

# Global Insights

## Mexico Cartels



Recent media attention has focused on the cartels in Mexico after the kidnapping and fatality of US citizens, yet the cartels have long plagued Mexico. This report profiles three of the major drug cartels in Mexico as well as looking at their geographical spread across the country.

---

## Introduction

The prevalence of cartels continues to be a problem throughout Mexico, where they operate with relative impunity, as their presence and violence have become established. However, this does not imply that Mexicans are fully aware of the implications of the situation, or that they support the cartels' cause. In Mexican territory, there are a range of cartel actors, two of which have a nationwide presence but three of which we highlight in this report. The influence and structure of these cartels will be profiled and mapped in this report.

The issue was nationally recognised in 2006, during Felipe Calderón's presidency, when he declared "war" on the cartels to achieve a safe and peaceful country. Contrary to his intentions, Calderón began a war that Mexico has yet to win because he underestimated the cartel's power. Murders, kidnappings, and forced displacements have all increased since then, as the cartels' power has grown rather than diminished. President Enrique Peña Nieto's subsequent attempts were also met with similar failures. His efforts to apprehend the major cartel leaders resulted in some factions spreading and changing, or simply ignoring supposed values such as not harming the innocent, further undermining the nation's security environment.

Thirteen years later, Mexico is still grappling with this issue, and it appears that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a way for the authorities to deal with the cartels' situation without declaring futile wars with minimal success and significant collateral damage to the economy, security, and Mexican society in general. However, there remain limited alternatives for the authorities. If the cartels are appeased, they risk becoming ingrained in Mexican culture, even becoming an aspirational feature, thanks to media and music that romanticise narcoculture. As a result, any measures to appease the cartels and normalise their existence may pose future challenges to the sovereignty of Mexico's government, with far-reaching consequences ranging from education to taxation. As a result, the doomed war on cartels continues.

# Cartel Profiling

## CJNG- Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación

**Leader:**

*Rubén Nemecio Oseguera Cervantes (El Mencho) / Rubén Oseguera González (El Menchito)*

**Area of operation:**

*CJNG has a significant presence in 28 of the 32 Mexican states. Notably: Jalisco, Nayarit, Colima, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Estado de México, Guerrero y Veracruz.*

**Business:**

*The largest and potentially most powerful cartel in Mexico. Operations nationwide including in the manufacturing and distribution of large sums of fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine into the Mexican and US markets.*

- CJNG attack on police officers in Zitácuaro left two dead (Mar 23- Andres Martinez)
- Prescription pills laced with Methamphetamine; fentanyl sold in northern Mexico pharmacies ( Feb 15- Isaac Norris)
- CJNG control of illegal mining in Michoacán, Mexico, claims indigenous lives (Jan 27- Yuago Rosado)

**Summary:**

The cartel is an extensive drug trafficking group. Large attention has been paid to the trafficking and manufacturing of synthetic drugs, such as fentanyl. Such drug supply not only has health implications in Mexico and the market of America but poses security risks as trafficking routes are commonly shared by cartels and may lead to violence. They are amongst the largest drug cartels in the world and one of the most established in Mexico today.

**Notable Recent news:**



# Cartel Profiling

## CDS- Cartel de Sinola

### Leader:

*Ismael Zambada García (EL Mayo)/Jesús Alfredo Guzmán/ Ivan Archivaldo Guzmán Salazar.*

### Area of operation:

*The Cartel de Sinaloa was active in 15 of 32 Mexican states back in 2020 (DEA). But now is primarily in the north of the country. Notably operating in : Sonora, Sinaloa, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Durango y Coahuila.*

### Business:

*Exports and distributes wholesale amounts of fentanyl, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana into the United States by maintaining distribution hubs in various cities across the north of Mexico. Illicit drugs distributed by the Cartel de Sinaloa are primarily smuggled into the United States and form the cartels main revenue source.*

### Notable Recent news:

- Violence in Caborca: Celebrations suspended after internal disputes of the Cartel de Sinaloa (March 19- Guillermo Frescas)

