



JUSTICE IN MEXICO POLICY BRIEF

March 19, 2018

The New Generation: Mexico's Emerging Organized Crime Threat

By Lucy La Rosa and David A. Shirk¹

OVERVIEW

Over the past decade, more than 200,000 people have been murdered in Mexico, including the record 29,000 murders that occurred in 2017 alone. While there are complex underlying factors behind every individual homicide, a substantial portion of Mexico's recent violence is attributable to organized crime groups. In an effort to reduce the operational capabilities of these groups, the government of Mexico has responded to this crisis with a deliberate strategy to target top organized crime figures for arrest and even extradition. In January 2017, these efforts culminated in the downfall of famed drug trafficker, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, who was extradited to the United States and is currently preparing to stand trial for various related crimes in New York.

One of the unintended consequences of Guzmán's downfall has been an increase in homicides to unprecedented levels. Following Guzmán's removal as the purported head of the Sinaloa Cartel, one of Mexico's most powerful criminal organizations, splinter groups and rival organizations have competed to take over the lucrative drug trafficking routes he formerly controlled. One group that has been behind much of this violence is a relatively new organized crime syndicate known as the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG), an offshoot of the Sinaloa Cartel that has managed to re-brand itself, consolidate splintered criminal networks, and emerge as one of the most powerful drug trafficking organizations in Mexico.

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Based in Guadalajara, the capital of the state of Jalisco, the CJNG has a widespread and growing presence that authorities say spans 21 of Mexico's 31 states, as well as Mexico City, the nation's capital. This policy brief provides an analysis of the conditions that contributed to the CJNG's emergence and rise as an organized crime syndicate. Below, the authors provide a detailed background on the establishment and emergence of the CJNG, its role and rise in the drug trade, its tactics, and recent clashes with the Mexican government and rival organizations.

From a policy perspective, the CJNG offers a timely case study of how organized crime groups adapt following the disruption of leadership structures, and the limits of the so-called "kingpin" strategy to combat organized crime, which has contributed to the splintering, transformation, and diversification of Mexican organized crime groups and a shift in drug trafficking into new product areas, including heroin, methamphetamines, and other synthetic drugs.

THE FORMATION AND EVOLUTION OF THE CJNG

The early origins of the CJNG can be traced back to the municipality of Aguililla, Michoacán, the cradle of drug trafficking activities in Michoacán and the hometown of the current head of the organization, Rubén "Nemesio" Oseguera Cervantes, located in Michoacán's Tierra Caliente region. Once a productive farming town with government-designated communal farms (*ejidos*), Aguililla was devastated by economic hardship and drought in the 1970s and 1980s, causing many of its denizens to turn to illicit drug cultivation.² Among the most successful was a man named Jose Valencia, who allegedly initiated a marijuana and opium poppy cultivation business that supplied other traffickers. These activities were carried on other family members, including Armando "El Maradona" Valencia Cornelio, Luis Valencia Valencia, and Ventura Valencia Valencia.³ The Valencia family was successful in using its

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² Ramírez, Ignacio, "En el centro del narcotráfico en Michoacán," *Proceso*, April 23, 1988.

<http://www.proceso.com.mx/148270/en-el-centro-del-narcotrafico-en-michoacan>

³ Fernández Menéndez, Jorge. "Los Valencia, los Milenio, la Nueva Generación," *Excelsior*, March 13, 2012, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/opinion/2012/03/13/jorge-fernandez-menendez/817937>

avocado growing operations as a front for its illicit activities, and eventually became known as the Milenio Cartel.⁴

Even as the Milenio Cartel expanded into cocaine trafficking, it went relatively unnoticed by U.S. and Mexican authorities until the early 2000s. However, in the 2001, the capture and extradition of business associate and Colombian drug trafficker Gino Brunetti exposed the operations of the Milenio Cartel and the illicit dealings of the Valencia family.⁵ Brunetti's confession and the authorities' subsequent crackdown on the cartel eventually led to the August 2003 arrest of Armando Valencia Cornelio. Thereafter, Luis Valencia Valencia, Ventura Valencia Valencia, and Óscar Nava Valencia took over the leadership of the Milenio organization.⁶ After Valencia Cornelio's arrest, however, a local group known as the Michoacán Family (La Familia Michoacana, LFM), working in collaboration with the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas, began to assert control over drug trafficking operations in Michoacán.⁷

Under pressure from rival organizations and government authorities, the Milenio Cartel relocated to Jalisco

Under pressure from rival organizations and government authorities, the Milenio Cartel relocated to Jalisco, operating under the umbrella of one of the top leaders of the Sinaloa

⁴ According to Mexican journalist Ricardo Ravelo, notable Milenio operatives also included: Jose "El Cochi" Gonzalez Valencia, Erick "El Erick" (or "El 85") Valencia Salazar, Oscar "El Lobo" Nava Valencia, Alfonso "El Poncho" Revueltas, Pedro "La Coya" Rebolledo López, Armando "El Tocayo" Valencia González, Cruz "El Cruzón" Valencia, and Gerardo "Gerardón" Mendoza Chávez. Ravelo, Ricardo. *En Manos del Narco: El nuevo rostro del crimen y su relación con el poder*. Ediciones B., 2016.

⁵ Ravelo, pp. 83-99.

⁶ Fernández Menéndez, Jorge. "Los Valencia, Los Milenio, La Nueva Generacion." March 13, 2012.

<http://www.excelsior.com.mx/opinion/2012/03/13/jorge-fernandez-menendez/817937>;

⁷ Heinle, Kimberly, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, "Citizen Security in Michoacán," Briefing Paper Series, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Justice in Mexico, January 2015, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Citizen%20Security%20in%20Michoacán_1.pdf

Cartel, Ignacio “Nacho” Coronel Villarreal.⁸ Coronel Villarreal had helped build up the Sinaloa organization with Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada, and the Beltrán Leyva family. Although he was also involved in cocaine trafficking, Coronel earned a reputation as the “Ice King” or “King of Crystal” because of his role in trafficking methamphetamine or “crystal meth.”⁹ Indeed, Coronel facilitated the Milenio Cartel’s expansion into the trafficking of synthetic drugs, linking the Milenio Cartel to Zhenli Ye Gon, a Chinese businessman.¹⁰

In the late-2000s, the Milenio organization became embroiled in Sinaloa’s escalating conflicts with other drug trafficking organizations, particularly after “Chapo” Guzmán turned against his former allies in the Juárez Cartel and the Beltrán Leyva Organization in 2008.¹¹ By this point, Oscar Orlando “El Lobo” Nava Valencia and his brother Juan “El

⁸de Maleón, Hector. “CJNG: La Sombra que nadie vio.” *Nexos*, June 1, 2015.

<https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=25113>

⁹ Perez Caballero, Jesus. “Mexico’s Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartels: Competing or Collaborating?” *InsightCrime*, November 10, 2015. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/mexico-sinaloa-jalisco-cartel-competing-or-collaborating>

¹⁰ In 1997, Ye Gon had founded Unimed, a pharmaceutical company that was licensed to import small quantities of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine from China and Hong Kong to Mexico, eventually becoming a major supplier for the illegal manufacture of methamphetamine. Ye Gon became a Mexican citizen in 2002 and was given his citizenship papers personally by President Vicente Fox. Thereafter, Ye Gong also founded two other companies and expanded into domestic production of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine in Mexico, using other pre-cursor chemicals imported from Asia. Mexico banned the import of methamphetamine’s main precursor chemicals in 2005, and that year Mexican authorities accused Ye Gon’s pharmaceutical business of illegally importing greater quantities of pseudoephedrine and ephedrine than allowed. In July 2007, Ye Gon and his wife were arrested by U.S. authorities months after Mexican authorities raided their home in a wealthy residential neighborhood in Mexico City. “Descubren dos empresas más vinculadas a Ye Gon,” *El Siglo de Torreón*, December 25, 2007. <https://www.elsiglodetorreon.com.mx/noticia/320319.descubren-dos-empresas-mas-vinculadas-a-ye-gon.html>; Jorge Carrasco, “Mexico, the DEA, and the Case of Zhenli Ye Gon,” *The Washington Post*, October 29, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/10/28/AR2008102801364.html>; Taylor, Adam, “Alleged Chinese-Mexican Meth Lord Is Causing A Headache For Sheldon Adelson,” *Business Insider*, August 7, 2012, <http://www.businessinsider.com/zhenli-ye-gon-causes-trouble-for-las-vegas-sands-2012-8>

¹¹ Coronel had worked closely with the Beltrán Leyva organization, but arguably had closer ties to Guzmán. The alliance between Guzmán and Coronel was reportedly cemented through family ties. On July 2, 2007, Guzmán, then 50, married Coronel’s alleged niece, Emma Coronel Aispuro, who turned 18 that same day. However, “Nacho” Coronel denied that Coronel Aispuro was his niece. What is known is that Emma Coronel Aispuro, Guzmán’s third wife, is that she is a U.S. citizen born in 1989 in San Francisco, who won the Miss Coffee and Guava beauty contest in her home town in January 2007. She gave birth to twin girls on August 15, 2011 in Los Angeles, who are among the 19 children Guzmán is believed to have fathered from different women. Anabel Hernández, “Murder, torture, drugs: Cartel kingpin's wife says that's not the 'El Chapo' she knows,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 2016. <http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-el->

