

# PROPAGANDA IN MEXICO'S DRUG WAR

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Propaganda has an extensive history of invisibly infiltrating society through influence and manipulation in order to satisfy the originator's intent. It has the potential long-term power to alter values, beliefs, behavior, and group norms by presenting a biased ideology and reinforcing this idea through repetition: over time discrediting all other incongruent ideologies. The originator uses this form of biased communication to influence the target audience through emotion.

Propaganda is neutrally defined as a systematic form of purposeful persuasion that attempts to influence the emotions, attitudes, opinions, and actions of specified target audiences for ideological, political or commercial purposes through the controlled transmission of one-sided messages (which may or may not be factual) via mass and direct media channels.<sup>1</sup>

The most used mediums of propaganda are leaflets, television, and posters. Historical uses of propaganda have influenced political or religious schemas. The trend has recently shifted to include the use of propaganda for the benefit of criminal agendas. Mexico is the prime example of this phenomenon. Criminal drug trafficking entities have felt the need to incite societal change to suit their self-interest by using the tool of propaganda. In this study, drug cartel propaganda is defined as any deliberate Mexican drug cartel act meant to influence or manipulate the general public, rivaling drug cartels and Mexican government.

## Background

Since December 11, 2006, Mexico has suffered an internal war, between quarreling cartels disputing territorial strongholds claiming the lives of approximately between 50,000 and 100,000 people, death estimates depending on source.<sup>2</sup> The massive display of violence has strongly been attributed to President Felipe Calderon's aggressive drug cartel dismantling policies and operatives. Mexico's Drug War level of violence increased exponentially soon after Felipe Calderon in conjunction with the Governor of Michoacán, Lazaro Cardenas Batel, began "Operacion Conjunta Michoacán." This operation was formed by elements of the Preventive Federal Police (PFP), the Federal Investigation Agency (AFI), the Center of Investigation and National Security (CISEN), the Mexican Military, and the Mexican Air Force (FAM) under the supervision of the Federal Secretary of Public Safety (SSPF), Attorney General of the Republic (PGR), and the National Defense Secretary (SEDENA).<sup>3</sup> During this federal and state joint operation a total of 4,260 soldiers arrived to the state of Michoacán with four goals in mind: to eradicate illicit crop fields (mostly of marijuana), establish vehicular traffic control in highways and secondary road systems, increase the number of raids and arrest warrants, and to identify and dismantle drug sale locations in the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Alan Nelson, "A Chronology and Glossary of Propaganda in the United States" (1996), 232-233

<sup>2</sup> Andrew O'Reilly, "Mexico's Drug Death Toll Double What Reported, Expert Argues" Fox Latino, August 10, 2012, accessed September 20, 2012, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2012/08-10/mexico-dru-death-toll-double-what-reported-experts-argues/#xzz274mzAlak>

<sup>3</sup> Claudia Herrera Beltran, "Operativo policiaco en Michoacán ha costado al narco \$6 mil 749 millones" *La Jornada*, December 19, 2006, accessed October 25, 2012, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/12/19/index.php?section=politica&article=022n1pol>

state.<sup>4</sup> This operation is distinguished for historically using the most state resources, as well as military and police personnel. This operative was the first phase launched in Mexico's war against drugs soon after its implementation other states followed with their own joint operatives.

Calderon's aggressive measures have severely crippled the seven drug trafficking cartels of the early 2000s and increased the number of drug cartels to approximately twenty. Even as late as December of 2010, the Mexican Secretary for Public Safety (SSP) announced Mexico was threatened by organized crime, primarily drug cartels, scattered around its territory: Cartel de Sinaloa, Cartel del Golfo, Los Zetas, Arellano Félix-Tijuana, Los Carrillo Fuentes-Ciudad Juarez, La Familia and Norte del Valle de Colombia.<sup>5</sup> Cartel realignment occurred as they sought to maintain plaza (territory) dominance, weak cartels merged with stronger cartels, new alliances were formed or arguments in leadership succession occurred after leaders' deaths and incarcerations.<sup>6</sup> Cartels not only violently fought for control of trafficking routes but also were forced to redirect their effort to domestic retail sales as the government cracked down on them.

These new criminal entities not only seek to continue their lucrative drug business but have broadened their scope of criminality by engaging in extortion, kidnapping, and human trafficking. As of August 2012 the following cartels were operating in Mexico: Cartel de Sinaloa, Cartel del Golfo, Arellano Félix-Tijuana, Los Carrillo Fuentes-Ciudad Juarez, Cartel del Pacifico Sur, Los Zetas, La Familia Michoacana, Los Caballeros Templarios, Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generacion, Cartel del Milenio, Cartel de Oaxaca, Cartel de Colima, Cartel de Guadalajara. Due to disputes, cartel enforcement cells surfaced to aid the eradication of adversary cartels and secure plaza dominance in key territorial stronghold. Los Negros, Los Artistas Asesinos, Los Mexicles, and Nueva Gente operate for Cartel de Sinaloa, La Linea and Los Aztecas are the enforcement cells for Los Carrillo Fuentes-Ciudad Juarez, and Los Rojos and Los Maestros serve Cartel del Golfo.<sup>7</sup> Enforcement cells are not loyal to one cartel and like Mexican drug cartels change sides overtime based on rational self-interest. Targeting of cartels by the Mexican government has spurred an adaptation of cartel modus operandi to include seeking the collaboration of other criminal networks.

As a result of governmental pressure, cartels evolved from criminal organizations to organizations with capabilities to conduct intelligence, enforcement and propaganda operations. This new level of sophistication has unprecedented and unidentified outcomes. Mexican drug cartels have actively sought to transform the Mexican populace with their intense forms of propaganda as they use violence, introduced the "narco" concept, the narco-culture, narco-saints, intimidation tactics, and intent to control the media. Cartels use of propaganda is also intended to create immense fear among rivaling cartels and public/elected officials, to defend their plazas, and to provide a warning sign for those who dare cross their path. The question arises: To what extent

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<sup>4</sup> Estela Botello, "A Michoacan, 5mil 300 Soldados Contra el Narco" *Cronica Nacional*, December 12, 2006, accessed October 10, 2012, [www.cronica.com.mx/nota.php?id\\_notas=275992](http://www.cronica.com.mx/nota.php?id_notas=275992)

<sup>5</sup> Ignacio Alzaga, "Disputan 7 Carteles el Territorio Nacional" *Milenio*, December 30, 2010, accessed October 10, 2012, [www.milenio.com/cdb/doc/noticias2011/1b6bcde8bf538d981ccb8ca58ccd7747](http://www.milenio.com/cdb/doc/noticias2011/1b6bcde8bf538d981ccb8ca58ccd7747)

<sup>6</sup> "Cárteles mexicanos, de 7 grupos en el 2006 ahora existen 20 células" *PuroNarco.com*, September 06, 2011, accessed September 20, 2012, <http://puronarco.com/2012/09/carteles-mexicanos-de-7-grupos-en-el-2006-ahora-existen-20-celulas/>

<sup>7</sup> Ariadna Ortega, "De siete al inicio del sexenio, los cárteles mexicanos se multiplicaron: Calderon dejara por lo menos 25" *Sinembargo*, August 20, 2012, accessed October 10, 2012, [www.sinembargo.mx/20-08-2012/335244](http://www.sinembargo.mx/20-08-2012/335244)

has Mexican drug cartel propaganda become embedded in mainstream Mexico and what are the cartel's benefits for using these tactics?

