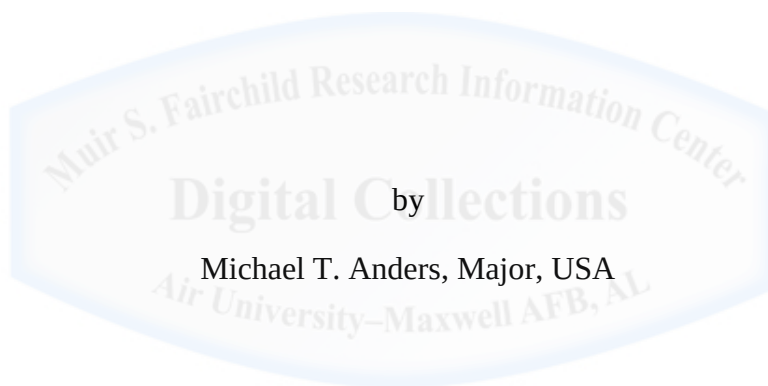


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AIR UNIVERSITY

Mexican Cartels: The Threat Along Our Southern Border



A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

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Mexican Cartels: The Threat Along Our Southern Border

Mexican Cartels along our Southern border pose a serious threat to our national safety and public health. As their influence and sophistication grows and the connection between them and terrorist organizations increases, the cartels become a larger threat to our national security. Cartels challenge the authority of states on various levels – through wholesale drug corruption, neighborhood intimidation, murder of government officials and candidates for public office, and kidnapping of citizens.¹ Drug trafficking is a common denominator and biggest business enterprise amongst all cartels. Efforts made to disrupt this enterprise and lower the distribution and use of illicit drugs in the U.S. will decrease our vulnerability to other border related threats in the long run as long as we remain persistent and continue work to strengthen and control our borders.

Who are they?

Geographically, Mexican Cartels are situated between the world's largest producer of cocaine (Colombia) and the world's largest consumer of cocaine (United States), leading Mexico to be a natural drug transshipment route between the two countries. Mexican Cartels transport drugs imported from South America as well as drugs locally produced and move them north across the United States-Mexico border. (See figure 1) Like other organized crime groups, Mexican Cartels are profit-driven. While the primary goods trafficked by Cartels are drugs, these organizations do generate income from other illegal activities, such as the smuggling of humans and weapons, counterfeiting and piracy, kidnapping for ransom, and extortion. Although Mexican Cartels have been active for some time, they have become more prominent since the decline of the powerful Colombian Cartels beginning in the 1980s.²

Mexican Cartels are well organized and pose a serious threat. The Director of the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), Steven McCraw, testified that they use a mature decision-making process that incorporates reconnaissance networks, techniques and capabilities normally associated with military organizations, and are very adept at corrupting government officials and entire institutions to support their criminal operations undermining the ability of Mexico to address this threat.³

According to the Mexican government there are seven drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) operating in Mexico. The **Sinaloa Cartel** dominates much of the drug smuggling on the Southwest Border its leader, Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzmán, made Forbes’ list of the world’s richest individuals in 2009.⁴ It was founded approximately 35 years ago and is also known as The Federation because it is a loosely run federation of cooperating sub-groups which operate as an alliance to share resources for the common goal of trafficking huge quantities of cocaine from South America into the United States. Reports suggest that the Mexican government’s fight against the cartels has focused on the Federation as part of a strategy to take care of the smaller cartels first, before turning to the more potent enemy.⁵ Of the Mexican Cartels, the Sinaloa Cartel has the broadest reach into Europe, Asia, and Australia.⁶ Due to their ruthless desire to expand and the successful efforts of law enforcement to curtail them, the Sinaloa Cartel has violently lashed out making it responsible for much of the upsurge in violence taking place in Mexico today.⁷