Tigre" Nava Valencia had emerged as the new leaders in the Milenio organization, and were reportedly responsible for drug shipments through the port of Manzanillo, Colima.¹² Oscar Nava Valencia reportedly had a falling out with Coronel and was later arrested in October 2009, and his brother Juan Nava Valencia was later arrested in May 2010.¹³ Meanwhile, the fact that Coronel was now viewed as a traitor by his former associates in the Beltrán Leyva family, led to the murder of his 16-year-old son, Alejandro, in April 2010.¹⁴ In July 2010, Coronel was himself killed at the age of 56 during a Mexican military raid on his home in the municipality of Zapopan, located near Guadalajara.¹⁵

These losses dealt a significant blow to the Sinaloa Cartel. Coronel had supervised the organization's entire cocaine and synthetic drug operations in Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, and Colima.¹⁶ These operations were at least partially interrupted in the aftermath of Coronel's death. In fact, a record seizure of 200 tons of precursor chemicals was made at the port of Manzanillo, Colima through a collaborative effort among the Tax Administration Service (Servicio de Administración Tributaria, SAT), the Mexican Navy (la Secretaría de Marina Armada de México, SEMAR), and the federal Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR).¹⁷

[chapo-wife-20160221-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-chapo-wife-20160221-story.html); Wilkinson, Tracy and Ken Ellingwood, "Wife of Fugitive Mexican Drug Lord Gives Birth in L.A. County," *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 2011. <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-mexico-twins-20110927-story.html>

¹² Oscar and Juan Nava Valencia are believed to be the nephews of Armando Valencia Cornelio. "Detención de óscar Orlando Nava Valencia (a) 'EL LOBO', líder de la Organización delictiva 'LOS VALENCIA'," *Press Release*, <https://www.gob.mx/sedena/prensa/detencion-de-oscar-orlando-nava-valencia-a-el-lobo-lider-de-la-organizacion-delictiva-los-valencia>

¹³ Oscar Nava Valencia was captured in the municipality of Tlajomulco following a fire fight with Mexican Army troops. "Extraditan a líder del cártel de Los Valencia a EU," *El Informador*, <https://www.informador.mx/Jalisco/Extraditan-a-lider-del-cartel-de-Los-Valencia-a-EU-20110130-0206.html>

¹⁴ The grieving Coronel reportedly responded by kidnapping the wife of Hector "El H" Beltrán Leyva. However, Coronel released her unharmed with a message intended to instill civility: "for us family is sacred." "Un hombre de negocios," *Noroeste* July 30, 2010. <http://www.noroeste.com.mx/publicaciones/view/un-hombre-de-negocios-264077>

¹⁵ Soldiers also captured Coronel's right-hand man Hiram Francisco Quiñones Gastélum, the only one of Coronel's alleged associates to survive the operation. The operation involved searches in at least six homes in the upscale Colinas de San Javier community in Zapopan, and was executed by 100 Mexican army troops with intelligence reportedly obtained entirely by Mexican agencies. One soldier was killed and another wounded by shots fired against them during the raid.

¹⁶ Ellingwood, Ken. "http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jul/31/world/la-fg-mexico-druglord-20100731

¹⁷ In the 18 shipping containers seized there were nearly 970 metal drums containing chemicals used to create drugs such crack cocaine or methamphetamine, including phenylethyl acetate, phenylacetic acid, and phenylethyl alcohol. The containers were originally shipped from Korea and China under fake permits that

Coronel's death was also destabilizing because he had reportedly been adept at striking deals with rival organizations to prevent violence in Mexico's Pacific coastal region.¹⁸ According to the Mexican Armed Forces, after his death, Coronel was succeeded by his nephew, Martín Beltrán Coronel, who worked in collaboration with José Ángel "El Changel" Carrasco Coronel, and with the approval of "Chapo" Guzmán.¹⁹ Martín had reportedly worked directly under Coronel since 2005, and had intimate knowledge of his Pacific coast operations.²⁰ However, Martín was arrested by the Mexican armed forces in May 2011.²¹ With the natural lines of succession undermined, internal infighting in the Milenio Cartel further debilitated the Coronel organization.

In the next several months, rival factions of the Milenio Cartel fought for territorial control of illicit drug trafficking operations in the Pacific coastal states of Jalisco, Nayarit, and Colima. The Milenio Cartel faction reportedly headed by Erick "El 85" Valencia Salazar became the basis for the CJNG. After Coronel's death, Valencia Salazar, the younger brother of Luis and Ventura Valencia, was backed by Nemesio Oseguera Ramos, the former head of security for Oscar Nava Valencia. The faction led by Valencia Salazar was dubbed "Los Torcidos" ("The Twisted Ones" or "The Traitors") due to a rumor that "El 85" had sold out Nava

...the Milenio Cartel faction reportedly headed by Erick "El 85" Valencia Salazar and became the basis for the CJNG.

gave false information about their contents. García, Gustavo Castillo. "Histórico decomiso de precursores." *La Jornada*. August. 5, 2010.

¹⁸ Méndez, Alfredo. "Prevén expertos escalada de violencia en zonas de Jalisco, Colima y Nayarit," *La Jornada* July 30, 2010; Castillo García, Gustavo. "Sacudida a la estructura del cártel de Sinaloa," *La Jornada* July 31, 2010.

¹⁹ Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, "El ejército mexicano detiene a Martín Beltrán Coronel alias "El Águila", sucesor de Ignacio Coronel Villarreal alias 'Nacho Coronel'," SEDENA Press Release, May 13, 2011.

²⁰ Another one of Nacho's nephews, Mario Carrasco Coronel, was also considered a potential successor. However, he was killed one day after his uncle when he confronted soldiers attempting to detain him in Guadalajara, Jalisco. Gómez, Francisco. Gustavo Castillo García, "Mata el Ejército al sobrino y posible sucesor de Nacho Coronel," *La Jornada*, July 31, 2010.

<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2010/07/31/politica/005n1pol>; "Sobrino de 'Nacho Coronel', su posible sucesor: DEA y PGR." *El Universal*. August 14, 2010,

<http://www.elsiglodedurango.com.mx/noticia/279714.sobrino-de-coronel-posible-sucesor-dea.html>

²¹ "Mexican army catches drug boss linked to Guzman," *Reuters*, May 13, 2011,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-drugs-kingpin/mexican-army-catches-drug-boss-linked-to-guzman-idUSTRE74C4IC20110513>

Valencia to the authorities. The opposing faction, known as “La Resistencia” (The Resistance), was headed by Ramiro “El Molca” Pozos González, who backed Nava Valencia lieutenant Elpidio “El Pilo” Mojarro Ramírez as the organization’s next leader. As the Valencia Salazar-Oseguera faction appeared to gain the advantage and the blessing of the Sinaloa Cartel, La Resistencia sought the support of La Familia Michoacana and later, Sinaloa’s enemies, the Zetas.²²

La Resistencia’s alliance with the Zetas led to a visible public warning deep inside Zeta territory in the state of Veracruz in September 2011.²³ In that incident, an armed group staged a dramatic scene in the resort city of Boca del Rio, just south of the port of Veracruz, abandoning two white trucks filled with 35 bodies on a busy roadway, blocking afternoon rush hour traffic.²⁴ Along with the bodies, the gunmen posted a message directed to the Zetas: “This will happen to all those Zetas who remain in Veracruz. The plaza now has a new owner: G.N.”²⁵

Security experts interpreted the “G.N.” reference as an allusion to the “New People (Gente Nueva) or “Los Chapos.”²⁶ Gente Nueva was an enforcer group founded by Noel “El Flaco” Salgueiro Nevárez in Veracruz in 2007 at the behest of “Chapo” Guzmán to combat rival organizations, particularly in Chihuahua.²⁷ While it is possible that Gente Nueva may have

²² De Maleón, Hector. “CJNG: La Sombra que nadie vio.” June 1, 2015. <https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=25113>

²³ “Zeta Killers say they target Mexican drug cartel.” *CNN*. September 27, 2011. <http://www.cnn.com/2011/09/27/world/americas/mexico-video/index.html>

²⁴ The message also included a reference to one of the victims: “Here lies ‘El Ferras’ and his royal court.” “El Ferras” was the nickname of Felipe Ferra Gomez, who had been featured in a 2008 online video in which he described murdering a fellow former-inmate who attacked him and sent a video message to a TV news broadcaster. Geoffrey Ramsey, “35 Dead ‘Zetas’ Dumped on Busy Street in Veracruz, Mexico,” *InsightCrime*, September 21, 2011. <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/35-dead-zetas-dumped-on-busy-street-in-veracruz/>

