



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on April 19, 2011

Mexican Drug Cartels Operating in at Least 1,286 U.S. Cities

On April 13, All Headline News reported that the influence of Mexican drug cartels operating in U.S. cities is growing because cartel members are becoming residents. Roberta Jacobson, Deputy Secretary of State for Mexico and Canada, brought this information to a political forum in Washington, D.C., quoting a March 27 report from the Justice Department. The findings are also being widely disseminated in the Mexican media.

The National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) report, according to Jacobson, listed the cartels with the most influence in the U.S. as follows: the Sinaloa cartel, operating in 75 U.S. cities; the Gulf and Zetas cartels, both in 37 cities; the Juarez, in 33 cities; the Beltran Leyva Organization, in 30; La Familia, in 27; and Tijuana, in 21. This list contains the largest and most widely known cartels; the Zetas organization, comprised mostly of Mexican Army special forces soldiers, is considered to be one of the most vicious. The unnamed cities are all said to have seen a substantial increase in drug sales and violence.

AHN reported that the U.S. government plans to cut spending for drug interdiction under the Mérida Initiative next year by \$250 million. The Initiative is a 2008 treaty under which the U.S. government pledged to contribute \$1.5 billion to Mexico, along with drug-fighting equipment and personnel.

Jacobson explained that the Initiative is entering a new phase in which achievements will likely take longer and progress will not be as obvious. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) claims that since 2009, its agents have doubled the amount of time they spend in breaking up cartel influence.

Borderland Beat (BB), referencing the same NDIC report on April 11, reported that [the expansion of cartel operations into the United States](#) has predictably resulted in increased violence. According to BB, the Intelligence Center information indicated that the Mexican cartels are now operating in at least 1,286 American cities in nine regions — with 143 of these operations controlled directly by cartel members in Mexico.

The report was sent to embassies and border entry points to aid officials in identifying cartel members regularly crossing the border or settling in the United States. Law enforcement personnel have been





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warned to check for tattoos and jewelry bearing the various symbols used by the cartels.

The *LA Times* for April 17 carried the report of a [Columbia, South Carolina](#) police sting that captured Sinaloa cartel member Frediberto Pineda, who had settled in the state capital to manage one of the cartel's U.S. outposts. According to the *Times*, cartel members living in America are trained in Mexico, with cartels claiming territories for their markets and developing routes. Many kkfear that the posturing by the gangs for routes and territories in the United States will soon produce the same result as in Mexico — savage, all-out turf wars.

When the FBI targeted Pineda, they finally had a direct connection to the cartel; however Pineda refused to cooperate with authorities for fear of cartel retaliation against his children in Mexico. The *Times* reported, “[Lead FBI agent Michael] Stansbury said the FBI tried to draw Pineda out in an interview to learn more about the cartel, but the discussion went nowhere. In the back of a car heading from the FBI office to jail, Pineda resisted. ‘You know what happens in Mexico if I start talking,’ he said. ‘You know what they will do.’”

Pineda had been deported twice before settling in Columbia, South Carolina. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison for heading a cocaine operation there.

Photo: Senate Crime and Drugs subcommittee Chairman Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill. during a hearing on law enforcement responses to the Mexican drug cartels, March 17, 2009: AP Images



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