva Cartel
- Sinaloa Cartel
- Juárez Cartel
- La Familia Michoacana
- Gulf Cartel
- Los Zetas
- Disputed territories

been inactive and remains a fugitive; the U.S.A. is offering a US\$5 million bounty for information leading to his arrest,<sup>[72]</sup> while the Mexican government is offering a US\$2.1 million bounty.<sup>[73][74]</sup>

## La Familia Cartel

*Main article: La Familia Michoacana*

La Familia Michoacana is based in Michoacán. It was formerly allied to the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas, but split off and became an independent organization.<sup>[75]</sup> In February 2010, La Familia forged an alliance with the Gulf Cartel against Los Zetas and Beltrán Leyva Cartel.<sup>[76]</sup>

The Attorney General in Mexico (PGR) stated that La Familia Cartel was "exterminated" by mid-2011,<sup>[78]</sup> but in the process, a splinter group, the Knights Templar Cartel was formed.<sup>[79][80]</sup>

## Gulf Cartel

*Main article: Gulf Cartel*

The Gulf Cartel (Cartel del Golfo), based in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, has been one of Mexico's two dominant cartels in recent years. In the late 1990s, it hired a private mercenary army (an enforcer group now called Los Zetas), which in 2006 stepped up as a partner but, in February 2010, their partnership was dissolved and both groups engaged in widespread violence across several border cities of Tamaulipas state,<sup>[76][81]</sup> turning several border towns into "ghost towns".<sup>[82]</sup>

The Gulf Cartel (CDG) was strong at the beginning of 2011, holding off several Zetas incursions into its territory. However, as the year progressed, internal divisions led to intra-cartel battles in Matamoros and Reynosa, Tamaulipas state. The infighting resulted in several arrests and deaths in Mexico and in the United States. The CDG has since broken apart, and it appears that one faction, known as Los Metros, has overpowered its rival Los Rojos faction and is now asserting its control over CDG operations. The infighting has weakened the CDG, but the group seems to have maintained control of its primary plazas, or smuggling corridors, into the United States.<sup>[83]</sup> The Mexican federal government has made notable successes in capturing the leadership of the Gulf Cartel. Osiel Cardenas Guillen, his brother Antonio Cardenas Guillen, Mario Alberto Cardenas Guillen, and Jorge Eduardo Costilla Sanchez have all been captured and incarcerated during Felipe Calderon's administration.

## Juárez Cartel

*Main article: Juárez Cartel*

The Juárez Cartel controls one of the primary transportation routes for billions of dollars worth of illegal drug shipments annually entering the United States from Mexico.<sup>[84]</sup> Since 2007, the Juárez Cartel has been locked in a vicious battle with its former partner, the Sinaloa Cartel, for control of Ciudad Juárez. La Línea is a group of Mexican drug traffickers and corrupt Juárez and Chihuahua state police officers who work as the armed wing of the Juárez Cartel.<sup>[85]</sup> Vicente Carrillo Fuentes heads the Juárez Cartel.



Juan José Esparragoza Moreno is a Sinaloa Cartel drug lord. He is a former Mexican Federal Judicial Police (PJF) officer.<sup>[77]</sup>

In 2011, the Juárez Cartel continues to weaken,<sup>[86][87]</sup> however, still controls the three main points of entry into El Paso, Texas. The Juárez Cartel is only a shadow of the organization it was a decade ago, and its weakness and inability to effectively fight against Sinaloa's advances in Juarez contributed to the lower death toll in Juarez in 2011.<sup>[88]</sup>

## Knights Templar

*Main article: Knights Templar Cartel*

The Knights Templar drug cartel (Spanish: *Caballeros Templarios*) was created in Michoacán in March 2011 after the death of the charismatic leader of La Familia Michoacana cartel, Nazario Moreno González.<sup>[89]</sup> The Cartel is headed by Enrique Plancarte Solís and Servando Gómez Martínez who formed the Knights Templar due to differences with José de Jesús Méndez Vargas, who had assumed leadership of La Familia Michoacana.<sup>[90]</sup>

After the emergence of the Knights Templar, sizable battles flared up during the spring and summer months between the Knights Templar and La Familia. The organization has grown from a splinter group to a dominant force over La Familia, and it appears to be taking over the bulk of their original operations in Mexico. At present, the Knights Templar appear to have aligned with the Sinaloa Federation in an effort to root out the remnants of La Familia and to prevent Los Zetas from gaining a more substantial foothold in the region.<sup>[91][92]</sup>

## Sinaloa Cartel

*Main article: Sinaloa Cartel*

The Sinaloa Cartel began to contest the Gulf Cartel's domination of the coveted southwest Texas corridor following the arrest of Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cárdenas in March 2003. The "Federation" was the result of a 2006 accord between several groups located in the Pacific state of Sinaloa. The cartel is led by Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, Mexico's most-wanted drug trafficker and whose estimated net worth of US\$1 billion makes him the 1140th richest man in the world and the 55th most powerful, according to his *Forbes* magazine profile.<sup>[93]</sup> In February 2010, new alliances were formed against Los Zetas and Beltran Leyva Cartel.<sup>[76]</sup> As of May 2010, numerous reports by Mexican and US media claimed that Sinaloa had infiltrated the Mexican federal government and military, and colluded with it to destroy the other cartels.<sup>[94][95]</sup> The Colima, Sonora and Milenio Cartels are now branches of the Sinaloa Cartel.<sup>[96]</sup>

## Tijuana Cartel

*Main article: Tijuana Cartel*

The Tijuana Cartel, also known as the Arellano Felix Organization, was once among Mexico's most powerful.<sup>[97]</sup> It is based in Tijuana, one of the most strategically important border towns in Mexico,<sup>[98]</sup> and continues to export drugs even after being weakened by an internal war in 2009. Due to infighting, arrests and the deaths of some of its top members, the Tijuana Cartel is a fraction of what it was in the 1990s and early 2000s, when it was considered one of the most potent and violent criminal organizations in Mexico by the police. After the arrest or assassination of various members of the Arellano Felix clan, the cartel is currently headed by Luis Fernando Sánchez Arellano, a nephew of the Arellano Felix brothers.

## Los Zetas

*Main article: Los Zetas Cartel*

In 1999, Gulf Cartel leader Osiel Cardenas Guillen, hired a group of 31 corrupt former elite military soldiers now known as Los Zetas, who deserted from the Airmobile Special Forces Group (GAFE) and the Amphibian Group of Special Forces (GANFE) of the Mexican Army, and began operating as a private army for the Gulf Cartel. The Zetas have been instrumental in the Gulf Cartel's domination of the drug trade in much of Mexico and have fought to maintain the cartel's influence in northern cities following the arrest of Osiel Cardenas.

