



# Violence and Insecurity in Guerrero

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*“Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic Responses to Crime and Violence” Briefing Paper Series*

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## List of Acronyms

APPG	<i>Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Guerrero</i>
CCSPIP	<i>Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal A.C.</i>
CIDA	<i>Cártel Independiente de Acapulco</i>
CJNG	<i>Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación</i>
CRAC-PC	<i>Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias y Policía Comunitaria</i>
CRSJ-PCP	<i>Coordinadora Regional de Seguridad y Justicia-Policía Ciudadana y Popular</i>
DTO	Drug trafficking organization
GVP	Guerrero Violence Project
INEGI	<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía</i>
PGJE	<i>Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado</i>
SNSP	<i>Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública</i>
UPOEG-SSJC	<i>Unión de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Estado de Guerrero-Sistema de Seguridad y Justicia Ciudadana</i>

## Executive Summary

Insecurity and violence associated with organized criminal activity are pervasive in Mexico's southern state of Guerrero. The state's homicide rate is the highest in the country and extortion and kidnapping are commonplace. For perpetrators, there is near complete impunity. The state is divided into territories within which either drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) or community policing networks exercise control over local policing functions. Local, state, or federal authorities occasionally join this competition, but for the most part policing powers are held by others. In rural areas competition between groups of traffickers over the state's prodigious narcotics output has created violent no-man's-lands in buffer zones between territories controlled by rival groups. In cities violence is mostly a byproduct of efforts to establish and preserve monopolies in extortion, kidnapping, and retail contraband markets. Despite claims to the contrary by state and federal authorities, there has been no discernible improvement in public security in recent months or years.

Guerrero is located along Mexico's Pacific coast due south of Mexico City. The most prominent city is the resort center of Acapulco. Other major population centers include: the coastal resort area west of Acapulco at Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo; the centrally located state capital of Chilpancingo; the city of Iguala in the north; and the twin cities of Coyuca de Catalán and Ciudad Altamirano in the northwest. Nearly a quarter of the state's population lives in Acapulco, another fifth in other urban centers, and the balance, nearly sixty percent of the total, lives spread among thousands of rural communities with fewer than 2,500 residents.

The dominant features of the landscape, from south to north, include a narrow coastal plain, an enormous east-west trending mountain mass that forms into a single ridgeline in the west, an east-west trending trench known as the Balsas Depression, and an area of rugged mountains in the far north. The transportation infrastructure is dominated by a north-south running interstate highway that connects Mexico City to Acapulco and east-west running highways on the coastal plain and in the Balsas Depression. These roads link the state's major population centers but transportation connectivity elsewhere is very poorly developed.

The DTOs that operate in Guerrero vary in size and structure but are generally composed of hierarchically organized networks of operationally specialized cells. They engage in a range of activities, including narcotics production and trafficking, contraband sales, extortion, and kidnapping. Money laundering schemes likely extend their activities to include a multitude of otherwise legal investments. Violence is a component in the exploitation of most of these activities, though the level of violence and the patterning of its application vary from one to the next. The single most important source of DTO earnings are profits from the sale of heroin derived from poppy that is grown in the mountains throughout the state. An estimated sixty percent of Mexico's poppy crop is grown in Guerrero. It is produced almost entirely for export to the U.S. market where demand is robust. Marijuana is also produced in Guerrero but more of the state's output is likely consumed domestically than exported. Profits from the sale of narcotics and other contraband in urban retail markets are another important source of earnings. Predatory extortion and kidnapping have also been areas of notable growth and innovation in recent years. The intensification of these crimes in cities and their expansion into rural settings, backed by prodigious applications of violence, has spread terror throughout the state.

At least nine separate DTOs operate in Guerrero today where as recently as 2008 there was only one, the Beltrán Leyva group. The current fragmentation has not weakened DTOs at the local level, however. To the contrary, DTOs probably have greater influence and control in local communities today than at any time in the past. In the earlier period local security forces were commonly compensated for granting Beltrán Leyva traffickers the freedom to operate with minimal interference. The situation in Guerrero today rarely makes this necessary. There is no local police force in the state that has the firepower or organizational capacity to impede DTO operations or provide even rudimentary security in local communities.