- Chiapas: disputes between the Cartel de Sinaloa and the CJNG accentuate violence (April 11- Expansion Politica)
- The authorities of Mexico City arrested seven alleged members of the Cartel de Sinaloa dedicated to the sale and distribution of drugs, as well as extortion in the south of the country's capital (April 4- Editorial Infobae Mexico)

### Summary:

Cartel de Sinaloa has long been a major cartel power and drug trafficker, to maintain an advantage over rivals, the Sinaloa cartel frequently relies on high-level relationships and corrupt elements of the federal police and military. It continues to be one of the most powerful cartels in Mexico and regions within the United States. Despite the arrest of one of its top leaders, El Chapo, the cartel maintains its influence and continues its illegal drug activities. Yet the cohesion of the Sinaloa cartel may be on the decline. Large cartels are increasingly fragmented inside Mexico, posing security risks of internal cartel violence.



# Cartel Profiling

## Cartel del Golfo

**Leader:**

*Main leaders: César Morfin Morfin (El Primito)/ Gilberto Garcia Mena (El June)/ Ernesto Sánchez Rivera (La Mierda) or (M-22)/ Héctor Sánchez Rivera (El M-1) or (La Mimi).*

**Area of operation:**

*The cartel operates throughout the gulf coast of Mexico. Stretching from Tamaulipas down to Quintana Roo having presence in Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosi, Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Chiapas.*

**Business:**

*Focuses its drug trafficking activities on heroin and cocaine by transporting illegal substances into the United States near the McAllen and Brownsville, Texas, areas. The group were formerly the most feared cartel but division and conflict with rival cartels has eroded their power and control of the drug trade through eastern Mexico.*

- Mexico's Cartel del Golfo Doing Damage Control After Kidnapping, Murdering US Citizens (March 12 - Parker Asmann)
- Cartel Apology in Matamoros (March 21- Philip Luke Johnson),
- Mexico Indicts 5 Men Turned Over by Cartel for Killing Americans (March 14- By Nicholas Reimann)
- "Video appears to show violent kidnapping of four Americans in Mexico" (March 6- Washington post)