Los Zetas, made up of former Mexican Special Forces members, were originally hired by the Gulf Cartel to be their security and enforcement team and provide protection from rival drug cartels as well as the Mexican military. The Zetas were known for being brutal enforcers and having an uncanny ability to corrupt local government and law enforcement officials to

further the Gulf Cartel's drug trafficking activities. Through the years, the Zetas evolved from their traditional role as personal security for Gulf Cartel leaders to obtain a share in leadership roles, plaza control, and full organizational enforcement. Moreover, the Zetas expanded the Gulf Cartel's business by adding new ventures to the organization to include the extortion of local businesses, prostitution, murder-for-hire, kidnapping, media piracy, and the theft of oil. As a result of their persistence and brutal nature, the Zetas were able to expand the Gulf Cartel's, and as it turned out, their own influence throughout most of central and southern Mexico. The Los Zetas separated from the Gulf Cartel in 2008 and became an independent organization. The separation was amicable until conflict erupted between the two groups in early 2010.⁸

The **Gulf Cartel** is the oldest organized crime group in Mexico that controls large-scale marijuana and cocaine trafficking through smuggling corridors in northeastern Mexico. Currently, the greater part of the Gulf Cartel's dominance lies in the state of Tamaulipas, though its influence extends to Nuevo Leon, San Luis Potosi, and Veracruz. The Gulf Cartel has entered into a greater alliance with the Sinaloa Cartel and LFM in recent years in its attempt to target Los Zetas.⁹

Since the early 1990s, the **Juárez Cartel**, aka Vic ente Carrillo Fuentes Organization (VCO), has controlled the Juárez-El Paso corridor in Chihuahua, Mexico. After its leader died in 1997, the Juarez Cartel's influence became reduced, existing only in the state of Chihuahua. By the mid-2000s, the Juarez Cartel launched a campaign to consolidate exclusive control over drug trafficking activities in Chihuahua by instituting an operating fee and exerting pressure on Sinaloa Cartel-aligned traffickers who had recently established themselves in the state. In January 2008, the Sinaloa Cartel commenced the war by targeting Juarez Cartel-aligned police officers in Ciudad Juarez. Despite years of fighting, the Juarez Cartel has demonstrated

adaptability and perseverance in the face of conflict. While the Sinaloa Cartel has established a foothold in southeastern Chihuahua, the Juarez Cartel remains dominant throughout the western and central portions of the state.¹⁰

Originally a part of the Sinaloa Cartel, the **Beltrán Leyva Organization (BLO)** split away from it after the arrest of its leader, Alfredo Beltrán Leyva, in January 2008. The two factions then clashed violently after the BLO tried to encroach on traditional Sinaloa territory. After the death of Alfredo Beltrán Leyva in 2009 by the Mexican Navy and the subsequent arrest of other leaders,¹¹ the BLO has fragmented under its new leadership to the point that they could no longer compete with other cartels. They currently continue to struggle for control of territory.¹²

La Familia Michoacána (LFM) is a prominent DTO based in the state of Michoacán, Mexico. The cartel originated in the 1980s as a primarily marijuana production and distribution organization. Unlike the other cartels, La Familia uses religion to encourage discipline. It also acts as a vigilante group protecting the people of Michoacán from other drug traffickers. Its use of religion allows it to portray the group's assassinations of other cartel members and government officials as "divine justice." It conducts recruiting throughout Michoacán based on religious propaganda.¹³ Although LFM ended its alliance with the Gulf/Zetas in late 2007, it has since resumed an alliance with the Gulf Cartel, along with the Sinaloa Cartel, in opposition to Los Zetas. LFM is heavily involved in the production of methamphetamine in Michoacán for transit to the United States, as well as the transportation of cocaine and marijuana to the United States.¹⁴

From the mid-1980s through the 1990s, the **Tijuana Cartel** was one of the most powerful poly-drug trafficking organizations in Mexico. This cartel operated not only in Tijuana

but also in parts of Sinaloa, Sonora, Jalisco, and Nuevo Leon. Since the early 1990s, it has been engaged in a bitter feud with other Mexican cartels and has been slowly dismantled by Mexican authorities through the arrest and death of the organization's key leaders. Infighting within the Tijuana Cartel has allowed for encroachment by the Sinaloa Cartel and La Familia Michoacána into its territory with little resistance.¹⁵

What are the threats?