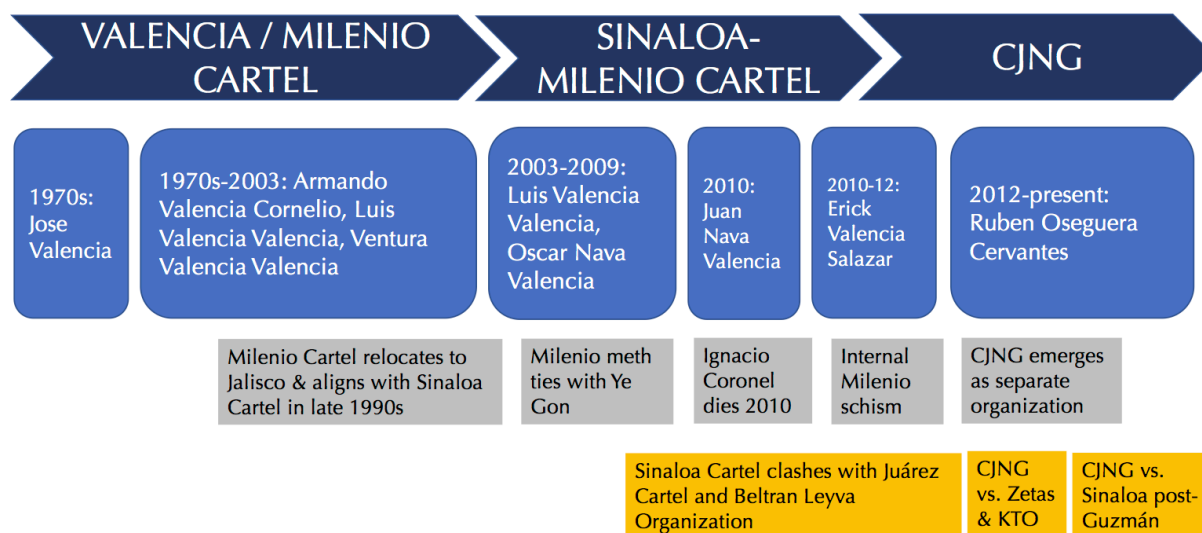
²⁵ “Mexico arrests senior Sinaloa drugs cartel suspect,” *BBC*, October 6, 2011. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-15191299>

²⁶ Geoffrey Ramsey, “35 Dead ‘Zetas’ Dumped on Busy Street in Veracruz, Mexico,” *InsightCrime.org*, September 21, 2011. <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/35-dead-zetas-dumped-on-busy-street-in-veracruz/>

²⁷ According to the Mexican government, the Gente Nueva group was initially formed in the Gulf coast state of Veracruz and later extended to support Sinaloa’s operations in Guerrero, Durango, Sinaloa, Sonora, and Chihuahua, and his capture demonstrated that the government “does not distinguish or privilege any criminal group.” In October 2011, Salgueiro Nevárez was arrested in Culiacán, Sinaloa. “Los *chapos* califican de terroristas a los Beltrán,” *Milenio*, December 10, 2009, <http://web.archive.org/web/20100720021024/http://impreso.milenio.com/node/8686650>; “La autoridades

been involved in the scheme to dump the 35 bodies, an online video surfaced days later featuring a group of five men who claimed responsibility for the murders under another name: “The Zeta Killers” (Mata Zetas).²⁸ While the men purported to be a vigilante organization, it later became evident that they were actually associated with the Valencia Salazar-Oseguera group, which had rebranded itself as the CJNG and was increasing its visibility and reach.²⁹ The “Mata Zetas” episode demonstrated the CJNG’s penchant for public communication and manipulation through online videos and its willingness to engage in false flag operations to obscure its activities.³⁰

Figure 1: Evolution of the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG)



detienen a fundadores de ‘La Familia’ y ‘Gente Nueva,’” *Expansión*, October 5, 2011, <https://expansion.mx/nacional/2011/10/05/el-ejercito-detiene-al-fundador-de-gente-nueva-y-operador-de-el-chapo>; SEDENA Press Release, “SEDENA detiene a Noel Salgueiro Nevarez “El Flaco Salgueiro,” Secretaría Nacional de Defensa, <https://www.gob.mx/sedena/prensa/sedena-detiene-a-noel-salgueiro-nevarez-el-flaco-salgueiro>; Doris Gómora y Marcos Muedano, “Cae presunto fundador de la agrupación Gente Nueva,” *El Universal*, October 6, 2011, <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/189605.html>; Capturan al fundador de ‘Gente Nueva,’” *Proceso*, October 5, 2011. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/283264/capturan-al-fundador-de-e2-80-9cgente-nueva-e2-80-9d>; Erin Shea, “Mapping Sinaloa Cartel Operatives in Juarez Battleground,” *InsightCrime*, May 25, 2012.

²⁸ Ravelo, Ricardo. (2016) “En Manos del Narco: El nuevo rostro del crimen y su relación con el poder.” Ediciones B. Pp. 149

²⁹ De Maleón, Hector. “CJNG: La Sombra que nadie vio.” June 1, 2015. <https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=25113>

³⁰ BBC Mundo. “Los Mata Zetas, el nuevo cartel de México.” *El Monstrador*. April 10, 2015.

<http://www.elmostrador.cl/noticias/mundo/2015/04/10/los-mata-zetas-el-nuevo-cartel-de-mexico/>

As the CJNG continued to battle “La Resistencia” back on their home turf, the organization suffered a serious blow soon after the Veracruz incident. In March 2012, when Valencia Salazar and two associates, Otoniel “Tony Montana” Mendoza and José Luis Salazar Gutierrez, were captured by the Mexican army.³¹

From March 2012, the man who stepped into the leadership of the CJNG was Rubén “Nemesio” Oseguera Cervantes. Oseguera grew up in the cradle of drug-trafficking in Michoacán and the Valencia family’s city of origin (see Textbox: Ruben Oseguera Cervantes). Known widely as “El Mencho,” Oseguera had a criminal record in the United States and a long history working within the Milenio Cartel.

In recent years, Oseguera had served as the head of security for Oscar Nava Valencia and was closely tied to Valencia Salazar, with whom he worked to build up CJNG after the fall of Coronel and the breakup of the Milenio Cartel. Following Valencia’s capture, Oseguera sustained the CJNG with the assistance of a longtime crony and former-Milenio associate named Abigael “El Cuini” González

RUBEN OSEGUERA CERVANTES: Born on July 1966, Rubén “Nemesio” Oseguera Cervantes was born in Naranjo de Chila, a small village located within the municipality of Aguililla, Michoacán, also the home town of the Valencia family. He is known by various aliases, including Rubén Ávila, José López Prieto, Roberto Salgado, Carlos Hernandez Mendoza, and others. His nickname, “El Mencho,” is short for Nemesio, the name he began to use in honor of his godfather. As a young boy, Oseguera, reportedly dropped out of school at an early age and worked for local avocado growers. In the 1980s he developed ties with the Valencia family and migrated into California without papers. In 1986, Oseguera was arrested for possession of stolen property in San Francisco. In 1994, at the age of 25, Oseguera was convicted in San Francisco with a five-year sentence for conspiracy to distribute heroin and was deported after serving three years. Back in Mexico, Oseguera reportedly worked as a police officer in the cities of Cabo Corrientes and Tomatlán, Jalisco, and later began working for the Valencia family. Oseguera has a reputation as a ruthless killer and a shrewd businessman who does not drink or cheat on his wife, Rosa Linda González Valencia, the sister of his business associate, Abigael González Valencia, head of “Los Cuinis.” Oseguera is said to be a motorcycle enthusiast, and is such a fan of cock fighting that he is called “The Cockfighter” (El Gallero).

SOURCES:

Eells, Josh. “The Brutal Rise of El Mencho,” *Rolling Stone*. July 11, 2017.
Muedano, Marcos. “El Mencho: Principal objetivo de las fuerzas federales.” *El Universal*. May 4, 2015.
Ravelo, Ricardo. *En manos del narco: El nuevo rostro del crimen y su relación con el poder*. Ediciones B., 2016.

³¹CNNMéxico. “La SEDENA Presenta al Presunto Líder del Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación.” *Expansion*, March 12, 2012. <http://expansion.mx/nacional/2012/03/12/la-sedena-presenta-al-presunto-lider-del-cartel-jalisco-nueva-generacion>

Valencia, who now headed a parallel organization known as “Los Cuinis.”³² Oseguera and González Valencia had been arrested together in the 1990s, and Oseguera later married one of González Valencia’s sisters, Rosa Linda. In addition to financing- from its investments in real estate and commercial businesses across the region- Los Cuinis also offered important methamphetamine market connections in Europe and Southeast Asia, including Australia, facilitating the rapid expansion of the CJNG.³³

The growing power and prominence of the CJNG and Los Cuinis led the U.S. Department of Treasury to designate both organizations as “Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers” under the Kingpin Act in April 2015, with special mention of the close personal relationship between Oseguera and González Valencia.³⁴ OFAC applied heavy sanctions against businesses affiliated with either cartel, including four entities (a sushi company, a bakery and restaurant) and three individuals (Alfonso Corona Romero, Edgar Alfonso Corona Robles, and Salime Abouzaid El Bayeh) in September 2017 in the state of Jalisco.³⁵

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Prior to its Kingpin designation in 2015, the CJNG was not a well-known criminal organization and had not been mentioned by the DEA in the annual National Drug Threat Assessment Summary. However, in its October 2015 assessment, the DEA stated that the CJNG: “is quickly becoming one of the most powerful TCOs in Mexico and in some cases rivals Sinaloa Cartel trafficking operations in Asia, Europe and Oceania. The CJNG by virtue of its growing power continues to expand its trafficking operations to the United States, with