After the arrest and extradition of Gulf Cartel leader, Osiel Cardenas Guillen, the Zetas seized the opportunity to strike out on their own. Under the leadership of Heriberto Lazcano, the Zetas, numbering approximately 300, set up its own independent drug, arms and human-trafficking networks.<sup>[99]</sup> In 2008, Los Zetas made a deal with ex-Sinaloa cartel commanders, the Beltrán-Leyva brothers and since then, became rivals of their former employer/partner, the Gulf Cartel.<sup>[76][100]</sup>

## Cartel propaganda

*Main article: Propaganda in the Mexican Drug War*

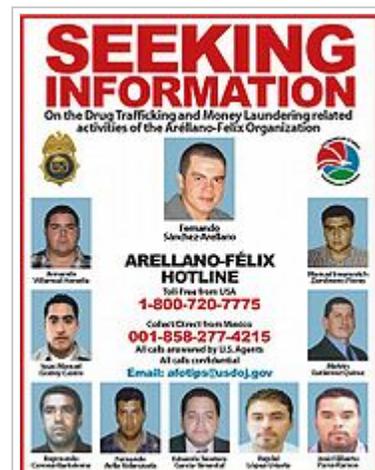
Cartels have been engaged in propaganda and psychological campaigns to influence their rivals and those within their area of influence. They use banners or "narcomantas" to threaten their rivals. Some cartels hand out pamphlets and leaflets to conduct public relation campaigns. Many cartels have been able to control the information environment by threatening journalists, bloggers, and others who speak out against them. They have elaborate recruitment strategies targeting young adults to join their cartel groups. They have successfully branded the word "narco", and the word has become part of Mexican culture. There is music, television shows, literature, beverages, food, and architecture that all have been branded "narco".<sup>[101]</sup>

## Smuggling of firearms

*Main article: Smuggling of firearms into Mexico*

*See also: Gun politics in Mexico*

Mexicans have a constitutional right to own firearms,<sup>[102]</sup> but legal purchase from the single Mexican gun shop in Mexico City is extremely difficult.<sup>[103]</sup> A significant number of firearms that make their way to Mexico come from U.S. gunshops. These are then smuggled into Mexico across the US-Mexico border.<sup>[104][105]</sup> Most grenades and rocket-launchers are smuggled through Guatemalan borders<sup>[106]</sup> or stolen from the Mexican police or military.<sup>[107]</sup> The vast majority of the handguns and many of the assault rifles used by the cartels enter Mexico from the United States.<sup>[106]</sup> Consequently, black market firearms are widely available. The most common smuggled firearms include AR-15 and AK-47 type rifles, and FN 5.7 caliber semi-automatic pistols. In 2009, Mexico seized more than 4,400 firearms of the AK-47 and AR-15 types.<sup>[108]</sup> Grenade launchers are known to have been used against Mexican



'Wanted' poster for the Tijuana Cartel leaders (2009)



AK-47 style rifle (locally called *Cuerno de chivo*, Spanish for *Goat Horn*, for its curved magazine)



M4 Carbine with Grenade launcher

security forces, and M4 Carbiners with M203 grenade launchers have been confiscated.<sup>[109]</sup> It is believed that some of these high powered weapons and related accessories may have been stolen from U.S. military bases.<sup>[110][111]</sup>

## Gun origins

*See also: Project Gunrunner, Operation Fast and Furious, and Operation Wide Receiver*

Research has asserted that most weapons and arms trafficked into Mexico are from gun dealers in the United States.<sup>[112]</sup> In response to a 2009 GAO report that claimed 87% of Mexican crime guns traced to U.S. origins, the DHS pointed out that DHS officials believe that the 87 percent statistic is misleading (i.e.: out of approximately 30,000 weapons seized in drug cases in Mexico for 2004-2008, 7,200 appeared to be U.S. origin, approximately 4,000 were found in ATF manufacturer and importer records, and 87 percent of those—3,480—originated in the United States).<sup>[113][114]</sup>

In an effort to control smuggling of firearms, the U.S. government is assisting Mexico with technology, equipment and training.<sup>[115]</sup> Project Gunrunner was one such efforts between the U.S. and Mexico to collaborate in tracing Mexican guns which were manufactured in or imported legally to the U.S.A.<sup>[116]</sup>

On February 2008, William Hoover, Assistant Director for Field Operations of ATF, testified before the U.S. Congress that over 90% of the firearms that have either been recovered in, or interdicted in transport to Mexico originated from various sources within the United States.<sup>[117]</sup> The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and others have disagreed with these figures, pointing that the Mexican sample submitted for ATF tracing is the fraction of weapons seized that appear to have been made in the U.S. or imported into the U.S.<sup>[113][114]</sup> While the United States is not the only source of firearms and munitions used by the cartels, ATF says that it has been established that a "significant" percentage of their firearms originate from gun stores and other sources in the U.S.<sup>[118]</sup>

Gun-rights groups in the U.S. use lower firearm tracing figures that advance their goals<sup>[119]</sup> while U.S. gun control advocates use higher figures to call for re-enactment of the expired Federal Assault Weapons Ban of 1994–2004.<sup>[120]</sup>

## Project Gunrunner

*Main article: ATF gunwalking scandal*

ATF Project Gunrunner has a stated official objective to stop the sale and export of guns from the United States into Mexico in order to deny Mexican drug cartels the firearms considered "tools of the trade".<sup>[121]</sup> However, in February 2008 it brought about a scandal when the project was accused of accomplishing the opposite by ATF permitting and facilitating 'straw purchase' firearm sales to traffickers, and allowing the guns to 'walk' and be transported to Mexico. Several of the guns sold under the Project Gunrunner were recovered from crime scenes

(locally called *Chanate*, Mexican Spanish for *Great-tailed Grackle*).



Beta C-Mag double Drum magazine (locally called *Huevos de Toro*, Spanish for *Bull Testicles*) on a M4 Carbine.