**Summary:**

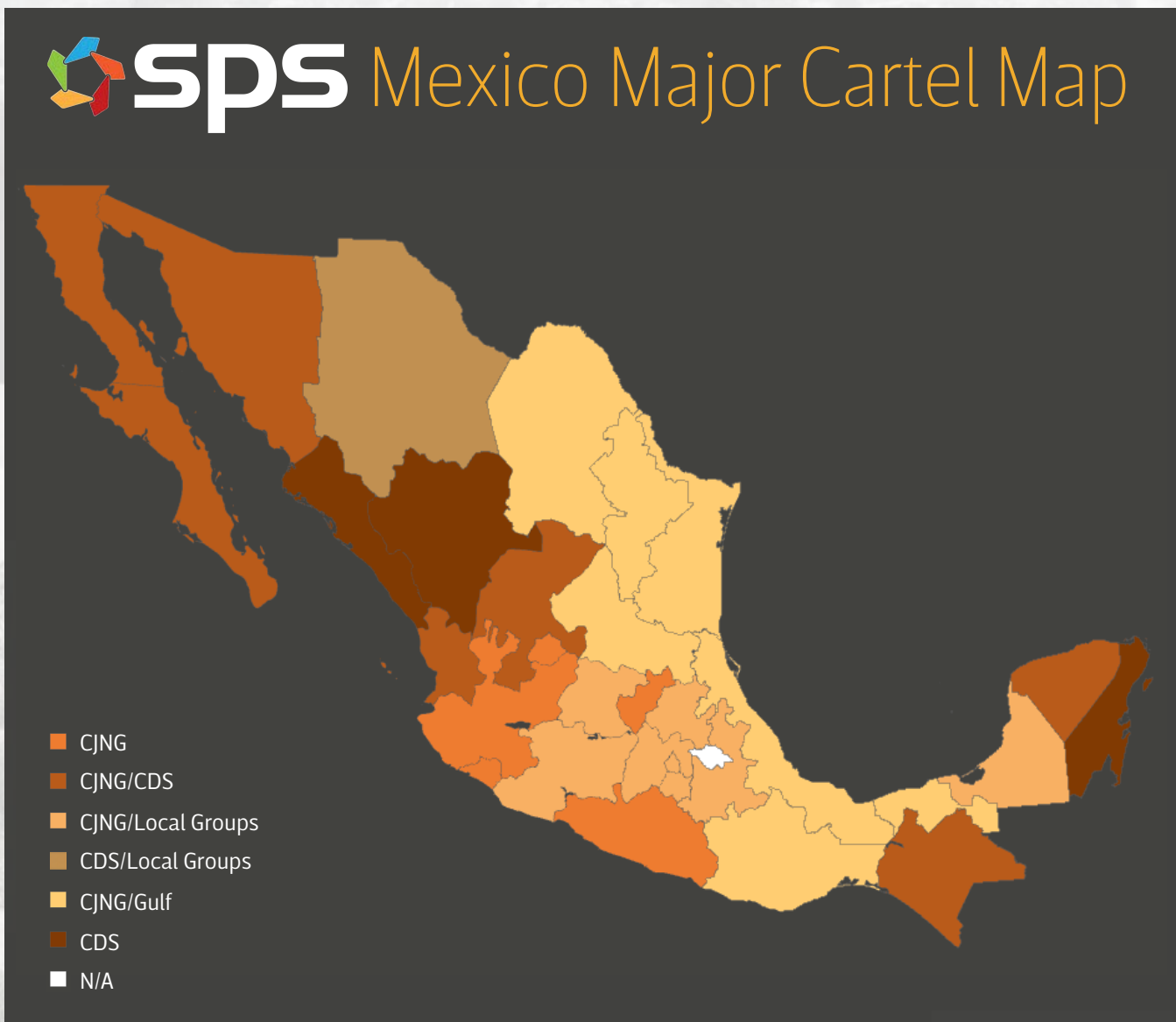
The Cartel del Golfo is no longer the same organisation it once was. Yet, major criminal organisations operating under the Cartel del Golfo name continue to compete for control of the illegal trafficking economy. The cartel has recently attracted attention after four US citizens were kidnapped in Matamoros in March 2023, allegedly by members of a Gulf Cartel offshoot. Two of the four people were killed, causing uproar in the United States

**Notable Recent news;**



## Outlook

Seventeen years after Felipe Calderón's declaration of war against the cartels, the Mexican government has failed to develop an effective, non-corruption-based plan to contain, corner, and eradicate the cartels from the country. It is highly unlikely that these targets will ever be realised, as the cartels and affiliated groups have only increased their power and look ever more entrenched in Mexican society. Strategies to arrest the leaders of the cartels have often destabilised the security situation further, with retaliatory cartel violence in the wake of arrests creating temporary havoc. It is likely that the well-positioned cartels will continue to interfere in the politics and administration of the nation. Several cartel factions and other criminal organisations are expanding their power and dominance across Mexico and as the old Mexican cartel culture and dynamics evolve, it becomes more challenging to erode their dominance.





## Contact

For more information on our services,  
Please contact our Intelligence Research Team  
[irt@sps-global.com](mailto:irt@sps-global.com)

Or follow our social media to access future SPS Insight reports



@SPSGlobalAssist



@spsglobalassistance



@SPS Global Assistance

This report was Edited by Ixchel Almaral Jimenez  
*America's Intelligence Analyst*



*Based in Mexico, as an America's Intelligence analyst, Ixchel, is our multilingual Strategic Intelligence expert based in Mexico. Holding a unique educational background with a Bachelor's in Strategic Intelligence from Anahuac University, and diplomas in Criminal Intelligence, Leadership and Student Management.*

## Propriety Information

The material provided in this report is based on the information made available at the time of writing and the conditions then in existence through open-source reporting and SPS proprietary human sources and represents the best judgment of SPS. The information provided in this report, which is issued without prejudice to liability, constitutes neither a warranty of results nor a surety against risks.