The **drug trade** is the primary generator of connections among criminal groups, very often on a global scale, and is the largest single contributor to the global black market economy, with profit estimates ranging between 100 billion and 500 billion dollars annually.¹⁶ Despite noticeable counterdrug successes in the United States in recent years, particularly against the cocaine trade, illicit drugs remain a serious threat to the health, safety, security, and financial well-being of Americans. The demand for illicit drugs, both in the United States and abroad, fuels the power, impunity, and violence of criminal organizations around the globe. Mexican cartels are escalating their violence to consolidate their market share within the Western Hemisphere, protect their operations in Mexico, and expand their reach into the United States.¹⁷ A primary means of accomplishing these objectives is through partnerships with street gangs across the United States.

Mexico's cartels already have tentacles that stretch across the border. The Department of Justice reported in 2009 that Mexican gangs are the "biggest organized crime threat to the United States," operating in at least 230 cities and towns (see figure 2). Crimes connected to Mexican cartels are spreading across the Southwest. Phoenix had more than 370 kidnapping cases in 2008, turning it into the kidnapping capital of the U.S. Most of the victims were illegal aliens or linked to the drugs trade.¹⁸

Crime-Terror-Insurgency connection is on the rise. Terrorists and insurgents are turning to cartels and transnational criminal organizations to generate funding and acquire logistical support to carry out their violent acts. The Department of Justice reports the most significant international drug trafficking organizations threatening the United States were associated with terrorist groups.¹⁹

A recent example of the attempted connection between Mexican cartels and terrorist attempts occurred in October 2011. Manssor Arbabsiar - a naturalized US citizen who holds both Iranian and US passports - allegedly contracted with men he believed were Mexican cartel associates to set off explosives at a public restaurant in Washington, D.C., where Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the US, was to be dining. The men turned out to be paid informants of the U.S. government. It was reported that Arbabsiar said that it was "no big deal" when he was informed there could be as many as 150 casualties, including U.S. Senators known to frequent the establishment, as a result of the restaurant bombing. A member of Iran's Quds Force, a special operations unit of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, allegedly approved the money transfer to fund the attack. Arbabsiar allegedly admitted his connection with the plot and was recruited and funded by men he understood were senior officials in the Quds.²⁰

Human smuggling operations cater primarily to migrants and refugees who travel for economic reasons, to escape prosecution or to reunite with family members. **Human trafficking** operations, on the other hand, generate profit from the exploitation of smuggled victims, primarily through forced labor or prostitution.²¹ The vast majority of people who are assisted in illegally entering the United States and other countries are smuggled, rather than trafficked. International human smuggling networks are linked to other transnational crimes including drug

trafficking and the corruption of government officials. It is estimated that the smuggling of persons from Latin America to the United States generated approximately \$6.6 billion annually in illicit proceeds for human smuggling networks.²²

Weapons trafficking provide firearms from the United States to the Mexican cartels, the Colombia's FARC, Central American gangs and other paramilitary groups. The trade is directly connected to other illicit markets. It is estimated that because of uncontrolled proliferation for several decades, there are now 45 million to 80 million small arms and light weapons circulating throughout the region.²³ U.S. Federal law enforcement agencies have intercepted large numbers of weapons or related items being smuggled to China, Russia, Mexico, the Philippines, Somalia, Turkmenistan, and Yemen in the last year alone.²⁴

Money Laundering and Illicit Financial Transactions. International banking networks are essential to terrorists, drug cartels and governments. Banks play a central role in evading international sanctions, washing funds from illegal transactions and passing funding to and between criminal and terrorist networks. According to the National Drug Intelligence Center, Mexican and Colombian cartels launder between 18 billion and 39 billion dollars every year.²⁵

Drug addiction in the United States

A study conducted by the Public Library of Science in 2008 found that illicit drug use is not distributed evenly across the globe. "In general, the US had among the highest levels of use of all drugs. Much lower levels were observed in lower income countries in Africa and the Middle East, and lower levels of use were reported in the Asian locales covered."²⁶

In 2008, the estimated total of cocaine users in North America was 6.2 million, and of the 480 metric tons of cocaine produce globally that year, the United States alone consumed 165 metric tons. The good news is that cocaine use in United States has been in decline over the past

decade and most significantly since 2006. This is likely due to pressure on supply related to law enforcement intervention in Columbia and Mexico.²⁷

