

# Fragmentation and cooperation: the evolution of organized crime in Mexico

Laura H. Atuesta & Yocelyn Samantha Pérez-Dávila 

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## Abstract

Some researchers suggest that the observed boom in the levels of violence in Mexico since 2008 are a consequence of placing federal military forces in states with a significant organized crime presence. However, little has been said about the role of the changeable, competitive, and violent nature of criminal organizations on this increasing violence. Using the literature on inter- and intra-state conflicts as matter of analogy to explain organized crime developments in Mexico, fragmentation and cooperation seem to be determinant forces that alter the equilibrium within Mexican criminal groups, affecting their territorial control. By using a private dataset gathered by the Drug Policy Program at the Center for Economic Research and Teaching (CIDE), we examine the evolution of criminal organizations in Mexico by focusing on their different alliances and fragmentations from December 2006 to December 2011. Our analysis suggests that violence is a consequence not only of the law enforcement actions, but also of the fragmentation and cooperation within and between private groups.

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## Notes

1. CIDE is a Mexican center for research and higher education specialized in social sciences. More information at <http://www.cide.edu/sobre-el-cide/>
2. We are using homicides categorized as “executions” allegedly related to organized crime as proxy for violence. Other indicators of violence can be used (i.e. number of disappearances, extortion, kidnappings, and torture, among others).
3. The number of events related to organized crime gathered in the PPD Database is greater than these numbers. However, a criminal group is not always identified.
4. Alliances and coalitions are not the same. According to Smith (1995), an alliance is a nonbinding agreement between two nations. A coalition is a group of nations that fight together in war, with or without a previous agreement.
5. A unique command allows an organization to be institutionalized, with all factions being represented by the organization (Bakke et al. 2012).
6. The [online appendix](#) provides a detailed description of the groups forming alliances and fragmentations, and a brief description of the PPD Dataset information used for this