## **Significance**

The long-term consequences of cartel propaganda are still unknown. This new form of criminality has the potential to threaten the United States homeland security as the narco-lifestyle, its messages and its violence spills over the borderland and into mainstream society. Much to the intent of the cartels, a large degree of Mexican citizens have become desensitized favorably to them due to their use of propaganda in their music, clothing, and religious aspects spread and become embedded in Mexican mainstream society. As acceptance of the cartels grows, so do their capabilities to recruit, glamorize the cartel lifestyle, and influence Mexican government measures as well as decrease the effectiveness of government countermeasures. The fear cartel propaganda spreading to the United States is grand, as the border region tends to contain a large number of Mexican immigrants who still maintain ties to Mexico. Contact with the border nation-state is constant and difficult to limit. If the propaganda continues to spread we can soon find it in our society as only a wire fence limits the United States from Mexico. Even though there are physical barriers, people are not limited by this because the flow of ideas can be transferred via the cartel's propaganda tools.

Cartels have effectively adapted propaganda into their illicit business blurring the lines between criminality, insurgency, and terrorism further raising the national security importance of this topic. The cartels engage in terrorist tactics to psychologically intimidate and manipulate rivals, journalist, and government officials by using IEDs, massive displays of violence, narco-demonstrations and roadblocks. Cartels use insurgency tools by targeting government officials through kidnapping or execution to produce a change in power structure that better suits the cartel's objectives further eroding the Mexican state. Government officials are forced to act by the infamous phrase "plata o plomo" demanding a decision between death or becoming a forced accomplice. The best initiative is to further investigate the cartels' propaganda campaigns, understand them and keep a vigilant eye on their affects, especially in the borderland in order to prevent cartel message infiltration. Ultimately, the relevance of propaganda to the United States national security is that of preventing problem crossover by tracking the evolution of the propaganda while the target demographic for said campaigns remains outside of the United States.

## **Research Design**

The research design used to study the phenomenon of propaganda in the Mexican drug cartels is a historical research design. The historical research design method is intended to report events that occurred in the past. The study focused on past Mexican drug cartel propaganda goals from 2006-2012. These included psychological impact, influence operations, symbolic violent messages, narco-corridos glorifying the lifestyle and attracting low level recruits, recruitment of high value individuals via bribes and scare tactics, narco-banners, drug lord graves, cartel influence in mainstream television, new media (i.e. blogs, websites, and YouTube videos), beverages, clothing,

narco-saints, intimidation tactics, and media silencing operations. This paper seeks to serve as an initial probe into the complexities of the cartels' propaganda operations and the surge of most probable impact on U.S. national security.

The objective of this research was to identify cartel propaganda in an unbiased, factual manner in order to arrive at an analytical conclusion that helps determine if cartel propaganda is indeed embedding in Mexican mainstream society.<sup>8</sup> The advantages of this type of research design are the ability to abstain from physical involvement, null danger of interaction between researcher and subject; and the ability to collect material and draw conclusions from observation and analysis. The strategical outline of the study will begin by collecting secondary sources. Primary sources will not be collected in for this research project due to the sensitivity of the problem and the high risks involved. Sources gathered will then be evaluated based on credibility, reputation, bias, and reliability. After evaluating the sources, a hypothesis will be formulated based on preliminary observation. After further analysis the findings will be reported in a quantitative manner to help the reader understand the importance of the topic. The study intends to create a foundation for further exploration.

## Literature Review

The major threat to the Mexican government and civil society is organized crime and the drug violence.<sup>9</sup> The literature directly related to Mexican drug cartel propaganda is limited. The effects have not fully been identified and it could take decades for the manifestation of the consequences to surface. Several hypotheses regarding the impact cartel propaganda on the Mexican state have been formulated to disentangle the ramifications. Some argue cartel propaganda has a kinetic, war-like, impact, others a political or economic, and others continue to view Mexican drug cartels as only transnational criminal organizations. Few have studied how Mexican culture and society is impacted.

The fight over control of the information space has become brutal in Mexico and has made use of propaganda in the Mexican organized crime groups critical to their illicit operations. John P. Sullivan, senior research fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies on Terrorism, asserts propaganda is an essential element of the Mexican Cartel' operations. Information operations are a crucial element of winning a war, including the non-traditional drug war. It expands their ability to fight back a stronger opponent by limiting physical engagements. The use of new media by cartels has increased as the preferred method of communication with the public at a non-hierarchical scale.<sup>10</sup> In this mindset, Cartel propaganda is viewed as an act of war directed at the Mexican state. Mexico's viability to govern is threatened as this kinetic war intensifies and corruption and drug trafficking run rampant.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> James P. Key, "Research Design in Occupational Education" *Oklahoma State University*, accessed September 24, 2012, <http://www.okstate.edu/ag/agedcm4h/academic/aged5980a/5980/newpage19.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Howard Campbell, "Narco-Propaganda in the Mexican "Drug War": An Anthropological Perspective" *Latin American Perspectives*, April 30, 2012, accessed September 1, 2012, <http://lap.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/04/30/0094582X12443519>

<sup>10</sup> John P. Sullivan, "Cartel Info Ops: Power and Counter-power in Mexico's Drug war" *Mountain Runner*, November 15, 2010, accessed September 19, 2012, [http://mountainrunner.us/2010/11/cartel\\_info\\_ops\\_power\\_and\\_counter-power\\_in\\_mexico\\_drug\\_war/#.UGR0ybvS7U0](http://mountainrunner.us/2010/11/cartel_info_ops_power_and_counter-power_in_mexico_drug_war/#.UGR0ybvS7U0)

<sup>11</sup> George W. Grayson, "Mexico: Narco-Violence and a failed state?" *Transaction*, August 31, 2009

Not every scholar views propaganda as kinetic based, others see their origin as ideological in nature. Another scholar who differs in opinion and views cartel propaganda as ideological in nature not kinetic is professor of Anthropology, Howard Campbell. He declares the correct course of action is to classify cartel propaganda as a new form of political discourse. He derives at this conclusion due to the territorial strongholds and state like functions cartels can have. In an interview with *Borderland Beat*, Campbell stated, "Let's understand the drug related violence as a political struggle involving the use of war tactics, techniques, propaganda, all the tools used historically by insurgent groups..."<sup>12</sup> In this quote, the assimilation of cartel propaganda to political entities is clear. Propaganda is politically directed at the Mexican state for the purpose of corroding its institutions. By inducing corruption within the Mexican government cartels are able to weaken its foundation and continue drug trafficking with less external pressures.

As the government is weakened and violence increases other sectors of Mexico begin to deteriorate. The economic impact of cartel propaganda is seen in the decline of tourism to the Mexican state, along with the loss of jobs, investment decline and an increase in "lethal" corruption.<sup>13</sup> The bloodshed has maintained Mexico's economy stagnant as an environment of fear and uncertainty escalates. Yet there are others who view drugs as the primary source of revenue for the Mexican government; and see the drug war as a pretext strategy advocating neoliberal policies in both the United States and Mexico.<sup>14</sup> Mexican drug cartels are seen as solely pecuniary driven organizations and the authors present the dangerous measures taken by cartels to continue supplying their American consumers, via tunnels, mules and submarines.<sup>15</sup> The idea of the "Narco" as a criminal individual who commits murders, intimidates public officials, bribes authority figures, sells drugs, and serves as employer is still powerfully engraved in Mexican Society.<sup>16</sup> The goal of cartels is the manufacture and distribution of drugs to consumers.