However, cocaine is just an example of the massive amount of drugs being consumed in the United States. Illicit drugs include marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, or prescription-type psychotherapeutics used non-medically.²⁸ The 2011 National Drug Threat Assessment published by the U.S. Department of Justice states that the demand for most illicit drugs in the United States is rising, particularly among young people.²⁹

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) reported that in 2010, an estimated **22.6 million** Americans aged 12 or older were current (past month) illicit drug users, meaning they had used an illicit drug during the month prior to the survey interview. This estimate represents 8.9 percent of the population aged 12 or older.³⁰ The age groups that show the largest problem are listed below:

- Among youths aged **12 to 17**, the current illicit drug use rate was *similar* in 2009 (10.0 percent) and 2010 (10.1 percent), but higher than the rate in 2008 (9.3 percent). Between 2002 and 2008, the rate declined from 11.6 to 9.3 percent.³¹
- The rate of current use of illicit drugs among young adults aged **18 to 25** *increased* from 19.6 percent in 2008 to 21.2 percent in 2009 and 21.5 percent in 2010, driven largely by an increase in marijuana use (from 16.5 percent in 2008 to 18.1 percent in 2009 and 18.5 percent in 2010).³²
- Among those aged **50 to 59**, the rate of past month illicit drug use *increased* from 2.7 percent in 2002 to 5.8 percent in 2010. This trend partially reflects the aging into this age

group of the baby boom cohort (i.e., persons born between 1946 and 1964), who's lifetime rate of illicit drug use has been higher than those of older cohorts.³³

The rate of current illicit drug use varied by age (see figure 3). Among youths aged 12 to 17 in 2010, the rate increased from 4.0 percent at ages 12 or 13 to 9.3 percent at ages 14 or 15 to 16.6 percent at ages 16 or 17. The highest rate of current illicit drug use was among 18 to 20 year olds (23.1 percent), with the next highest rate among 21 to 25 year olds (20.5 percent). Thereafter, the rate generally declined with age, although not all declines were significant. For instance, the rate was 14.8 percent among those aged 26 to 29, 12.9 percent among those aged 30 to 34, and 1.1 percent among those aged 65 or older.³⁴

Violence involving Mexican Cartels

The Cartels are finding it more difficult and more costly to control the production zones, markets, and smuggling routes into the United States due to the efforts of the Mexican government to interdict and increasing border enforcement measures taken by the United States. One of the consequences of this increasingly competitive environment is a rise in the level of violence as the cartels struggle for control over their territory.³⁵ Much of the violence has been increasingly concentrated in the four Mexican states bordering Texas and in Juarez, which is in close proximity to El Paso. The percentage of organized crime-related homicides that occurred in the states bordering Texas was 17 percent in 2007, 35 percent in 2008, 39 percent in 2009, and 43 percent in 2010.³⁶

Mexican Cartels are now at war with each other as well as with the police and military personnel who are attempting to enforce the drug laws in northern Mexico along the U.S. border. While the violence in Juarez has represented a significant portion of the violence along the Texas border since 2008, the ongoing conflict between the Gulf cartel and Los Zetas appears to have

prompted a significant and sudden increase in violence in Tamaulipas state in 2010. The number of homicides in Tamaulipas grew from 90 in 2009 to more than 1,200 in 2010.³⁷

These violent crimes go beyond homicide. The Texas DPS Director also testified that the Cartels “employ horrific tactics to intimidate their adversaries and the public such as decapitations, acid baths, skinning people alive, torture and improvised explosive devices”.³⁸ Since January 2009, multiple sources show that 224 decapitations have been reported in Mexico. These include 8 reported in 2009, 152 reported in 2010, and 64 reported from January to June 2011.³⁹

Violence against American citizens in Mexico has also increased since 2006, and has been concentrated in the four Mexican states adjacent to Texas. The U.S. State Department reports 341 American citizen deaths in Mexico classified as homicide, drug-related, or execution between January 1, 2006, and December 31, 2010. Of these, 47 deaths occurred in 2006, 38 in 2007, 62 in 2008, 81 in 2009, and 113 in 2010.⁴⁰

Cartels proudly boast they have established training camps inside Texas. They have taken control of urban gangs and now use them as retail franchises to distribute drugs, launder money and arrange for the southward export of deadly firearms. Ranchers may not say much to the media for fear of reprisal or retaliation by the cartels. However, they do talk to each other, every day, about what they see, hear and experience.⁴¹