³² Balcárcel, Pep. “Los Cuinis: The Wealthiest Narcos You Never Heard Of.” *PANAM Post*, May 7, 2015. <https://panampost.com/pep-balcarcel/2015/05/07/los-cuinis-the-wealthiest-narcos-you-never-heard-of/>

³³ ‘El Mencho,’ el deportado que se convirtió en el narco mas sanguinario.” Univision. <http://www.univision.com/los-angeles/kmex/noticias/narcotrafico/el-mencho-el-deportado-que-se-convirtio-en-el-narco-mas-sanguinario>

³⁴ The Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act imposes additional sanctions, including civil and criminal penalties, on entities and individuals that are considered “Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers.” “Treasury Sanctions Two Major Mexican Drug Organizations and Two of Their Leaders.” Department of the Treasury Press Center. April 8, 2015. <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl10020.aspx>

³⁵ “Treasury Sanctions Mexican Entities and Individuals Linked to CJNG and the Los Cuinis Drug Trafficking Organization.” U.S. Department of the Treasury. September 14, 2017. <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/sm0159.aspx>

law enforcement increasingly reporting CJNG members and associates as sources of supply for drugs in the United States.”³⁶

Today, the CJNG is widely recognized as a rapidly growing organization. The Mexican government now believes that the CJNG has operations in Mexico City and 21 states, according to InsightCrime.³⁷ The CJNG is especially dominant in the Pacific states due to the west-coast’s strategic role in trafficking and manufacturing South American narcotics and synthetic drug components to Southeast Asia, Oceania and North America.³⁸ According to the 2017 National Drug Threat Assessment, the CJNG is also one of the fastest growing threats within the United States: while there were 26 open investigations linked to the CJNG in 2016, this number rose to 46 open investigations within a year.³⁹ Within the United States, the DEA reports that CJNG maintains drug distribution hubs in Los Angeles, San Jose, New York, and Atlanta, as well as a presence in other U.S. cities, including: Charleston (SC), Columbia (SC), Roanoke (VA), San Diego (CA), El Paso (TX), San Antonio (TX) and Seattle (WA).⁴⁰

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THE CJNG AND THE RESURGENCE OF DRUG VIOLENCE IN MEXICO

The CJNG’s rapid expansion across Mexico has been accompanied by high levels of violence. Even after defeating its rival Milenio organization faction, La Resistencia, the CJNG continued to target the former group’s allies, the Zetas.⁴¹ The CJNG also specifically

³⁶ 2015 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary. Drug Enforcement Administration. October 1, 2015.

<https://www.dea.gov/docs/2015%20NDTA%20Report.pdf>

³⁷ “Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG),” *InsightCrime*, <https://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/jalisco-cartel-new-generation/>

³⁸ De Mauleon, Hector. “CJNG: el gran ganador de la Guerra contra el narco.” *El Universal*. June 03, 2017. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/entrada-de-opinion/columna/hector-de-mauleon/nacion/2017/03/6/cjng-el-gran-ganador-de-la-guerra>

³⁹ 2017 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary. Drug Enforcement Administration. October 2017. https://www.dea.gov/docs/DIR-040-17_2017-NDTA.pdf

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Specifically, the CJNG is believe to operate in Aguascalientes, Baja California Sur, Baja California, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Nuevo León, Puebla, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Jalisco, Colima, México, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Morelos, Nayarit, Guerrero, and Veracruz). “Jalisco Cartel- New

targeted the Knights Templar Organization (Los Caballeros Templarios, KTO) and is believed to have assassinated government officials supporting the KTO.

Specifically, alleged CJNG assassinations include the March 2013 assassination of José de Jesús Gallegos Alvarez, a wealthy real estate developer and newly appointed secretary of tourism in Jalisco who was gunned down in a government-issued SUV. The hit was reportedly ordered due to Oseguera's suspicions that Gallegos was laundering money for the Knights Templar. Also, as noted by the late-George Grayson, a professor at the College of William and Mary, tourism secretaries are often involved in corrupt negotiations, which may have instigated Gallegos' murder.⁴²

The CJNG is also alleged to have financed and infiltrated self-defense groups working to combat the Knights Templar.⁴³ In addition, the CJNG initially appeared to portray itself as a self-defense force, fighting Los Zetas and the Knights Templar on behalf of Mexico, even releasing propaganda videos to advocate their cause.⁴⁴ In one widely-circulated video (published in 2013), CJNG operatives, armed and dressed in black, condemn the Knights Templar for extortion and violence, promising retaliation on behalf of society.⁴⁵ A portion of

Generation (CJNG)" April 17, 2017. Insight Crime. <http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/jalisco-cartel-new-generation>

⁴² According to authorities, Jonathan García García, one of the suspects arrested for the murder, confessed that the tourism minister's assassination was ordered by Oseguera because Gallegos was working with the KTO and would reduce the CJNG's ability to operate in Michoacán. "Jesús Gallegos Álvarez 'lavaba dinero' para 'Los Caballeros Templarios,'" *Milenio*, February 6, 2014, http://www.milenio.com/policia/Jesus-Gallegos-Alvarez-Caballeros-Templarios_0_310169018.html; Olsen, Lise, "Slain Mexican official had Houston ties," *Houston Chronicle*, April 30, 2013. <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Slain-Mexican-official-had-Houston-ties-4477485.php?t=245a81589a2b1a0ac9>; Tinoco, Miguel García. "CJNG busca recuperar zonas de los 'templarios'. *Excelsior*. December 4, 2015. <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2015/04/12/1018309>

⁴³ In March of 2013, Mexican military forces arrested about 30 members of a vigilante organization in the Buenavista Tomatlán municipality of Michoacán. The authorities claimed that the organization was armed by the CJNG. However, the arrested vigilantes claimed that their weapons had been appropriated from the Knights Templar, the target of the vigilante organization. Cawley, Marguerite. "Mexican Authorities Accuse Vigilantes of Drug Cartel Ties," *Insight Crime*. March 08, 2013. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/mexican-authorities-accuse-vigilantes-drug-cartel-ties>

⁴⁴ Eells, Josh. "The Brutal Rise of El Mencho," *Rolling Stone*. July 11, 2017. <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/the-brutal-rise-of-el-mencho-w491405>

⁴⁵ Grillonautas2. "Guerreros del Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación vs Los Caballeros Templarios." YouTube Video, May 30, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gN8_VdenzV0

the video's transcript reads, "We are not involved in kidnapping or extortion. For this reason and with all due respect, Mr. President Enrique Peña Nieto and governor of Guerrero, Ángel Aguirre Rivero, we ask to be left alone to do our work."⁴⁶

The CJNG's plea for peace belied several months of violent conflict and confrontations with Mexican authorities, which escalated after the early March 2012 capture of Erick Valencia Salazar. Over the following week, the CJNG had seized and set fire to buses, creating "narcobloqueos" (blockades) on various roadways across Jalisco.⁴⁷ Later that year, in August of 2012, Mexican Federal Police conducted an operation against a CJNG stronghold in the municipality of Tonaya in the state of Jalisco. The raid led to the death of six CJNG operatives and the seizure of a CJNG stash of heavy weaponry and ammunitions. The cartel retaliated with over 25 blockades across Jalisco, which according to the Public Security Secretariat (Secretaría de Seguridad Pública, SSP) was intended to cripple the movements of the Mexican authorities and prevent further

CJNG'S VIOLENT TACTICS: A key factor behind CJNG's rise is its use of extreme violence and military tactics, including shooting down a Mexican army helicopter. The Center of Investigation and National Security (Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional, CISEN) has gone so far as to suggest that the CJNG has borrowed tactics from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), such as improvised explosive devices (IED) or "potato bombs" (bombas papas). The CJNG is also blamed for large scale killings and mass graves, including a mass grave with 66 bodies found near La Barca, Jalisco in 2013 and directly confronted Mexican military forces in a series of incidents in 2015. The CJNG is also believed to be responsible for serious atrocities, including the rape and murder of a rival's alleged 10-year-old daughter in 2013, and the filmed murder of a man and his young son, killed by detonating explosives strapped to their bodies.

SOURCES:

Becerril, Andres. "Narcos Copian bombas de FARC; CISEN alerta de explosivos tipo 'papa'. Excelsior. July 21, 2017
Eells, Josh. "The Brutal Rise of El Mencho" Rolling Stone. July 11, 2017.