As the previous sections demonstrate, there is no scholar consensus regarding Mexican drug cartels' propaganda. Disagreement among the primary goal of Mexico's drug cartels and the existence of propaganda operations is still debated in the academic setting. The adaptation of new cartel operations has been ongoing and change is seen differently by scholars as future assessments are difficult to conduct. Mexico's drug cartels have gradually learned to refine their information and influence operations against their adversaries and the Mexican state.

## Research Data Collection

As described above, no primary data was used in this study. The researcher did not directly observe the event-related data gathered. The secondary sources used were a conglomeration of different types of media. Newspaper articles from Mexico and the United States were used to categorize various types of documented propaganda

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<sup>12</sup> Tobin Hansen, "Extreme Violence and Narco-terrorism in Mexico," *Borderland Beat*, September 14, 2012, accessed October 13, 2012, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2012/09/extreme-violence-and-terrorism-in-mexico.html>

<sup>13</sup> George W. Grayson, "Mexico: Narco-Violence and a failed state?" *Transaction*, August 31, 2009

<sup>14</sup> Peter Watt & Roberto Zepeda, "Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism, and Violence in the Narcoeconomy" *Zedbooks*, 2012

<sup>15</sup> Sylvia Longmire, "Cartel: The Coming Invasion of Mexico's Drug War" *Palgrave Macmillan*, August 27, 2012

<sup>16</sup> Ioan Grillo, "El Narco- Inside Mexico's Criminal Insurgency" *Bloomsbury Press*, 2011

occurrences over the past six years. Newscasts of the borderland between Mexico and the United States were also collected for this study. Videos, online pictures, websites, and blogs posted by Mexican drug cartels are another type of secondary source that are included. Narco-corridos were obtained from radio stations and mainstream top chart metrics. The methods used to gather this information were database and open source research.

This study focused on the different tactics Mexican drug cartels use to proliferate propaganda in Mexican mainstream society. The methods, delivery and outcome were also identified to help the reader better understand this phenomenon. A total of 300 data points were gathered and separated into four categories: psychological impact, increase recruitment, societal acceptability, and influence government and society. Each of these categories explained the intended societal response/goal of the propaganda and the benefits expected by the cartels. The following paragraphs break each category into subdivisions that were identified through the data gathering collection demonstrating the significant cartel permeation in Mexican society. A graph depicting the percentages of cartel infiltration will serve as a visual representation of the findings. Mexico's countermeasures will be included to help increase problem perspective.

## **Psychological Impact**

In this study psychological impact is considered to be part of psychological warfare and is conceptually defined as broad attacks against Mexican society favorably influencing cartel interests. The key difference between the concept of psychological warfare and that of influence operations is the extensive target audience. The impact of psychological warfare is intended to be nationwide as their display of violence and threat of using violence directly or indirectly affects all of the Mexican populace. In this study scare tactics, murders, their symbolism, and bombings were included as acts that cause severe psychological impact.

Scare tactics encompass the use of fear or intimidation through threats of violence to influence a desired outcome. Scare tactics are exhibited in actions that cause closing of public establishments, policemen resignations, roadblocks, and threats to government officials. Businesses, medical clinics, ranches and schools have been forced to close and/or be abandoned due to the increased level of daily cartel intimidation. These threats not only serve to suppress populace actions against cartels but also allow for advantageous circumstances to surface benefitting cartel objectives. The aforementioned establishments are forced to close when cartels begin collecting "protective taxes" and constant insecurity becomes routine.<sup>17</sup> The coerced cooperation of the populace induces them to become accomplices of organized crime by actively supporting them financially. This not only temporarily increases the cartel's financial intake, but also allows for the properties to turn into shelter and stash houses, or training camps once vacant. As threats to municipal police chiefs increase, policemen opt for resignation to safeguard their physical wellbeing and that of their loved ones. Policemen are intimidated through threats of violence and forced to compromise their ethics and protect cartel personnel. An example of this is for approximately four years,

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<sup>17</sup> Sylvia Otero & Manuel Lombera, "Comerciantes juarenses bajan cortinas" *El Universal*, February 12, 2010, accessed October 13, 2012, [www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/74749.html](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/74749.html)

after death threats against the police officers in Villa Humada surfaced, the municipality was cleared of a police force.<sup>18</sup> Without rule of law organized crime is left to rule de facto without fear of apprehension.

Another way cartels' insight fear or psychological impact in Mexican society is through unexpected roadblocks. This tactic is used to prohibit military transportation throughout the city increasing cartel traffic control.<sup>19</sup> Cartels accomplish logistical flow control by stealing vehicles to block streets. In other instances blockades of major avenues have occurred as a sign of protest when members are apprehended. The possibility of being in the wrong place at the wrong time increases the public's insecurities and they begin taking precautions by decreasing unnecessary outings that may put their lives or property at risk. Scare tactics are employed to coerce government officials (e.g. military, public officials, intelligence personnel, and law enforcement) into supporting cartel objectives by delivering. Messages are sent to government official's desks via written notes, sending messengers, or even emails. Threatening messages are sent daily claiming they are linked to the cartel adversary and should stop government official support immediately. This constant harassment creates a dilemma authorities cannot ethically work without feeling threatened by either side if territorial dispute of plazas are among different cartels.

The desired action of this tactic is to end favoritism through threats, intimidation and blackmail and comply with the originator's demands. To ensure effectiveness in this type of propaganda it is important to carry out threats only when the desired behavior is not achieved. Reacting accordingly validates drug cartel credibility and increases the chances of obtaining the desired result both currently and in the future. If excessive violence is used even after the demands have been met, this can create a negative societal reaction. In some instances the way to prove a cartel's capabilities and show their ability to follow through is by using the weapons that will cause the greatest psychological impact, such as, grenades and car bombs. In the state of Michoacán a drug cartel warned the state government a grenade attack would occur against the Mexican military on Mexican Independence Day. The warning was intended to safeguard the lives of children that might attend the festivities planned for the day. Government officials waited until ten hours before the event to warn local police and federal employees to take action, inhibiting the people from taking proper precautions. As warned the cartel delivered on its threats creating chaos.<sup>20</sup>

A different component of propaganda with immense psychological impact is the symbolic messages interpreted in the murdered victims. The dramatic violence exerted on the bodies is not solely intended to damage psychologically the Mexican citizenry but also to transmit messages of warning and revenge. Mutilations in murder victims have multifaceted symbolism that represents the completion previous threats and offers a credible reason for others to follow new directives that are issued. For example, if the victim's hands are mutilated this typically signifies he stole goods. In the case of a missing finger, commonly the index finger, it is sometimes found inside the victim's anus

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<sup>18</sup> Alejandro Salmon Aguilera, "Cumple Villa Ahumada cuatro años sin policías municipales" *Ahora Mismo*, June 13, 2012, accessed October 28, 2012, <http://www.ahoramismo.com.mx/noticia.aspx?id=37623>

<sup>19</sup> La Redacción, "Narcobloqueos y balaceras en Matamoros: mueren nueve sicarios y dos militares" *Proceso*, October 12, 2012, accessed October 15, 2012, [www.proceso.com.mx/?p=322409](http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=322409)

<sup>20</sup> Francisco Gomez, "Narco avisó 15 días antes del atentado" *El Universal*, September 26, 2008, accessed October 10, 2012, [www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/541671.html](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/541671.html)

as consequence for being an informant. The violent amputation of the feet usually means the victim was a defector or joined the opposition. The decapitations normally symbolize the victims were participants of both sides of a conflict and did not fulfill their promises to the cartel. The removal of the ears signifies the victim heard something he was not supposed to hear and carried the message and the removal of the tongue means he divulged a sensitive matter. In male victims the testicles and penis are gruesomely detached and placed in their mouth as a sign of weakness or lack of valor to fulfill a cartel mandate.<sup>21</sup> Most murdered victims have a tendency to be male and between the ages of 16 and 30. Messages in bodies are far more common in individuals or a small number of corpses than on massacre killings.