By the end of 2014, state or federal authorities had relieved local police of responsibility for security in 27 of the state's 81 municipalities. This is a strategy that has been adopted repeatedly over the years and that has never shown signs of success. The level and patterning of DTO-related violence in a community reflects the types of remunerative opportunities the community offers combined with the degree of competition that exists between rival organizations. Levels of violence are not significantly affected by the presence or absence of local police or by the deployment of state and federal security forces. The dominant policing strategies used by security forces in Guerrero are simply ineffective against the DTOs that operate in the state today.

In response to the failure of local, state, and federal authorities to provide security, a number of community policing networks have formed. In several cases, the presence of community policing groups has merely added a new dimension to existing DTO conflicts, with community policing groups directly or indirectly siding with one DTO against a rival. But in other cases these groups have been effective at curbing DTO activity, reducing levels of violence, and significantly improving public perceptions of personal security. In some cases, these improvements have come at the expense of constitutionally protected rights but it is not clear whether this resulted from excessive exuberance or operational necessity. Minimally, the ongoing experiments in community policing provide a rich opportunity to examine alternatives to the strategies that are known to be ineffective. As a case in point, in response to pleading by citizen groups the state recently authorized the creation of a citizen-based rural police force operating under state authority and control. Although the initiative has been underfunded, the first group trained and deployed under the program has been highly effective.

Solving the security crisis in Guerrero is possible. To do so will require that state authorities make a systematic effort to address two existing realities that sustain the criminal activities producing violence. First, the judicial reform of 2008 needs to be implemented, expanded, and extended to include penal reform. No matter how capable policing institutions were to become, without the support of open and efficient judicial processes no amount of effective policing will help. Authorities should look carefully at the multitude of experiments in community policing that are taking place in the state and should be prepared to support successful practices where these are found to be consistent with constitutional rights guarantees. Second, quelling the violence in Guerrero will require recognition by state authorities of the extent to which DTOs have become integrated into the fabric of state's social and economic life. A substantial portion of the state's population depends on earnings derived from narcotics production and many others depend on revenue streams that involve DTO participation. Reducing the economic role of DTOs will cause substantial dislocation and hardship that the state and federal governments must be prepared to address.

# VIOLENCE AND INSECURITY IN GUERRERO

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## Overview

Violence associated with organized crime has become a regular feature of everyday life in Mexico's southern state of Guerrero. The state overtook Chihuahua as the country's most homicidal in 2012 and it has retained this distinction through 2014.<sup>1</sup> The available statistics on extortion and kidnapping are unreliable, but these crimes too are clearly commonplace and occur with near complete impunity. The state is divided into territories within which drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and/or community policing networks compete for control over local policing functions. Local, state, or federal authorities occasionally join this competition, but for the most part they have ceded policing powers to others and instead restrict their activities to other administrative functions. In rural areas competition between groups of traffickers over the state's prodigious narcotics output has created violent no-man's-lands in buffer zones between territories controlled by rival groups. In cities violence is mostly a byproduct of DTO extortion and kidnapping operations as well as efforts to monopolize retail contraband markets. Competition between rival DTOs in urban areas of Guerrero, especially in the working class neighborhoods of Acapulco, has produced some of the highest rates of violent crime in the world.

State efforts to suppress the violence and the associated criminal activities have been disorganized and have not been successful. Part of the problem clearly involves the permeation of state institutions by DTOs. But even where corruption is not a factor, the basic approaches adopted to suppress the violence have remained unchanged over the years despite a scant record of success. The efforts have invariably involved a temporary suspension of local police forces and their replacement by differing combinations of state and/or federal police, generally with the participation of army and/or marine units. Overall command of these mixed units has varied from one initiative to the next, as has the balance among state, federal, and military forces, but the basic template has remained unchanged. Claims at success by state authorities notwithstanding, there is very little evidence that these measures have had more than a modest and temporary effect. Unfortunately, most of the proposals currently under consideration promise more of the same.

