FIGHTING FOR THE PLAZA AND THE PUEBLO: ASSESSING THE ROLE OF “HEARTS AND MINDS” IN THE MEXICAN DRUG CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

Since 2006, Mexico has experienced an explosion of violence, as violent criminal organizations compete for control of illicit markets and the government struggles to contain them. This thesis seeks to answer the question, does population support matter in Mexico’s drug conflict? To try and answer this question, this paper tests David Galula’s theory—how insurgencies seek to achieve the complicity of the population by winning popular support and attacking government legitimacy—for the case of Mexico. The evidence presented in this paper challenges the widespread assumption that “hearts and minds” do not matter in Mexico’s effort to combat violent drug trafficking organizations. Instead this thesis argues that criminal organizations in Mexico are attempting to—and are succeeding in—disassociating the population from the state through propaganda and calculated, strategic violence.
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I. Introduction:

In March 2011, a banner addressed to Mexican President Felipe Calderón appeared on a bridge in the town of Reynosa, Tamaulipas. The printed message, signed only with the name “The United Cartels,” finished with the oath: “We promise to make possible what has been impossible for the government: recovering the safety of Mexican families.”

The idea that the same narcotraffickers who toss heads into nightclubs and brutally murder public officials expect anyone in Mexico—let alone the President—to believe that they can protect the population better than the state can seems morbidly laughable. At the very least, efforts by violent criminal organizations to woo popular support away from the government appear puzzling: why would a non-ideological, rent-seeking criminal enterprise even bother to try? Do drug gangs really expect anyone to believe they care about citizen safety more than the government does? However, behind the absurdity of violent criminals’ publicly guaranteeing the “tranquility” of Mexican families, lies a disturbing reality of Mexico’s drug war: the disassociation of the Mexican population from the state.

At the most fundamental level, this thesis seeks to answer the question, does population support matter in the Mexican government’s struggle to control violent drug trafficking organizations (DTOs)? To attempt both to answer this question and to fill a gap in the existing literature on narcoviolence in Mexico, I will test David Galula’s theory—how insurgencies seek to achieve the complicity of the population by winning popular support and attacking the government’s legitimacy—for the case of Mexico. To do this I will examine, in a way that both regional analysts and proponents of recent “narcoinsurgency” theories have not yet done, if and how the DTOs attempt to affect the “hearts and minds” of the Mexican population.
This paper originally arose out of my puzzlement over the debate that emerged in 2010 over whether Mexican DTOs had moved beyond organized criminal activity into insurgency. Insurgency, as defined by Bard O’Neill, is “a struggle between a nonruling group and the ruling authorities in which the nonruling group consciously uses political resources (e.g., organizational expertise, propaganda, and demonstrations) and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics.”\(^1\) With the specter of the United States’ long war in Afghanistan against the Taliban insurgency looming in the background, references to Mexico as a “counterinsurgency” situation by some American officials and journalists—such as Secretary of State Clinton’s controversial comparison of Mexico’s gangs to Colombia’s leftist insurgency in September 2010—caused justifiable alarm in the Mexican government and among both Mexican and American scholars. Suggestions by some U.S. congressmen that the United States send its own armed forces into Mexico to fight organized crime, while never seriously considered as a policy option by either government, only served to exacerbate the negative reaction to the idea of applying counterinsurgency measures in Mexico.

Regional experts and human rights activists, alarmed by the seemingly militaristic implications of such analysis, have criticized the application of counterinsurgency (COIN) by pointing out that the DTOs have no ideology and do not seek power at the national level, unlike other past and present regional insurgencies such as Sendero Luminoso in Peru and Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in Colombia. Whereas these groups were motivated by Maoism and revolutionary leftism, respectively, the Mexican DTOs lack any

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2 Stone, Hannah, and Jen Sokatch, “Battles, Tanks, Missiles, but no Insurgency in Mexico,” Insight Crime, May 30,
“political ambition” beyond increasing their ability to operate with impunity. Some have also argued that because the DTOs have not explicitly attempted to hit national targets in the way that Colombian trafficker Pablo Escobar did during his anti-extradition campaign in the 1990s— including bombing a commercial airliner and assassinating presidential candidates—they have no interest in challenging the federal government.

Much of the predominantly web-based literature on a possible “new” form of insurgency in Mexico, often termed “narco-insurgency,” has failed to address these concerns or to provide a suitable answer as to why insurgency and counterinsurgency theory should apply to the case of Mexico, focusing on the scale of the violence— the violent capacity of the DTOs and their use of military tactics—rather than on the nature of the conflict. Authors with backgrounds in security or gang studies rather than in Mexican regional issues, such as John Sullivan of the Los Angeles Police Department, have emphasized certain military tactics of the DTOs—homemade “tanks” and military-grade communications technology and arms—and the pseudo-religious ideology of groups such as La Familia Michoacana in order to justify the application of the term insurgency. Works such as the Center for New American Security’s Crime Wars: Gangs, Cartels, and U.S. National Security define insurgency as “an attempt to weaken or disrupt the functions of government,” a vague, wide definition that seems to encompass a great variety of criminal activity and neglects the very core of what makes insurgencies so difficult for governments to put down: the role of the population. Thus, the existing literature has used the term “insurgency”


while neglecting to examine whether the core of “classic” counterinsurgency theory—
population-centric insurgency and counterinsurgency—applies to the Mexican situation.

In an attempt to both answer my puzzle—does population support matter in the Mexican
drug conflict—and fill the gap in the understanding of if and how insurgency and
counterinsurgency theory applies to the case of Mexico, this thesis will return to the work of the
discipline’s most influential scholar: David Galula. Despite my caution over the use of the term
“insurgency” to describe the situation in Mexico due to the controversy explained above, this
thesis seeks to test Galula’s theory that an insurgency is a war for the hearts and minds of the
population for the case of Mexico. As a 2011 RAND study on insurgency explains, despite
advances in tactics and changes in ideology, not much about the core, conventional wisdom on
counterinsurgency has changed since Galula. Nearly all COIN philosophies and theories “stem
from or refer to [him] either directly or indirectly.” Thus, to test the application of Galula’s work
is to test the basic tenets of classic insurgency/counterinsurgency theory for the case of Mexico.⁴

The objective of this thesis is not to argue that Mexican DTOs fit Galula’s definition of
an insurgency in that they seek to overthrow the federal government and take power at the
national level; they clearly do not. Nor do I attempt, as others have done, to coin a new name for
the violence in Mexico, such as “criminal” or “narcoinsurgency.” At the most fundamental level,
this thesis seeks to question the implicit assumption that population support—“hearts and
minds”—does not matter in Mexico’s drug conflict, by testing the application of David Galula’s
theory to the case of Mexico. In this paper I argue that the DTOs in Mexico are attempting to—
and are succeeding in—disassociating the population from the state through propaganda and

calculated, intimidating violence, or what I term violent strategic signaling, with the aim of winning popular support and attacking government legitimacy.

**Scope Note:**

While the DTOs or gangs connected to them certainly carry out drug trafficking and/or production, human trafficking, smuggling, and other criminal activities throughout the whole of Mexico, this thesis is limited to the states in Mexico that have experienced sustained, significant violence caused by the DTOs. All of the states that border the United States fall in this category: Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Durango, and Tamaulipas. Along the western coast of the Pacific Ocean, this includes the states of Sinaloa, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guerrero. On the eastern coast of the Gulf of Mexico, this includes the state of Veracruz. Finally, in central Mexico, this includes Guanajuato.

II. Argument and Methodology

In this section I first define David Galula’s conception of an insurgency and lay out the aspects of Galula’s theory that my thesis seeks to test for the Mexican drug war. Second, I set out my argument and the hypotheses that this thesis will test. Finally, I explain out my methodology.

David Galula’s theory of insurgency

In *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, David Galula defines an insurgency as a “protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order.”5 Most critically, according to Galula, what distinguishes “ordinary, everyday bandit activity” from insurgent warfare as defined above is “the complicity of the population.”6 Persuasion may rally the small, active minority of supporters, but the complicity of the population—which differs from mere “sympathy” in that the population permits the insurgents to do as they will—is obtained by force, although insurgents must take care to limit the use of violence so as to “never to antagonize at any one time more people than can be handled.”7 In assessing population support, Galula relies on a simple, fundamental rubric for “the basic exercises of political power: in any situation, whatever the cause, there will be an active minority for the cause, a neutral majority, and an active minority against the cause.”8 This idea can also be expressed graphically through this simple yet critical chart from the Army COIN Field Manual:

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6 Ibid. Kindle Locations 583-586
7 Ibid. Kindle Locations 585-590
8 Ibid. Kindle Locations 815-816
In most countries, this basic law of political power is applied “unconsciously.” While a particular administration or party obviously will confront differing levels of support over the course of its rule, the population’s “tacit support…submission to law and order, [and] consensus” with regards to the state apparatus can generally be taken for granted.\(^9\) In a country facing an insurgency, however, the state can no longer afford to ignore this rule; the state must now fight to “obtain the support of the population—support not only in the form of sympathy and approval, but also in active participation in the fight against the insurgent.”\(^10\)

Defeating an insurgency “can be achieved only with the support of the population,” and thus the government must concentrate its resources on protecting the people and demonstrating its own legitimacy, rather than on simply killing as many enemies as possible.\(^11\) The main cause of all the government’s active efforts and propaganda must be to show that “the cause and the situation of the counterinsurgent are better than the insurgent’s.”\(^12\)

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\(^9\) Ibid. Kindle Locations 807-811
\(^10\) Ibid. Kindle Locations 814-815
\(^11\) Ibid. Kindle Locations 807-811
\(^12\) Ibid. Kindle Locations 829-831
Victory, for the counterinsurgent, does not mean merely destroying the insurgent’s forces in one area. In order to truly defeat an insurgency, the state must not only isolate the population from the insurgents, but also rally the population in maintaining that isolation.\(^\text{13}\) In order to convince the population to do so, however, the counterinsurgent must prove to both the minority already hostile to the insurgent and the complicit majority that the counterinsurgent has “the will, the means, and the ability to win.”\(^\text{14}\) Propaganda unaccompanied by a demonstrated commitment will not suffice when people’s lives are at risk.\(^\text{15}\) Furthermore, despite the temptation to initiate popular political, social, economic, and other reforms as soon as possible, the government must secure the safety of the population from the insurgency before undertaking projects or reforms that may put them at risk.\(^\text{16}\)

**Argument and Hypotheses**

This thesis argues that although the DTOs’ motivations may be criminal/rent-seeking rather than ideological, they engage in the most vital aspect of Galula’s conception of insurgency: the disassociation of the population from the state. The end purpose of the DTOs’ activities may be to turn a profit and expand power, but attaining the complicity of the population has become their intermediary goal, which they try to achieve by exerting their influence and demonstrating the ineffectiveness and illegitimacy of the government.

To test my argument—to apply Galula’s theory to the case of Mexico—I will evaluate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis:** If Galula’s theory holds true for Mexico—if the DTOs are engaged in a war for the “hearts and minds” of the Mexican population—we will expect to see more than

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\(^\text{13}\) Ibid. Kindle Locations 834-835  
\(^\text{14}\) Ibid. Kindle Locations 841-844  
\(^\text{15}\) Ibid. Kindle Locations 841-844  
\(^\text{16}\) Ibid. Kindle Locations 844-847
just “normal” criminal violence stemming from in-group policing and competition between
groups over profits. Instead, we will expect to see the use of tactics such as propaganda and
pointed, strategic violence aimed at changing the behavior and beliefs of the population, with the
desired outcome of reducing popular support for and the legitimacy of the Mexican state while
increasing popular support for/obedience to criminal groups.

**Null hypothesis:** if Galula’s theory does not hold true—if the DTOs do not care
about the population’s support—then we would expect to see the DTOs to refrain from the use of
propaganda. Furthermore, we would expect the DTOs to limit their bloodshed to “practical”
violence: shootouts with rival gangs over territory or other disputes, confrontations with
intervening police and security forces, and in-group policing or conflict.

This paper will test my hypothesis through a qualitative analysis of the effect that two
phenomena, propaganda and strategic violence, have on the Mexican population’s faith in and
loyalty to the government:

**Independent Variable 1: Propaganda**

The first independent variable which we would expect to see if Galula’s theory
holds, propaganda, will be examined through an analysis of narcomantas, or banners left by
DTOs in public spaces containing messages for rival organizations, the population, or the
government.

**Independent Variable 2: Strategic violence**

The second independent variable which we would expect to see if Galula’s theory
holds, strategic violence, will be examined through an analysis of what I term violent strategic
signaling, or calculated and symbolic public violence.
Dependent Variable: Population support

I will examine the causal effect the two independent variables have on the dependent variable, population support, through an analysis of recent public opinion polling data.

Methodology

This thesis assumes a qualitative approach towards assessing my hypothesis, through an analysis of aggregated primary sources.