The psychological impact extends beyond adversary cartels and frightens the masses when massacres occur. The large number of victims found in the same location heavily resonates with the public. For the purpose of this study, massacres were identified as being ten or more victims. Executions of this type tend to occur during social events when the victims are vulnerable and unarmed. There is also a high number of collateral damage as the “sicarios” or hit men aim indiscriminately at the crowd. Other common practices of cartels are to leave massacred victims in public roads or in vehicles where authorities and civilians are more likely to view them.

Finally, new weapons used by the cartels to cause a high degree of psychological impact are fragmentation grenades, Molotov cocktails, and car bombs. Mexican organized crime groups prefer these types of weapons because little to no experience is needed to effectively detonate any of the before mentioned artifacts; unlike arsenal which requires a competent level of accuracy and precision to effectively reach the target. These types of weapons are fast acting, have a high psychological impact due to the magnitude of the attack, and stun the enemy upon detonation allowing time to escape during pursuit situations. With the exception of military grade fragmentation grenades, all of these weapons can be made at home with common household items. Reports of toy grenades filled with gunpowder have surfaced indicating the ability of cartels to improvise if need be.<sup>22</sup> Attacks by car bombs, grenades and Molotov cocktails are most commonly done in public places with high human traffic, such as, hair salons, clubs, malls and banks. This psychologically impacts a vast majority of people often greater than the number of physically damaged individuals. Although the argument can be made for their kinetic use against rivals or government officials as the primary reason for using these types of weapons, the argument crumbles as more detonations occur in public places than in government buildings or residential areas. Two messages were identified through this study as the reasons for using these weapons: (1) retaliation against authorities due to apprehension of an associate drug trafficker, or (2) to threaten rival cartel members with the intent of deterrence. The intended purpose of psychologically impacting Mainstream society is to make society remain silent, fearful and limit their time outside the home. Passive cartel support is augmented as fear increases in society. No one is willing to reveal vital information that may lead to an arrest or dismantling of a cartel hampering government operatives and

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<sup>21</sup> “Narcomutilaciones tienen un significado” *El Occidental*, June 7, 2010, accessed October 30, 2012, <http://www.oem.com.mx/eloccidental/notas/n1663221.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Daniela Guazo, “Granadas, el arma de moda en la Guerra del narco” *Fundacion MEPI*, November 30, 2011, accessed October 12, 2012, [www.animalpolitico.com/2011/11/granadas-el-arma-de-moda-en-la-guerra-del-narco/](http://www.animalpolitico.com/2011/11/granadas-el-arma-de-moda-en-la-guerra-del-narco/)

indirectly aiding cartel objectives. Cartel impunity continues to rule the streets hindering the Mexican government.

## Recruitment

The second goal of Mexican drug cartel propaganda is to increase their ability to recruit. The drug cartels need a myriad of individuals to work in the illicit drug trade, as their business ventures grow transnational. This study identified two types of recruitments- high value recruits and low-level recruits. High value recruits are identified as people with power or authority whose actions will benefit or damage cartel interests. Examples of high value individuals are federal, state and municipal police, judges, directors of public safety, governors, agency of investigation specialized in organized crime, public secretary of security, jailers, and intelligence officers. Low-level recruits are those who work directly for the cartels as lookouts, drug dealers, sicarios (hitmen), and mules. Drug traffickers entice these individuals with the world's strongest motivator- money.

High value recruitment is largely based on protection bought with monthly pay offs varying in amount by the degree of importance to cartel operations. The bribe ranges from five thousand pesos to 600 thousand pesos monthly. Municipal police officers are bribed to allow retail drug sales to continue with the protection of not being confiscated. State officials allow free illegal activities of the cartel paying the bribe. Federal corruption offers immunity to any operation that might harm the cartel via apprehension, dismantling, or seizures. One of the most shocking cases of corruption occurred in December 2008 when a presidential security guard and military officer, Arturo Gonzalez, was found to have disclosed classified information regarding President Felipe Calderon's whereabouts to a cartel.<sup>23</sup> Mexico's drug cartels use tactics of intimidation when individuals reject bribes, the using infamous quote "plata o plomo." This phrase forces the authority figure to choose between forcefully joining the illicit organization and take the money or death. Mexico's drug cartels ability to corrupt and infiltrate high governmental entities is symbolic of Mexico's vulnerabilities. People are recruited to infiltrate these government entities.

Low-level recruitment occurred in three steps according to a newspaper article. The first step is to become a lookout, which paid approximately five thousand pesos weekly, followed by becoming a recruiter of lookouts with the ability to help with murders. Lastly, in three months the individual became a hit man with a salary of ten thousand pesos weekly.<sup>24</sup> Another way cartels are able to fulfill their human capital needs was by taking advantage of immigrants who hoped to migrate illegally to the United States. Immigrants are the best candidates as they are easy targets in an unknown country with no one to turn to. Three ways were recognized by this study as the methods used to entice migrants into the drug underworld. Cartels brainwash these individuals into accepting a "job" with the lure of money, girls, possessions and fame. Migrants may also be kidnapped for ransom and force to work for the cartel by selling drugs, human trafficking or kidnapping if they are unable to pay. Yet, there are others

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<sup>23</sup> "Ex guardia presidencial filtraba información a narcotraficantes" *Univision*, December 27, 2008, accessed October 9, 2012, <http://noticias.univision.com/mexico/noticias/article/2008-12-27/ex-guardia-presidencial-filtraba-informacion#axzz2BKEBaveA>

<sup>24</sup> Carlos Benavides, "Forman a sicarios en tres meses" *El Universal*, March 22, 2009, accessed October 13, 2012, [www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/166579.html](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/166579.html)

who like government officials are given the choice between joining the cartel or death. Rumors of Roman-like coliseums in Tamaulipas exist where claims are made of cartels forcing migrants to fight for survival. The last man standing earned not only the possibility to keep living but is forced to become a hit man.<sup>25</sup> Cartels also employment of children, some as young as eight, and adults to work in agriculture, typically in Marijuana crops also occurs at the low level of the recruitment spectrum.

Recruitment propaganda is shaped by the idea of work synonymous with success and personal betterment as jobs created by the cartels are highly paid. The idea of a better lifestyle full of riches, possessions, women, and fame allures many people who are poorly educated, low skilled who have nothing to lose as joining drug cartels. A Mexican newspaper article recently publicized the Mexican Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA) announced there are 500,000 “narcos” involved in organized crime. The report identified 300 thousand people involved with drug crop growing, 160,000 work in retail drug sales, as distributors, informants, or transporters and 40,000 hold leadership positions.<sup>26</sup> Organized crime offers the Mexican citizens basic commodities such as: food, toys, money and school supplies; fulfilling necessities the government does not. False ideology of drug dealing as “easy money” lures Mexican adolescents into drug trafficking as the demand in the United States continues to grow. Becoming a “narco” may be the only viable way to get out of poverty for Mexico’s misfortunate youth. The organized crime economy provides supplemental income to law enforcement and government officials who tend to be poorly paid and work under extremely dangerous conditions. Drug cartels attempt to change the negative connotation of being involved with drugs to an idea of a well paying employer. In sum, recruitment propaganda is mostly based on monetary motivation.

