

Forum: UNODC

Issue 2: The question of cartel violence and drug trafficking networks in Mexico and their impact on regional security

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The question of cartel violence and drug trafficking networks in Mexico and their impact on regional security

Videos

- [How Drug Trafficking Actually Works — From Heroin to Cocaine](#)
- [The Geopolitics Of The Mexican Cartels](#)
- [The deadly genius of drug cartels](#)
- [How Mexican Drug Cartels Make Billions | The War On Drugs](#)
- [Mexico: War of the drug cartels | DW Documentary](#)
- [Real Reason the US Doesn't Wipe Out the Mexican Cartels](#)

Articles

- [Addressing the nature and impact of organised crime on the international scene: Understanding and legislating for the role of organised crime groups as geopolitical actors](#)
- [Organized crime, violence, and territorial dispute in Mexico \(2007–2011\)](#)
- [Mexico and the war against drug trafficking](#)
- [Mexico's Long War: Drugs, Crime, and the Cartels](#)
- [Mexico's cartel crackdown hits top ranks – but will it fuel Jalisco violence?](#)

Key Terms

Drug Trafficking: Global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, and sale of substances that are subject to drug prohibition laws

Violence: Actions that are intended or likely to hurt people or cause damage

Trauma: severe and lasting emotional shock and pain caused by an extremely upsetting experience, or a case of such shock happening

Injury: physical harm or damage to someone's body caused by an accident or an attack

Cartel: A group of independent corporations or other entities that join together to fix prices, rig bids, allocate markets, or conduct other similar activities

Overview

Drug trafficking and cartel-related violence remain among the most significant security challenges facing Mexico. For more than two decades, Mexican authorities have conducted extensive operations against organised criminal groups, yet drug cartels continue to exert considerable influence over large areas of the country. These organisations play a major role in the global drug trade and are responsible for the production, transportation, and distribution of illicit substances across international borders.

The origins of organised drug trafficking can be traced back to the late 19th century. Following the arrival of Chinese migrants in northern Mexico, opium cultivation and consumption became more widespread in certain regions. At the same time, marijuana production gradually expanded throughout the country. Over time, criminal networks emerged to profit from the cultivation and smuggling of these substances.

Modern Mexican cartels gained significant power during the 1980s and 1990s following the decline of major Colombian drug cartels. As Colombian organisations lost control of many trafficking routes into the USA, Mexican criminal groups assumed a greater role in transporting and distributing narcotics. This shift allowed organisations such as the Sinaloa Cartel to expand rapidly and establish themselves as dominant actors within the international drug trade.