Colt AR-15 A3 Tactical Carbine

in Arizona,<sup>[122]</sup> and at crime scenes throughout Mexico,<sup>[123]</sup> resulting in considerable controversy.<sup>[124][125][126]</sup>

## Course of the conflict

### Operation Michoacan

Although violence between drug cartels had been occurring long before the war began, the government held a generally passive stance regarding cartel violence in the 1990s and early 2000s. That changed on December 11, 2006, when newly elected President Felipe Calderón sent 6,500 federal troops to the state of Michoacán to end drug violence there (Operation Michoacan). This action is regarded as the first major operation against organized crime, and is generally viewed as the starting point of the war between the government and the drug cartels.<sup>[1]</sup> As time progressed, Calderón continued to escalate his anti-drug campaign, in which there are now about 45,000 troops involved in addition to state and federal police forces. In 2010 Calderón said that the cartels seek "to replace the government" and "are trying to impose a monopoly by force of arms, and are even trying to impose their own laws."<sup>[127]</sup>



Mexican Marines during a combat against a drug cartel in Xalapa, Veracruz

As of 2011, Mexico's military captured 11,544 people who were believed to have been involved with the cartels and organized crime.<sup>[128]</sup> In the year prior, 28,000 individuals were arrested on drug-related charges. The decrease in eradication and drug seizures, as shown in statistics calculated by federal authorities, poorly reflects Calderón's security agenda. Since the war began, over forty thousand people have been killed as a result of cartel violence. During Calderón's presidential term, the murder rate of Mexico has increased dramatically.<sup>[129]</sup> Although Calderón set out to end the violent warfare between rival cartel leaders, many argue that he has inadvertently made the problem worse. The methods that Calderón adopted involved confronting the cartels directly. These aggressive methods have resulted in public killings and torture from both the cartels and the country's own government forces, which aids in perpetuating the fear and apprehension that the citizens of Mexico have regarding the war on drugs and its negative stigma. As cartel leaders are being removed from their positions, either in the form of arrest or death, power struggles for leadership in the cartels have become more intense, resulting in enhanced violence within the

cartels themselves.<sup>[130]</sup> Naturally, Calderón's forces concentrate on taking down cartel members that have a high-ranking in the cartel in an attempt to take down the whole organization. But the resulting struggle to fill the recently vacated position is one that threatens the existence of many lives in the cartel. Typically, many junior-level cartel members then fight amongst one another, creating more and more chaos. The drug cartels are more aggressive and forceful now than they ever were in the past and at this point, the cartels hold much of the power in Mexico. Calderón relies heavily on his military to defend and fight against cartel activity. Unfortunately, Calderón's military forces have yet to yield significant results in dealing with the violent cartels due in part to the fact that many of the law enforcement officials working for the Mexican government are suspected of being corrupt. There is suspicion that cartels have corrupted and infiltrated the military at a high level, influencing many high-ranking generals and officers. Mexico's National Human Rights Commission has received nearly 5,800 complaints regarding military abuse since the beginning of the drug war in 2006. Additionally, the National Human Rights Commission has completed nearly 90 in-depth reports since 2007, addressing the many human rights violations towards civilians that have occurred while the military officers

were actively participating in law enforcement activities.<sup>[131]</sup> Violence in May 2012 in which nearly 50 bodies were found on a local highway between the US-Mexican border and Monterrey has led to the arrests of 4 high-ranking Mexican military officials.<sup>[132]</sup> These officials were suspected of being on the cartel payrolls and alerting the cartels in advance of military action against them. Such actions demonstrate that Calderón's significant military offensive will continue to reveal mixed results until the military itself is rid of the corrupting influences of the cartels whom they supposedly aim to persecute.

## Escalation

In April 2008, General Sergio Aponte, the man in charge of the anti-drug campaign in the state of Baja California, made a number of allegations of corruption against the police forces in the region. Among his allegations, Aponte stated that he believed Baja California's anti-kidnapping squad was actually a kidnapping team working in conjunction with organized crime, and that bribed police units were being used as bodyguards for drug traffickers.<sup>[3]</sup> These accusations sent shock waves through state government. Many of the more than 50 accused officials quit or fled. The progress against drug cartels in Mexico has been hindered by bribery, intimidation, and corruption; four months later the General was relieved of his command.<sup>[133]</sup>



Mexican troops operating in a random checkpoint.

On April 26, 2008, a major battle took place between members of the Tijuana and Sinaloa cartels in the city of Tijuana, Baja California, that left 17 people dead.<sup>[134]</sup>



Mexican Marines during an operation against Zetas

In March 2009, President Calderón called in an additional 5,000 Mexican Army troops to Ciudad Juárez. The United States Department of Homeland Security has also said that it is considering using the National Guard to counter the threat of drug violence in Mexico from spilling over the border into the US. The governors of Arizona and Texas have asked the federal government to send additional National Guard troops to help those already there supporting local law enforcement efforts against drug trafficking.<sup>[135]</sup>

According to the National Drug Intelligence Center, Mexican cartels are the predominant smugglers and wholesale distributors of South American cocaine and Mexico-produced cannabis,

methamphetamine and heroin. Mexico's cartels have existed for some time, but have become increasingly powerful in recent years with the demise of the Medellín and Cali cartels in Colombia. The Mexican cartels are expanding their control over the distribution of these drugs in areas controlled by Colombian and Dominican criminal groups, and it is now believed they control most of the illegal drugs coming into the U.S.A.<sup>[136]</sup>

No longer constrained to being mere intermediaries for Colombian producers, Mexican cartels are now powerful organized-crime syndicates that dominate the drug trade in the Americas.

Mexican cartels control large swaths of Mexican territory and dozens of municipalities, and they exercise increasing influence in Mexican electoral politics.<sup>[137]</sup> The cartels are waging violent turf battles over control of key smuggling corridors from Matamoros to San Diego. Mexican cartels employ hitmen and groups of enforcers,

known as *sicarios*. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration reports that the Mexican drug cartels operating today along the border are far more sophisticated and dangerous than any other organized criminal group in U.S. law enforcement history.<sup>[136]</sup> The cartels use grenade launchers, automatic weapons, body armor, and sometimes Kevlar helmets.<sup>[138][139][140]</sup> Some groups have also been known to use improvised explosive devices (IEDs).<sup>[141]</sup>

Casualty numbers have escalated significantly over time. According to a Stratfor report, the number of drug-related deaths in 2006 and 2007 (2,119 and 2,275) more than doubled to 5,207 in 2008. The number further increased substantially over the next two years, from 6,598 in 2009 to over 11,000 in 2010.<sup>[141]</sup>

## Cartel losses

On 7 October 2012, the Mexican Navy responded to a civilian complaint reporting the presence of armed gunmen in Sabinas, Coahuila. Upon the navy's arrival, the gunmen threw grenades at the patrol from a moving vehicle, triggering a shootout that left Lazcano and another gunman dead and one marine slightly wounded.<sup>[142]</sup> The vehicle was found to contain a grenade launcher, 12 grenades, possibly a rocket-propelled grenade launcher and two rifles, according to the Navy.<sup>[143]</sup> The Navy managed to confirm his death through fingerprint verification and photographs of his corpse before handing the body to the local authorities.<sup>[144]</sup> Lazcano is the most powerful cartel leader to be killed since the start of Mexico's Drug War in 2006, according to Reuters.<sup>[145]</sup>

This death came just hours after the Navy arrested a high-ranking Zeta member in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Salvador Alfonso Martínez Escobedo.