To attain information on my two independent variables, narcomantas and the violent signaling, I have primarily relied on three kinds of primary sources written in both Spanish and English. First, for information on violent incidents I have used Mexican newspapers such as El Universal and Milenio. Second, when unable to find a suitable Mexican primary source, I have used English-language sources such as Insight Crime that report on organized crime and violence in Mexico and the rest of the Americas. Third, for photos of the mantas and the violence and for information that many Mexican newspapers now refuse to print, I have relied on both English-language blogs such as Borderland Beat and Mexican blogs such as Blog del Narco. These blogs do present some difficulty with regards to citations, because due to fear of reprisal from the DTOs, the authors must post anonymously. However, as described in more detail in Chapter VII, given the self-censorship now practiced by many reputable Mexican newspapers following both attacks on the press and pleas from the government not to give the DTOs’ free publicity, these blogs are often the only source for uncensored information and photos.

With regards to the narcomantas, or banners left by the DTOs, the primary methodological challenge is that there is no database or count of the number of mantas left over the course of the Calderon administration’s offensive against the DTOs. To attempt to mitigate the possible selection bias of just choosing certain mantas to analyze, I have tried to rely on
broad patterns in the DTOs’ messages and to provide explanations for specific mantas that contain unusual or unique messages. As mentioned above, I have obtained many of the photos of the mantas from anonymous blogs, due to the fact that many reputable newspapers now refuse to run photos of the banners. The same difficulties apply for the violent strategic signaling.

III. Background

This chapter provides background on drug violence in Mexico and identifies the principal criminal organizations involved in the conflict. The current situation in Mexico—brutal competition among DTOs, clashes between DTOs and government security forces, and citizens caught in the violence—has its roots in three interrelated causes.

First, beginning in the 1980s, increased law enforcement pressure on ocean transit routes from Colombia to the United States shifted transportation of cocaine and marijuana to land routes through Mexico.17 Unable to move product through the Gulf of Mexico into Miami, Colombian cartels began relying on Mexican smugglers, who had previously only trafficked low levels of marijuana and opiates, mostly cultivated in Mexico’s “Golden Triangle” in Durango, Chihuahua, and Sinaloa.18 While the Colombians had always firmly controlled the actual sale of drugs to suppliers in the United States, forbidding Mexican groups from getting involved, the collapse of powerful Colombian groups like the Cali and Medellin cartels in the 1990s allowed Mexican organizations to take over the trade.19 Easy access to the robust U.S. market for cocaine, marijuana, and heroin, coupled with the end of the dominion of Colombian criminal

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18 Ibid. 32
19 Ibid. 33
groups, allowed Mexican criminal organizations such as the Sinaloa, Guadalajara, Juarez, Arellano-Felix, and Gulf DTOs to grow in size, power, and wealth.

Second, the democratic transition in 2000 that ended the Partido Revolucionario Internacional’s (PRI) 75 plus year rule disrupted existing networks of patronage between the government and organized crime. Under the PRI’s corporatist regime, the government’s centralized, hierarchical control of state institutions also extended to organized crime. The high level of official corruption—especially in the security sector—allowed the Mexican government to keep competition between organized criminal groups to a minimum, “with territories and markets often clearly demarcated.” As the PRI’s control weakened throughout the 1990s, the equilibrium among the major DTOs began splintering as blood feuds erupted and ambitious lieutenants left to form their own organizations. Following the PRI’s 1997 loss of the legislature and Partido de Acción Nacional candidate Vicente Fox’s victory in the 2000 presidential elections, the Mexican government began pursuing corrupt officials and arresting capos in an unprecedentedly aggressive manner (although corruption obviously remains pervasive). The years of endemic corruption, however, left law enforcement and judicial institutions hollowed out, and thus unable to cope with the increase in violence that occurred as inter-DTO conflict heated up.

Third, President Calderón’s decision to confront the DTOs using a “decapitation” or “kingpin” strategy—focusing resources on capturing “high-value targets”—disrupted the criminal balance of power and led to increased competition among DTOs. While the

20 Ibid. 34
21 Ibid. 34
22 Ibid. 32
23 Ibid. 41
administration chose the kingpin strategy due to its intended outcome of breaking up the DTOs into smaller organizations, “with the assumption that smaller groups will be less able to threaten the national state,” evidence suggests that merely killing or capturing the heads of an organization actually leads to an increase in violence.\(^\text{25}\) As Vanda Felbab-Brown has argued, this “high-value interdiction” strategy creates vacuums of power both within and among DTOs, as mid-level members and rival organizations scramble to fill the void left by the death or capture of a powerful DTO head.\(^\text{26}\) After government forces killed Arturo Beltrán-Leyva, the titular head of the powerful Beltrán-Leyva organization, in Cuernavaca in 2009, the Sinaloa DTO and Beltrán-Leyva Organization’s ensuing split and power struggle caused the murder rate to double in the state of Morelos.\(^\text{27}\) Similarly, the arrest of Gulf DTO leader Osiel Cardenas, who had recruited the original Zetas, served as the final straw for the Zetas’ growing desire for independence, and the violent war between the two organizations for control of Nuevo León and Tamaulipas continues to this day.\(^\text{28}\)

Furthermore, while Calderón’s decision in 2006 to deploy the military to confront spiraling violence in Michoacán and Ciudad Juarez was understandable given the poor state of Mexico’s police, the lack of a specific “mandate” for the military left their goals, objectives, and limitations unclear.\(^\text{29}\) Some evidence suggests that the high-level interdiction strategy coupled with the unclear mandate of the military led to an unfortunate causal relationship between the deployment of the military and the level of violence. Two pieces in Mexican magazine *Nexos*,

\(^{26}\) Ibid. p. 37
\(^{28}\) Ibid.
the first by sociologist Fernando Escalante and the second by Autonomous Technical Institute of Mexico professor Jose Merino, concluded, “military operations have caused an increase in the homicide rate in the states where they have taken place.”

Many officials in the Calderón administration, such as Alejandro Poiré, former Spokesman for the National Security Strategy and current Secretary of the Interior, have vehemently denied this analysis (arguing for a relationship of correlation rather than causation), but have failed to provide an empirical defense for the government’s strategy.

As Calderón’s offensive has worn on, the landscape of Mexican DTOs has been marked by increasing decentralization and fragmentation. Competition for command of the *plazas* has heightened as the control of hierarchical, hegemonic groups has weakened. Keeping track of the activities and geographic areas of criminal organizations can prove challenging due to the constantly shifting rivalries, alliances, successes, and defeats of DTOs. The following is a list of the major players in the Mexican drug trade along with a brief assessment of their past, current, and future power. I have neglected to include information on organizations such as the Arellano-Felix, Beltrán-Leyva/Cartel Pacífico del Sur, and the Independent Cartel of Acapulco DTOs, not because they are completely defunct, but because they have experienced significant losses in power and/or have been subsumed by other, larger DTOs.

**Sinaloa:** The network of organizations that comprise the Sinaloa DTO form the largest criminal organization in the western hemisphere and control an estimated 45% of the drug trade in Mexico as of late 2011. Headed by Mexico’s most wanted man, “El Chapo” Guzmán, for more than two decades, the Sinaloa is the most politically connected and likely remains the most

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powerful of Mexico’s DTOs. Both the PRI and President Calderón’s PAN have faced accusations about “favoring” the Sinaloa DTO over other organizations by turning a blind eye to some of their activities (see Chapter V). This accusation is particularly sensitive for President Calderón due to the fact that his entire strategy—and by now the historical legacy of his presidency—hinges upon his “break from the past” of institutional corruption and criminal collusion by the PRI. The Sinaloa DTO operates in Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Durango, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima, Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche, Zacatecas, Hidalgo, Morelos, and the Distrito Federal.\textsuperscript{32} Its anti-Zetas alliance with the Gulf DTO gives it access Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and Coahuila.\textsuperscript{33} To fight the Zetas, in 2011 the Sinaloa DTO formed alliances with the Caballeros Templarios in Michoacán and with the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación in Jalisco.\textsuperscript{34} Some evidence suggests that the Sinaloa DTO has had recent success in muscling in on the Juarez/Vicente Carrillo Fuentes DTO’s control of Ciudad Juarez.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{Zetas:} As of late 2011, the Zetas have become the largest DTO in Mexico in terms of the number of states in which they operate and, according to anonymous Mexican intelligence and U.S. law enforcement officials, the primary security concern of the Mexican government.\textsuperscript{36} Originally serving as an “enforcer” wing for the Gulf DTO and composed of former Mexican special forces, the Zetas have gained particular infamy on both sides of the border for their brutality, including mass killings of Center American immigrants and gruesome torture.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. 4
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid. p. 3
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
Zetas are active in Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, San Luis Potosi, Tabasco, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Campeche, Quintana Roo, and the Yucatan. The Zetas’ alliance with the Beltrán-Leyva organization also gives them influence over Guerrero, Colima, and Sonora, while their alliance with the Juárez Cartel gives them access to Chihuahua. The Zetas have also vigorously expanded into Guatemala, while continuing to battle the Sinaloa and Gulf DTOs and fending off new aggression from the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación.

**Juarez/Vicente Carrillo Fuentes:** The Juarez DTO, led by Vicente Carrillo Fuentes, has spent the last three years fiercely contesting the Sinaloa DTO for control of the plaza that encompasses Ciudad Juarez and provides access to the United States, leading to the explosion of violence that has overtaken the city since 2008. The Juarez DTO grew weaker throughout 2011 due to increased pressure by the Sinaloa DTO; according to Stratfor’s annual report, the DTO’s “inability to effectively fight against Sinaloa's advances in Juarez contributed to the lower death toll in Juarez in 2011.” Despite its decreased power, the Juarez/Carrillo Fuentes DTO continues to operate in Chihuahua, Durango, and the Distrito Federal.

**Gulf:** Since the Zetas broke away beginning in late 2008, the Gulf DTO has been engaged in bitter conflict with its former hired guns for control of the plazas in Tamaulipas and Nuevo León. After becoming extremely powerful in the early 90s due to it ties with Colombia’s Cali Cartel and its extensive distribution network in the United States, the Gulf DTO faced two major setbacks in the past decade: the loss of its well-connected leader, Osiel Cardenas

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39 Ibid. 4
41 Ibid. 11
Guillen, and the defection of the Zetas.\textsuperscript{42} The Gulf DTO has maintained its operations in Coahuila, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, and Hidalgo, but infighting has left it slightly weakened.\textsuperscript{43}

**Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación:** After first splitting from the Sinaloa DTO and announcing its “intention to take control of Guadalajara,” the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación appears to have reconciled with the Sinaloa Cartel and essentially declared war against the Zetas in Veracruz.\textsuperscript{44} The group gained notoriety in July of 2011 when it released a video on the Internet in which members announced the organization’s arrival in Jalisco and referred to themselves as the “Matazetas,” or “Zetas Killers.”\textsuperscript{45}

**Familia Michoacana/Caballeros Templarios:** La Familia Michoacana, which mainly produces and traffics methamphetamines, emerged in the early 2000s and quickly gained notoriety due to its combination of ostentatious brutality and strange, religious ideology.\textsuperscript{46} Following a string of government victories against the group in late 2010 and early 2011, several of the group’s lieutenants broke off to form a new, “rebranded” offshoot known as the Caballeros Templarios (Knights Templar).\textsuperscript{47} Having taken over La Familia’s old operation, the Caballeros Templarios operate in Michoacán, Colima, Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Queretaro. The state of the


\textsuperscript{47}Ibid. 8
Caballeros’ alliances is slightly unclear, although the identity of their principal enemy is all too obvious due to the group’s extensive anti-Zeta propaganda.⁴⁸

IV. Literature review

This chapter begins by first reviewing the existing literature on drug violence in Mexico. I have divided the relevant literature into three categories: regional experts at U.S. and Mexican universities and/or think tanks, human-rights oriented authors at think tanks/activist organizations, and security-studies authors of what I call the “neo-COIN” school. Second, this chapter demonstrates that despite the breadth of literature on the causes and nature of the violence in Mexico and the new work on the possibility of an insurgency in Mexico, the role of popular support and legitimacy remains relatively unexamined.

Regional experts

The vast majority of the literature on the Mexican drug war by Mexico experts at think tanks and universities focuses on determining the structural, political, economic, and cultural factors that led to the current level of violence and/or assessing the Mexican government’s current policies. While most scholars generally support President Calderón’s initial decision to break the longstanding tradition of government collusion with organized crime, many experts have criticized both the efficacy and the collateral human rights damage of the Calderón administration’s strategies.

Vanda Felbab-Brown, a fellow at the Brookings Institute whose research focuses on the intersection of illicit economies and national security, argues that President Calderón’s “high

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value interdiction” or decapitation strategy has driven the escalation of violence.\textsuperscript{49} In “Calderón’s Caldron: Lessons from Mexico’s Battle against Organized Crime,” published in late 2011, she challenges the Calderón administration’s assumption that breaking up the DTOs into smaller organizations will weaken them, pointing out that disrupting the leadership of and balance of power between the DTOs results in increased violent competition. Most critically, Felbab-Brown argues that any efforts to reduce the power of the DTOs must be accompanied by the goal of reducing violence. She offers two possible strategies for “restructuring interdiction” in order to achieve both objectives.\textsuperscript{50} First, the government should prioritize the most violent DTOs. To do this, however, the government would need to demonstrate a preexisting deterrent credibility, which it has so far been unable to achieve. Second, the government should primarily target the DTOs’ middle layers rather than pursuing high-value leaders and easily collared foot soldiers. This would require a greatly improved ability to collect intelligence, both from elite “insulated vetting units” and from community policing programs.\textsuperscript{51} After using these strategies to reestablish a criminal balance of power, the government could use this “narco peace” in order to deepen police and judicial reforms.