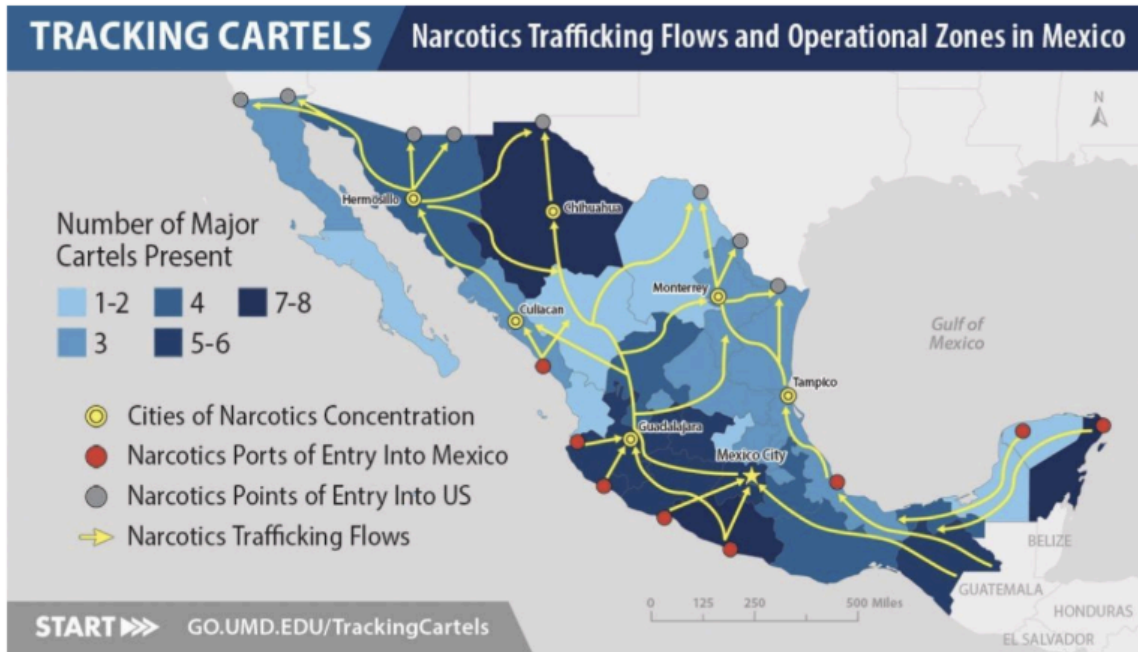
Today, Mexican cartels have expanded their market into a multi-national network all across the world. They employ a variety of trafficking methods, including commercial cargo shipments, maritime routes, underground tunnels, and concealed compartments within vehicles to evade law enforcement and maintain the flow of illicit substances. (UNODC Global Report on cocaine).

As for the effects of this drug trafficking, many argue that cartel violence is not the sole result of the issue; in fact, there are many varied outcomes to the issue. It clarifies that these criminal organizations were able to dominate in regions that tend to have weaker governments, resulting in factors like corruption. Something that has expanded violence is competition between the rival gangs, leading to severe consequences for locals, such as deaths, disappearances, forced displacement, and overall a sensation of fear throughout the whole of Mexican communities. Through that, the Mexican government has used strategies such as enforcing military operations to combat mobs, which obviously increases violence in the area, rather than achieving long-term stability. (International Crisis Group reports on Mexico).

The impact of Mexican cartels is not limited to Mexico. Drug trafficking networks affect the security, stability, and governance of countries across the Americas, particularly the United States and Central American states, making the issue a significant regional and international concern. Organized crime leads to instability and insecurity throughout the region, particularly in countries that serve as transit routes for drug trafficking. In addition, the vast profits generated by the drug trade allow Mexican cartels to expand their connections globally. The impact of Mexican cartels extends beyond Mexico, as their drug trafficking networks contribute to instability, insecurity, and governance challenges across the Americas while expanding their influence globally through the profits generated by the drug trade. (OAS).