## **Societal acceptance**

Colloquial exposure to Mexican drug cartels has created the “narco” concept to identifying anything directly tied to cartel association: narco-culture, narco-corridos, narco-economy, narco-banners, ect. Formalizing the cartel lifestyle by attributing the prefix “narco” increases the legitimacy of the entity within the general populace. The “narco” concept allows society to imitate and understand the Mexican drug cartels. Recognition of cartel identity simplifies the ability for others to pinpoint drug dealer preferences, a form of labeling, such as, what drug lords would wear, listen to, drink, and what religions they observe. The term “narco” comes from the long version of “narcotraficante” meaning narcotics trafficker; origins of the word date back to the 1950s.<sup>27</sup>

The “narco” concept at its root is negative because it symbolized the act of selling drugs, harming the populace through addiction and violent outbursts. As the general public becomes continuously exposed desensitizing occurs and the authentic connotation is lost. An example of this are pirates, in times past were feared and looked down upon as they were considered criminals by society. Nowadays children dress up

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<sup>25</sup> “Zetas recrean peleas del Coliseo Romano con secuestrados: *Houston Chronicle*”, *Animal Politico*, June 13, 2011, accessed October 13, 2012, [animalpolitico.com/.../zetas-recrean-peleas-del-coliseo-romano-con-secuestrados-houston-chronicle/](http://animalpolitico.com/.../zetas-recrean-peleas-del-coliseo-romano-con-secuestrados-houston-chronicle/)

<sup>26</sup> Andrea Merlos, “Hay 500 mil narcos,” *El Universal*, August 9, 2008, accessed October 10, 2012, [www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/528865.html](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/528865.html)

<sup>27</sup> Luis Astorga, “Corridos de Traficantes y Censura” *Region y Sociedad*. 17(32), 2005, p.145.

as pirates, ignoring their active presence in parts of Somalia. The “watered down” version of the connotations increases popular acceptance. The term “narco” has shifted to be part of the folklore and culture, ultimately embedding some aspects of Mexican drug cartels in Mexican mainstream society. The amount of exposure to cartels has created a counterculture in the general public increasing the social acceptance of the Mexican organized crime groups. Although drug trafficking organizations are not a phenomenon in Mexico the glorification of drug traffickers in society and adolescents is glorified. The cartel counter-culture is not limited to those who partake in drug trafficking organizations but is also imitated by those who do not have any organizational ties. The narco-culture can be divided into the following sections: music, television, books, religious tendencies, beverages and clothing preferences.

The music genre associated with Mexican organized crime groups is narco-corridos or narcotic ballads. This genre can be characterized as popular country songs celebrating the exploits of drug lords, violence and sicarios with the intent of promoting a lavish drug-fueled way of life.<sup>28</sup> Narco-corridos originally date to the 1970s but their general popularity expanded in the 1990s.<sup>29</sup> The more headlines cartels make the more songs there are singing of their glory, defeat, rivalry, and operations. Narco-corridos have national and transnational audience. The United States national radio stations broadcast these types of songs. One example of this is the nationally broadcast El Gato 94.7 weekly playing an hour dedicated to this genre.

It is not uncommon to find songs that romanticize the act drug trafficking involvement. For example a song by Gerardo Ortiz titled “En Preparacion” (In Preparation) tells the story of an infamous drug dealer who is preparing for battle. The song states “...con mi pechera y mi cuerno soy bueno para el combate, encapuchado de negro y mis botas militares, en preparacion me encuentro pa’ integrarme al equipo...” The English translation would be “...with my chest protector and my AK-47 I am good for combat, black hooded and with my military boots I am in preparation to join my team.” The song symbolizes the horrid violent acts cartels have been known for a typical soldier getting ready for a workday. Another of his songs states “I like the work...abide by the bosses roles... only through loyalty will money keep coming” making the connection of a drug trafficking organization as a normal employer.

Drug ballads can have serve the purpose of idolizing the drug lords, their lifestyle, and see them as individuals deserving respect. Many do not mention names in particular but talk about the loyalty they have to their “high commander” and how they are willing to fight anyone in support their cartel. A narco-corrido by Larry Hernandez refers to Mayo Zambada, one of the leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel, as having it all “...cowboy hats, horses, women, rifles, money...courage, and grenades” another ballad by Tigrillo Palma boasts of El Chapo always riding in brand new trucks full of arsenal to defend himself. It appears as the higher in rank the individuals are within a criminal organization, the more likely they are to have a music group make a narco-corrido in their honor. Examples of drug lord ballads found during this study were: Mayo Zambada, El Chapo, Vicente Carrillo, M1, and La Barbie.

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Beckhusen, “Que Malo, Narcos! Mexico Attacks Cartels with Comics.” Conde, Nast Digital. September 9,2011, accessed September 13, 2012, <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/09/mexico-attacks-cartels-with-comics>

<sup>29</sup> John Burnett, “Narcocorridos: Ballads of the Mexican Cartels” *NPR*, October 10, 2009, accessed October 16, 2012, [www.npr.org/2009/10/10/113664067/narcocorridos-ballads-of-the-mexican-cartels](http://www.npr.org/2009/10/10/113664067/narcocorridos-ballads-of-the-mexican-cartels)

Other songs send the message of glorification of weapons and tactics used by cartels and are violence-centric. The lyrics of a song, *Sanguinarios del M1*, by a collective of musicians named *Movimiento Alterado* (Disturbed Movement), talks about the weapons used to inflict violence with a boastful sound by asserting “with a AK-47 and a bazooka...blowing heads off... we like to kill, the people are scared and never ask...violent team, bloody work to traumatize...” The song *500 Balazos* (500 Shots) by *Voz de Mando*, begins by bragging about the amount of violence they can exert due to their weaponry capabilities “500 shots, automatic weapons, chest protectors...commanders killing civilians indiscriminately...2 or 3 bazookas and grenade launchers...Obregon, Sonora really thought they were in Iraq...highly trained because they were soldiers the mafia pays them...killing anybody who gets in their way.” This song details a day in the life of an ex-military member who has joined the cartel as a mercenary. Interestingly, during the course of this research study seventeen musical groups were found to play narco-corridos originally from Sinaloa and only one of Baja California. As it is to be expected, the groups with Sinaloan roots were sympathetic to the Sinaloa Cartel.

The music is not the only social element affected by Mexican organized crime. The narco-culture has invaded the religious sphere by introducing new saints that are not approved by the Catholic Church, Mexico’s most practiced religion. Jesus Malverde, an outlaw from Sinaloa, is the non-official patron saint of drug dealers and bandits. Allegedly, he stole from the rich to give to the poor, a Robin Hood type of story, but his existence is contested. He is known as the generous bandit. In Sinaloa, Tijuana and Chihuahua chapels have been built that allow believers to pray, ask for miracles, and for his protection particularly for drug trades, border crossings and against violent encounters. Recently in Guadalajara a brewing company recognizing Marverde’s presence in Mexican folklore began a beer in his name. Strategically, this beer should attract people who are part of drug trafficking organization and imitators of the lifestyle.<sup>30</sup> The Santa Muerte (Holy Death), another non-approved saint, has been highly linked with Mexican organized crime. Similar to Malverde people have built chapels and ask for her intercession in drug related issues. By using an established practice, the saints in this instance, and thwarting it to their benefit it allows organized crime to appeal to the masses. San Judas Tadeo, patriot saint of lost causes, and San Ramon Nonato, patriot saint of secrecy of confessional, are also known to be worshipped by Mexican organized crime groups. These acts gives a sense of social similitude (i.e. we are like you) to the Mexican public building links between what is acceptable and what is not, further bridging the gap and allowing acceptance to flourish. The exploitation of social similitude does not stop at the religious spectrum; they have also been associated with infiltrating the Mexican soccer league and national beauty pageants.<sup>31</sup>