In “Evade, Corrupt, or Confront? Organized Crime and the State in Brazil and Mexico,” John Bailey, a prominent Mexico expert and Georgetown professor, and Matthew Taylor address the question of when and why organize crime chooses to disrupt existing patterns of collusion with or submission to authorities and instead confront the government. The authors argue that organized crime groups decide when to confront the government based on strategic cost-benefit calculations about the costs of tolerating state anti-crime actions and the risks of inviting heavy

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. 40
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. p. 42
Factors that influence criminal decision-making include increased government repression of crime, suspected government collusion with rival organizations, and the perceived weakness of the state to intimidation.53

The Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson for International Scholars has released a number of publications specifically aimed at addressing challenges to security cooperation between the United States and Mexico. Erik Olson, Andrew Selee, and David Shirk’s *Shared Responsibility: U.S.-Mexico Policy Options for Confronting Organized Crime* seeks to better understand both the environmental factors—such as flow of arms and money across the border from the United States—and the institutional challenges—painstaking, desperately needed police and judicial reform—facing Mexico. In chapter one, “Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context,” Luis Astorga and David Shirk argue that the breakdown of the highly centralized Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) political machine disturbed the state’s ability to control organized crime through corruption and collusion. As explained in the previous chapter, this represents the most widespread accepted explanation in the policy and academic communities for at least the initial increase in violence following the PAN’s victory over the PRI in 2001.

Scholars at the Congressional Research Service have published a number of reports about the territorial distribution of Mexican DTOs and the scope of drug-related violence, including “Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence” by June Beittel and *Mexican DTOs Latin America and the Caribbean: Illicit Drug: Trafficking and U.S. Counterdrug Programs* by Clare Ribando Seelke, Liana Sun Wyler, June S. Beittel, and Mark P. Sullivan. Though CRS releases multiple reports on narcotics trafficking in Mexico each year, the

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53 Ibid. p. 5
rapid pace of shifts in the DTOs’ alliances and territories can result in information becoming outdated relatively quickly. These reports do however retain their utility for drawing conclusions about trends and changes.

**Human Rights NGOs**

Human rights-oriented NGOs, such as the Washington Office on Latin America, the Latin America Working Group, and Human Rights Watch, have heavily criticized President Calderón’s strategy. The use of the armed forces in a law enforcement capacity has proven particularly controversial, despite the continued popularity of the military within Mexico. Reports such as Adam Isaacson and Lucila Santos’ *Practice What You Preach: the Separation of Military and Police Roles in the Americas* and Lisa Haugaard, Adam Isacson and Jennifer Johnson’s *A Cautionary Tale: Plan Colombia’s Lessons for U.S. policy towards Mexico and Beyond* warn about the potential legal and social risks of using soldiers as police. In late 2011, Human Rights Watch released a disturbing report titled, *Neither Rights Nor Security: Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico’s ‘War on Drugs,’* that detailed the results of a two years of research in five states in northern Mexico. The report alleges that the use of torture by Mexican security force is widespread and that credible evidence links the Mexican army and police to extrajudicial killings and disappearances.

**Neo-COIN**

As violence continued to escalate in 2010 and 2011, a number of American academics in the fields of law enforcement, gang, terrorism, and insurgency studies began arguing that Mexican DTOs had transitioned from a criminal threat to public safety into an military or insurgent threat to national security, based on the unprecedented scale and brutality of the violence. The work of Stephen Metz of the U.S. Army War College serves as the principle
bridge—both theoretically and chronologically—between “classical” COIN theory and the “neo-” or “narco-COIN authors” of recent years. Metz first introduced the idea of a “commercial” insurgency in “The Future of Insurgency” in 1993. He argued that in the future the greatest challenges to citizen security for some states would stem from what he termed “spiritual” or “commercialist” insurgencies. In “commercial” insurgencies, “Western materialism” and “Third World” poverty come together to create “sustained criminal activity with a proto-political dimension that challenges the security of the state.”

He also warned that Latin America could prove the most fertile ground for this new kind of insurgency due to its high income-inequality and its role as a major producer of cocaine and marijuana. Metz has not significantly revisited the idea since.

While RAND’s 2011 report “The Challenge of Violent Drug-Trafficking Organizations” deliberately avoids labeling drug violence as an insurgency, the report uses a scorecard of 15 “good” and 12 “bad” factors present in previous insurgencies to rank the position of the Mexican government. According to RAND’s COIN scorecard of positive and negative government characteristics, Mexico sits squarely in the “empirical gap” between cases of government victory and cases of insurgent victory or stalemate. Authors Christopher Paul, Agnes Gereben Schaefer, and Colin P. Clarke recommend that, insurgency or no insurgency, the Mexican government would do well to avoid the mistakes and imitate the successes of previous counterinsurgents.

Published in September 2010 by the Center for New American Security, Bob Killibrew and Jennifer Bernal’s report Crime Wars: Gangs, Cartels and U.S. National Security gained

54 Metz, Stephen, The Future of Insurgency, Carlyle: Strategic Studies Institute, 1993, p. 15
significant attention in both the academic/think tank and policy communities. This report argues that the DTOs in Mexico have transformed into a “widespread, networked criminal insurgency.” The authors classify the Mexican DTOs as an insurgency—defined here as an “attempt to weaken or disrupt the functions of government”—due to their scale and “capability to destabilize governments.”

The most strident voices in this “narcoinsurgency” faction come from two authors who principally write in *Small Wars Journal*: John Sullivan, a lieutenant in the LAPD, and Dr. Robert Bunker. In November 2011, *Small Wars Journal* published a special issue titled, *Criminal Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas: The Gangs and Cartels Wage War*. In the chapter “Rethinking Insurgency: Criminality, Spirituality, and Societal Warfare in the Americas,” Bunker and Sullivan build off Stephen Metz’s theory of spiritual and commercial insurgencies to assert that criminal organizations like the Mexican DTOs are “challenging states through high-order violence and leveraging nascent social/spiritual movements.” In addition, Dr. Bunker also presented written testimony for a House Foreign Affairs committee meeting in October 2011. In his testimony, titled, “Criminal (Cartel & Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas: What you need to know, not what you want to hear,” Bunker names Mexican DTOs alongside Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations as “new war-making entities.” Bunker and Sullivan’s work seems to have resonated more with some American lawmakers and member of the U.S military than it has with regional experts and scholars.

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57 Ibid. 5
As journalists such as Patrick Corcoran of *Insight Crime* have pointed out, these “neo-COIN” authors and the policymakers who quote them have not offered a defense for analyzing the drug war in Mexico through the framework of counterinsurgency beyond the extraordinary scale and brutality of the violence. There has been little or no evaluation of whether the absolute “basics” of insurgency and counterinsurgency theory—as outlined in Chapter II—apply to the Mexican situation. To reduce the criteria for an insurgency down to an “attempt to weaken or disrupt the functions of government” misses the key insight articulated by David Galula in his classic work, *Counter-insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*: that a counterinsurgency war is a war for the hearts and minds of the population.\(^{61}\) Galula’s 1964 book, striking not only for its parsimony but for its continued relevance, builds off Mao Zedong’s maxim that “the people are the sea in which the revolutionary swims,” arguing that winning the support of the populations is more critical for defeating an insurgency than holding territory and killing enemies.\(^{62}\) While, in the words of David Kilcullen, there may be “no fixed ‘laws’ of counterinsurgency,” the general lessons and theories of Galula have not been significantly modified beyond their adaptation to different operational theaters.\(^{63}\)

**VI. The meaning behind the mantas**

If Galula’s theory holds for the case of Mexico—if the DTOs are engaged in a competition with each other and with the state to achieve the complicity of the population—we would expect to see sustained use of propaganda with calculated messages, promises, or threats aimed at affecting popular support and/or attacking the legitimacy of the government. If Galula’s

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theory does not hold, we would expect to see nothing beyond criminal gang “tagging”—graffiti of names or insignia, etc.

This chapter evaluates my hypothesis through an analysis of my first independent variable: the DTOs’ prolific use of propaganda in the form of narcomantas. Narcomantas, or mantas, are banners containing messages from DTOs, either hung on their own or accompanying corpses (for photos and translations of the mantas referred to in this chapter, please see Appendix A). These mantas range from bed sheets or tarps crudely marked with marker or paint to professionally printed banners. The messages vary from grammatically incorrect, expletive-ridden rants to lengthy, reasoned proposals.

For all the gruesome headlines about beheadings, massacres, and shootings in Mexico, the phenomenon of “narcomantas” has received relatively little attention in the U.S. media, except perhaps in border newspapers such as El Paso Times. When the narcomantas do receive attention in English-language media, they are often accompanied by some expression of puzzlement over why the DTOs would bother to use them, but there has been no serious analysis of why and how the DTOs use these messages. Some analysts are skeptical of the public relations power of the narcomantas, arguing that the Mexican population is unlikely to actually believe the DTOs’ claims.64 Evaluating the exact impact of the mantas’ explicit messages—the actual text of the banners—on the population is difficult, but regardless of whether Mexicans believe specific promises and threats, the increased use of narcomantas and the calculated content, timing, and location of the DTOs’ messages demonstrate that these criminal organizations believe not only that these messages can sway the population, but also that

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competing for popular support is a necessary part of consolidating power and expanding their businesses.

The location of the mantas—on a bridge, a highway overpass, a town or city square, or the side of a street—interjects both the authors’ explicit message, the text of the manta, and the implicit meaning, “we control public space, the government and other DTOs do not,” into the sphere of public life, regardless of whether or not a narcomanta is specifically addressed to the population. The narcomantas intrude into a space that is intended to be reserved for the state, the church, and the population. Just as in Spain and other former Spanish colonies, in Mexican communities the town plaza—the literal meaning, not the aforementioned slang term for a drug trafficking corridor—has a particularly special historical and cultural meaning as a public space. From urban metropolises such as Monterrey to small villages, every community has a plaza that hosts the town’s most important institutions: the church and the local government. The plaza serves as the stage for all the major rituals of public life: “candidates are sworn in and protests staged…concerts are held, and local heroes memorialized.” In addition, the plaza serves as an integral communal space—perhaps the only communal space in small towns—for Mexican families.

These gruesome messages have become increasingly prevalent over the course of Calderón’s administration, and though there does not appear to be any recorded tally of the exact number, they are a weekly and sometimes even daily occurrence in many Mexican states. Although, as explained in Chapter II, there is no existing “database” of narcomantas, from examining the pictures of mantas available in Mexican newspapers and blogs I have divided the

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
mantas into three broad categories: messages directed at rival groups, at the population, and at the government.

1. “So great is their fear…The monster is coming!”

The first category involves messages addressed to rival DTOs. These messages are intended both for their explicitly stated recipient—the rival gang—and for the wider audience of the public, who see the mantas either in the public space or in the media. The DTOs use this kind of manta—often accompanied by corpses bearing signs of torture—to announce their arrival into a city or plaza and to essentially “declare war” on rival organizations. The Zetas famously announced their incursion into Monterrey on February 3, 2010, with a series of ominous banners—including one hung on a statue of revolutionary leader José María Morelos in the city center—that read “here comes the monster,” signed only with the letter “Z.”

Gente Nueva, an enforcer gang associated with the Sinaloa DTO’s “El Chapo” Guzmán, challenged the Zetas by leaving a narcomanta atop a roadblock in downtown Veracruz on September 20, 2011. Accompanied by the bodies of thirty-five alleged Zetas members, the manta read, “This will happen to all those Zeta [expletive] who remain in Veracruz. The plaza now has a new owner: G.N.” A second manta at the site also read, “No more extortions, no more murders of innocent people!...people of Veracruz, do not let [the Zetas] extort you, and do not pay their dues.”

DTOs often publicly accuse other organizations of “heating up the plaza,” an expression that refers to efforts by a criminal organization “to take over a town under rival control through targeting competitors, attacks on government facilities, riots in local jails, and other violent

68 Ibid.
tactics.”

La Familia Michoacana in particular “adopted a type of paramilitary, ‘self-defense’ rhetoric, attacking rivals like the Zetas for being ‘outsiders’ who ‘corrupted’ the morality of Michoacán,” but other groups use this tactic as well. After accusing a rival group of heating up the plaza through “prison riots and attacks on government installations,” the manta left in Durango by one faction of the Sinaloa DTO warned another to get out of the state in less than 24 hours because “the war is about to begin.” On May 3, 2011 the Zetas posted 27 narcomantas in various public spaces throughout the state of Nuevo León, all addressed to the “informants of the Gulf Cartel.” The mantas repeatedly exhorted the Gulf DTO to “stop killing innocent people.” In a sign of the kind of corruption and/or intimidation endemic among Mexican government institutions, the police reportedly allowed the mantas to hang for several hours—even in front of buildings that are supposed to be guarded—before removing them.