Statistics & Infographics

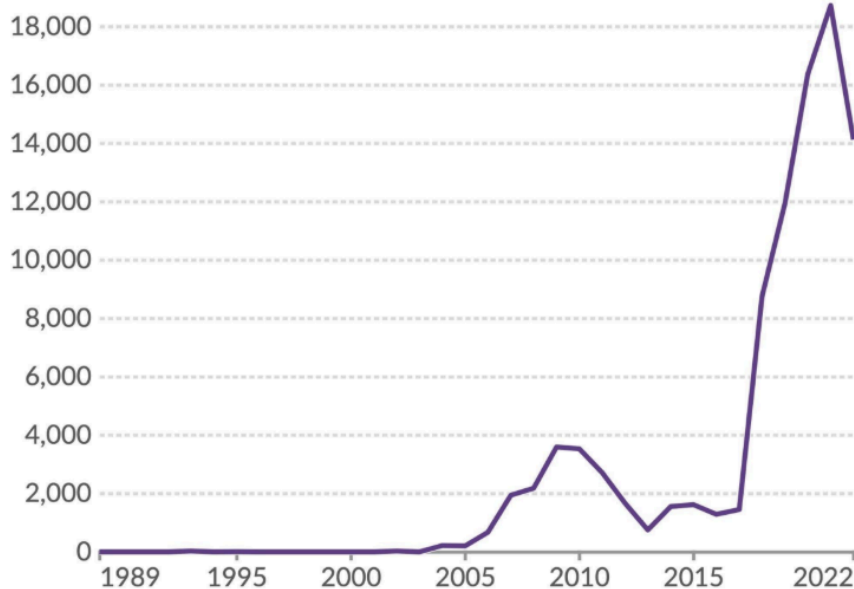




Violence between drug cartels in Mexico has surged in recent years

Our World in Data

Deaths of combatants and civilians in fighting between non-state armed groups, such as criminal organizations.



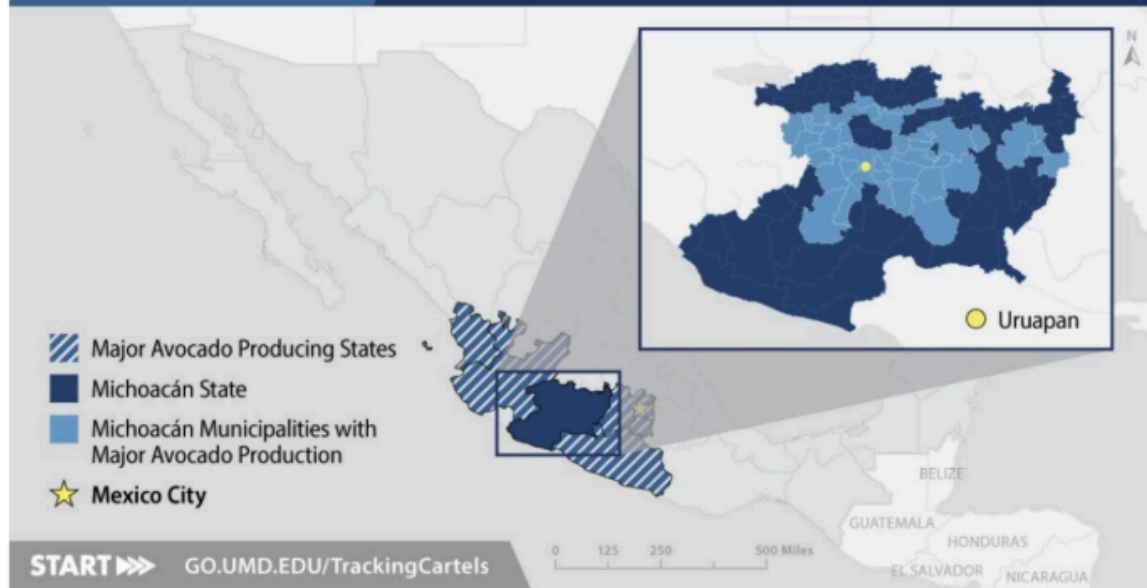
Data source: UCDP (2023)