The imitation of religious practices is not limited to entrusting saints but also to burial traditions. In Culiacan, Sinaloa a cemetery known to be the resting place of Mexico’s most notorious drug lords shows the magnitude of their propaganda is not limited by death. Mausoleums honoring the dead capos have been built since the 1980s in the Jardines de Humaya Cemetery. Religious images, jewels, and golden touches

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<sup>30</sup> “Cerveza con sabor a narco Jesús Malverde,” *Associated Press*, December 12, 2007, accessed August 13, 2012, <http://www.cnnexpansion.com/actualidad/2007/12/12/narco-santo-jesus-malverde-ahora-se-bebe>

<sup>31</sup> Jose Angel Parra & Jorge Guzman Torres, “Nadie quiere dar detalles,” *El Universal*, October 24, 2008, accessed October 10, 2012, [www.eluniversal.com.mx/deportes/102984.html](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/deportes/102984.html)

adorn their final resting places. Some mausoleums are as tall as two stories high, have air conditioner, carpeted floors, furniture and sound systems. Located in one of the poorest areas of Sinaloa they serve as visual reminders of how much wealth drug dealers can accumulate and remind the living of how costly it can be. The illusion of grandeur of the drug dealer's life and death is manipulated to be something to be striven for.

The entertainment media has played a crucial role in the permeation of Mexican cartel lifestyle on mainstream society. Movies, soap operas (Novelas), television series, books, novels, and newspaper interviews depicting the infamous drug lords and their life stories have become popular. The use of the media to further connect organized crime with the general public has spurred social acceptance. The apprehension in 2007 of Sandra Avila Beltran or better known as La Reina del Pacifico (the Queen of the Pacific) was followed two years later by a bibliographical book where she gave her perception on being born and raised in a drug trafficking organization. The general public feels sympathetic as their stories are further engraved in their minds. It is especially dangerous in today's world, where people are solely 'famous' for appearing on television without having to proof talent or social benefit.

The Mexican cartel's counter-culture has also invaded fashion by attributing a specific sense of style to their manner of dress. These "more modern" drug dealers have left behind the fashion of the 80s the cowboy boots, silk shirts and Piteado belts. Now they wear expensive reputable brands such as Ed Hardy, Versace, Dolce & Gabbana, Ralph Lauren, and Cartier. Expensive clothing and accessories serve as visual reminders to the general populace of the earning potential in the drug business. The drug lord image also includes expensive vehicles habitually the Ram or Lobo (the Mexican version of the F-150), whiskey as the alcoholic drink of preference, and manner of speak.

The media spreads narco-culture fashion as they air drug traffickers after their apprehension and focus on what they were wearing rather than on the crimes committed. Edgar Valdez Villareal, also known as La Barbie, was arrested on August 2010 wearing Ralph Lauren polo like t-shirt valued at US\$125, jeans and Nike Max Air shoes valued at US\$200.<sup>32</sup> Focus of the media was directed at how costly these items were and the "fashion sense" he had disregarding why he was apprehended. The same can be said of Joaquin Guzman Loera's son, "El Chapito," Vicente Carrillo Leyva, and Vicente Zambada Niebla. In comments following the news article of their apprehension, women approval of their dress was eminent through the posted remarks. People attempt to follow these fads and go to extremes by obtaining counterfeit goods that resemble those worn by the drug lords. For the Mexican youth drug lords embody success due to their money, power, cars, fashion and women. Cartels have successfully transmitted the message of why the youth should become part of them. This is another example of how drug lords take a preconceived paradigm and shift it to manipulate the masses. By introducing a way of dressing and being photographed as well as videotaped cartels are able to shift a news story from a negative light into a tangent of limited importance. Apprehensions news has morphed to be similar to red carpet events

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<sup>32</sup> Armando Ramos Alvarez, "Tras la sonrisa de la Barbie; vestimenta de 300 dolares," *Diario Presencia*, August 31, 2010, accessed September 22, 2012, <http://diariopresencia.com/nota.aspx?ID=21104&List=%7B6E7751F4-8D18-4995-8D02-96402CDC9038%7D>

making the aggressor a public figure not a dangerous criminal. This powerful control of the media is dangerous.

The drug lord lifestyle has gradually infiltrated the minds Mexico's most vulnerable: the children. In schools children are playing games that mimic cops and robbers but instead of robbers they are hitmen or drug lords. In Chihuahua young extortionists were demanding protective tax from children and teachers to guard against physical violence. Mexico's youth is looking at the counterculture for guidance and following their example. As children see what is happening and how passive society has become regarding the cartels they begin to view it as any other profession. The answer of what do you want to be when you grow up now is I want to be a narco just like my uncles. A fifteen year old in Tijuana murdered three of his nephews and his sister-in-law to prove his cartel worthiness. During a session with his psychologist he expressed a sense of accomplishment and stated, "he had now entered through the big door."<sup>33</sup> This brutal act of violence was not an initiation act required of him by a cartel but a self-initiated act.

Although following the drug trafficker counter-culture may seem unorthodox it is an expression of passive support. The general public is not directly providing a good or a service to the cartels. The danger lies when ideology and desenzitization occurs and the drug cartels become part of Mexican society. Active support of cartels is far more dangerous as its consequences may be devastating especially to the Mexican government. In Michoacan a series of protests in favor of La Familia Michoacana have surfaced calling for the end of police persecution and departure of adversary cartels<sup>34</sup>. The degree of social acceptance has shifted the balance to a point where society feels the need to choose between quarreling cartels. The solution is no longer eradication of all cartels as it is deemed impossible by society. Cartels are now achieving dangerous levels of social acceptance through assimilation into Mexican mainstream culture.

## Influence

The last goal of Mexican organized crime is to influence society and the government to their advantage. For the cartels it is important to control the messages sent to the public and the actions taken by the government in order to continue maintaining passive and active support. This type of propaganda is conducted by silencing the media, posting their own written propaganda, targeting killings of high value individuals, and becoming involved in elections.

The media personnel is bought or killed if the message delivered to the masses does not coincide with the image the cartels want to portray. In Monterrey, Nuevo Leon the famous national television station Televisa was attacked with grenades. After the attack a written notice was left behind asking them to stop only transmitting news about them and to include transmissions of the drug lords.<sup>35</sup> Through intimidation tactics and exerted violence organized crime attempts to influence the message sent to the

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<sup>33</sup> Julieta Martinez, "Quiero ser narco como mis tios," *El Universal*, January 5, 2009, accessed October 13, 2012, [www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/70545.html](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/70545.html)

<sup>34</sup> "Nueva marcha en México a favor del capo narco abatido," *Associated Press*, December 19, 2012, accessed October 17, 2012, [america.infobae.com/notas/15912-Nueva-marcha-en-Mxico-a-favor-del-capo-narco-abatido](http://america.infobae.com/notas/15912-Nueva-marcha-en-Mxico-a-favor-del-capo-narco-abatido)

<sup>35</sup> "Mexico: Atacan sede de Televisa en Monterrey," *BBC*, August 15, 2010, accessed October 13, 2012, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/america\\_latina/2010/08/100815\\_mexico\\_ataque\\_televisa\\_monterrey\\_pea.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/america_latina/2010/08/100815_mexico_ataque_televisa_monterrey_pea.shtml)

populace. If the message sent is distorted in their favor, the “reality” people believe will also be distorted positively toward the cartels. After the death of two journalists in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, *El Diario de Juarez* (Juarez Daily News) published an article directly asking the cartels to tell them what exactly they want published to stop the killings of colleagues. In this article they name organized crime as the de facto government given the lack of control the government has on their actions. The newspaper seeks a truce from the cartels, as they see no other way to protect themselves than by abiding by the cartels’ mandates. *El Diario* states they are not fortune-tellers and should be provided guidelines to prevent future aggressions.<sup>36</sup> A journalist is no longer at liberty to transparently inform the public instead they are taking preventive measures through auto-censorship. Mexico is being forced to comply with the cartels’ de facto rule of silence limiting information to spread freely and creating not only biased opinions but also a biased reality.