Spillover violence is becoming an increasing threat

Farmers and ranchers whose families have spent generations on the U.S. side of the border say that the character and intent of border crossing immigrants have changed over the past three years. Most of the intruders on their land are men tattooed with the marks of cartels, gangs and in some cases Hezbollah members. Smugglers regularly cross ranches to move their loads

around checkpoints, cut fences, break water lines and sometimes steal vehicles. Ranchers and farmers often encounter groups of menacing strangers, and increasingly find cartel members on their doorstep demanding to use their phones or trucks. The situation is so bad that owners of a ranch in Brooks County, approximately 75 miles from the border, packed up and left their 38,000 acre ranch because their home had been broken into, their land littered with garbage and the distinct sounds of gunfire could be heard from their front porch day and night. The ranch runs alongside Farm Road 755 which law enforcement calls a “main smuggling corridor” for the cartels.⁴²

Perhaps the least reported aspect of cartel intrusion in the border states is the psychological impact of increasingly open and brazen activities along the border. Two years ago, cartel agents inside Texas conducted their criminal activities covertly seeking as much as possible not to bring attention and create an atmosphere harmful to their financial successes. Today cartels’ seem to no longer fear public exposure and often mark their vehicles with symbols that reflect their organizations or show the willingness to confront and sometimes fight openly against local, state and federal border authorities.⁴³

The Texas Experiment

The Texas Department of Public Safety has developed a comprehensive military-like operational campaign against the cartels. The initial border strategy framework included a substantial increase in local and state law enforcement patrols made possible by a creative program that brought together local, state and national forces under a state-led coordinated arrangement.

This ad hoc partnership allowed for centralized coordination of patrol operations without interfering with the sovereignty of federal and the autonomy of local border enforcement

agencies. Centralized coordination and planning opened the door to the creation of an intelligence scheme to drive border operations. A single effort permitted all three levels to combine many disparate border surveillance ideas and technologies together into a single inclusive program.⁴⁴

The overall plan is structured much like a military-style “joint” command and control pyramid with strategic (national), operational (state) and tactical (local) elements united within layered “headquarters,” and tied together with communications and training. The big difference between a military and the Texas solution is that no one in the latter is in command. Instead, the Texas effort led by the Texas Rangers is dependent on a cooperative relationship based not on command authority, but on a shared relationship, trust and commitment to work together.⁴⁵

The key coordinating elements are the “unified commands” (UCs). These are headquarters-style organizations created for six border sectors consisting of multiple jurisdictions with coordinated and shared federal-state-local-tribal responsibilities and resources.⁴⁶ UCs are decision-making organizations that develop and seek to implement consensual solutions to defeat narco-terrorism at the border as well as promote interagency communication and information sharing. Every UC has a senior Texas Ranger on board to ensure that unified commands are held together. State, local and federal participants have offered the Texas Rangers the distinct advantage of coordinating the border security effort through a set of facilities and communications shared by all.⁴⁷

What do we do next?

Drug trafficking is the most lucrative business and should be the U.S. priority target in combating the Mexican cartels. Future U.S. strategy should focus on:

1. **Reduce the level of illicit drug use in the United States, and therefore the market for illegal drugs that enriches cartels.** This effort will take time if done correctly through prevention, treatment, punishment, and interdiction but will address a major health problem in our nation, directly attack the cartels' primary source of funding for their operations, and increase their vulnerability to law enforcement initiatives by forcing them to diversify and take risks.⁴⁸

Many states now operate unique and highly effective “drug courts” that bring together intervention teams of treatment, education, law enforcement and court probation personnel to aggressively deal with first-time offenders. Under the direction and close supervision of a drug court judge, a person arrested on drug possession charges passes through a rigorous intervention program managed by the court that typically lasts for several months. If the subject successfully completes the intervention program, charges are dismissed and the arrest record is expunged. When used, these courts have low rates of repeat offenders. However, these local programs are subject to the pressures of local budgets that compete with schools, police departments and other municipal services and should be federally funded in order to maximize their benefits. With their detailed intervention programs, drug courts are relatively expensive – but effective.⁴⁹