⁴⁶ Authors' translation of the original statement: "Nosotros no nos dedicamos al secuestro ni a la extorsión. Es por esto que usted, señor presidente Enrique Peña Nieto y el Gobernador de Guerrero, Ángel Aguirre Rivero, con todo respecto les pedimos que nos dejen hacer nuestro trabajo" The "CJNG sube video en el que aparecen decenas de hombres armados reiterando 'Guerra contra los Caballeros Templarios.'" *Sin Embargo*. May 31, 2013. <http://www.sinembargo.mx/31-05-2013/638922>

⁴⁷ Three individuals were confirmed dead because of the violence, including a seven-year old girl, a driver, and a CJNG affiliate reported *El Economista*. Corocoran, Patrick. "How Arrest of Gang Leader Sparked Chaos in Guadalajara." *Insight Crime*. March 13, 2012. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/how-arrest-of-gang-leader-sparked-chaos-in-guadalajara>. Redacción. "Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación pide disculpas por narcobloqueos," *El Economista*, March 14, 2012. <https://www.economista.com.mx/politica/El-cartel-Jalisco-Nueva-Generacion-rapta-al-hijo-de-El-Chapo-Guzman-20160816-0010.html>

seizures.⁴⁸ In the months after the above-mentioned video, Mexican officials continued to target the cartel with the July 2013 arrest of CJNG operatives, Victor Hugo Delgado Renteria “El Tornado” and Domingo Medina Mogel.⁴⁹

In early 2015, the government’s conflict with CJNG escalated significantly. On March 19, 2015, CJNG launched an ambush on federal police officers in Ocotlán, Jalisco. The assault killed five officers and wounded eight other officers. Although the attackers were unidentified, they were assumed to be members of the CJNG.⁵⁰ Several days later, the CJNG attempted to assassinate Alejandro Solorio, commissioner of public security in Jalisco, but was ultimately unsuccessful.⁵¹

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The subsequent shootout led to the death of Heriberto “El Gringo” Acevedo Cardenas, a local CJNG leader. On April 6, the CJNG laid ambush to a convoy of police driving to Guadalajara, killing 15 officers in the deadliest attack against Mexican law enforcement since 2010.⁵² Commissioner Solorio announced that the attack was cartel retribution for the death of “El Gringo.”⁵³ In all, at least 21 killings of police officers were attributed to the CJNG over the 20-day period between March 19 and April 7, 2015.⁵⁴

Mexican federal forces responded in turn with Operation Jalisco in a surprise effort to capture Oseguera on May 1, 2015 that was not reported in advance to Jalisco governor Aristóteles Sandoval Díaz due concerns about criminal infiltration in the state security

⁴⁸ “Guadalajara hit by ‘narco-blockades’ following federal police operations.” August 27, 2012.

<https://thetequilafiles.com/2012/08/27/guadalajara-hit-by-narco-blockades-following-federal-police-operation/>
⁴⁹ O Neill McClesky, Claire. “New Generation Jalisco Cartel Leader Captures in Mexico.” Insight Crime. July 22, 2013. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/new-generation-jalisco-cartel-leader-captured-in-guadalajara>

⁵⁰ Bunker, Robert. “Mexican Cartel Tactical Note #24.” Small Wars Journal. May 20, 2015. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/mexican-cartel-tactical-note-24>

⁵¹ Wilkinson, Tracy. “Assailants block Mexican police convoy, kill 15 officers in ambush.” Los Angeles Times. April 7, 2015. <http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-mexico-police-killed-20150407-story.html>

⁵² Sullivan, John P. and Robert Bunker. “Mexican Cartel Tactical Note #25: Ambush Kills 15; Injures 5 Police in Jalisco.” Small Wars Journal. July 16, 2015. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/mexican-cartel-tactical-note-25-ambush-kills-15-injures-5-police-in-jalisco>

⁵³ Gagne, David. “Bloody Attack on Police in Mexico Raises Jalisco Cartel’s Profile.” Insight Crime. April 8, 2015. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/bloody-attack-police-mexico-raises-jalisco-cartel-profile>

⁵⁴ “Attacks by New Generation Cartel in Jalisco,” Justice in Mexico, May 4, 2015. <https://justiceinmexico.org/attacks-in-jalisco/>

apparatus.⁵⁵ The operation was a coordinated effort between military forces, Federal police, members of the PRG and CISEN, specifically targeting the CJNG.⁵⁶ However, on the first day of the operation, the CJNG shot down a military helicopter using a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG), killing five soldiers.⁵⁷ Following the unprecedented helicopter attack, security forces seized armored vehicles and other weaponry from the CJNG, as well as uniforms reading “CJNG High Command Special Forces.”⁵⁸ Several weeks later, however, Mexican authorities turned their attention to the escape of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán in July 2015, which had important implications for the next phase of the CJNG’s development.⁵⁹

THE FALL OF CHAPO GUZMAN AND THE RISE OF THE CJNG

In July 2016, one year after his escape, Mexican federal forces again arrested Joaquín Guzmán, a development that would dramatically reshape the landscape of Mexican organized crime. The fragmentation of the Sinaloa Cartel after Guzman’s arrest provided to be a major factor in the rise of the CJNG. Guzmán was believed to have continued to oversee the Sinaloa Cartel’s organization even during his imprisonment in 2014, his escape in 2015, and the manhunt that led to his eventual arrest. However, following Guzman’s recapture and eventual extradition in January 2017, the Sinaloa Cartel fragmented into three separate entities vying for ultimate leadership of the cartel, including the sons of Joaquin Guzman (Iván Archivaldo and Alfredo Guzmán Salazar), a group called “Los Dámaso” (led by Dámaso “El Licenciado” Lopez Nuñez and his son, Dámaso “El Mini Lic” López Serrano), and the

The fragmentation of the Sinaloa Cartel after Guzman’s arrest provided to be a major factor in the rise of the CJNG.

⁵⁵ “Infiltración del narco en Jalisco,” *El Universal*, May 2, 2015. <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion-mexico/2015/bajo-reserva-expres-infiltracion-del-narco-en-jalisco-1096969.html>

⁵⁶ Lohmuller, Michael. “Operation Jalisco in Mexico: New General, Same Police.” *Insight Crime*. May 06, 2015. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/mexico-selects-army-general-to-lead-operation-jalisco>

⁵⁷ Gage, David. “Challenging the State a poor strategy for Mexico’s Jalisco Cartel.” *Insight Crime*. May 4, 2015. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/challenging-state-a-poor-strategy-for-mexico-jalisco-cartel>

⁵⁸ Philipp, Joshua. “Mexico Police Unprepared for New Military Tactics From Cartels.” *The Epoch Times*. May 6, 2016. https://www.theepochtimes.com/mexican-drug-war-reaches-new-level-as-cartels-turn-to-military-style-attacks_1348151.html

⁵⁹ Eells, Josh. “The Brutal Rise of El Mencho” *Rolling Stone*. July 11, 2017. <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/the-brutal-rise-of-el-mencho-w491405>

brother of Joaquin Guzman (Aureliano “El Guano” Guzmán).⁶⁰ Considered to be the natural inheritors of his business operations, Guzmán’s sons were reportedly supported by Ismael Zambada García “El Mayo”, one of Sinaloa’s founding leaders. However, after Guzmán’s extradition, their leadership was challenged by their uncle and the Dámaso faction.⁶¹

Los Dámaso made an unsuccessful attack on Guzmán’s sons and Zambada in February 2017.⁶² In May 2017, three months after the attack, the leader of Los Dámaso (Lopez Nuñez) was arrested, while his son turned himself in to U.S. Customs and Border Protection in Calexico on July 27, 2017.⁶³ Prior to these events, Los Dámaso had worked in concert with the CJNG in a counter-Sinaloa alliance. Security specialists postulated that with the arrest and surrender of their two main leaders, the remaining members of Los Dámaso—sometimes referred to as Special Forces of Los Damaso (Fuerzas Especiales de Damaso, FED) would become incorporated into the CJNG.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ García, Dennis A. “Guerra Interna desata debacle del Cártel de Sinaloa.” *El Universal*. March 05, 2017. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/seguridad/2017/05/3/guerra-interna-desata-debacle-del-cartel-de-sinaloa>; “El enfrentamiento en el Cartel de Sinaloa, dividido en 3 grupos de poder.” *El País*. May 3, 2017. <http://www.elpais.com.uy/mundo/enfrentamiento-cartel-sinaloa-dividido-grupos.html>

⁶¹ Dámaso Lopez Nuñez worked as a close associate to Joaquin Guzmán since helping him escape from Puente Grande prison in 2001, where Lopez had served as a security deputy director, and also reportedly oversaw Guzmán’s later escape from Altiplano prison in 2015. Lopez Nuñez and Guzmán were so close that the latter served as godfather to López Serrano. “Perfil: Damaso López, ‘El Licenciado’ que heredó el cártel de ‘El Chapo,’” *El Universal*. May 2, 2017. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/seguridad/2017/05/2/perfil-damaso-lopez-el-licenciado-que-heredo-el-cartel-de-el#imagen-1>

⁶² “Hijos de ‘El Chapo’ acusan emboscada del ‘Licenciado’, brazo derecho de su padre.” *El Universal*. September 2, 2017. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/seguridad/2017/02/9/hijos-de-el-chapo-acusan-emboscada-del-licenciado-brazo-derecho>

⁶³ Winkley, Lyndsay. “Godson of ‘El Chapo’ indicted on drug charges after surrender.” *San Diego Union Tribune*. August 7, 2017. <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/public-safety/sd-me-lopez-serrano-charges-20170807-story.html>

⁶⁴ “CJNG va por el control de todo el territorio nacional.” *Noreste*. August 9, 2017. <http://www.noreste.net/noticia/cjng-va-por-el-control-de-todo-el-territorio-nacional/>

Although it is not clear exactly when or why the CJNG broke away from the Sinaloa Cartel, the two groups have been at odds recently. Mexican columnist Héctor de Mauleón asserts that signs of a schism first became apparent in Colima in September 2015, where violence rose dramatically over the next several months. Reportedly, Sinaloa leader Ismael Zambada ordered a cartel operative in Manzanillo named Jorge Raul “El Comandante R-18” Rosales, or “El R-18,” to “clean up” criminal operations in the port city by driving out members of the CJNG.⁶⁵ Even after “El R-18” was arrested in August 2016, continued fighting between CJNG and Rosales’s successor César Rafael “Comandante Fierro” Vázquez Pérez contributed to a dramatic increase in violence in the state of Colima in the summer months of 2017.⁶⁶ Vázquez Pérez was captured in September 2017, which was followed a renewed surge in homicides in the remaining months of the year.⁶⁷

Although it is not clear exactly when or why the CJNG broke away from the Sinaloa Cartel, the two groups have been at odds recently.