Several community policing networks operate within the state and some of these perhaps offer models for state-supported initiatives. Setting aside community policing networks that are merely extensions of DTO rivalries, several groups have had localized success at reducing rates of crime and associated violence. The community policing movement in Guerrero is diverse, however, and there is little reason to anticipate significant geographic expansion of the more successful models without significant and thoughtful state support.

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<sup>1</sup> See "Tasas por cada 100 mil habitantes 1997-2014." *Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública* (SNSP), December 19, 2014. Available at [http://www.secretariadoejecutivosnp.gob.mx/work/models/SecretariadoEjecutivo/Resource/1/1/tasas\\_publicacion.pdf](http://www.secretariadoejecutivosnp.gob.mx/work/models/SecretariadoEjecutivo/Resource/1/1/tasas_publicacion.pdf) (retrieved 1/9/2015).



Restraining the violence in Guerrero will require that state authorities make a systematic effort to address two existing realities that sustain the criminal activities producing violence. First, the judicial reform of 2008 needs to be implemented, expanded, and extended to include penal reform. No matter how capable policing institutions were to become, without the support of open and efficient judicial processes no amount of effective policing will help. Authorities should look carefully at the multitude of experiments in community policing that are taking place in the state and should be prepared to adopt successful practices where these are found to be consistent with constitutional rights guarantees. Second, quelling the violence in Guerrero will require recognition by state authorities of the extent to which DTOs have become integrated into the fabric of state's social and economic life. A substantial portion of the state's population depends on earnings derived from narcotics production and many others depend on revenue streams that involve DTO participation. Reducing the economic role of DTOs will cause substantial dislocation and hardship that the state and federal governments must be prepared to address.

## Geographic Setting

Situated due south of central Mexico along Pacific coastline, the state of Guerrero is dominated by the east-west trending Sierra Madre del Sur (Figure 1). This range begins as a jumbled mountain mass in the east that narrows to the west where it resolves into an enormous ridgeline, known as the Filo Mayor. North of the Sierra Madre del Sur lies the Balsas Depression, a large valley system draining most of the southern escarpment of the central Mexican highlands. In the north-central portion of the state, the valley is narrow and the landscape dominated by mountainous extensions of the central Mexican Plateau. In the northeast, the valley broadens into low-lying basin that curves around the Filo Mayor and drains into the Pacific along the Guerrero-Michoacán border. South of the Sierra Madre del Sur the land drops rapidly to sea level, a descent that is interrupted by a narrow coastal plain that rarely exceeds 10 km in width.