Sometimes the DTOs’ ploys to gain public support reach comical levels of absurdity. In early February of 2012, the Caballeros Templarios—famous for following in the footsteps of their progenitor, La Familia Michoacana, in their use of a “mixture of terror tactics and public relations in search of popular support and acceptance”—began issuing warnings, in the form of eleven mantas hung in seven municipalities throughout the state of Guanajuato, to other DTOs.

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76 Ibid.
about the need to refrain from violence during Pope Benedict’s planned visit to Mexico in late March. The messages state:

We just want to warn that we do not want more groups in the state of Guanajuato. … You have been warned, New Generation [Jalisco Cartel], we want Guanajuato in peace, so don't think about moving in and much less causing violence, precisely at this time when His Holiness Benedict XVI is coming.

These mantas followed a plea by the Archbishop of León for a temporary halt to the violence during the Pope’s visit. While the Pope’s representative in Mexico quickly clarified that the Catholic Church wishes for “a change in mentality,” rather than a “truce” with organized crime, this was not the first time that an Archbishop asked for a peace in anticipation of a special event. In August of 2011, the Episcopate of Mexico publicly begged organized crime to refrain from violence during the tour of the relics of Pope John Paul II. By parading their supposed respect for the Pope and clearly setting out the consequences of “aggression” by other organizations, the Caballeros Templarios ensure that should violence occur, they will have the ability to portray their own response as mere defense of the Pope (and thus of the Catholic Church and the pueblo). Furthermore, intentional or not, forcing perhaps the most powerful social institution in Mexico into a position of begging an organized criminal group to refrain from violence demonstrates the group's power.

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78 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
2. “This is a message for all Mexicans….”

The second category includes mantas addressed directly and explicitly to the population; these usually feature a header that reads something along the lines of “Attention population” of a specific town or state, or “Attention people of Mexico.” These mantas typically take one of two forms: threats/extortion or, more commonly, ploys for public support. Sometimes the authors combine both: a July, 2011, banner left by the New Generation Jalisco Cartel first promised never to kill innocent people, then warned the population that “if you support…the Zetas or La Familia, the states of Jalisco and Colima will become another Ciudad Juarez or Monterrey.”

Mantas often assure the population that the “war is between us narcos,” and if citizens will only follow certain simple rules, they will be safe, but sometimes the threats are more direct.

Banners of the latter category were hung outside public schools in 2008 in Monterrey and in 2010 in Ciudad Juarez, demanding that teachers give their “aguinaldos,” or Christmas bonuses, to criminal organizations. Then in late August 2011, mantas began popping up in Acapulco demanding that “teachers hand over half of all their salaries, and that schools give a list of staff and their current pay scale.”

Fearing reprisals from organized crime and lacking adequate state protection, thousands of teachers refused to go in to work, disrupting the studies of an estimated 50,000 students.

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85 Ibid.
DTOs will sometimes use mantas not to claim responsibility for attacks, but to deny involvement in an apparent attempt to attain favor with the public by proving that, unlike their organization, rival groups harm the community and kill innocent people. Sometimes mantas announce that a particular group stands “in solidarity” with the families of particularly sympathetic victims, such as women and children.\(^87\) After a brutal attack in July 2011 in which gunmen opened fire in a crowded Monterrey bar, killing twenty people, the Zetas placed a series of narcomantas around the entire country denying any involvement in the murders.\(^88\) “The Gulf Cartel is responsible for these attacks,” read the banners, “they are signs of desperation upon seeing that they cannot fight with our group. . . . [Gulf members are] the only ones who have to kill civilians unassociated with organized crime.”\(^89\) Per usual, the Zetas accuse other groups of just wanting to “heat up the plaza.”

On occasion DTOs may even offer a public apology. After the New Generational Jalisco Cartel placed eleven “narcobloqueos,” or narco-roadblocks, around the city of Guadalajara and throughout the state of Jalisco in March of 2012, the group placed thirteen mantas in the capital and three in the rest of the state asking forgiveness from citizens for the “acts that occurred last Friday.” The mantas assured the population that the roadblocks were merely a “reaction” to the government’s “meddling with a member of the CJNG who has only dedicated himself to working in our group, and to caring and maintaining the tranquility of the state of Jalisco.”\(^90\) This

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“meddling” refers to the recent arrest of suspected CJNG leader Erick Salazar, alias El 85. Do not be afraid, proclaimed the banners, CJNG is “here to support you for a stable, tranquil, and better state.” While publicly apologizing could be interpreted as showing weakness, the nature of the apology—asking forgiveness for supposedly “unavoidable” and “necessary” acts—allows the group to pander to the population while shifting the blame for its road blockade to the government’s actions.

This tactic of painting one’s own group as more honorable than other DTOs—and more trustworthy than the government—was a particular favorite of the now mostly-defunct Familia Michoacana. La Familia, a particularly aggressive user of narcomantas among DTOs, often either hung “traditional” mantas or handed out pamphlets in Michoacán attempting to place the blame for escalating violence on the Federal Police. For example, on December 24 of 2010, La Familia hung banners and left flyers in the city of Lázaro Cárdenas that read:

La Familia Michoacana wishes the whole world a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. Taking into account these difficult times in which we live, it is our greatest desire to communicate to the whole Mexican family and especially to the Michoacán family that La Familia Michoacana disavows all the criminal acts which have occurred in the state of Michoacán, these are acts committed and fabricated by the Federal Police…The function of La Familia Michoacana…is to defend out state and our people from injustice…Our function is not governing so for that we ask that society judge us.

Familia mantas, usually positioned strategically to achieve maximum visibility among the population, the media, and the police, frequently accused the Federal Police of rape, robbery,

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murder, extortion, and torture.\textsuperscript{94} One banner offered the population a choice: “[The care of Michoacán], to the Federal Police or La Familia Michoacana, society is who decides…”\textsuperscript{95}

More recently, on December 26, 2011, a massive, professionally printed manta appeared in the center of Veracruz from the Zetas. Addressed in large type to “all the people of Veracruz,” this message implored citizens not “let themselves be tricked [into believing that the Zetas] are their enemies.”\textsuperscript{96} The Zetas, relatively late to the public relations game among DTOs, claimed to be innocent in various October murders and in the December 22 bus attack that left 16 passengers dead, claiming that “a corrupt government official was the executioner of those murdered, shooting them without conscience and without regard for innocent life.”\textsuperscript{97} Assured the authors, “we are not guilty of these tragedies, we are merely people of the pueblo and we will continue the fight.”\textsuperscript{98} A possible explanation for this change in strategy may be that the Zetas have realized the price of being Mexico’s most feared, brutal DTO; in recent months, statements from both Mexican and American officials have indicated that the Zetas have become the Mexican government’s top priority.\textsuperscript{99} However the fact that the Zetas, famed for their unparalleled brutality, have begun appealing to public opinion seems to suggest that the group has learned that the kind of public relations ploys that other groups such has La Familia have long engaged in have significant strategic value. The Zetas’ increased use of cajoling mantas, rather than merely threats and shocking violence, to appeal to the population indicates that the

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
groups’ leaders have begun rethinking the organization’s previous strategy of ruling through fear alone. In a particularly perverse twist, several organizations have posted mantas addressed to Mexican poet and civil society leader Javier Sicilia. Sicilia, whose son was brutally murdered in March of 2011, has become the leader of a national peace movement under the slogan “we have had enough.”

His “National March for Justice and against Impunity” galvanized thousands of Mexicans to protest the Calderón’s administrations anti-organized crime strategy. After the Gulf DTO was initially blamed for Sicilia’s son’s death and protests erupted across the country, the organization quickly hung a series of mantas in Morelos, the city in which Sicilia was killed, that denied any involvement in the killing. Members of the Gulf DTO then abducted Rodrigo Elizalde, a member of the South Pacific Cartel (an offshoot of the Beltrán-Leyva DTO), left him beaten and tied up in an abandoned truck, and alerted authorities to his involvement in Sicilia’s murder. Sure enough, after Elizalde allegedly confessed to Federal Police, the Beltrán-Leyva DTO also released a series of mantas disavowing the murder and promising that its members “do not kill innocent people.” While the DTOs’ speed in handing over rival criminals stems partially from a desire to avoid increased heat from law enforcement, the release of the corresponding mantas suggests they also wish to avoid their reputation among the population becoming tainted due to blame for high profile incidents.

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103 Ibid.
On December 2, 2011, the Caballeros Templarios left a number of unusually lengthy mantas throughout Morelia and other cities in Michoacán, all addressed to Sicilia. The full text of these messages is available on pages 83 and 90 in Appendix A, but the mantas had two principal points. First, the Caballeros Templarios again assured the population that they are not, in fact, “a group of narcotraffickers,” but a “group exercising the law, like the community that we are.” Second, the group proposed their acceptance of a “truce” between organized crime and the government, in the style of the “Christmas truce” proposed by Sicilia in late November. They agreed to accept a truce with “no conditions, with the exception that the federal government not attack our people [pueblo] and that it respect the truce agreed upon.”

In January 2012, the Caballeros Templarios released another series of 25 banners addressed to Sicilia, this time appealing on behalf of “Michoacán society, [and] especially its women,” for the poet’s help in investigating and stopping the “string of human rights abuses” propagated by the federal government in Michoacán. The banners asked that Sicilia personally “listen [to] and support” the Caballeros Templarios. Bizarrely the mantas accused the Calderón government of carrying out abuses such as murder, rape, and false imprisonment in reprisal for President Calderón’s sister’s loss in the state’s gubernatorial elections. The biggest concern for Sicilia, beyond the obvious indignity of criminals’ attempts to coopt his personal

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108 Ibid.
tragedy, is that opponents of his peace movement, especially those in the federal government, may use these mantas against him.\footnote{Ibid.}

The DTOs also use the mantas to recruit new members. In April of 2008, the Zetas, always the most straightforward of the DTOs, left bright red banners in Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, and other border cities that proclaimed, “The Zetas want you, military and ex-military!”\footnote{Osorno, Diego, “Comer en un campamento de Los Zetas,” \textit{Milenio}, July 6, 2011, http://www.milenio.com/cdb/doc/impreso/8987334 (accessed March 9, 2012).} Reading more like a classified ad than a narcomanta, the message promised recruits “a good salary, good, and care for your family,” and guaranteed they would not suffer “mistreatment” or “hunger.”\footnote{“Ofrecen buen sueldo Los Zetas a militares.” \textit{Diario de Morelos}, April 14, 2008. http://www.diariodemorelos.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15601&Itemid=47 (accessed March 8, 2012).} The message also snidely implied that unlike in the Armed Forces, Zetas members do not have to insist on sub-par rations such as ramen noodles. The banners ended with a telephone number for interested parties—but not “snitches”—to call.

3. **“Little lead soldiers and straw police, this is Arturo Beltrán-Levy’s territory!”**

The third category involves messages addressed to the state, usually challenging the authority of the government, demanding that the government pursue a supposedly more harmful rival organization, or accusing a public official of collaborating with one of the DTOs. In the latter category, in February 2012, a mere four hours after the Governor of Nuevo León, Ricardo Medina, announced the appointment of a new state Secretary of Security in the wake of the deadly Monterrey casino attack, mantas and narcobloqueos appeared around Monterrey claiming that Nuevo León was “Zetas territory” and “these acts demonstrate it.”\footnote{“Encaran Zetas a Gobernador Medina con Narcomantas,” \textit{Terra}, February 24, 2012, http://noticias.terra.com.mx/mexico/estados/nuevo-León/encaran-zetas-a-gobernador-medina-con-narcomantas,e11913ad2f4b5310VgnVCM4000009bf154d0RCRD.html (accessed March 9, 2012).} Signed by two Zetas leaders, the mantas reminded the public and Governor Medina that “although he doesn’t like it,
Rodrigo Medina obeys [us] because we supported him in becoming Governor.”\textsuperscript{114} The message also taunted the Governor, “or did you think that the 20 million dollars [we gave you] was free?” before finishing by promising the public that “all that remains for Calderón’s government is to make a pact with us…so we don't have to take power by force like we have up until now.”\textsuperscript{115} While he declined to address specific accusations, Governor Medina assured reporters that the mantas merely represented an attempt by the DTOs to “deceive and divide” the population.\textsuperscript{116} As a recent report by the Wilson Center pointed out, after Mexico’s democratic transition disrupted the federal government’s political control over criminal organizations, “state governors and municipal leaders [like Medina] were left on their own to deal with” DTOs, often allowing criminal organizations to gain the upper hand and resulting in the “submission of many local political elites to the interests and power of criminals.”\textsuperscript{117}

The DTOs often personally address their mantas to President Calderón. On August 27, 2008, mantas appeared throughout the country, in the states of Veracruz and Tamaulipas, addressed to President Calderón. In Veracruz, the messages all contained nearly identical text, in black and red letters:

Mr. Narco-President, if you want the insecurity to end, stop protecting traffickers like Mr. Chapo Guzman [current head of the Sinaloa DTO], El Coronel [former Sinaloa leader killed a shootout with the army in 2010], El Mayo [current Sinaloa leader], La Familia Michoacana, and the party leaders that just like you are narcos like those before, who already have \textbf{40 years of narco-leaders}.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
In Tamaulipas, the messages were more succinct and professionally produced. One read “Mr. Felipe Calderón, if you want to end crime, first end your corrupt cabinet,” while another promised, “war and executions will not stop if your cabinet keeps protecting criminals.” One massive banner featured a large color photo of President Calderón above the taunting caption, “so this is your war against crime?”