Building further enmity between the CJNG and Sinaloa, Iván and Jesús Alfredo Guzman, the youngest sons of “El Chapo” Guzmán were kidnapped when they ventured into CJNG’s Jalisco turf in August 2016.⁶⁸ According to one account, Oseguera had ordered Ivan and

⁶⁵ According to de Mauleón, El R-18 supposedly met with a La Familia Michoacana operative named Gerardo “El Flaco” Mendoza, and the two agreed to drive out members of the CJNG, as well as extortionists, kidnapers, and thieves operating in the area. El R-18 reportedly organized an attack on Oseguera that killed 20 CJNG operatives. The next day, Mendoza reportedly ordered an assassination attempt on the state’s governor, Fernando Moreno Peña, who survived. In February 2016, a group calling itself the “true Sinaloans” (*los verdaderos Sinaloa*) alleged that El R-18 was an imposter who did not represent the Sinaloa Cartel. See: de Mauleón, Héctor “La guerra entre ‘El Chapo’ y ‘El Mencho,’” *El Universal*, August 18, 2016.

<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/entrada-de-opinion/columna/hector-de-mauleon/nacion/2016/08/18/la-guerra-entre-el-chapo-y-el-mencho>

⁶⁶ Reportedly, Vázquez Pérez was a former-Walmart employee turned cocaine dealer who ran afoul of CJNG operatives by selling drugs in their territory. In a CJNG attack that killed his brother, a .45 caliber bullet tore into Vázquez Pérez’s arm, earning him a metal bone splint and the nickname “Commander Iron” (Comandante Hierro). de Mauleón, Héctor, “El ‘Comandante Fierro’ y la Colima truculenta,” *El Universal*, October 9, 2017. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/columna/hector-de-mauleon/nacion/el-comandante-fierro-y-la-colima-truculenta>

⁶⁷ Dávila, Patricia, “Capturan a “El Comandante Fierro”, operador de Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada,” *Proceso*, September 27, 2017. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/505280/capturan-a-comandante-fierro-operador-ismael-mayo-zambada>

⁶⁸ Others reportedly kidnapped with Jesús Alfredo Guzmán were three men identified as Juan Daniel Calva Tapia, Josias Nahujali Rabago Borbolla, and Víctor Galvan Ureña. Emanuella Grinberg and Rafael Romo,

Jesús Alfredo's kidnapping with the intention of killing them, but both were released in exchange for \$2 million.⁶⁹ Mexican security expert Alejandro Hope posited that Oseguera only returned Guzmán's sons due to a potential threat by Sinaloa against his own son, Rubén "El Menchito" Oseguera González, who was in jail in Miahuatlán, Oaxaca at the time.⁷⁰ Yet another possibility, offered by security analyst Eduardo Guerrero, is that the kidnapping was intended to send a message to "El Chapo" Guzmán to prevent him from disclosing sensitive information to authorities after his capture.⁷¹

...part of the CJNG's success lies in its strategic alliances with regionally-based

Amid these violent conflicts with the Sinaloa Cartel and other enemies, part of the CJNG's success lies in its strategic alliances with regionally-based groups. For example, in Mexico's northwest region, CJNG allegedly developed ties to former Sinaloa affiliates and remnants of the Arellano Felix organization (including the groups known as *El Chan*, *El Jorquera*, and *El Kieto*), in an effort to assert itself against the Sinaloa Cartel in Baja California.⁷² At the same time, the CJNG has

"Official: Son of 'El Chapo' Has Been Kidnapped," *CNN*, August 17, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/16/americas/el-chapo-son-kidnapped-official-says/>; "Con secuestro de hijo de 'El Chapo', el CJNG busca ganar territorio: Especialista," *Excelsior*, August 19, 2016, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2016/08/19/1112077>

⁶⁹ Eells, Josh. "The Brutal Rise of El Mencho" *Rolling Stone*. July 11, 2017. <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/the-brutal-rise-of-el-mencho-w491405>

⁷⁰ Oseguera González is a U.S. citizen who was born in California. There are several different versions of his multiple arrests and releases by Mexican authorities. He was arrested by Mexican authorities in January 2014, released by court order due to insufficient evidence in October that same year. He was arrested again in December 2014, and sent to the Occidente maximum prison facility in Jalisco. In January 2014, he was released again. On June 23, 2015 Oseguera González was released by a judge due to the lack of a warrant, and re-arrested on new charges as he was leaving the prison on July 1, 2015. Hope, Alejandro. "Por qué no cae El Mencho?" *El Universal*. April 17, 2017. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/entrada-de-opinion/columna/alejandro-hope/nacion/2017/04/17/por-que-no-cae-el-mencho>; Rubén Mosso, "A 'El Menchito' lo agarraron porque 'no les avisaron a tiempo,'" *Milenio*, July 7, 2015, http://www.milenio.com/policia/no_les_avisaron_a_tiempo-conversaciones_interceptadas-caso_Menchito_0_550145014.html

⁷¹ de Mauleón, Héctor "La guerra entre 'El Chapo' y 'El Mencho,'" *El Universal*, August 18, 2016. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/entrada-de-opinion/columna/hector-de-mauleon/nacion/2016/08/18/la-guerra-entre-el-chapo-y-el-mencho>

⁷² Sandra Dibble, "New Group Fuels Tijuana's Increased Drug Violence," *San Diego Union Tribune*, February 13, 2016, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/sdut-nueva-generacion-cartel-moves-tijuana-2016feb13-story.html>

made alliances with former-Sinaloa affiliates in the northern border state of Coahuila (including Los Salazar and Los Memos), where the organization called out the Sinaloa Cartel by way of a public “narco” message left in in Saltillo: “We are people who know how to respect the public, we are not like you...Mayo (Zambada) and Los Menores (Guzmán’s sons) should be ashamed of how low their organization has fallen.”⁷³

Also along the northern border, in Chihuahua, the CJNG has reportedly developed ties to former Sinaloa Cartel allies (Los Artistas Asesinos, Los Cabrera, and remnants of the Gente Nueva).⁷⁴ In Mexico’s Gulf Coast southwest region, the CJNG is also allegedly working with Zeta splinter groups (including Grupo Operativo Zetas and Fuerzas Especiales Zetas) and former-Gulf Cartel affiliates (Los Metros and Los Dragones), as well as groups working in the state of Quintana Roo (Los Pelones y Los Talibanes).⁷⁵ In central Mexico, the CJNG is reported to have forged ties to Jesús Alfredo “El Mochomito” Beltrán Guzmán, son of Alfredo Beltrán

Leyva, whose arrest in January 2008 is believed to have sparked the bloody feud between the Sinaloa, Juárez, and Beltrán Leyva organized crime groups a decade ago.⁷⁶ Leveraging alliances with all of these groups could prove to be an effective strategy not only to establish the CJNG’s supremacy over the Sinaloa Cartel, but also a means to consolidate a near monopoly on organized crime activities throughout the country. This kind of collusion across illicit enterprises is precisely the reason for which Mexican organized crime groups are often referred to as “cartels.”

This kind of collusion across illicit enterprises is precisely the reason for which Mexican organized crime groups are often referred to as “cartels.”

⁷³ Authors’ translation of the original text: “nosotros si somos gente que sabe respetar a la población y no somos como ustedes...a ti Mayo y a los Menores les debería dar vergüenza lo bajo que ha caído su organización.” “CJNG va por el control de todo el territorio nacional.” *Noreste*. August 9, 2017. <http://www.noreste.net/noticia/cjng-va-por-el-control-de-todo-el-territorio-nacional/>

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Jesús Alfredo (reportedly related to Joaquín Guzman and his sons), supposedly masterminded the La Leche kidnapping in 2016. “El Mochomito”, sobrino de “El Chapo”, y el CJNG, estarían detrás del robo de gasolina en Puebla,” *Vanguardia.mx*, January 30, 2017. <http://www.vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/el-mochomito-sobrino-de-el-chapo-y-el-cjng-estarian-detras-del-robo-de-gasolina-en-puebla>. Sandra Dibble, “New Group Fuels Tijuana’s Increased Drug Violence,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, February 13, 2016, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/sdut-nueva-generacion-cartel-moves-tijuana-2016feb13-story.html>

CJNG DRUG TRAFFICKING OPERATIONS

Behind the CJNG's rapid emergence as a prominent player in Mexico's OGCs is the lucrative methamphetamine market, the CJNG's primary source of revenue. The United States tightened regulations on retail over-the-counter sales of pharmaceuticals through the 2005 Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act (CMEA), and since then the majority of methamphetamine consumed in the United States has been sourced from Mexican organized crime groups. However, early on, the CJNG focused its distribution efforts in international markets, including Australia and Canada, which enabled the organization to avoid unwanted attention from U.S. authorities until around 2015.⁷⁷

Since then, the organization has developed a large and recognized presence in the United States and the focus of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Law enforcement seizures/data trace the majority of methamphetamine in the United States to Mexico and categorize methamphetamines as the most significant drug threat to the Southwest, West Central and Pacific region of the United States.⁷⁸ The majority of Mexican-sourced methamphetamine is trafficked through the southwest border region from major corridors like Tijuana, Juarez, and Nuevo Laredo to

...early on, the CJNG focused its distribution efforts in international markets, including Australia and Canada...