The apparent death of Lazcano may benefit three parties: the Mexican Navy, who scored a significant blow to organized crime with the death of Lazcano; Miguel Treviño Morales, who now rises as the "uncontested" leader of Los Zetas; and Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, the leader of the Sinaloa Cartel and the main rival of Los Zetas. *El Chapo* is perhaps the biggest winner of the three, since his primary goal is to take over the smuggling routes in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, the headquarters of Treviño Morales.<sup>[146]</sup> If the body hadn't been stolen, it would also be a symbolic victory for Felipe Calderón, who can say that his administration took down one of the founders and top leaders of Los Zetas and consequently boost the morale of the Mexican military.<sup>[147]</sup>

Analysts say that Lazcano's death does not signify the end of Los Zetas. As seen in other instances when top cartel leaders are taken out, fragmenting within the organizations occur, causing short-term violence. Los Zetas have a line of succession when leaders are arrested or killed, but the problem is that most of these replacements are younger, less-experienced members who are likely to resort to violence to maintain their reputation.<sup>[148]</sup>

Torres Félix, one of the leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel was killed in a gunbattle with the Mexican Army in the community of Oso Viejo in Culiacán, Sinaloa early in the morning on 13 October 2012. His body was sent to the forensic center and was guarded by military-men in order to prevent his henchmen from snatching the body.<sup>[149][150]</sup>

After the shootout, the military confiscated several stashes of weapons, ammunition, and other materials.<sup>[151]</sup>

Prior to his death, Torres Félix was a key figure and major drug trafficker for Ismael Zambada García and Joaquín Guzmán Loera, Mexico's most-wanted man.<sup>[152]</sup>

## Effects in Mexico

## Violence

The Mexican attorney general's office has claimed that 9 of 10 victims of the Mexican Drug War are members of organized-crime groups,<sup>[153]</sup> although this figure has been questioned by other sources.<sup>[154]</sup> Deaths among military and police personnel are an estimated 7% of the total.<sup>[155]</sup> The states that suffer from the conflict most are Baja California, Guerrero, Chihuahua, Michoacán, Tamaulipas, Nuevo León and Sinaloa. President Calderón's government is currently fighting the traffickers, especially in his home state of Michoacán, but there are more operations taking place in the states of Jalisco and Guerrero, and in 2009 drug-related violence increased considerably in Sonora.

By January 2007, these various operations had extended to the states of Guerrero as well as the so-called "Golden Triangle States" of Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa. In the following February the states of Nuevo León and Tamaulipas were included as well.

Seizures and arrests have jumped since Calderón took office in December 2006, and Mexico has extradited more than 100 people wanted in the U.S.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

On July 10, 2008, the Mexican government announced plans to nearly double the size of its Federal Police force to reduce the role of the military in combating drug trafficking.<sup>[156]</sup> The plan, known as the Comprehensive Strategy Against Drug Trafficking, also involves purging local police forces of corrupt officers. Elements of the plan have already been set in motion, including a massive police recruiting and training effort intended to reduce the country's dependence in the drug war on the military.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

On July 16, 2008, the Mexican Navy intercepted a 10-meter long narco submarine travelling about 200 kilometers off the southwest of Oaxaca; in a raid, Special Forces rappelled from a helicopter onto the deck of the submarine and arrested four smugglers before they could scuttle their vessel. The vessel was found to be loaded with 5.8 tons of cocaine and was towed to Huatulco, Oaxaca, by a Mexican Navy patrol boat.<sup>[157]</sup>  
[158][159][160][161]

One escalation in this conflict is the traffickers' use of new means to claim their territory and spread fear. Cartel members have broadcast executions on YouTube<sup>[162]</sup> and on other video sharing sites or shock sites, since the footage is sometimes so graphic that YouTube will not host the video. The cartels have also tossed body parts into crowded nightclubs and often hung banners on streets stating their demands and/or warnings.<sup>[163]</sup> The 2008 Morelia grenade attacks took place on September 15, 2008, when two hand grenades were thrown onto a crowded plaza, killing ten people and injuring more than 100.<sup>[164]</sup> Some see these efforts as intended to sap the morale of government agents assigned to crack down on the cartels; others see them as an effort to let citizens know who is winning the war. At least one dozen Mexican *norteño* musicians have been murdered. Most of the victims performed what are known as *narcocorridos*, popular folk songs that tell the stories of the Mexican drug trade—and celebrate its leaders as folk heroes.<sup>[165]</sup>

The extreme violence is jeopardizing foreign investment in Mexico, and the Finance Minister, Agustín Carstens, said that the deteriorating security alone is reducing gross domestic product annually by 1% in Mexico, Latin America's second-largest economy.<sup>[166]</sup>

Teachers in the Acapulco region were "extorted, kidnapped and intimidated" by cartels, including death threats



The states where most of the conflict takes place, marked in red.

demanding money. They went on strike in 2011.<sup>[167]</sup>

## Government corruption

Mexican cartels advance their operations, in part, by corrupting or intimidating law enforcement officials.<sup>[3][168][169]</sup> Oftentimes, the Mexican municipal, state, and federal government officials, along with the police forces, work together with the cartels in an organized network of corruption.<sup>[32]</sup> A *Pax Mafioso*, is a specific example of corruption which guarantees a politician votes and a following in exchange for turning a 'blind eye' towards a particular cartel.<sup>[32]</sup> The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) reports that although the central government of Mexico has made concerted efforts to reduce corruption in recent years, it remains a serious problem.<sup>[170][171]</sup> Some agents of the Federal Investigations Agency (AFI) are believed to work as enforcers for various cartels, and the Attorney General (PGR) reported in December 2005 that nearly 1,500 of AFI's 7,000 agents were under investigation for suspected criminal activity and 457 were facing charges.<sup>[168]</sup>