Reducing illicit drug use in the United States is important in order to improve public health and reduce crime among other reasons, but attacking drug distribution or cutting drug profits alone will not end the threat of the cartels and gangs. Cartels and gangs are enterprising, *permanent* organizations, not just casual gangs of smugglers. When drug profits fall, cartels will adapt to find other “markets” to replace lost revenue.⁵⁰ Human trafficking will likely rise as drug trafficking is increasingly targeted. It is the second highest profit making activity after drug trafficking and provides a return of approximately \$32 billion annually.⁵¹

2. **Enhance direct attacks on cartels.** The DEA should continue to advise and assist Mexican police and counter narcotics forces, but the size of the agency should be increased. With 5,500 agents spread worldwide, including the United States, the agency that plays such a key role in combating the cartels is spread too thin.⁵²

3. **Attack the cartels' financial networks and money-laundering capabilities.** This is a key strategy that requires more resourcing at the U.S. Treasury Department. The cartel's greatest strength is their wealth. Thus, it is essential to diminish and undermine their financial and economic power by attacking all components of the financial and economic structure.⁵³

The extradition of Manuel Noriega to the United States by the DEA on charges of racketeering and conspiracy to distribute and import cocaine into the United States⁵⁴ sent a message to other cartel leaders. They have learned to fear U.S. indictments and extradition to U.S. courts; extradition, exposure and seizure of "dirty" money from criminal operations are all effective strategies that identify kingpins and threaten them with trials in U.S. courts and long terms in U.S. prisons.⁵⁵ U.S. officials can build cases against cartel transactions using the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program developed by the Treasury Department after 9/11 to identify, track and pursue foreign terrorists.⁵⁶

4. **Enhance federal support to local law enforcement.** Local police departments, backed up by state and federal assistance, are the front line against the cartels and gangs. The closeness and sensitivity of local police departments to community issues makes them the most effective law enforcement agencies in the fight against cartels and gangs. They are familiar with the streets, the people, and the neighborhoods in which gang activity is most likely to take place. A nationwide law enforcement network of federal and state law enforcement capabilities organized

and focused on supporting local police departments would be a powerful system against the cartels and gangs.⁵⁷

Texas law enforcement has developed a remarkably flexible and efficient system of border protection that involves all levels of command from federal to local. The future success of this effort will depend on the ability of the state of Texas, local and federal agencies to work together to expand their operations against intrusion by cartels. However, this system is under threat not only by an increasingly ruthless and adaptive enemy but also by an increasingly diminished budget. As the violence escalates, the potential consequences of success or failure will affect our entire nation. Systems like the one developed in Texas must be developed and funded along the other border states as well as other cities across the nation that have increasing levels of cartel and gang activity.⁵⁸

5. **Fight gangs in schools.** The spread of youth gangs that facilitate the destructive use of illegal drugs and violence not only undermines the future of young people and the security of local streets and neighborhoods, it directly threatens the long-term security of the United States by providing environments conducive to violent activities. Gangs of all types actively recruit in public and private schools at all levels and use a variety of techniques, including positive incentives, intimidation and social media. Despite various state laws against gang recruitment, gangs continue to attract students at younger and younger ages. Gang recruitment of the next generation of American children should be addressed as a national challenge. There are techniques known to work to counter gang influences; among them are School Resource Officers (SROs) to identify gang activity in schools and fight gang recruitment, increased parental involvement at early stages, school uniforms to deny wearing of gang “colors” and glamour and a host of other law enforcement and social preventive measures.⁵⁹