⁷⁷ Eells, Josh. "The Brutal Rise of El Mencho" Rolling Stone. July 11, 2017.

<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/the-brutal-rise-of-el-mencho-w491405>

⁷⁸ 2016 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary. U.S. Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration. November 2016. <https://www.dea.gov/resource-center/2016%20NDTA%20Summary.pdf>

U.S. distribution centers in Los Angeles and Atlanta.⁷⁹ An article by *Animal Politico* notes that the CJNG's drug trafficking growth in the United States is related to their alliances with U.S. gangs located in primarily in the Pacific and border regions.⁸⁰

The increased flows of methamphetamines have been accompanied by growing numbers of seizures by U.S. authorities since 2011. In a comparison between 2016 and 2015, seizures have surged across every corridor: San Diego, El Centro, Yuma, Tucson, El Paso, Big Bend, Del Rio, Laredo and Rio Grande Valley with respective increases of 9%, 20%, 35%, 98%, 169%, 1431%, 187%, 26%, and 69%.⁸¹ The role of CJNG in this upward trend is illustrated by the increase in arrests of its operatives in the United States.⁸²

SMUGGLING TECHNIQUES: The CJNG has reportedly invested in submarines, colluding with Russian naval engineers, to transport narcotic substances along the Pacific Coast. CJNG also relied on other creative trafficking tactics, including using fashion models to smuggle in drugs from Colombia and Venezuela. In late 2017, the Mexican federal police reported a rising trend of drug trafficking organizations changing the physical state of illicit substances and smuggling drugs mixed or dissolved in viscous food products, like salsas, moisturizing lotion, soft caramels, and canned goods. Although not directly attributed to the CJNG, this trend has been reported in areas with strong CJNG presence, including Jalisco, Michoacán and Guerrero.

SOURCES:

Eells, Josh. "The Brutal Rise of El Mencho" *Rolling Stone*. July 11, 2017.

Bucio, Manuel Espino. "Para evader controles, meten droga a EU en productos "gourmet". *El Universal*, October 11, 2017.

⁷⁹ 2017 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary. U.S. Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration. October 2017. https://www.dea.gov/docs/DIR-040-17_2017-NDTA.pdf

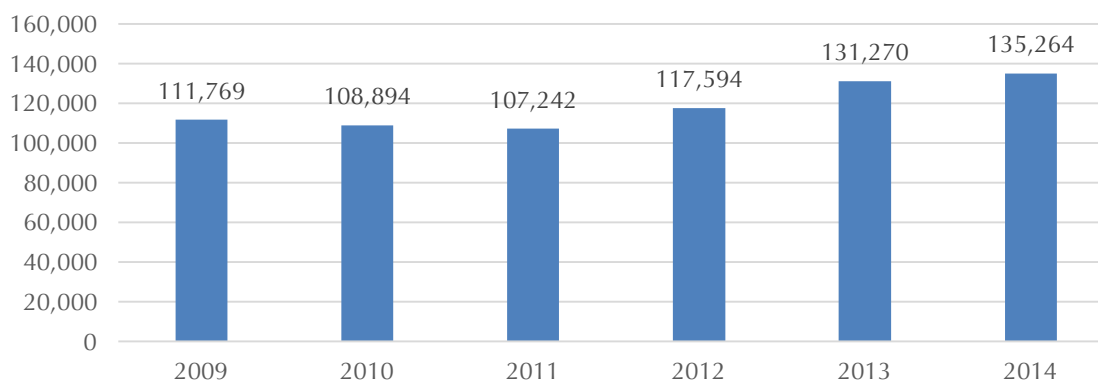
⁸⁰ Perhaps most relevant to their expansion in drug trafficking and distribution to the United States is their strategic presence in Tijuana, one of the most important cities to drug trafficking organizations due to its geographic access to both California and the Pacific Coast. Alonso Perez, Luis. "La evolución del cártel Jalisco nueva generación: de la extinción al dominio global." *Animal Politico*. <http://www.animalpolitico.com/diez-de-guerra/expansion-cjng.html>

⁸¹ 2017 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary. U.S. Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration. October 2017. https://www.dea.gov/docs/DIR-040-17_2017-NDTA.pdf

⁸² For example, on September 2017, eight CJNG operatives were charged for drug trafficking in the Dallas region, following the August seizure of 750 kilograms of methamphetamine (worth about \$6 million). Krause, Kevin. "Arrests indicate violent Mexican drug cartel is back in Dallas." *Dallas News*. <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/crime/2017/09/13/arrests-indicate-violent-mexican-drug-cartel-back-dallas>

As the CJNG has grown, so has the availability of methamphetamines in the United States and other major consumer markets. According to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the number of methamphetamine users has risen from 314,000 in 2008 to 569,000 in 2014.⁸³ In addition, the DEA identifies a steady increase of admissions to treatment facilities for methamphetamine use across the United States. (see Figure 2)⁸⁴ A 2015 report by the United States Sentencing Commission (USSC) investigated the prevalence of methamphetamines across the United States and found that more than half of all 50 states listed methamphetamine as the most common drug offense.⁸⁵ Methamphetamines are particularly a problem in the West and Mid-West regions of the United States and is notably abused by workers in industrial sectors, such as the oil field development.⁸⁶

Figure 2: Number of Admissions to Treatment Facilities for Methamphetamines in the United States, 2009-2014.



Source: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

⁸³ Schuppe, Jon. "Twin Plagues: Meth Rises in Shadow of Opioids." July 5, 2017.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/twin-plagues-meth-rises-shadow-opioids-n776871>

⁸⁴ 2017 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary. U.S. Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration. October 2017. https://www.dea.gov/docs/DIR-040-17_2017-NDTA.pdf

⁸⁵ "State Sentencing: How Drug Sentencing Varies Across the U.S." Drug Abuse.com. <https://drugabuse.com/featured/sentencing-by-state-2/>

⁸⁶ According to reports and testimonies from Midland and Ector, Texas (both oil industry towns), oil field workers often rely on stimulants such as methamphetamines, to get through long, grueling shifts. A comparison of meth seizures in Midland and Ector between 2010 and 2016, sees a rise from about 3.6 pounds to 95.5 pounds of methamphetamine. See: Woody, Christopher. "The US heroin habit is growing, and 2 of Mexico's most powerful cartels are fighting to supply it." September 28, 2016. Business Insider. <http://www.businessinsider.com/sinaloa-jalisco-cartels-fighting-control-us-heroin-supply-2016-9>

While methamphetamines are a growing concern in the United States, in 2016 they were the second most commonly used drug (after cannabis) by regular drug users in Australia, where the Milenio Cartel and CJNG reportedly first developed their operations. According to Australia's National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016, daily and/or weekly use of methamphetamines rose from 9.3% in 2010 to 20% in 2016 among recent users (within the last 12 months). Additionally, the use of crystal meth "ice" (rather than powdered methamphetamines) by recent users increased from 22% in 2010 to 57% in 2016. Meth use is so widespread that one out of every seventeen Australians (6.3%) over the age of 14 have used methamphetamines at least once in their lifetime.⁸⁷

According to Australia's Federal Justice Minister, Michael Keenan, Mexican drug cartels are now a major source of methamphetamine in Australia, and a key supplier of cocaine and cannabis. The Australian Federal Police recently opened a field office in Mexico City in October 2017 to address this issue and collaborate with Mexican officials.⁸⁸ A 2016 report by the Australian National University's Strategic & Defence Studies Centre highlights the CJNG as an entrepreneurial cartel in Australia's illicit drug market, using connections with Chinese OGCs to promote drug trafficking in the Southeast Asian region.⁸⁹

According to the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit of British Columbia, the CJNG has also made inroads in Canada, working with criminal organizations based there. The CJNG maintains a distribution base in Vancouver, which is Canada's primary narcotic hub. The cartel's early focus on international drug markets, rather than the U.S drug market, may have been motivated by the higher prices found

the CJNG has also made inroads in Canada, working with criminal organizations based there...

⁸⁷ National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016. September 28, 2017.