DTOs occasionally use mantas to offer their “services” to the government. In March, 2011, a series of mantas appeared throughout the country from the “United Cartels,” presumed to be comprised of allied factions of the Sinaloa, Gulf, and Familia DTOS, offering to help the government fight against a common enemy: the Zetas. After acknowledging that “we know that you do not make deals with narcotraffickers,” the manta continued:

However with all due respect that your position merits, and for the wellbeing and future of the families of Mexico, we propose that the fight to eliminate the criminal group Los Zetas, that does so much damage to the country, be realized through a common front between the armed forces and the “United Cartels.”

The message assured the public that “this is not about narcotic traffick[ing], or money, or much less the fight for plazas,” but instead “about saving human lives.” Finally the manta ended by promising that once the Zetas have been eliminated, the government is welcome to return to “its labor of trying to eliminate narcotics trafficking.” The text and tone of the messages paint the United Cartels as a mercenary force rather than a criminal organization, on the level of or even above the government; the mantas imply that if the outgunned government would only accept the DTOs’ generous offer, Mexico would be safe once again.

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119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
Particularly aggressive organizations or factions have issued direct challenges to the authority of the national government. In early December 2011, mantas signed by the Zetas began appearing around Monterrey that read:

Not the army, not the marines nor the security and anti-drug agencies of the United States government can resist us. Mexico lives and will continue under the regime of the Zetas. Let it be clear that we are in control here and although the federal government controls other cartels, they cannot take our plazas.125

Of the hundreds of mantas viewed as part of the research for this thesis, this is by far the most straightforward challenge to the government’s authority. However, in a similar fashion, narcos often issue threats or instructions for either local or federal police, warning them to do what the DTOs want or face the consequences. In the four years since the Sinaloa DTO began trying to take over Juarez from the Juarez DTO, more than 175 municipal police officers have been murdered.126 In February of 2010, Ciudad Juarez was forced to set aside twenty-five million pesos (around two million dollars) to temporarily house police in hotels after a one group calling itself the New Juarez Cartel issued at least ten banners warning the chief of police that the group would kill one policeman a day if he did not step down or start leaving the group alone.127 While the government obviously has to respond to credible threats by protecting its personnel, the public nature of the DTOs’ threats ensures that the population understands exactly how groups provoke the government into reacting.

There are signs that at least some of elements of the DTOs are aware that the turn toward classifying criminals as terrorists or insurgents may bring the heat they fear most of all:

American law enforcement. In mid-December of 2011, in the wake of the Monterrey casino attack and the discovery of an alleged Zetas-Iranian Quds force plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador, ten narcomantas appeared around the city of Monterrey signed by the Zetas boss Miguel Angel Treviño. Directly contradicting the confrontational, anti-government tone of the Zetas’ mantas from only weeks earlier, the messages all opened by saying:

We do not govern this country, nor do we have a regime; we are not terrorists or guerrillas. We concentrate on our work and the last thing we want is to have problems with any government, neither Mexico nor much less with the US.

The placating tone of this manta seems out of place with previous Zeta messages, but if this manta did come directly from one of the group’s leaders, it demonstrates how much DTOs value at least the appearance of maintaining a “good” reputation among the population and valuing the lives of “innocents.” It also illustrates, as the next section will further explore, how DTOs strategically adjust their propaganda and behavior based on media coverage and popular response.

The position and message of the mantas appear to demonstrate that while the DTOs—decentralized organizations—do not coordinate messaging in a tightly controlled, hierarchical manner, they do make strategically timed and placed efforts to influence the population, win support and loyalty, and diminish the legitimacy of the government. DTO leaders and top lieutenants appear to put particular effort toward maintaining their organizations’ “brands,” quickly responding to the challenges of rival organizations or to missteps by unsupervised foot

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soldiers. This appears to lend support to my hypothesis that if Galula’s theory holds true, we would expect to see the DTOs use propaganda to attain the complicity of the population.

**VII. Violent strategic signaling**

The extraordinarily high level of violence—over 50,000 murders since 2006—is not sufficient to suggest that what is happening in Mexico is qualitatively different from other instances in which organized crime conflict spiraled out of control, or that the situation resembles an insurgency. The increase in the number of killings (which appears perhaps to have peaked in 2011) has a variety of causes and explanations, as detailed in Chapter III. However, to test whether or not Galula’s theory fits the case of Mexico, one must examine the form, rather than merely the level, of violence. If the DTOs do not care about influencing the population so as to gain their complicity, we would expect to see “normal” types of criminal violence: gang shootouts and competition, in-group policing, and confrontations with intervening authorities. If Galula’s theory does apply, however, we would expect to see pointed, strategic violence aimed at changing the behavior and beliefs of the population.

To examine whether the DTOs intentionally craft their violence to achieve the dissociation of the population, this chapter evaluates my hypothesis through an analysis of my second independent variable: the DTOs’ use in calculated, public violence aimed at sending a message to the population—what I term violent strategic signaling. I have divided the elements of this violent strategic signaling into four categories: violent public competition, the erosion of safe public space, targeted identities of the victims, and the magnification of violence through the press.

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1. Violent public competition: a brutal race to the bottom

The unspeakable brutality of the violence—bodies left beheaded, dismembered, burned, or disfigured—and the clear pattern of escalation over the past six years demonstrate how the DTOs compete to send the loudest messages to each other, to the government, and to the population. The first recorded beheading in Mexico’s drug violence occurred in 2006, with the deaths of two policemen.131 However, the event that sparked the spiraling violent competition between gangs and brought Mexico’s intensifying drug violence to both national and international attention was La Familia’s September 2006 “coming out party,” when members rolled five decapitated heads into a nightclub (along with a note reassuring patrons that La Familia “doesn’t kill innocent people”). Some observers, such as criminologist Jorge Chabat, have suggested that Mexican DTOs learned this tactic—beheading hostages, posting video of the killings on YouTube, and exploiting the media uproar that follows—from al-Qaeda’s methods in Iraq and Pakistan.132 Whatever the initial inspiration, murder by beheading—and the subsequent abandonment of either the corpse or the head in a public place—quickly became commonplace, as DTOs worked to top each other to gain more media exposure and thus magnify the impact on both rival organizations and on the population.

The DTOs, attentive as ever to public relations, are quick to abandon techniques that do not send strong signals to other cartels and to the population. Dissolving corpses in vats of acid, a tactic that emerged around the same time as beheading, did not “take off” the way many feared it would. While occasional instances of this tactic have continued to occur sporadically, dissolving bodies in acid was unable to “compete” as a strategic signaling technique due to its relatively low

media impact. Arturo Durango Duran, a security consultant in Monterrey, concludes, “dissolving the bodies in acid didn't bring them [the DTOs] the same spectacular results” that beheading won.¹³³

The DTOs engage in a kind of “push and pull” with the population, balancing the “pull” of cajoling mantas with the “push” of brutal, public violence. Rather than merely their eliminating enemies, groups use “exaggerated violence” fraught with “heavy symbolism” to make sure their messages are understood.¹³⁴ In additions to bearing signs of gruesome torture, bodies frequently carry tags such as a “Z” carved into the back or forehead to make clear either the identity of the victims or the identity of the killers.¹³⁵ The killers may also carve the text of a “narcomanta” directly onto a victim, or even skin the victim’s face.¹³⁶ Alarmingly, in December 2011, for the first recorded time in Mexico’s drug conflict, a police officer was burned alive in Ciudad Juarez in front of a crowd of bystanders, causing worries about a horrifying potential new trend for the DTOs.¹³⁷

The use of tactics described by Mexican and American media as “terrorism,” such as car bombs, is particularly illustrative of how DTOs adjust their tactics based on the resulting public reaction. While the use of car bombs gained significant attention in both the Mexican and the international press due to its obvious association with insurgent tactics in Colombia, Afghanistan, and Ireland, the disproportionately magnified effect of what remains an extremely uncommon tactic may actually serve to constrain it. Although estimates vary depending on the

¹³³ Ibid.
¹³⁶ Ibid.
source, the DTOs have used car bombs around seven or eight times since the first usage in 2010. The use of a cellphone-detonated car bomb in Ciudad Juarez in July 2010 is believed to have been the first use of a car bomb by Mexican DTOs. The DTO first lured emergency services and federal police to the intersection before detonating twenty-two pounds of C4 plastic explosives, killing “a policeman, a doctor, a rescue worker and an unidentified man.” This method of tricking security forces into moving into the car bomb’s blast radius is recurring: in January 2011, in Hidalgo, Guerrero, the Zetas left a corpse and a narcomanta in an abandoned car to lure police to the scene before detonating a bomb, resulting in the death of one policeman and the injury of three. Most recently, March 20, 2012, in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, a car bomb exploded outside the office of the capital’s most widely circulated newspaper, Expreso. Authorities believe the attack to be linked to the decapitation of ten people and subsequent murder of the twelve policemen who went searching for the bodies.

Perhaps the most famous incident to be termed an act of “terrorism” by the media is the August 2011 firebombing of the Casino Royale in Monterrey, in which armed men reportedly connected to the Zetas attacked the casino and lit the building on fire before barricading the

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140 Ibid.
doors, resulting in the deaths of fifty-two people.¹⁴⁴ Prior to this attack, the Calderón administration had quickly and stridently protested the use of the word “terrorism” to describe any of the violence in Mexico, obviously unwilling to permit any association between Mexico and terrorism.¹⁴⁵ In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, however, President Calderón appeared on television to condemn the attacks, admitting “it is evident that we are not facing common criminals, we are facing true terrorists…without respect for life.”¹⁴⁶ As shown later in Chapter VII, these attacks certainly had the effect of increasing the Mexican population’s fear of a “terrorist attack:” 55% of Mexicans report greatly fearing terrorist attacks such car bombs and the 2011 Monterrey Casino attack.¹⁴⁷ 73% of lower-income Mexicans, 54% of middle-income, and 49% of high-income Mexicans describe terrorism as a “very big problem.”¹⁴⁸

There is reason to believe, however, that while massacres and beheadings may continue to escalate unchecked as long as the government cannot provide a credible deterrent threat to check them, the DTOs may be more cautious in the future about using tactics that invite the label—whether used correctly or incorrectly—of terrorism. Aside from the dozens of narcomantas condemning the attacks that appeared throughout the country from the Zetas’ rivals, mantas quickly appeared signed by Zetas leader E-40 denying that he had ordered the attack, in an attempt to perform damage control on the Zetas’ reputation. The mantas repeatedly and forcefully assured the population and the governments of both Mexico and the United States that

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.
the Zetas are neither “terrorists nor guerrillas” and that the group “respects” all governments (see Appendix A, page 84). Aware that becoming associated with “terrorism” will bring the increased wrath not only of the population and the Mexican state, but also unwanted attention from the United States government, the Zetas may act to stick to “safe,” tried and true tactics such as body dumps, beheadings, and blockades.

2. Blood in the plaza: the erosion of safe public space

Although recently government officials have moved away from this narrative slightly, President Calderón and other in his administration have often argued that most of the victims in the violence are themselves narcos, and thus the high levels of violence do not greatly affect the country’s social fabric. In 2010, Calderon claimed that at least “90% of the dead” are “criminals.” After President Calderón attempted to downplay the massacre of seventeen teenagers at a birthday party in Juarez by implying that the victims must have been somehow connected to the DTOs, the resulting outcry forced him to quickly backtrack. The debate over what percent of the victims are criminals, however, fails to recognize that the narco-violence has consequences for more people than just the dead. Intense violence “pushes people indoors and out of touch not just with the state, but also with their neighbors,” decreasing the organizational capacities of communities. It’s not just the identities of the dead that matters; the location where the bodies are left is also critical. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the erosion of the safety of the town plaza—and the end to the state’s monopoly on communicating with the population—has grave consequences for perceptions of state capacity and social cohesion.

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152 Ibid. p. 13
Just like the narcomantas, the bodies and severed heads and limbs of the DTOs’ victims are usually left along highways, hanging from bridges, outside government buildings or media outlets, and/or in the town plaza. In addition to leaving individual corpses, groups often dump mass groups of bodies or heads—sometimes dozens—at one time to magnify the impact. On March 18, 2012, ten heads were left neatly arranged outside a slaughterhouse in Guerrero, and twelve policemen were gunned down the next day while searching for the bodies.\(^\text{153}\) In September 2011, during the period in which 43 teachers were kidnapped in Acapulco and thousands went on strike due to threats from the DTOs, five decomposing heads were pointedly left outside an elementary school.\(^\text{154}\) In that same month, as part of the Sinaloa DTO’s ongoing war with the Zetas, member of Gente Nueva left two abandoned pick up trucks in the middle of a busy highway in downtown Veracruz in the middle of the afternoon rush hour.\(^\text{155}\) Along with two massive narcomantas, Gente Nueva littered the highway with the nude, asphyxiated bodies of 35 alleged members of the Zetas.\(^\text{156}\) DTOs carefully calculate the location of the body dumps to ensure they reach as large an audience as possible.