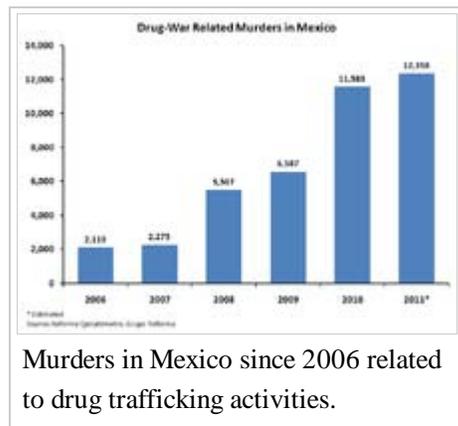
In recent years, the federal government conducted purges and prosecution of police forces in Nuevo Laredo, Michoacán, Baja California and Mexico City.<sup>[168]</sup> The anti-cartel operations begun by President Calderón in December 2006 includes ballistic checks of police weapons in places where there is concern that police are also working for the cartels. In June 2007, President Calderón purged 284 federal police commanders from all 31 states and the Federal District.<sup>[168]</sup>

Under the 'Cleanup Operation' performed in 2008, several agents and high-ranking officials have been arrested and charged with selling information or protection to drug cartels,<sup>[172][173]</sup> some high profile arrests were: Victor Gerardo Garay Cadena,<sup>[174]</sup> (chief of the Federal Police), Noé Ramírez Mandujano (ex-chief of the Organized Crime Division (SIEDO)), José Luis Santiago Vasconcelos (ex-chief of the Organized Crime Division (SIEDO)), and Ricardo Gutiérrez Vargas who is the ex-director of Mexico's Interpol office. In January 2009, Rodolfo de la Guardia García, ex-director of Mexico's Interpol office, was arrested.<sup>[175]</sup> Julio César Godoy Toscano, who was just elected July 5, 2009 to the lower house of Congress, is charged with being a top-ranking member of La Familia Michoacana drug cartel and of protecting this cartel.<sup>[176]</sup> He is now a fugitive.

In May 2010 an NPR report collected allegations from dozens of sources, including US and Mexican media, Mexican police officials, politicians, academics, and others, that Sinaloa Cartel had infiltrated and corrupted the Mexican federal government and the Mexican military by bribery and other means. The reports also alleged that Sinaloa was colluding with the government to destroy other cartels and protect itself and its leader, 'Chapo'. Mexican officials denied any corruption in the government's treatment of drug cartels.<sup>[94][95]</sup> Cartels had previously been reported as difficult to prosecute "because members of the cartels have infiltrated and corrupted the law enforcement organizations that are supposed to prosecute them, such as the Office of the Attorney General."<sup>[177]</sup>

## Impact on human rights

The US drug control policies in Mexico that have been adopted to prevent drug trafficking via Mexico and to eliminate the power of the drug cartels have adversely affected the human rights situation in Mexico. These policies have given the responsibilities for civilian drug control to the military, which has the power to not only carry out anti-drug and public security operations but also enact policy. According to the United States



Murders in Mexico since 2006 related to drug trafficking activities.

Department of State, the police and the military in Mexico were accused of committing serious human rights violations as they carried out government efforts to combat drug cartels.<sup>[178]</sup> Immense power in the executive branch and corruption in the legislative and judiciary branches also contribute to the worsening of Mexico's human rights situation, leading to such problems as police forces violating basic human rights through torture and threats, the autonomy of the military and its consequences and the ineffectiveness of the judiciary in upholding and preserving basic human rights. Some of the forms of human rights violations in recent years presented by human rights organizations include illegal arrests, secret and prolonged detention, torture, rape, extrajudicial execution, and fabrication of evidence.<sup>[179][180][181]</sup> The US Drug Policy fails to target high-level traffickers. In the 1970s, as part of Operation Condor, the Mexican government sent 10,000 soldiers and police to a poverty-stricken region in northern Mexico plagued by drug production and leftist insurgency. Hundreds of peasants were arrested, tortured, and jailed, but not a single big drug trafficker was captured.<sup>[182]</sup>

The emergence of internal federal agencies that are often unregulated and unaccountable also contributes to the occurrence of human rights violations. It has been found that the Federal Investigations Agency (Agencia Federal de Investigación-AFI) of Mexico had been involved with numerous human rights violation cases involving torture and corruption. One well-known case is the death of a detainee, Guillermo Velez Mendoza while in the custody of AFI agents. The AFI agent implicated in his death was arrested but he escaped after being released on bail.<sup>[183]</sup> Similarly, nearly all AFI agents evaded punishment and arrest due to the corrupt executive and judiciary system and the supremacy of these agencies.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> The Attorney General's Office reported in December 2005 that one-fifth of its officers were under investigation for criminal activity, and that nearly 1,500 of AFI's 7,000 agents were under investigation for suspected criminal activity and 457 were facing charges.<sup>[184][185]</sup> The AFI was finally declared a failure and was disbanded in 2009.<sup>[186]</sup>

Ethnic prejudices have also emerged in the drug war, and poor and helpless indigenous communities have been targeted by the police, military, drug traffickers and the justice system. According to the National Human Rights Commission (Mexico) (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos-CNDH), nearly one-third of the indigenous prisoners in Mexico in 2001 were in prison for federal crimes, which are mostly drug related.<sup>[187]</sup>

Another major concern is the lack of implementation of the Leahy Law in U.S. and the consequences of that in worsening the human rights situation in Mexico. Under this U.S. law, no member or unit of a foreign security force that is credibly alleged to have committed a human rights violation may receive U.S. security training. It is alleged that the U.S., by training the military and police force in Mexico, is in violation of the Leahy Law. In this case, the U.S. embassy officials in Mexico in charge of human rights and drug control programs are blamed with aiding and abetting these violations. In December 1997, a group of heavily armed Mexican special forces soldiers kidnapped twenty young men in Ocotlan, Jalisco, brutally torturing them and killing one. Six of the implicated officers had received U.S. training as part of the Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales (GAFE) training program.<sup>[188]</sup>

## Journalists and the media

*Main article: List of journalists killed in the Mexican Drug War*

In the first years of the 21st century, Mexico was considered the most dangerous country in the world to practice journalism, according to groups like the National Human Rights Commission, Reporters Without Borders, and the Committee to Protect Journalists. Between 2000 and 2012, several dozen journalists, including Miguel Ángel López Velasco, Luis Carlos Santiago, and Valentín Valdés Espinosa, were murdered there for covering narco-related news.<sup>[189][190][191]</sup>