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TRACKING CARTELS

The Pits: Violence in Michoacán Over Control of Avocado Trade



Timeline

1970s	Mexico becomes a key transit route for marijuana and heroin entering the United States.
1980s	Colombian cartels increasingly use Mexican traffickers to transport cocaine into North America. Drug trafficking organizations in states such as Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Jalisco gain wealth and influence. Corruption within law enforcement and political institutions allows criminal networks to expand.
1985	Camarena Case: DEA agent Enrique Camarena is kidnapped and murdered.
1990s	Rise of Powerful Mexican Cartels: Decline of major Colombian organizations such as the Medellín Cartel and Cali Cartel. Mexican groups take greater control over trafficking operations. Major organizations emerge, including the Sinaloa Cartel and the Gulf Cartel.
Early 2000s	Fragmentation and Militarization: Cartels diversify into extortion, kidnapping, and human trafficking. The Gulf Cartel's enforcement arm evolves into the Los Zetas, composed partly of former military personnel.
2006-2012	The Mexican Drug War: President Felipe Calderón deploys tens of thousands of troops against cartels. Government operations target cartel leaders through a "kingpin strategy." Rival organizations fight for territory after the arrests and killings of leaders.
2010-2015	Cartel Fragmentation: Large organizations are split into smaller factions. New groups emerge, including the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG). Competition for territory intensifies.
2014	Ayotzinapa Disappearances: Forty-three students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College disappeared in Guerrero. Investigations reveal links among criminal groups, local authorities, and corruption.
2016-2019	Rise of Synthetic Drugs: Criminal groups increasingly produce and traffic fentanyl and methamphetamine. Mexican cartels become central actors in global synthetic drug supply chains. The CJNG expands rapidly across multiple states.
2020-2023	Intensified Competition and Fentanyl Crisis: Competition between the Sinaloa Cartel and CJNG dominates many

	regions. Cartels employ drones, encrypted communications, and sophisticated financial networks. Fentanyl becomes a major policy issue in U.S.–Mexico relations.
2024-Present	Current Trends: Cartels continue diversifying into fuel theft, migrant smuggling, illegal mining, and extortion. Security strategies increasingly combine law enforcement, intelligence operations, financial investigations, and social development programs. Governments across North America focus on disrupting precursor chemical supply chains and transnational financial networks.

Major Parties

Mexico – it serves as the primary focus of this topic as it inhabits most of the cartels that are guilty of the violence in the country. Mexico strongly upholds solutions like Intelligence-Led Operations, Institutional Cleansing, for example, like “Operación Enjambre” and even form Us-Mexico alliance to combat this issue.

Drug Cartels – Sinaloa Cartel: Remains one of Mexico's largest and most powerful transactional criminal organizations. However, its position is highly unstable. Following the 2024 arrests of top leaders like Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada, the group is fractured by a bloody civil war between rivals known as “Los Chapitos” and “Los Mayos”

Jalisco New Generation Cartel – Also known as CJNG, remains one of the most infamous and dangerous cartels in the world, founded by Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, who went by the nickname “El Mencho,” who was murdered by the Mexican Army in 2026. This organization operates in multiple countries around the globe, especially being the major supplier of drugs like Fentanyl and Methamphetamine.

Gulf Cartel – One of the oldest organized crime groups in Mexico, and a U.S. -designated terrorist organization. Its Main base is located in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, directly across the U.S. border from Brownsville, Texas. This group coordinates Multi-ton shipments of cocaine, fentanyl, methamphetamine, marijuana, and heroin.

United States – This crisis directly impacts the United States, as it borders Mexico and is a prime target for drug trafficking. While confronting this issue with aggressive immigration policies and heavily securitized borders, and an increasing focus on treating cartels as national security threats. Under Trump, the U.S. has adopted a hardline stance to combat the inflow of illicit narcotics, particularly fentanyl, which has been formally designated as a weapon of mass destruction.

Possible Solutions

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime at RCMUN 2026 should prioritize reducing cartel violence and drug trafficking in Mexico. They could possibly recommend that the Mexican government strengthen law enforcement and judicial systems, for example, by providing better training, resources, and anti-corruption measures. In addition, we suggest forming a stronger alliance between Mexico and the USA and the Central American countries in order to maintain a firmer position against the cartels. Another strategy is to disrupt the trafficking network by education, sharing intelligence, and coordinated operations. Long-term solutions should focus on improving economic opportunities, education, and community development in vulnerable areas to avoid recruitment into criminal organizations. By also providing security measures with social and economic reforms, governments can address both the causes and consequences of cartel activity.

Committee Objective:

To achieve cooperative, diplomatic communication within the committee. To balance supply side enforcements with public health considerations. To produce realistic, implementable recommendations. To establish a stronger framework for precursor chemical scheduling and to reduce global drug trafficking networks and cartels.

Sources

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