Cartel written propaganda is disseminated via banners, leaflets or videos. The narco-mantas (drug banners) are typically written on bleached cotton fabric with markers or printed canvas. Leaflets usually are distributed on government buildings, schools, bridges, monuments, the streets, or on rare instances dropped by an airplane at a specified location. The purpose of this type of propaganda is to communicate a message to a considerable target audience. The banners and leaflets gathered during the course of this study were found to have several recurring themes. In the messages the author of the message seemed to be either defending its organization or attacking other entities. The most repeated message made accusations against the Mexican President, Felipe Calderon, the Mexican government, and the military for being one sided on their fight against drugs. Infiltration of high-level officials by organized crime was cited as the reason for the sheltering of the ‘preferred’ cartel. In other messages cartels would revoke violent atrocities committed as being tied to their organization. The messages would also portray them as heroes ridding the city of extortionists and kidnappers. Fighting just wars by valuing family, life and following unwritten civility rules were mentioned in banners to increase grassroots support. As evidence of cartel disloyalty messages emphasizing betrayal are exposed to increase distrust within the cartel. These messages also create the image of cartels as victims and consequentially increase public support. Death threats against rivaling cartels and those who support them were also a continuous theme on distributed propaganda. Curfews announcements sent through banners asked people to stay home after 9:00pm in order to “clean” the city of a cartel. Messages offering rewards for the death of rival members are common in banners where territorial disputes are high. To gain recognition cartels place messages announcing their arrival in a new territory. Videos posted online serve a very different purpose. The cartels have macabre utilizations of new media to show interrogations of rival cartel members, their torture and their execution to demonstrate what occurs when they get crossed. Because these videos are only limited to the Internet, they are aimed at a much narrower audience: rival cartels. The separation between written propaganda and videos allows Mexican organized crime groups to positively shape the public perception and discourage their enemies from attacking or counter-attacking.

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<sup>36</sup> “Que quieren de nosotros?,” *El Diario de Juarez*, September 19, 2010, accessed October 13, 2012, <http://www.diario.com.mx/notas.php?f=2010%2F09%2F19&id=ce557112f34b187454d7b6d117a76cb5>

Individuals who do not comply with organized crime or who are deemed enemies of the cartels are killed to silence them or to stop a hostile action. These murders separate those from the before mentioned section, psychological impact, because they are aimed at very particular groups or sometimes individuals in Mexican society. During this study musicians, criminal investigators, military personnel and activist were sought out and murdered from the benefit of cartel interests. Musicians, particularly those that play drug ballads, have been tortured and executed to stop the spread of support of a particular cartel through their lyrics. Artists like Valentin Elizalde, Sergio Gomez, Zayda Pena, El Loco Elizalde, and Jesus Rey Alfaro Pulido were all executed presumably by a Mexican drug cartel<sup>37</sup>. Mexican organized crime groups realize the access the general populace has to narco-corridos and in an effort to contain their message they kill those musicians whose ideology is in disagreement with theirs. In an effort to remain out of prison organized crime targets criminal investigators who they deemed enemies of the cartel. The rationale lies in the possibility to delay, disrupt, and halt prosecution against hit men and drug lords. In the same context, military personnel are murdered to stop the prosecution and killings of cartel members in a “quid pro quo” strategy. A banner issued after military personnel murders stated, “kill one of ours and we will kill ten of yours.” This strategy is aimed specifically to halt further antagonist actions. Activists who are attracting too much attention to a specific regional area have also been murdered to silence their message and keep “media calmness” allowing organized crime to continue the de facto ruling. The death of Marisela Escobedo in the Chihuahua state building in 2010 is a prime example of this. Escobedo was murdered while she brought attention to the murder of her daughter in 2006. According to El Paso Times, her murder was agreed between two cartels “because her protests were attracting too much news media attention.”<sup>38</sup> The underpinning of targeted killings is control of individual’s actions and messages through murder.

Another way cartels influence through propaganda is by getting involved with elections. Mexican organized criminal groups in order to ensure government measures are to their benefit in the past have influenced politics. To control election outcomes cartels have prevented people from attending certain public forums of candidates not supportive of a cartel ‘friendly’ agenda. They have also gone to great lengths such as kidnapping candidates to threaten, intimidate and force him/her to comply with cartel interests if they are the most likely to win the election. Cartels also pipe money into campaigns or finance entire campaigns to be in full control of elections. If the candidate chosen does not win the election, violence usually increases in the area.

## **Government Counter-Propaganda**

The Mexican government has not rested since implementation of the operations responsible for stirring the violence. This study identified that through legislation, military actions, media control, and witness protection they attempted to counter and contain Mexican drug cartel propaganda. The counter measures taken by the government are

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<sup>37</sup> “Las victimas gruperas del narco,” *El Universal*, October 20, 2010, accessed October 13, 2012, [www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/690651.html](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/690651.html)

<sup>38</sup> Juan Antonio Rodriguez, “Suspect charged in Chihuahua activist Marisela Escobedo's death,” *El Paso Times*, October 10, 2012, accessed October 12, 2012, [http://www.elpasotimes.com/news/ci\\_21736574/suspect-charged-activists-death](http://www.elpasotimes.com/news/ci_21736574/suspect-charged-activists-death)

often at a national level. Few state and local strategies have been implemented with limited success. Generalizing policies can be ineffective as cartel propaganda is not equally employed in all states and tactics used are varied.

In order to prevent dissemination of cartel propaganda the Mexican government has provided guiding principles for organized crime reporting to the media. The media should not publish any information that may directly or indirectly endanger security operations and should try to protect its journalist from organized crime violence. They cannot report on cartel propaganda: written propaganda or violent images. The ten guidelines given serve the purpose of inhibit the media from becoming spokesmen of organized crime. Unfortunately, organized crime has the ability to use new media and continue their message distribution through Youtube and blogs. Legislation prohibiting radio stations from transmitting narco-corridos has passed in an effort to control message disbursement. Ironically, in border towns between Mexico and the United States where drug cartels are a major threat the United States radio stations play drug ballad and their transmission is accessible into Mexican radios. The difference can be attributed to the importance of maintaining control of trafficking routes into the United States. Mexico has also increased attempts to prohibit penetration of Mexican politics and have them serve as filter against government infiltration by organized crime.