The use of road blockades, or narcobloqueos, such as the aforementioned instance in Veracruz, is perhaps the DTOs’ most direct tactic for demonstrating their power over the public space. To display their power or in retaliation for the capture of prominent members, DTOs use buses and trucks—often highjacked from passing drivers—to block major highways. In the

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former category, in January 2011, the Milenio Cartel used seven simultaneous roadblocks, accompanied by grenade attacks against police, to announce their resurgence in Guadalajara; local newspapers and television ran maps of the blockades and warned residents to avoid the affected area.\footnote{\textit{Realizan bloqueos en la Zona Metropolitana de Guadalajara}, \textit{El Informador}, February 1, 2011, http://www.informador.com.mx/jalisco/2011/268115/6/realizan-bloqueos-en-la-zona-metropolitana-de guadalajara.htm?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:+informador-jalisco+(El+Informador+Noticias+de+Jalisco) (accessed March 30, 2012).} In the latter category, a year later the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación also brought Guadalajara traffic to a halt through the placement of thirteen narcobloqueos in retaliation for the capture of group leader “El 95.”\footnote{Agiss, Diana R, “Narcobloqueos erupt in Guadalajara after arrest of alleged leader of New Generation Cartel,” \textit{Justice in Mexico}, March 16, 2012, http://justiceinmexico.org/2012/03/16/narcobloqueos-erupt-in-guadalajara-after-arrest-of-alleged-leader-of-new-generation-cartel/ (accessed March 29, 2012).} The narcobloqueos—which disrupt the order of the public space, impede the population’s ability to travel to work and school, and disturb public services such as transit and emergency response—send as a pointed, unavoidable message to the population that the DTOs, not the government, run the streets of Mexican cities.

3. “We’ve got our eye on you;” targeted identities of victims

If the brutal, public murders of DTO members and innocent civilians caught in the crossfire sends the message that the state cannot protect the population and the public space, the deaths of government officials signals to the population that the state cannot protect itself. Even if many if not most government officials are presumed to have been killed because of links with organized crime, the implication that the government is outgunned is powerful.

of October 2011, 3000 police and soldiers have been killed.\footnote{Davies, Dave, “Reporting on the front lines of Mexico’s drug war,” \textit{NPR}, October 26, 2011, \url{http://www.npr.org/2011/10/26/141659461/reporting-on-the-front-lines-of-mexicos-drug-war} (accessed March 10, 2012).} The Zetas’ incursion into Monterrey—a cosmopolitan city with a former reputation for safety—and subsequent war with the Gulf DTO demonstrates the progression of violent signaling via the murder and kidnapping of public officials. First, as mentioned above, in February 2010 mantas signed with the letter Z appeared, warning, “the monster is coming.” Later that month, Nuevo León’s head of intelligence was kidnapped and his car found in downtown Monterrey with his body inside; his assailants had drenched the vehicle in gasoline and lit it on fire.\footnote{Steinberg, Nik, “The Monster and Monterrey: the Politics and Cartels of Mexico’s Drug War,” \textit{The Nation}, May 25, 2011, \url{http://www.thenation.com/article/160945/monster-and-monterrey-politics-and-cartels-mexicos-drug-war} (accessed March 8, 2012).} In April, the DTOs dumped the tortured body of a policeman along with “a handwritten letter…listing the names of thirty-five police officers who, the letter alleged, worked for the Zetas” and four of whom had already been murdered.\footnote{Ibid.} Less than two weeks after the mayor appointed a new transit secretary and tasked him with investigating the vulnerable department’s links to organized crime, the secretary, his second-in-command, and the four members of the newly created internal affairs department were all kidnapped. The murders and abductions sent a clear message to the population and the government of Monterrey that “now organized crime was establishing boundaries for the authorities, not the other way around.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Attacks against members of civil society, from student leaders to prominent human rights activists, have made speaking out against violence or extortion a potentially life-threatening gamble in Mexico. Advocacy group the National Center for Social Communication counted sixty-nine threats and attacks against activists in 2011, up from the thirty-two counted from April
to December in 2010. Thirty-one activists were murdered in 2011, compared to three from April to December in 2010. Three peace activists associated with Javier Sicilia’s peace movement have been murdered and two kidnapped in the past six months. On November 28, 2011, peace activist Nepomuceno Moreno was murdered in broad daylight by a gunman in Hermosillo, Sonora, a mere six blocks from the governor’s office. Moreno became a part of Javier Sicilia’s peace movement as part of his quest to find out what happened to his son, who was abducted in July 2010. Moreno had gone public with allegations that those who took his son were corrupt policeman affiliated with organized crime. Barely a week later, another activist with the movement, Jose Trinidad de la Cruz Crisoforo, was found murdered in Aquila, Michoacán, after enduring months of death threats. The body of the activist, who was in his mid-seventies, bore signs of extensive torture; authorities reported that his left ear was nearly detached.

Journalists have also become targets as DTOs seek to gain control over the media. The assault on the freedom of the press that has occurred over the course of the conflict has changed the ways in which the population learns and understands information about the violence. In 2011, three journalists were murdered “in direct retaliation for their reporting,” while the deaths of four

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166 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
more are still under investigation. In addition, two were abducted; Mexico has the “highest number of missing journalists in the world over time,” according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), with more than 30 journalists abducted or killed from the time Calderón took office to February 2011. As of 2011, CPJ also ranks Mexico first worldwide “in retaliation for reporting done on social media” (although this ranking may be somewhat meaningless as Mexico essentially has no competition). Newspapers and television stations have experienced attacks by car bombs, hand grenade, improvised explosive devices, and gunmen.

In 2010, after the murder of a second staff member, Ciudad Juarez’s El Diario published a lengthy open letter to organized crime, asking them “what do you want from us?” The editors, acknowledging that the DTOs “impose the force of law in this city,” proposed that criminal organizations tell them what the paper should and should not publish, to avoid more “deaths…injuries…and intimidation.” Occasionally the DTOs decide to cut out the middleman—threats and abductions—and just force media outlets to run their propaganda. In July 2010, one DTO abducted journalists in Durango and refused to release them until a local television station aired videos containing confessions implicating a rival organization in paying off local police. In Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, the Zetas “PR” division forced local newspapers to run their press releases criticizing the army. These instances of direct intimidation and message control not only affect the targeted journalists and media outlets, but also send a message to others that reinforces self-censorship; as an official from CPJ reported,

173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
the worst consequence of the violence “is a climate of fear and intimidation that is fostering widespread censorship.”\(^{179}\) The Mexican government has compounded this affect by asking media outlets not to publish DTO “propaganda,” with some officials asking newspapers not to run photos of mantas.\(^{180}\) With pressure on journalists not to report crimes, organized crime has now “[taken] control of the information vacuum.”\(^{181}\)

**Violence magnified: from the “red press” to “El Blog del Narco”**

This widespread intimidation of traditional media journalists had led to an explosion of anonymous online reporting and information sharing. Unfathomably gruesome photos—blood-spattered pictures of car accidents, homicides, and natural disasters—have had their place in Mexico’s print media since the 1950s through its infamous “prensa roja,” or “red press.” But while crime tabloids such as “El Nuevo Alarma” and the back pages of local newspapers—which carry “la nota roja,” the gory police news—may run grisly photos, many Mexicans have turned to online sources for information on drug violence. Along with hundreds of individual blogs, the website *El Blog del Narco, La Policiaca, Diario del Narco*, and *Mundo Narco* publish constantly updated, completely uncensored news and photos from Mexico’s drug violence. DTOs often send photos and videos directly to the blogs. *El Blog del Narco* in particular has become famous both within Mexico and “in the international media for the anonymous documentation of drug-

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related deaths.” Government officials, citizens, and narcos themselves have come to rely on these websites for news that traditional media outlets are unwilling or unable to report; while other Mexican media outlets agreed to self-imposed censorship in an attempt to halt the DTOs power to influence the population via the media, sites such as Blog del Narco have continued unaffected.

Even online, ostensibly anonymous reporting can have deadly consequences. The Zetas in particular have brutally cracked down on “internet snitches.” In September 2011, the bodies of a young man and woman were left hanging from a bridge in Nuevo Laredo, bearing signs of extensive torture. Attached to the corpses were signs, signed by the Zetas, warning the anonymous users of Blog del Narco and similar websites, “We’ve got our eye on you.” Two weeks later, the decapitated body of journalist Maria Elizabeth Macias was found on the side of the road in Nuevo Laredo. Accompanied by a note saying “this happened to me because of my reports, and yours,” the woman’s head was “placed next to a keyboard, computer mouse, headphones, and speakers, while the other two corpses had ears and fingers cut off.” The Zetas killed Macias as a message to other users of Nuevo Laredo en Vivo, a website which urged citizens to report crimes and featured helpful services such as interactive crime maps. Tellingly, the newspaper where Macias worked refused even to confirm her employment status or name her.

185 Ibid.
in the article mentioning her death.\textsuperscript{188} Two months later, another man was murdered in the same fashion, this time bearing a note saying “this happened to me for failing to understand that I should not report things on social media websites. I am…just like La Nena from Laredo.”\textsuperscript{189}

This use of strategic, symbolic violence, coupled with mantas apologizing for certain events or attempting to shift the blame to other organizations, sends a message to the population about who is really in charge in Mexico. The DTOs engage in a seemingly absurd dance of public relations, one minute issuing cajoling mantas so as, in Galula’s words, “never to antagonize at any one time more people than can be handled,” then dumping a mangled, tagged body in the public plaza the next.\textsuperscript{190} The evidence presented in this chapter seems to lend support to my hypothesis that if Galula’s theory holds true, we would expect to violence that is qualitatively different from “normal” criminal violence stemming from in-group policing and competition between groups over profits. Instead, we will expect to see—and do see, as demonstrated in this section—calculated, public violence aimed at changing the behavior and beliefs of the population, with the desired outcome of reducing popular support for and the legitimacy of the Mexican state while increasing popular support for/obedience to criminal groups.

V. Polling Data

Some may still try to argue that even if the DTOs are actively attempting to influence the population and disassociate it from the state, as the past two chapters have demonstrated, these efforts—both the narcomantas and the violent strategic signaling—are meaningless given the

criminal, rather than ideological, nature of their actions. Returning to the puzzle of whether anyone would actually believe that a DTO could protect the “safety of Mexican families” better than the government, some authors such as Patrick Corcoran have argued that “these crude attempts to manipulate public opinions are generally unlikely to succeed.” The Calderón administration seems to agree: while government has made certain limited attempts to repair Mexico’s social fabric through community-building programs such as “Todos Somos Juarez,” its overall strategy appears to assume that the state does not need to "win back" its own population.

However as recent polling data demonstrate, popular support for the government and public faith in the ability of the state to protect the population and gain control over the DTOs have reached critically low levels. Having found support for my hypothesis that Galula’s theory does indeed hold and that the DTOs are using propaganda and pointed, strategic violence aimed at affecting the “hearts and minds” of the Mexican population, this chapter attempts to confirm whether or not the DTOs’ efforts, coupled with the government’s insufficient response, appear to be having their desired effect on the population. This chapter evaluates the effects of the DTOs’ efforts to achieve the disassociation of the population, as described in the previous two chapters, through an analysis of survey data on the Mexican population’s perception of safety, evaluations of the government’s success or failure against the DTOs, and opinion on public institutions.