6. **Reform prisons.** Cartel and gang leaders often continue their activities from inside prison. Younger first timers are often recruited into gangs while serving alongside more hardened offenders; prisons often lack education or job training; and former inmates are released with little or no prospects for reentering society. The ability of cartel and gang leaders to continue to operate from prison must be curtailed in order to prevent their communication with their organizations. Prison regimens must become more focused on rehabilitation, job training and education. However, not everyone can be rehabilitated. Hardened criminals should be locked away and their ability to supervise gangs “outside” should be restricted. However, rehabilitation should be the model for the largest number of the over 1.5 million prisoners in the United States, the highest number in ratio to population in the world.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Drug related murders in Mexico along the U.S. border have reached unimaginable heights, and the partnership between drug cartels and street gangs facilitate the spread of intimidation and violence across the border to the American public. The United States must be proactive in nature to prevent the recruiting of young people in schools as well as in prisons to reduce gang activity. This threat will grow as the cartels increase their activities and operational reach into our nation if the drug enterprise is not disrupted. In addition, active coordination and communication between multiple levels of law enforcement is key to successfully disrupt drug trafficking operations. The state of Texas has developed a working model of cooperation between federal, state, local, and tribal authorities that has proven effective in conducting “joint” operations to interdict smuggling efforts by cartels. However, this program requires additional federal funding to increase its effectiveness and to ease the financial burden of local communities in supporting what should be a national effort. The federal government must also increase the level of direct action taken against cartel leadership and financial networks in cooperation with

Mexican authorities. Successful extradition of key leaders would have a significant impact on cartel operations.

The most difficult solution to disrupt drug trafficking is reducing the demand for illicit drugs in the United States. State drug courts that bring together intervention teams of treatment, education, law enforcement and court probation personnel to aggressively deal with first-time offenders provide a holistic approach to complex problem. However, federal funding is required to maximize the benefits of this type of program.

Mexican Cartels are well established and adaptable organizations that pose a significant threat to public health and safety to the United States through drug trafficking and associated violence. While there has been no evidence of terrorists attempting to smuggle weapons of mass destruction via Mexican Cartels, the possible threat to national security exists given the growing connection between cartels and terrorist organizations.