In an effort to counter cartel recruitment of ex-military personnel surveillance has been increased surveillance of soldiers. Although the measure is on track to limit desertion and track ex-military movement it is reactive and should focus on retention of personnel. Ex-military personnel are lured into criminal enterprises by the money there is to be made. Increasing military salaries can have a positive effect on reduced desertion. Another countermeasure the Mexican government has initiated is the amplification of the Law of Transparency. This law was expanded to protect witnesses that testify against drug lords and hit men. The law allows protective vigilance and withholding of personal information of witnesses, prosecutors, judges, and police. Under this witness protection program name changes, medical and psychological treatment, and protection of family members is also included<sup>39</sup>. Thirty-eight judges who have persecuted members of organized crime have been given protection in an effort to increase justice and prosecution. The President of Mexico has also denoted organized crime members as terrorist to augment the sentences received during prosecution. In a similar effort, protocols against cartel street blockades, kidnap and vehicle burnings are under review to propose new methods and techniques to deal with blocks in an effective and timely manner. In Sinaloa, a free 24/7 hotline where reports against organized criminal activity, kidnapping and other illicit activities has been established to increase law enforcement response. The problem with this program is that the public is afraid to call in fear of retaliation, as a linkage of law enforcement officials with Mexican drug cartels is high.

In an interesting twist the Mexican government is also issuing its propaganda aimed at discouraging grassroots support through comics on Youtube. By doing so they are countering the cartels by using their own means: new media. The effect of this type of propaganda is not certain for the number of Mexicans reached is unknown as well as the perception and message interpretation of the viewer. In sum, the most prevalent

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<sup>39</sup> "Aprueban ley para proteger testigos contra el narco," *El Informador*, April 28, 2012, accessed October 22, 2012, [informador.com.mx/mexico/2012/372641/6/aprueban-ley-para-proteger-a-testigos-contra-el-narco.htm](http://informador.com.mx/mexico/2012/372641/6/aprueban-ley-para-proteger-a-testigos-contra-el-narco.htm)

counter measures used against cartels are prohibition and protection. The government is attempting to prohibit the listening of their music, their distribution of written propaganda, and penetration of politics. They are also increasing protection of the law enforcement, journalists, and witnesses. Unlike cartel propaganda, Mexican government propaganda seems one-dimensional and reactive.

## Analysis

The compilation of propaganda is represented in the table below by Mexican state and propaganda type. Critical importance is given to the number of criminally infected states as 26 of 31 show at least one type of exerted propaganda.<sup>40</sup>

States	Psychological Impact	Increase Recruitment	Social Acceptance	Influence	State TOTAL
Aguascalientes	0	0	0	2	2
Baja California	6	0	5	1	12
Chiapas	1	0	0	0	1
Chihuahua	13	0	2	12	27
Coahuila	11	0	0	1	12
Colima	3	0	0	0	3
Durango	7	0	0	1	8
Mexico State	10	2	3	1	16
Guanajuato	1	0	0	6	7
Guerrero	11	0	0	10	21
Jalisco	8	0	2	5	15
Michoacán	10	1	2	9	22
Morelos	2	1	0	7	10
Nayarit	1	0	0	0	1
Nuevo Leon	11	2	2	5	20
Oaxaca	0	0	0	1	1
Puebla	0	0	0	3	3
Quintana Roo	1	0	0	2	3
San Luis Potosi	1	0	1	2	4
Sinaloa	8	0	28	9	45
Sonora	1	0	0	1	2
Tabasco	2	3	0	2	7
Tamaulipas	14	1	1	8	24
Veracruz	6	0	0	3	9
Yucatan	2	0	0	0	2
Zacatecas	4	0	0	6	10
Prop. TOTAL	134	10	46	97	300

<sup>40</sup> The table shown above was a compilation of 300 newspaper articles, Youtube videos, song lyrics, and blogs.

The objective most sought after by the cartels in Mexico was psychological impact. This study identified 134 data points from the 300 collected. Following closely was the goal to influence government and society with 97 articles collected. 46 data points were gathered in support of social acceptance and lastly, 10 in aid of recruitment efforts. Mexican government counter measures totaled only 13. The state with the most exerted cartel propaganda was Sinaloa (45 articles). Sinaloa is the home state of one of the most powerful Mexican cartels, which explains the emphasis and efforts used by cartels to continue influencing and manipulating the public in that region. As the territorial battles continue it is evident why Chihuahua, one of the most contested drug trafficking routes by cartels, is the second state with the most propaganda demonstrated are located in the U.S.- Mexico border, the third being Tamaulipas with 24. Although Mexican organized crime is spread throughout all of Mexico it is apparent that concentration of propaganda is mostly on state where a particular cartel is headquartered: Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Michoacán, and Tamaulipas.

The breakdown of the psychological impact category included scare tactics, murders and bombings/grenades. The most used propaganda tactic in this category was predominantly murders with 101 articles gathered. Tamaulipas was the state with the most identified activity (14 articles). Scare tactics were only identified 19 times and bombings/grenades 14. In those categories Tamaulipas was also identified as the state with the most propaganda activity. The category of increased recruitment was divided into two sections: high value and low-level recruitment. Limited exerted recruitment propaganda was identified by this study, 10 data points, and divided equally between the two subsections. The state with the most obtained data was also Tamaulipas (3 data points). The possible explanation for this is the ability of other types of propaganda to positively influence recruitment. This idea will later be explained. Social acceptance received 46 data points. The most active state was Sinaloa with 28. The most information was found on drug ballads and musicians originating from this state. A relationship between states with high levels of violence and low social acceptance or visa versa seems to exist. Propaganda aimed to influence the Mexican government and society had the second highest information gathered with 97 articles. The second most used tactic by cartels is written propaganda with 75 data points gathered. The state of Michoacán was seen as the most affected by this type of propaganda with 14 data points.

Counter measures by the Mexican government were far less comparable to cartel efforts. Only 13 operations were found and the most were geared towards Sinaloa with 3 articles found. From the information gathered only nine states were affected and with the exception of Sinaloa and Tamaulipas the states targeted were not the one with the most cartel propaganda. This may imply that government efforts may not be as effective as intended and redirection should be considered. Overall the states with the highest levels of cartel propaganda were Sinaloa (45), Chihuahua (27), Tamaulipas (24), Michoacan (22), Guerrero (21), and Nuevo Leon (20).

The propaganda objectives listed above are not mutually exclusive as the propaganda for one objective may also aid another. For example, promoting the lifestyle of drug traffickers may increase social acceptance as well as aid in the recruitment of low-level individuals. Intimidation tactics not only help maintain the general population inactive but also help propagate the myth of the drug trafficker as highly respected. The

act of drug trafficking can then be seen as respectable employment augmenting low-level recruitment as most people confuse fear with respect. Tactics used to cause psychological impact such as murder can also serve as leverage to influence the opposition's (e.g. Mexican government or rival cartel) actions.

A limitation of this study is the ability to generalize from the sample, as it may not reflect an accurate portrayal of the cartel propaganda in Mexico. As journalists exhibit auto-censorship and violence against journalists is greater in some states inhibiting a complete picture. Cartel propaganda also overlaps in certain territories and may be based on particular cartels, which this study does not explain. Separation of propaganda by cartel is needed to demonstrate preference and correlation between cartel and territory presence.

Cartel propaganda attempts to control all dimensions of Mexican society to ensure continuation of their illicit business. The Mexican government is bought, coerced, intimidated or murdered to prevent damaging policies. Law enforcement is corrupted or annihilated to ensure territorial strongholds remain intact and drug activity profitable. The military is recruited for their technical skills with a promise of better pay. The populace continuous passive and active support is encouraged to continue the assimilation process into mainstream Mexico. The United States needs to keep a close watch as how the Mexican government handles the situation and ensure the spread of organized crime propaganda does not commence permeating through its soil.

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