Offices of Televisa and of local newspapers have been bombed.<sup>[192]</sup> The cartels have also threatened to kill

news reporters in the U.S. who have done coverage on the drug violence.<sup>[193]</sup> Some media networks simply stopped reporting on drug crimes, while others have been infiltrated and corrupted by drug cartels.<sup>[194][195]</sup> In 2011, Notiver journalist Miguel Angel Lopez Velasco and his wife and son were murdered in their home.<sup>[196]</sup>

About 74 percent of the journalists killed since 1992 in Mexico have been reporters for print newspapers, followed in number by Internet media and radio at about 11 percent each. Television journalism only includes 4 percent of the deaths.<sup>[197]</sup> These numbers are not proportional to the audience size of the different mediums; most Mexican households have a television, a large majority have a radio, but only a small number have the internet, and the circulation numbers for Mexican newspapers are relatively low.<sup>[198][199][200]</sup> There is no clear explanation of why a medium that reaches a much smaller portion of the population is statistically much more dangerous.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Since harassment neutralized many of the traditional media outlets, anonymous blogs like Blog del Narco took on the role of reporting on events related to the drug war.<sup>[201]</sup> The drug cartels responded by murdering bloggers and social media users. Twitter users have been tortured and killed for posting and denouncing information of the drug cartels activities.<sup>[202]</sup> In September 2011, user NenaDLaredo of the website Nuevo Laredo Envivo was murdered allegedly by the Zetas.<sup>[203]</sup>

In May 2012 several journalist murders occurred in Veracruz. Regina Martinez of Proceso was murdered in Xalapa. A few days later, three Veracruz photojournalists were tortured and killed and their dismembered bodies were dumped in a canal. They had worked for various news outlets, including Notiver, Diario AZ, and TV Azteca. Human rights groups condemned the murders and demanded the authorities investigate the crimes.<sup>[191][204][205]</sup>

## Murders of politicians

*Main article: List of politicians killed in the Mexican Drug War*

Since the start of the Mexican Drug War in 2006, the drug trafficking organizations have slaughtered their rivals, killed policemen, and now increasingly targeted politicians – especially local leaders.<sup>[206]</sup> Most of the places where these politicians have been killed are areas plagued by drug-related violence.<sup>[206]</sup> Part of the strategy used by the criminal groups behind the killings of local figures is the weakening of the local governments.<sup>[206]</sup> Extreme violence puts politicians at the mercy of the mafias, and thus allowing the cartels to take control of the fundamental government structures and expand their criminal agendas.<sup>[206]</sup> In addition, because mayors usually appoint local police chiefs, they are seen by the cartels as key assets in their criminal activities to control the police forces in their areas of influence.<sup>[207]</sup> The cartels also seek to control the local governments to win government contracts and concessions; these "public works" help them ingrain themselves in the community and gain the loyalty and respect of the communities in which they operate.<sup>[207]</sup> Politicians are usually targeted for three reasons: (1) Political figures who are honest pose a direct threat to organize crime, and are consequently killed by the cartels; (2) Politicians make arrangements to protect a certain cartel and are killed by a rival cartel; and (3) a cartel simply kills politicians to heat up the turf of the rival cartel that operates in the area.<sup>[208]</sup>

## Exploitation of migrants

The cartels engage in kidnapping, ransom, murder, robbery, and extortion of migrants traveling from Central and South America through Mexico on their way to El Norte. Sometimes the cartels force the migrants to join their

organization and work for them. Mass graves have been also discovered in Mexico containing bodies of migrants.<sup>[209]</sup> In a case in San Fernando, Mexico, most of the dead had "died of blunt force trauma to the head."<sup>[210]</sup> The cartels have also infiltrated the Mexican government's immigration agencies, and attacked and threatened immigration officers.<sup>[211]</sup> The National Human Rights Commission of Mexico (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, CNDH) said that 11,000 migrants had been kidnapped in 6 months in 2010 by drug cartels.<sup>[212]</sup>

## Human Trafficking

There are documented links between the drug cartels the business of human trafficking for forced labor, forced prostitution, and rape. A wife of a narco described a system in which young girls became prostitutes and then were forced to work in drug factories.<sup>[213]</sup> Circa 2011, Los Zetas reportedly began to move into the prostitution business (including the prostitution of children) after previously being only 'suppliers' of women to already existing networks.<sup>[214]</sup> The U.S. State Department says that the practice of forced labor in Mexico is larger in extent than forced prostitution.<sup>[215]</sup> Mexican journalists like Lydia Cacho have been threatened, beaten, raped, and forced into exile for reporting on these facts.<sup>[213]</sup>

## Effects internationally

### Europe

Improved cooperation of Mexico with the U.S. led to the recent arrests of 755 Sinaloa cartel suspects in U.S. cities and towns, but the U.S. market is being eclipsed by booming demand for cocaine in Europe, where users now pay twice the going U.S. rate.<sup>[33]</sup> U.S. Attorney General announced September 17, 2008 that an international drug interdiction operation, Project Reckoning, involving law enforcement in the United States, Italy, Canada, Mexico and Guatemala had netted more than 500 organized crime members involved in the cocaine trade. The announcement highlighted the Italian-Mexican cocaine connection.<sup>[39]</sup>

In December 2010 the government of Spain remarked that Mexican cartels have multiplied their operations in that country, becoming the main entry point of cocaine into Europe.<sup>[216]</sup>

### Guatemala

The Mexican Army crackdown has driven some cartels to seek a safer location for their operations across the border in Guatemala, attracted by corruption, weak policing and its position on the overland smuggling route.<sup>[217][218]</sup> The smugglers pick up drugs from small planes that land at private airstrips hidden in the Guatemalan jungle. The cargo is then moved up through Mexico to the U.S. border. Guatemala has also arrested dozens of drug suspects and torched huge cannabis and poppy fields. The U.S. government sent speedboats and night-vision goggles under a regional drug aid package.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> In February 2009, Los Zetas threatened to kill the President of Guatemala, Álvaro Colom.<sup>[219]</sup> On March 1, 2010, Guatemala's chief of national police and the country's top anti-drugs official was arrested over alleged links to drug trafficking.<sup>[218]</sup> A report from the Brookings Institution<sup>[220]</sup> warns that, without proactive, timely efforts, the violence will spread throughout the Central American region.<sup>[221]</sup>

According to the United States government, Los Zetas control 75% of Guatemala through violence, political corruption and infiltration in the country's institutions.<sup>[222]</sup> Sources mentioned that Los Zetas gained ground in

Guatemala after they killed several high-profile members and the supreme leader of *Los Leones*, an organized crime group from Guatemala.<sup>[223]</sup>