Figure 1

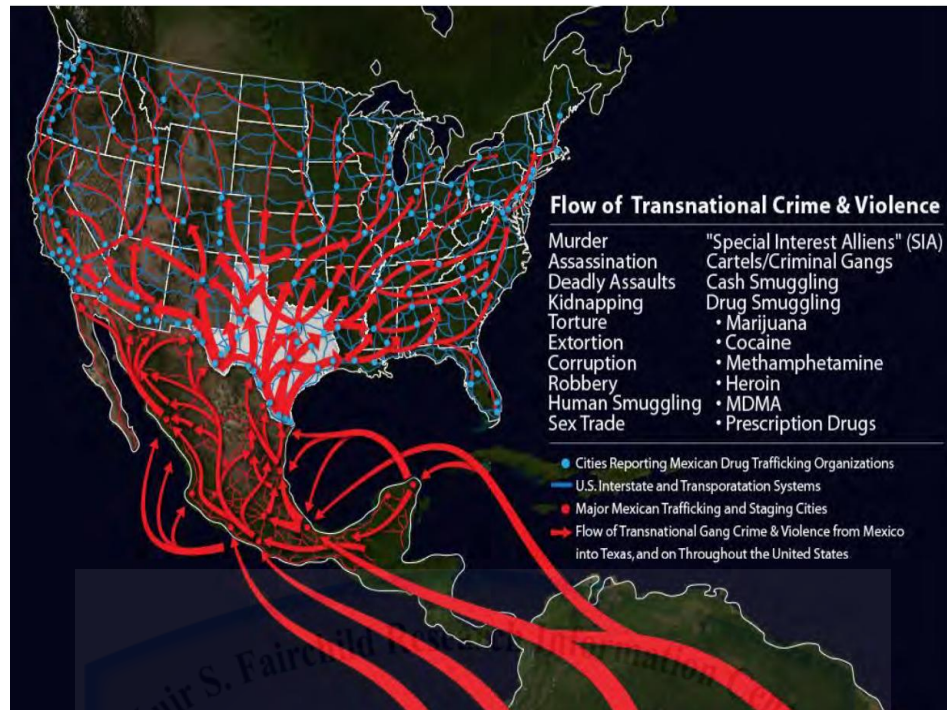


Figure 2

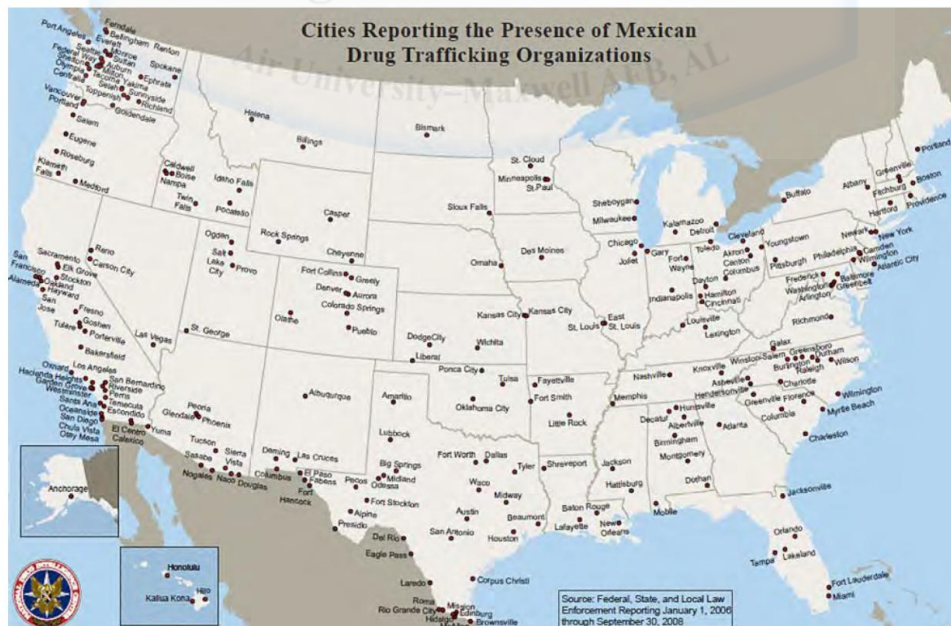
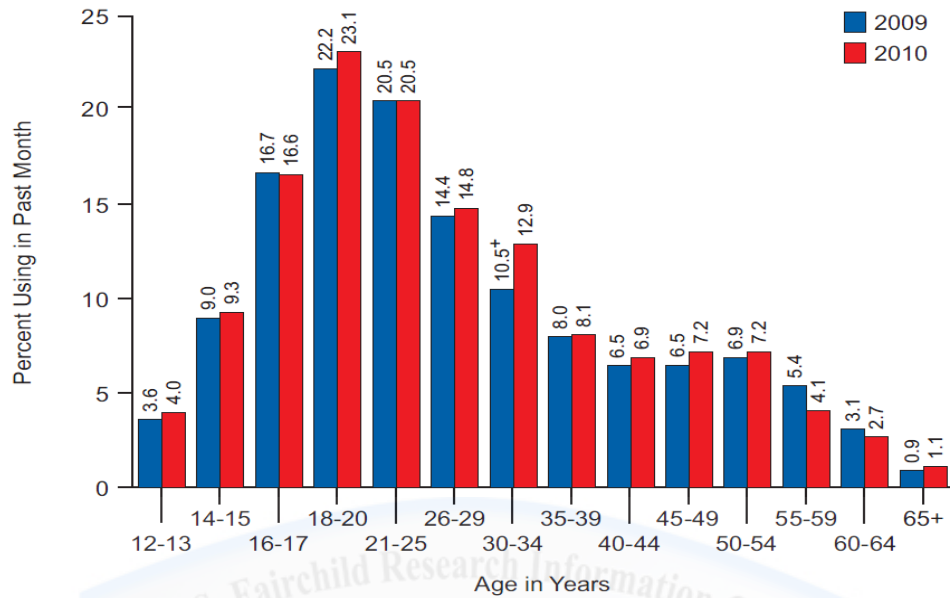


Figure 3⁶¹

Past Month Illicit Drug Use among Persons Aged 12 or Older, by Age: 2009 and 2010



* Difference between this estimate and the 2010 estimate is statistically significant at the .05 level.

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- ⁵ Ibid
- ⁶ Benson, *Is Merida Antiquated? Part Two: Updating US Policy to Counter Threats of Insurgency and Narco-Terrorism*
- ⁷ Leonhart, *Operation Xcellerator Press Conference*
- ⁸ Benson, *Is Merida Antiquated? Part Two: Updating US Policy to Counter Threats of Insurgency and Narco-Terrorism*
- ⁹ Ibid
- ¹⁰ Ibid
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