Mexicans United Against Crime and Mitofsky Consulting’s ninth “Survey on the Perception of Security in Mexico,” paints a disturbingly bleak picture of the Mexican population’s fearful outlook and lack of faith in the government’s ability to win the war it has waged for six years. Obtained through 1000 face-to-face interviews conducted from October 21 to October 24 of 2011, these findings can be compared with those of the eight previous surveys

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going back to 2007, presenting a clear representation of how perceptions have changed over the course of the Calderón administration. Almost perfectly consistent with the results obtained for the past four years, more than eight out of ten Mexicans believe that the security situation in Mexico is worse than it was one year ago.\textsuperscript{192} For a plurality of Mexicans (35\%), insecurity is the greatest problem facing the country; this is the highest percentage obtained for this question since 2007 and the first time that insecurity trumped all other problems.\textsuperscript{193} Alarmingly, one out of four Mexicans report knowing someone who has died since 2007 from organized crime-related violence.\textsuperscript{194}

Fear of crime has increased significantly since last year, suggesting that the DTOs’ relentless demonstrations of the government’s inability to protect the population continue to erode the public’s perception of safety. Fear of kidnapping does not appear to correlate with social class and has increased for three straight years after dropping in 2007 and 2008, with two-thirds of Mexicans reporting that they greatly fear kidnapping; one-third of Mexicans report that they or one of their family members have been the victim of a crime in the past three months.\textsuperscript{195} 55\% of Mexicans report greatly fearing terrorist attacks such car bombs and the 2011 Monterrey Casino attack, illustrating what a disproportionately powerful these relatively infrequent tactics have on the population.\textsuperscript{196} Many Mexicans report that they have changed their behavior due to their fear of crime, with 45\% of people saying they have stopped going out at night and 43\% saying they have stopped letting their children play in the street.\textsuperscript{197}

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid. 6
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid. 6
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid. 7
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid. 7
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid. 7
Few Mexicans are willing to risk assisting the government in the fight against the DTOs by reporting information or otherwise assisting security forces, due to intense fear of reprisal. With regards to perceptions of the police, 84.6% of Mexicans living in the North report that it “very” or “somewhat” dangerous to help the police in their city or town, compared to 74.3% across the country as a whole.\footnote{Ibid. 18} The percentage of people who would be “very” or “somewhat” willing to serve as witnesses in a trial declined from 78% in November of 2008 to 62% in 2011.\footnote{Ibid. 18} Especially among lower-income Mexicans, visibility of law enforcement is very low: only 29.6% report seeing police in their community very or somewhat frequently, while 35.5% report seeing police infrequently and 22.7% report never seeing police.\footnote{Ibid. 20} In contrast, 56.8% of high-income Mexicans report very or somewhat frequently seeing police, with only 7% reporting that they never see police.\footnote{Ibid. 20} Across all social classes, the number of Mexicans who report frequently seeing police is down to 44% from a high of 51% in 2009.\footnote{Ibid. 20}

Most critically for the Mexican government, when the struggle against organized crime is presented as a “war,” 58% of Mexicans believe that organized crime is winning and only 18% believe that the government is winning.\footnote{Ibid. 26} This suggests that the DTOs’ demonstrations of power over the public space and the people, coupled with the government’s insufficient response, have succeeded in disassociating the population from the state. The numbers have held more or less steady for the past year, down from March 2010 when 39% believed that organized crime was winning and 37% believed the government was winning.\footnote{Ibid. 26} Interestingly, in the North, where most of the violence has occurred, had the highest proportion of respondents (25%) who reported
that neither side is winning, and tied with Central Mexico for the lowest proportion of respondents (16%) who reported that the government is winning. Only 14% of Mexicans believe that President Calderón will have “won the war against organized crime” upon completing his six-year term in late 2012, while 44% believe “things will stay the same” and 30.1% believe “things will get worse.” A significant portion of Mexicans may be tiring of the fight against the DTOs to the point where they would consider some kind of formal truce between organized crime and the government; 33% of people think that negotiating with organized crime would help decrease violence, up 12% since last April. These survey results illustrate that the Mexican government has been unable to demonstrate that it possesses “the will, the means, and the ability to win” against the DTOs, showing a society that has, at least in certain affected regions, entirely lost faith in its own state.

The implications of this data are critical: if the DTOs’ attempts to draw support away from the government towards themselves (as described in Chapters V and VI) are succeeding, as the survey results indicate, then the Mexican government must force the population to make a choice—to side with the state against the DTOs—by proving to citizens that it can protect them and the public space. The government must make the Mexican population believe that it can win.

VIII. Conclusions, Policy Recommendations, and Areas for Future Research

Conclusions

This thesis has sought to answer the fundamental question of whether population support matters in Mexico’s drug conflict. To do this and to attempt to fill a gap in the existing literature

205 Ibid. 26
206 Ibid. 11
on narcoviolence in Mexico, I have tested the application of David Galula’s theory—that an insurgency is a war for the “hearts and the minds” of the population—for the case of Mexico. I hypothesized that if Mexican DTOs’ cared about achieving the complicity of the population, we would expect to see them engage in the use of propaganda and calculated, strategic violence to affect popular support and to attack the legitimacy of the government. The evidence presented above, in the form of an analysis of narcomantas, violent strategic signaling, and public opinion, appears to lend strong support to my argument: the DTOs are indeed attempting to—and succeeding in—disassociating the Mexican population from the state. This conclusion then raises an important question: how should this affect the government’s strategy?

**Policy Recommendations**

This July Mexico will hold presidential elections, bringing President Calderón’s six-year term to an end. In a somewhat surprising turn of events given how highly most Mexicans prioritize public security, the two main contenders—Josefina Vásquez Mota for the PAN and current frontrunner Enrique Peña Nieto for the PRI—have largely avoided making security a central aspect of their campaigns. Vásquez Mota will presumably continue with her predecessor’s policies, while Peña Nieto, after making earlier promises about new strategies, released a proposed security plan that contained very few changes from Calderón’s policies and expressed support for continued use of the armed forces to fight organized crime.208 The only candidate to suggest significant changes such as completely withdrawing the armed forces within six months and refusing U.S. military aid is the leftist Partido de la Revolución Democrática

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(PRD)’s Andrés Manuel López Obrador, but he does not stand a serious chance of winning; his “hugs, not bullets” campaign slogan seems out of touch with the concerns of most Mexicans.\textsuperscript{209}

As the campaign season begins to pick up speed following its official kick-off on March 30, the candidates will likely be forced into greater discussion and debate on the future of Mexico’s security policies. Regardless of campaign promises, however, the new president will face a population weary of violence and highly skeptical of the government’s ability to make a difference. On the one-year anniversary of his son’s death and only two days before campaign season began, activist Javier Sicilia announced that he will be boycotting the presidential elections and implored other Mexicans who are also “fed up” to do the same.\textsuperscript{210} This overt dismissal of the upcoming elections is cause for alarm. Under President Calderón, the Mexican government has failed to acknowledge that it can no longer take for granted the population’s “tacit support…submission to law and order, [and] consensus.”\textsuperscript{211} How can the government convince justifiably apathetic Mexican citizens such as Sicilia—who feel that the upcoming elections do not matter because the national government as a whole does not really matter in their lives—that it can win against the DTOs?

If, as my investigation suggests, Galula’s classic theory does indeed apply to the case of Mexico—if this struggle is at least partially a war for the “hearts and minds” of the Mexican people—it follows that some of the strategies he provides in \textit{Counter-insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice} may also offer some solutions for Mexico’s struggle to contain the DTOs. It is critical that the Mexican government—with the support and aid of the U.S. government—


improve its ability to limit the power of the DTOs to coerce, frighten, and cajole the Mexican people. Using Galula’s recommendations for regaining the “hearts and minds” of the population in a country faced with an insurgency, I have crafted the following two fundamental yet potentially transformational policy recommendations for the Mexican government:

**Protect the population and prioritize reduction of violence**

First and foremost, the government must make protecting the population and reducing violence—rather than just eliminating DTO leaders—its top priority. It is quite clear from the polling data laid out in the previous chapter that a majority of Mexican citizens do not feel safe and sufficiently protected by the government, fearing kidnapping, murder, and even “terrorist attacks” by the DTOs.\(^{212}\) As Galula bluntly states, the government “cannot achieve much if the population is not, and does not feel, protected against the insurgent,” or in this case, against the DTOs.\(^{213}\) The population’s fear—and resulting disassociation from the government—has grave consequences for the rule of law and for the state’s ability to rally the population in its fight against the DTOs. The idea that the government can gather critically-needed intelligence on the DTOs while 75% of Mexicans report that helping the police is at “somewhat” or “very” unsafe is absurd; as Galula explains, “the population will not talk unless it feels safe, and it does not feel safe until the insurgent's power has been broken.”\(^{214}\)

There is already a precedent in the region for the importance of population protection: as writer James Bosworth has pointed out, Mexico has something to learn from Colombia about


\(^{214}\)Ibid. Kindle Locations 841-844
prioritizing the reduction of homicides and kidnappings over combating drug trafficking. President Uribe’s Democratic Security Strategy was by no means an unmitigated success: the human rights costs were high and the counternarcotics gains were dubious. But public opinion polling over the past decade has consistently shown that the Uribe administration succeeded in making the people of Colombia feel safer. Given that a quarter of all Mexicans know someone who has died in the violence and two-thirds report “greatly fearing” kidnapping, the Mexican government has a long way to go towards improving the protection of the population. To paraphrase Galula, “attrition of the enemy” must become a “by-product” of the government’s fight against the DTOs, “not its essential goal.”

The government should also take care to prioritize the protection of the state’s most vulnerable groups. Recently the Mexican Senate approved a constitutional amendment to make attacks against journalists a federal crime, as part of an effort to curb the DTOs’ continued assault on the freedom of the press. This is a step in the right direction, but more protection is needed for vulnerable groups such as journalists and activists, both for obvious reasons—protecting citizens performing valuable work in Mexican society—and to curtail the power of the cartels to intimidate the population through strategic violence and control over the press. The United States may able to be of some assistance in this area by increasing the number of temporary visas for activists and journalists facing death threats in Mexico. With the United States’ presidential campaign also approaching, Mexico may not be a top priority for President

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Obama, and the issue of immigration, especially from Mexico, remains politically sensitive, but using the visas as a kind of temporary, “witness protection” style system may prove feasible given that they would apply to people who clearly intend to return to Mexico.

**Improve strategic communication:**

While writing in 1964, Galula did not use the term “strategic communication”, but a 2011 RAND report used the term to encapsulate the communication aspect of his theory. Strategic communication, or “coordinated whole-of-government persuasion and influence efforts,” involving maintaining credibility with the population, minimizing the “say-do” gap, prioritizing consistency of message, and managing expectations.219 The Mexican government has, thus far, failed to prioritize strategic communication as a way of limiting the DTOs ability to attack the government’s legitimacy; President Calderón has vacillated between downplaying and inflating the threat posed to Mexican society by the DTOs, and the defense of his administration’s strategy presented by top officials has often come off as mere “spin.”220 As Galula states and as the mantas discussed in Chapter V show, propaganda is a “powerful weapon” for an insurgent, or, in this case, for a DTO.221 Unlike the government, who cannot lie or exaggerate for fear of becoming discredited, the insurgent is “free to use every trick…[and] if necessary, he can lie, cheat, and exaggerate.”222 Thus to counter the DTOs’ use of propaganda, the government must use its own propaganda as an effort “to inform and not to fool.”223

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222 Ibid Kindle Locations 248-253
223 Ibid. Kindle Location 253
For Mexico’s security forces, part of enhancing strategic communication includes taking a more strategic view of the importance of improving their human rights record. In a struggle for “hearts and minds,” any “misdeeds” by government forces will turn popular support away from the state.\textsuperscript{224} Unfortunately, it is insufficient to emphasize the intrinsic value of human rights; as Galula explains, “antagonizing the population” only makes the insurgents’ job easier, thus it is critical that “rash actions on the part of the forces be kept to a minimum.”\textsuperscript{225} As seen in the mantas described in Chapter V, the DTOs use both real and invented human rights violations by the armed forces to attack government legitimacy. Currently, the Mexican public holds the armed forces in relatively high esteem, especially in comparison with other institutions such as the police. Despite Human Rights Watch’s damning November 2011 report about widespread extrajudicial killings and torture by the armed forces, a poll by the Mexican newspaper \textit{Excelsior} that same month found that 67\% of Mexicans report feeling “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with the armed forces’ respect for human rights.\textsuperscript{226} That esteem, however, has slipped over the course of the conflict, likely due to the increase in reported human rights violations by the armed forces and to growing uneasiness about the continued deployment of the military.\textsuperscript{227} Given the slow pace of police reform and professionalization, critical though it may be, it is likely that the armed forces will continue to play a key role in the fight against the DTOs. By making a real effort to prioritize human rights—perhaps made easier by “thoroughly indoctrinating” leaders in the armed forces with the strategic importance of this—and by communicating demonstrable

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid. Kindle Locations 1130-1132
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid. Kindle Locations 1130-1132
improvements to the population, the government can increase its legitimacy and reduce the propaganda power of the DTOs.\textsuperscript{228}

\textbf{Areas for Future Research}

The importance of the conclusions drawn from this thesis—that the DTOs are indeed succeeding in disassociating the “hearts and minds” of the Mexican population from the state—for the Mexican government’s strategy means that more research is needed in this area. Efforts must be made to realistically assess what specific targets Mexican government can achieve at the local, state, and federal levels to limit the power of the DTOs to coerce, frighten, and cajole the Mexican population, given the limitations and obstacles posed by corruption and DTO infiltration. In addition, should the government move toward making any changes in policy similar to those recommended above, more consistent public opinion polling data is needed to track the effects of these interventions on the population. Furthermore, given the paucity of existing research on the application of classic counterinsurgency theory to the case of Mexico, future investigations on how Mexico could apply the lessons that other governments have learned in dealing with past or current insurgencies—such as in Peru, Sierra Leone, and Colombia—could prove fruitful. Finally, it is vital that the same kind of investigation undertaken in this thesis be applied to the case of Central America. Due to trafficking shifts from increased pressure on the DTOs in Mexico, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, recently replaced Ciudad Juarez as the most violent city in the Western Hemisphere, and the average homicide rate of the region’s six largest countries is double that of Mexico.\textsuperscript{229} All the challenges Mexico currently faces—violence, endemic corruption, lack of state control over territory, entrenched criminal networks,


and unemployment—are thus exponentially worse in Central America, raising the stakes for future research.
IX. Appendices

Appendix A: Narcomantas

I. Date: August 2008.
Location: Veracruz, Veracruz
Author: Unsigned

Translation:

“Mr. Narco-President, if you want the insecurity to end, stop protecting traffickers like Mr. Chapo Guzman….La Familia Michoacana and the party leaders that just like you are narcos like those before who already have 40 years of narco-leaders!”
II. Date: June 2009.
Location: Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua
Author: Unsigned

Translation:

“The war is between us (the narcos). But all those who continue denouncing us with anonymous call, we are going to kill. Remember that for a peso anyone will pass information.”
III. Date: March 2010.
Location: Chihuahua, Chihuahua
Author: Sinaloa DTO

Translation:
“The Sinaloa Cartel is in solidarity with the family of Ms. Marisela Escobedo and with the people of Chihuahua. To provide us with information...[sic]...Get out swine, that’s what the Zetas are, or the Line and end these beasts that the government of the state is protecting and, as this shows, what happens. Denounce them!”
IV. Date: July 2011  
Location: Tecomán, Colima  
Author: New Generation Jalisco Cartel  

Translation (with added grammar and punctuation for better comprehension):

“Attention: this is a communiqué for Mexican society, in particular for the people of Jalisco and Colima. To be distinguished from all the banners and murders in the past few days, to the name of our business already [people] think to tarnish our name. We will never leave our homes. You know well that we do not kidnap or kill innocent people, nor do we threaten the authorities. Be as that may we respect the same, take into account that if you support the Resistoles or the cartel that calls itself the Zetas or La Familia, the states of Jalisco and Colima will become another Ciudad Juarez or Monterrey. In this most attentive way we ask you to take heed.”
Translation:

“Mr. President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa,

We know that you do not make deals with narcotraffickers. However with all due respect that your position merits, and por the wellbeing and future of the families of Mexico, we propose that the fight to eliminate the criminal group Los Zetas, that does so much damage to the country, be realized through a common front between the armed forces and the “United Cartels.”