## West Africa

At least nine Mexican and Colombian drug cartels have established bases in 11 West African nations.<sup>[224]</sup> They are reportedly working closely with local criminal gangs to carve out a staging area for access to the lucrative European market. The Colombian and Mexican cartels have discovered that it is much easier to smuggle large loads into West Africa and then break that up into smaller shipments to Europe - mostly Spain, the United Kingdom and France.<sup>[224]</sup> Higher demand for cocaine in Western Europe in addition to North American interdiction campaigns has led to dramatically increased trafficking in the region: nearly 50% of all non-U.S. bound cocaine, or about 13% of all global flows, is now smuggled through West Africa.<sup>[225]</sup>

## Canada

The Mexican Army has severely curtailed the ability of the Mexican drug cartels to move cocaine inside the U.S. and Canada, prompting an upsurge in gang violence in Vancouver, where the cocaine price has increased from \$23,300 to almost \$39,000 per kilo as both the U.S. and Canadian drug markets are experiencing prolonged shortages of cocaine.<sup>[33]</sup> As evidence of this pressure, the U.S. government says the amount of cocaine seized on U.S. soil dropped by 41 percent between early 2007 and mid-2008.<sup>[33]</sup> Since 2009 Vancouver, British Columbia became the main Mexican drug cartels' center of operations in Canada.<sup>[226]</sup>

## United States

*See also: Mérida Initiative and ATF gunwalking scandal*

The U.S. Justice Department considers the Mexican drug cartels the greatest organized crime threat to the United States.<sup>[227]</sup> During the first 18 months of Calderón's presidency, the Mexican government has spent about \$7 billion USD in the war against drugs.<sup>[228]</sup> In seeking partnership from the United States, Mexican officials point out that the illicit drug trade is a shared problem in need of a shared solution, and remark that most of the financing for the Mexican traffickers comes from American drug consumers.<sup>[229]</sup> On March 25, 2009, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that "[America's] insatiable demand for illegal drugs fuels the drug trade", and that "the United States bears shared responsibility for the drug-fueled violence sweeping Mexico."<sup>[230]</sup> U.S. State Department officials are aware that Mexican president Felipe Calderón's willingness to work with the United States is unprecedented on issues of security, crime and drugs, so the U.S. Congress passed legislation in late June 2008 to provide Mexico and Central American countries with \$1.6 billion USD for the Mérida Initiative, a three-year international assistance plan. The Mérida Initiative provides Mexico and Central American countries with law enforcement training and equipment, as well as technical advice to strengthen the national justice systems. The Mérida Initiative does not include cash or weapons. In January 2009, a U.S. military assessment expressed some concern that if the war is extended 25 years, it could cause a collapse of the Mexican government due to the military strength of organized crime, and that the conflict could possibly spread to border states.<sup>[231][232]</sup> Currently, the Mexican drug cartels already have a presence in most major U.S. cities.<sup>[233]</sup>

In 2009, the Justice Department has reported that Mexican drug cartels have infiltrated nearly 200 cities across the United States,<sup>[234]</sup> including Los Angeles, Chicago and Atlanta.<sup>[235]</sup> Gang-related activity and violence has increased along the U.S. Southwest border region, as US-based gangs act as enforcers for Mexican drug

cartels.<sup>[236]</sup>

Multiple researchers propose focusing on prevention, treatment and education programs to curb demand rather than the continued support of combating the supply of drugs. Studies show that military interdiction efforts fail because they ignore the root cause of the problem: U.S. demand. During the early to mid-1990s, the Clinton administration ordered and funded a major cocaine policy study by the Rand Drug Policy Research Center; the study concluded that \$3 billion USD should be switched from federal and local law enforcement to treatment. The report said that treatment is the cheapest and most effective way to cut drug use. President Clinton's drug czar's office rejected slashing law enforcement spending.<sup>[237]</sup> The Bush administration proposed cutting spending on drug treatment and prevention programs by \$73 million, or 1.5%, in the 2009 budget.<sup>[166]</sup>

## U.S. death toll and national security

U.S. authorities are reporting a spike in killings, kidnappings and home invasions connected to Mexico's cartels, and at least 19 Americans were killed in 2008.<sup>[238][239]</sup> Another 92 Americans were killed between June 2009 and June 2010.<sup>[240]</sup>

The U.S. Joint Forces Command noted in a 2008 report that in terms of worst-case scenarios, Mexico bears some consideration for sudden collapse in the next two decades as the government, its politicians, police, and judicial infrastructure are all under sustained assault and pressure by criminal gangs and drug cartels.<sup>[231]</sup> The Joint Forces Command is concerned that this internal conflict will have a major impact on the stability of the Mexican state over the next several years, and therefore would demand an American response based on the implications for homeland security alone.<sup>[231]</sup> After the JFC broached the issue in its 2008 report, several journalists and academics subsequently discussed in print the possibility that Mexico could become a failed state.<sup>[241][242][243][244]</sup>

In March 2009, the United States Department of Homeland Security said that it is considering using the National Guard to counter the threat of drug violence in Mexico from spreading to the US. The governors of Arizona and Texas have asked the federal government to send additional National Guard troops to help those already there supporting local law enforcement efforts against drug trafficking.<sup>[135]</sup> The call for National Guard on the border greatly increased after the 2010 murder of Arizona rancher Robert Krentz, possibly at the hands of Mexican drug smugglers.<sup>[245][246]</sup>

In March 2009, the Obama administration outlined plans to redeploy more than 500 federal agents to border posts and redirect \$200 million to combat smuggling of illegal drugs, money and weapons.<sup>[247]</sup> On May 25, 2010 President Obama authorized deployment of 1,200 National Guard troops to the U.S. border with Mexico to assist with border protection and enforcement activities, as well as help train additional Customs and Border Protection agents.<sup>[248]</sup> However, as the Washington Office on Latin America (<http://www.wola.org/>) has pointed out, in spite of fears that violence in Mexico would spill over the border into the United States, the U.S. southwest border region has remained calm and, in fact, is currently experiencing homicide rates lower than national averages.<sup>[249] [250]</sup>

## Controversies

### Policy failure

According to former Presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil, Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico and César

Gaviria of Colombia, the United States-led drug war is pushing Latin America into a downward spiral; Mr. Cardoso said in a conference that "the available evidence indicates that the war on drugs is a failed war".<sup>[251]</sup> The panel of the Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy commission, headed by Cardoso, stated that the countries involved in this war should remove the "taboos" and re-examine the anti-drug programs. Latin American governments have followed the advice of the U.S. to combat the drug war, but the policies had little effect. The commission made some recommendations to President Barack Obama to consider new policies, such as decriminalization of cannabis (marijuana) and to treat drug use as a public health problem and not as a security problem.<sup>[252]</sup> The Council on Hemispheric Affairs states it is time to seriously consider drug decriminalization and legalization,<sup>[253]</sup> a policy initiative that would be in direct opposition to the interests of criminal gangs.