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/15db8c15-7062-4cde-bfa4-3c2079f30af3/21028.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

⁸⁸ Hurley, David. "Justice Minister Michael Keenan says Mexican drug cartels are a main target for Australian Federal Police." Herald Sun. November 1, 2017. <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/justice-minister-michael-keenan-says-mexican-drug-cartels-are-a-main-target-for-australian-federal-police/news-story/1324bdfeaafd5a4a6a688c6a12cb616f>

⁸⁹ McCarthy-Jones, Anthea. "Mexican Drug Cartels and Dark-Networks: An Emerging Threat to Australia's National Security." Strategic & Defence Studies Centre. April 2016. http://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/2016-05/mexican_drug_cartels_and_dark-networks_an_emerging_threat_to_australias_national_security.pdf

The CJNG's diversified business model also appears to be partly attributable to the growing availability of recreational and medical marijuana in the United States...

elsewhere. For example, a kilogram of cocaine worth 190,940 pesos in Mexico is worth 824,919 pesos in the U.S. and 3,819,284 pesos in Australia.⁹⁰

Although methamphetamine has been the primary source of income for the CJNG, the organization has begun to expand its drug trafficking operations to include other drugs.⁹¹ According to a DEA spokesman, the CJNG has taken advantage of Joaquin Guzmán's arrest and the fractured leadership structures within the Sinaloa Cartel to increase its role in heroin trafficking, in direct competition with its former allies.⁹² The CJNG's diversified business model also appears to be partly attributable to the growing availability of recreational and medical marijuana in the United States, which has contributed generally to the shift to so-called hard

drugs that is illustrated by recent drug seizures along the border.⁹³

POLICY OPTIONS

While there are many issues related to the problems of organized crime and violence in Mexico—such as lack of education and employment opportunities, the widespread availability of high-powered firearms and money laundering in the international financial industry—we offer some specific recommendations in three main areas that appear to be particularly relevant in the case of the CJNG.

⁹⁰ Alonso Perez, Luis. "La evolución del cártel Jalisco nueva generación: de la extinción al dominio global." *Animal Politico*. <http://www.animalpolitico.com/diez-de-guerra/expansion-cjng.html>

⁹¹ 2016 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary. U.S. Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration. November 2016. <https://www.dea.gov/resource-center/2016%20NDTA%20Summary.pdf>

⁹² Woody, Christopher. "The US heroin habit is growing, and 2 of Mexico's most powerful cartels are fighting to supply it." September 28, 2016. *Business Insider*. <http://www.businessinsider.com/sinaloa-jalisco-cartels-fighting-control-us-heroin-supply-2016-9>

⁹³ Don Winslow, "El Chapo and the Secret History of the Heroin Crisis," *Esquire*, August 9, 2016. <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a46918/heroin-mexico-el-chapo-cartels-don-winslow>; Borunda, Daniel. "El Paso DEA leader leaving for Houston, talks of new drug cartel, meth menace." *El Paso Times*, September 10, 2017. <http://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/crime/2017/09/10/el-paso-dea-leader-leaving-houston-talks-new-drug-cartel-meth-menace/635452001/>

the reliance of U.S. and Mexican law enforcement on leadership disruption, or “kingpin” removal, stands out as a counter-productive strategy...

First, while numerous factors contributed to the rapid and sustained growth of the CJNG, the reliance of U.S. and Mexican law enforcement on leadership disruption, or “kingpin” removal, stands out as a counter-productive strategy. The CJNG has successfully taken advantage of a series of power vacuums resulting from the disruption of leadership structures in Mexican organized crime groups to displace these rivals. Thus, well-intentioned law enforcement efforts to break up Mexican organized crime groups have resulted in what scholars have long referred to as a “hydra-effect,” in which the arrest or elimination of the heads of major drug trafficking organizations simply results in the emergence of new criminal groups.⁹⁴

Blows to La Familia Michoacana, Knights Templar Organization, the Zetas, and ultimately the Sinaloa Cartel have created opportunities for the CJNG to expand and grow its organization over time. While the death of Ignacio Coronel and the fall of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzman were initially damaging to the Milenio Cartel, these developments ultimately cleared a path for the emergence of Ruben “El Mencho” Oseguera as Mexico’s newest major kingpin. While the arrest or removal of Oseguera could have crippling effects on the CJNG in the short term, it would surely open the door to further violent competition as splinter groups and rival criminal organizations vie to become the next major Mexican cartel.

Of course, allowing violent actors like Oseguera to operate with impunity is not a desirable option, so how can law enforcement better address the problem of organized crime? One recommendation is to bolster the capacity of Mexican law enforcement to conduct long-term, wide-reaching criminal investigations and more effective prosecutions targeting not only drug kingpins but all levels of a criminal enterprise, including corrupt politicians and private sector money laundering operations. Doing so would help to address the problem of splinter groups vying for succession when a major kingpin is removed.

Hence, continued domestic and international efforts to improve prosecutorial effectiveness in Mexico are urgently needed. Special emphasis should be placed on training justice system personnel how to properly conduct investigations, collect evidence, and successfully litigate organized crime cases under Mexico’s newly reformed, oral adversarial criminal

⁹⁴ Eva Bertram, Morris Blachman, Kenneth Sharpe, and Peter Andreas, *Drug War Politics: The Price of Denial*, University of California Press, 1996.

procedures. Such efforts would benefit from an integrated model that includes cross-training among police, forensic experts, and prosecutors.

Second, it is notable that Oseguera violated U.S. immigration laws and was later incarcerated in California for a heroin dealing offense and went on to become a major drug trafficker after his deportation to Mexico. Over the last ten years, by greatly accelerated its efforts to expel undocumented immigrants with criminal records, the United States has sent many deportees back to the welcoming embrace of Mexican organized crime groups, either as potential victims or recruits. As a result, all along the U.S. border, Mexican authorities and humanitarian organizations have struggled to address the problems of deportees returning to Mexico due to a lack of coordination with U.S. authorities and limited resources to address the needs of deportees.

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At a minimum, it makes sense for U.S. authorities to work closely with their Mexican counterparts on developing shared protocols for returning undocumented criminal offenders to ensure that Mexican authorities are prepared to manage the return of individuals susceptible to recruitment by organized crime. A more robust effort would allocate U.S. funds to assist Mexican authorities and humanitarian organizations in addressing the needs of deportees (e.g., temporary shelters, counseling, workforce orientation, etc.), which would still prove far less costly than housing Mexican criminal offenders in U.S. prisons. Of course, U.S. legislation to resolve the problem of undocumented immigration by expanding the legal pathways to enter the United States for work purposes is long overdue, and the best way to keep undocumented immigrants from engaging in black market activities like drug trafficking is to bring them out of the shadows.

Third, the most obvious factor fueling Mexico's decades-long effort to combat organized crime is the voracious international market for prohibited psychotropic substances. Attention to the CJNG's business model reveals that, while the United States is easily the largest market for illicit drugs, Mexican organized crime groups have identified lucrative opportunities elsewhere, including Australia and Canada. As long as demand for such substances remains high and availability is restricted by legal prohibitions on production, distribution, and consumption, groups like the CJNG will emerge. Thus, even as major criminal organizations are repeatedly dismantled, the enormous revenues available through the black market will empower new suppliers.

In this sense, the story of the CJNG provides a cautionary tale and underscores the urgency of developing alternative strategies to address the growing health crisis associated with illicit drug consumption. While the United States and Mexico have begun to introduce reforms that have partially decriminalized certain substances (particularly marijuana), the CJNG and

other Mexican organizations have simply diversified and redoubled their efforts to produce and distribute other, more potent illicit drugs. This, in turn, has contributed to the rapid increases in heroin and methamphetamine abuse, creating a growing public health crisis in both countries. Law enforcement and security measures are inadequate and potentially harmful to resolving a such public health crisis, in so far as they contribute to elevated profit margins for black market dealers and drive drug users into an unregulated shadow economy that gives rise to groups like the CJNG.

In this sense, further drug policy reforms are needed to properly regulate the production, distribution, and consumption of not only marijuana but also more potent drugs, including cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. However, at present, there is little public support for full legalization of such substances in either Mexico or the United States. Thus, would-be reformers should work to objectively monitor, document the results of public health-based approaches currently underway domestically and in other countries, such as Portugal and the Czech Republic, and work to educate the public about the unwanted consequences of prohibition and potential benefits of legalization.

CONCLUSION

This report highlights the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación, CJNG), its origins and development, known drug trafficking activities, recent threats to the Mexican state, and violent competition with other criminal organizations. While the CJNG is just one criminal organization among several currently operating in Mexico, it has begun to achieve a level of prominence that now equals or surpasses its former ally, the Sinaloa Cartel. Understanding the evolution of the CJNG offers a number of insights and lessons about Mexican organized crime, as well as U.S. and Mexican government efforts to combat it.

There is no question that the CJNG and other organized crime groups represent a serious present threat to Mexican public security. However, this threat is the result of long-term, complex and unresolved issues that require serious and sustained attention by Mexican authorities and their international partners. Short-sighted policies that focus on targeting top drug traffickers for arrest and extradition only lead to greater violence and the eventual emergence of powerful new criminal organizations like the CJNG. Ideally, this policy brief will help to inform policy makers' efforts to reduce the power and impunity of the CJNG and similar criminal organizations in the future.



Justice in Mexico (www.justiceinmexico.org) works to improve citizen security, strengthen the rule of law, and protect human rights in Mexico. We generate cutting edge research, promote informed dialogue, and work to find solutions to address these enormously complex issues. As a U.S.-based initiative, our program partners with key stakeholders, experts, and decision makers, lending international support to help analyze the challenges at hand, build consensus about how to resolve them, and foster policies and programs that can bring about change. Any opinions expressed here are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the University of San Diego or Justice in Mexico's sponsoring organizations.