We do not pretend to justify our illicit activities, much less to negotiate our impunity. We know that there will never be a pact, but this is not about narcotic trafficking, or money, or much less the fight for plazas, it is about saving human lives.
Once the task of eradicating Los Zetas is finishes, you all can continue your labor or trying to eliminate narcotics trafficking.

It is on you as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Mexico to bring back peace to the country.

The members of the [United] Cartels, we promise to make possible what has been impossible for the government: recovering the safety of Mexican families.”

VI. Date: September 2011
Location: Veracruz, Veracruz
Author: Gente Nueva/Sinaloa DTO

Partial translation:

"No more extortions, no more deaths of innocent people!...This [torture and asphyxiation] will happen or [we'll kill you] the way we've shot people dead in the past. To the people of Veracruz, don't let them extort you, don't pay any more fines. If they do it, it is because they want to. These people, it's the only thing they know how to do."
VII. Date: May 2011
Location: C-5 Highway, Nuevo León
Author: Zetas

Translation:

“For: the informants of the Gulf DTO,

Stop going around killing innocent people and fight. Just like how we’re going to Valle Hermosa and Miguel Aleman and [expletive] you up and fight you face to face. For you it’s heating up the plazas, it’s throwing grenades and going around killing defenseless old people, it’s shameless, so stand up and don’t kill innocents!”
VIII. Date: December 2011
Location: Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas
Author: Zetas
Translation:

“To whom it may concern,

With respect to the banner under my name, Miguel Angel Treviño Morales, that challenges the Mexican government and all the authorities and federal agencies of the two countries. To start, let me clarify that I did not order those banners to be hung. We do not govern this country, nor do we have a regime, we are not terrorists or guerrillas. We are dedicated to our occupation and what we least desire is to have problems with any government, be it Mexican or much less with the American.

That message must have been put by someone with nothing better to do; that person wants to set me up against the government and make the government believe that is my mindset.

Yes, I know and am aware that you cannot and should not fight against any government. Never would it even cross my mind to go up against Samson, I have no motive to put such those stupid remarks on a message, nor do I think the government believes anybody with a brain would sign their name to such stupid remarks.

We also want to clarify that the Zetas are not terrorists and we are against terrorism. Not long ago the media said the DEA had an informant who told them that we would make an attempt against the life of an ambassador [referring to the alleged Quds force plot against the Saudi ambassador]. We would not now or ever have any such inclination to have anything to do with acts of this nature.

That [manta] is not ours and we do not have that kind of mentality. That message must have been put up by someone who wants to succeed in changing how people see me. I don't know who put it up, nor am I going to say it was this group or that person because in reality I do not know who it was. But what is true is that I respect the Mexican and the American
governments, and I totally disavow the foolish comments made on that manta, and I emphasize that I am not of that mindset and the Zeta cartel is not and will not trying anything. In regards to what happened at the casino royal in Monterrey, Nuevo León: this was not ordered, it was stupid what those people did… I don't think it passed through their chicken brains, the damage they were going to cause to the families of the victims that died in that regrettable occurrence. With our most sincere condolences we want you to realize that we did not order that. We know this will cause a lot of comments, but what those idiots did not have sense or reason, and they did not realize the problems they were getting into.

Our respect to the Mexican government.”
Translation:

“They’re fulfilling their commitment to heat up the plaza with prison riots and attacks on government installations and bystanders. This is not going to continue, so we give you 24 hour to withdraw your people. The fight we gave you last week was just a test of who is in control here. The war is about to begin. You had your opportunity…to have withdrawn your people from the state

Sincerely,

Gente Nueva and [los Mayos]”
Partial translation:

[By photo of President Calderón] “So this is your war against crime”
XI. Date: November 2010
Location: Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua
Author: Unknown

Translation:

“Fine, 30 of Nov., Teachers’ Christmas Bonus.”
Translation:

“To those who prefer, for the care of our state and of the Michoacanan people, either the Federal Police or La Familia Michoacana, society is who decides.

The organization is prepared to dissolve itself if society asks it to, but if not we are prepared to die fighting for you.

It is better to die on your feet facing ahead than to live your whole life on your knees and humiliated.

Sincerely,

La Familia Michoacana”
XIII. Date: July 2011
Location: Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas
Author: Zetas

Translation:

“The Zetas operations group wants you. Military or ex-military. We offer you a good salary, food, and care for your family. You will not suffer bad treatment or hunger anymore. We will not give you ramen rations.

Snitches don’t bother calling.

Those interested contact us.”
Translation:

“Mr. Javier Sicilia,

Answering the petition for a truce on the part of the federal government and the existing groups or cartels in our country, we say the following:

We the Caballeros Templarios are not a group of narcotraffickers, we are a group exercising the law, like the community that we are, we have decided to accept the truce, in the case that there is one. We ask you then, the federal government and above all General Garcia
Luna, will they accept and respect the truce, given that they already on December 9, 2009 and the 8 and 9 of December, 2010, have attacked the population of Tierra Caliente with the force of the Federal Government, through the Federal Police…And we believe that this year 2011, they are going to return to the same, hit innocent families that never have anything to do with us and they will keep stealing, raping women, and killing innocent people.

Because of this, our question is Mr. Sicilia, will the federal government obey a truce, when it has not respected the agreements that it has reached with you, and continued to put them off? You are the first and the only one to have petitioned the federal government to reach an agreement with organized crime, with the goal of stopping this wave of violence that is happening in our country and that has caused more than 50,000 deaths, something that would not have occurred, if the government had respected the petition when you first made it.

Mr. Sicilia, we the Caballeros Templarios are ready to respect the truce that you propose, without conditions, with the exception that the federal government not attack our community and our people and that it also respects the agreement.

Sincerely,

Caballeros Templarios.”
Translation:

“The New Generation Jalisco Cartel remains strong, firm, and united

To all citizens,

We ask your forgiveness for the acts that occurred the past Friday, it was just a reaction
to meddling with a member of the CJNG that only dedicates himself to working for our group,
caring and maintaining the tranquility of the state of Jalisco.

Staying on the margin of the population, the evil ones like the Zetas just dedicate
themselves to robbing, extorting, and kidnapping without respecting innocent people. Do not fear, the people of CJNG are on all sides to support you for a stable, tranquil, and better state. Let us know any kind of calls of extortion or threats and the location of any of these evil ones.

Enough of these people who make publications on social networks. More than a member of the CJNG will realize so as to put up intelligence and support them.

While the police stay on the sidelines, CJNG will not mess with them.

CJNG Firm and United”
XVI. Date: July 2011  
Location: Monterrey, Nuevo León  
Author: Zetas  

Translation:

“The Zetas group disavows the attacks on the civilian population that occurred on July 9 in Monterrey, Nuevo León…we hold the Gulf Cartel responsible for these attacks, there are signs of desperation upon seeing that they cannot fight our group and to heat up the plaza and to distract attention from the operations in Reynosa, Matamoros, and Diaz Ordaz…the only thing they have is to kill innocent people that don’t have anything to do with crime, with the only end of heating up the plaza.

…we invite [all you Cartel members] to fight us head on and not go around messing with the civilian population and we reiterate that we are not going to fall for you games and order our
people in Reynosa and Matamoros to do the same [expletive] that you all did, go around setting off car bombs and indiscriminately killing innocent people.

Sincerely,

The Zetas Group”
XVII. Date: February 2012
Location: Monterrey, Nuevo León
Author: Zetas

Translation:

"Message for the people of Mexico. To the public opinion. Nuevo León is the territory of
the Zetas and we demonstrate that power with our acts. And although he doesn’t like it, Rodrigo Medina obeys me because we supported him in achieving the governorship.

Or did you think that the 20 million dollars that we gave to...his campaign was free?

Or [did you think] that we what paid for the expenses of Rodrigo...we weren't going to charge for?

I do what I want in Nuevo León, because it belongs to me., and I set free who I want from the jails, and in the same way I kill members of the Gulf DTO. Accept it, the only thing that remains for the Calderón government and those whom come after is to negotiate with us, because if not we will have to defeat you and take power by force like we have up until now. Already you have realized that not even with the support of the U.S. government (ICE, ATF, FBI, DEA), much less the [Mexican] Navy, Army, Police, and Prosecutor's Office can you take us, because here the Zetas rule.”
XVIII. Date: January 2012  
Location: Morelia, Michoacán  
Author: Caballeros Templarios  

Translation (via Borderland Beat):

“Mr. Sicilia: Michoacán society, especially its women, asks that you monitor the conditions in which the federal government and the military have engulfed Michoacán’s homes in oppression. The constant outrages that we are subjected to have put us at the edge of desperation.

We ask your support to show President Calderón that Michoacán is not the home of criminals only, but that the majority of society are honest people with dignity that work every day to support their families.

Help us to make the government understand that the men who take up arms do so for their own reasons and that they are responsible for their actions. That is why only they should face justice for their crimes.

In Michoacán a string of human rights violations are occurring that have put society in opposition to the actions taken by the federal government, through the use of the Army. We want
an end to the violence. We don’t want them to take our sons and wives as scapegoats to justify their presence in Michoacán, concocting crimes and accusing innocent people, planting weapons and drugs to unjustly imprison them.

We want to be heard, that Felipe Calderón is treating his own people cruelly. In a systematic manner the federal government is labeling all Michoacanos as criminals, first using the federal police (PFP) to attack us and now using the Mexican Army to do the same, who outside of any legal authority raid our homes, rob, rape and murder innocent civilians.

Investigate what the military is doing, killing innocents, acting outside the law and arresting innocents. How can we make them understand that not all Michoacanos are criminals, and that Michoacán women must not be violated, not one more.

The aggressive behavior and the excessive and unlawful abuse by the soldiers denigrate the institution that they represent. Where is the military honor and discipline that gave rise to admiration and respect from Mexican society that considered them heroes? Now with their vulgar and shameful behavior they only provoke condemnation from society, and in turn they cause families victimized by military abuses to sympathize with the ideals of the alleged organized crime that for many of us they are not criminals because they care more for the protection and support of society that our own authorities.

The Mexican people demand respect of the rule of law by the authorities of all levels and all branches of government. If they continue with the abuses and discrimination against Michoacán they are only driving us down the road to civil disobedience and what will follow will be determination because we are tired of the abuses and that the people’ denunciations of the oppression by the government are not heard.

We hope Mr. Sicilia that you will listen and support us. That the association that you
honorably lead will take up this cause and prevent President Calderón from continuing his abuses as a reprisal because his sister was not victorious in the race for Governor. The people are free to elect whoever they want to govern them and not be oppressed and mistreated for their choice. We demand respect for the constitution and human rights. Michoacán is state that wants to live in peace, stop attacking us and help us to live peacefully.

    Sincerely, Michoacán society, and presently the Knights and Ladies Templar.”
Translation:

“To all the people of Veracruz,

Do not be deceive, we are not your enemies. The government has allowed innocent Veracruz families to die in this war that is only between some cartels. The murder of three members of a family on October 13 in Moralillo and the attack on bus passengers on December 22 was not caused by us. A corrupt government official executed these attacks: shooting without conscience and without caring about innocent life. We are not guilty of these strategies, we are people of the pueblo and we will continue our fight.

Sincerely: the Zetas.”
NOTE: Appendix B contains a number of graphic photos of the kinds of violence referenced in Chapter VII. I have decided to include these photos not in an attempt to shock readers, but because seeing the violence that many Mexicans confront every day is an integral part of understanding the psychological effects of the drug war. To ensure that those readers who do not wish to look at the photos may avoid doing so, I have placed Appendix B into a separate document.
X. Bibliography