## Money laundering

Despite the fact that Mexican drug cartels and their Colombian suppliers generate, launder and remove \$18 billion to \$39 billion from the United States each year,<sup>[254]</sup> the U.S. and Mexican governments have been criticized for their unwillingness or slow response to confront the various cartels' financial operations, including money laundering.<sup>[254][255][256]</sup>

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has identified the need to increase financial investigations relating to the movement of illegal drug funds to Mexico.<sup>[257]</sup> The DEA states that attacking the financial infrastructure of drug cartels has to play a key role in any viable drug enforcement strategy.<sup>[257][258]</sup> However, the U.S. DEA has noted that the U.S. and Mexican financial services industry continues to be a facilitator for drug money movement.<sup>[166][257]</sup> Following suit, in August 2010 President Felipe Calderón proposed sweeping new measures to crack down on the cash smuggling and money laundering. Calderón proposes a ban on cash purchases of real estate and of certain luxury goods that cost more than 100,000 pesos (about USD \$8,104.) His package would also require more businesses to report large transactions, such as real estate, jewelry and purchases of armor plating.<sup>[256]</sup> In June 2010, Calderón "announced strict limits on the amount in U.S. dollars that can be deposited or exchanged in banks",<sup>[256]</sup> but the proposed restrictions to financial institutions are facing tough opposition in the Mexican legislature.<sup>[254][256]</sup>

In 2011, Wachovia, at one time a major U.S. bank, was implicated in laundering money for Mexican drug lords.<sup>[259]</sup> In a settlement, Wachovia paid federal authorities \$110 million in forfeiture.<sup>[260]</sup> In July 2012 HSBC -Europe's biggest bank- was also discovered to be assisting Mexican drug lords by moving billions of dollars of bulk cash.<sup>[261][262]</sup> While money laundering problems at HSBC have been flagged by regulators for nearly a decade, the bank continued to avoid compliance; analysts expect a \$1 billion dollar fine, much less than the profit amount.<sup>[262]</sup>

## Demand

RAND studies released in the mid-1990s found that using drug user treatment to reduce drug consumption in the United States is seven times more cost effective than law enforcement efforts alone, and it could potentially cut consumption by a third.<sup>[263]</sup>

In FY2011, the Obama Administration requests approximately \$5.6 billion to support demand reduction. This includes a 13% increase for prevention and a nearly 4% increase for treatment. The overall FY 2011 counter-drug request for supply reduction and domestic law enforcement is \$15.5 billion with \$521.1 million in new funding.<sup>[264]</sup>



## See also

- 2011–2012 in the Mexican Drug War
- 2011 Mexican protests
- Blog del Narco
- Crime in Mexico
- Mérida Initiative
- Mexican Naval operations in the Mexican Drug War
- Narcoterrorism
- Timeline of the Mexican Drug War

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## External links

- Map of Mexican Drug War violence ([http://stanford.edu/~dkronick/mexico\\_crime/](http://stanford.edu/~dkronick/mexico_crime/))
- Statistics of Crime in Mexico (<http://www.seguridadpublicaenmexico.org.mx>)
- Bowers, Charles. "The Mexican Kidnapping Industry" ([http://works.bepress.com/charles\\_bowers/7/](http://works.bepress.com/charles_bowers/7/)) An academic paper examining both the emergence of kidnapping as a drug war spillover, and statewide variance in Mexico's kidnapping statutes.
- AP interactive map: Mexican Drug Cartels ([http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/\\_international/mexican\\_cartels/index.html?SITE=AP](http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/_international/mexican_cartels/index.html?SITE=AP))
- Map: Areas of cartels' influences ([http://web.stratfor.com/images/latinamerica/map/Mexican-drug-cartels-map\\_v3\\_800.jpg](http://web.stratfor.com/images/latinamerica/map/Mexican-drug-cartels-map_v3_800.jpg))
- The Mexican Zetas and Other Private Armies (<http://www.rightsidenews.com/200910086759/border-and-sovereignty/the-mexican-zetas-and-other-private-armies.html>) - written by the Strategic Studies Institute.
- Mexico page on InSight Crime (<http://insightcrime.org/country-profiles/mexico>) . Ongoing reporting on Mexico's drug war and involved cartels.
- Mexico's Lone Gunshop. (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=105848207>)
- The Last Narco ([http://www.amazon.com/Last-Narco-Inside-Worlds-Wanted/dp/0802119522/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1289429113&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Last-Narco-Inside-Worlds-Wanted/dp/0802119522/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1289429113&sr=8-1)) , book about the current phase of the drug war by journalist Malcolm Beith.
- El Narco: Inside Mexico's Criminal Insurgency ([http://ioangrillo.com/el\\_narco\\_blog/](http://ioangrillo.com/el_narco_blog/)) , A report on the history and inner workings of drug cartels; by journalist Ioan Grillo.
- BBC documentary (2010): *Mexico's Drug War* ([http://www.cbc.ca/video/#/Shows/The\\_Passionate\\_Eye/1274903384/ID=1435817799](http://www.cbc.ca/video/#/Shows/The_Passionate_Eye/1274903384/ID=1435817799))
- Los Angeles Times Feature on Mexico's Drug War (<http://projects.latimes.com/mexico-drug-war>)
- The Atlantic: Mexico's Drug War (<http://www.theatlantic.com/infocus/2012/05/mexicos-drug-war-50-000-dead-in-6-years/100299/>)
- Council on Foreign Relations (<http://www.cfr.org>)
- Human Rights Watch (<http://www.hrw.org>)
- Juarez, City of Death, City of Hope (<http://www.literalmagazine.com/bilingual/city-of-death-city-of-hope/>)
- Cocaine Incorporated (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/magazine/how-a-mexican-drug-cartel-makes-its-billions.html>) June 15, 2012

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| Organized crime conflicts | Organized crime conflicts in Mexico | People murdered by organized crime

| Wars involving Mexico | 2006 in Mexico | 2007 in Mexico | 2008 in Mexico | 2009 in Mexico

| 2010 in Mexico | 2011 in Mexico | 2012 in Mexico | Drugs in Mexico

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