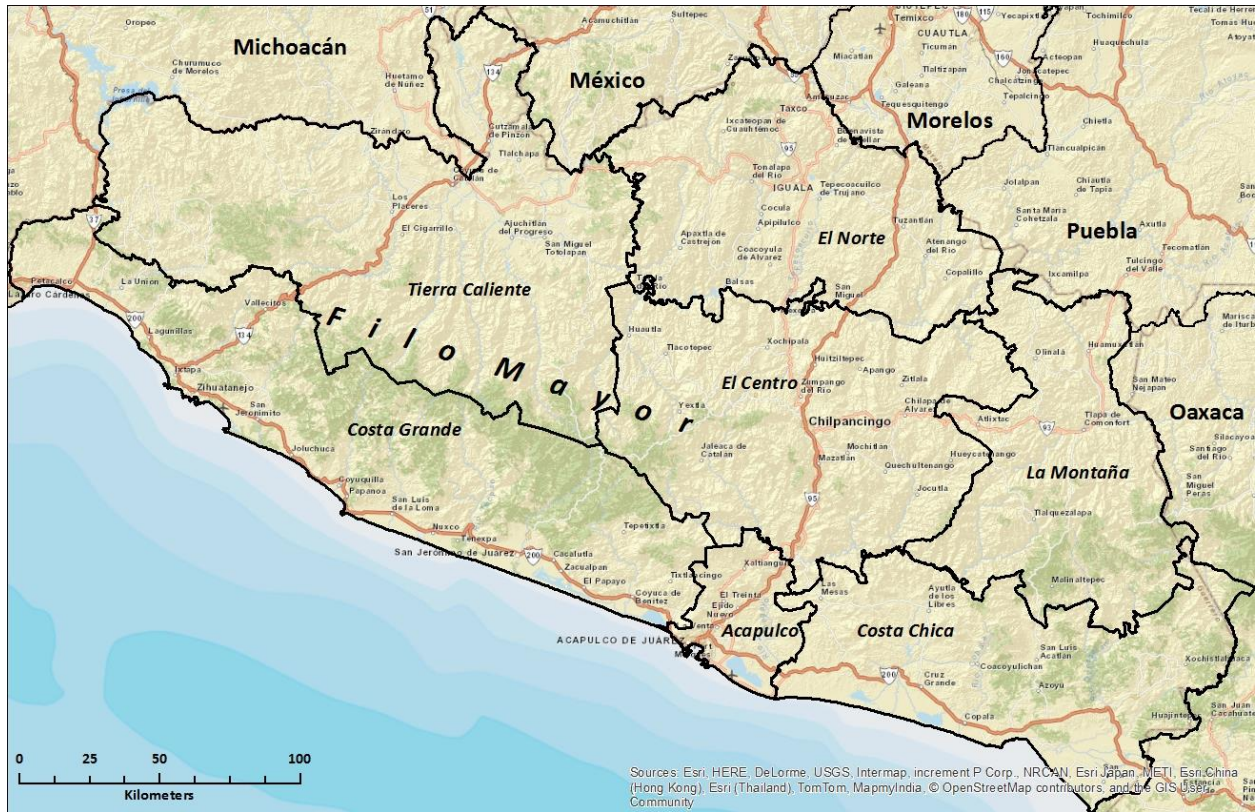


Figure 1 – Regions of Guerrero

By standard economic measures, Guerrero consistently ranks among Mexico’s most impoverished states. The terrain through much of the state is forbidding and the transportation infrastructure is poorly developed and maintained. Just over half of the state’s roughly 3.5 million residents live in “urban” settlements. Acapulco, the largest, accounts for about twenty-five percent of the state’s population. The rural population lives dispersed among scattered and often isolated villages; in 2010 just over fifty-eight percent of the state’s population was spread among more than seven thousand communities with fewer than 2,500 residents.<sup>2</sup> Subsistence agriculture with supplemental commodity production or seasonal wage employment remains a way of life for a substantial majority of the rural population.

The state is conventionally divided into seven geographic and sociocultural regions, including Acapulco, Costa Grande, Costa Chica, El Centro, La Montaña, El Norte, and Tierra Caliente (Figure 1). In La Montaña and rural areas in El Centro and El Norte, farmers combine subsistence agriculture, small-scale commodity production, and seasonal migration for their survival. The economies of rural communities are somewhat more deeply embedded in national and international commercial networks in mountainous portions of Costa Grande and Tierra Caliente. Agricultural communities on and near the coastal plain in Costa Chica and Costa Grande and in a zone of intensive irrigation agriculture in low elevations in Tierra Caliente are more capital intensive and still more deeply enmeshed in international commercial networks.

<sup>2</sup> *Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010*, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI). Available at <http://www.inegi.org.mx/> (accessed 1/9/2015).

The state's largest urban settlements are tourist destinations and administrative centers while smaller cities perform commercial and service functions for surrounding rural communities. There is very little industrial development in the state. And aside from Chilpancingo, the state capital, few cities support a significant middle class. Urban settlements in Guerrero are instead characterized by large working class populations and heavy reliance on informal sector employment. Unemployment and underemployment are pervasive problems, especially among young adults.

## DTO Organization and Criminal Activity in Guerrero<sup>3</sup>

Organized criminal groups operating in contemporary Guerrero are complex business enterprises that vary in organizational structure and economic specializations. They are probably best conceptualized as confederacies of cooperating cells, with individual cells varying in size, composition, and capabilities and the confederacies exhibiting varying degrees of internal stability, hierarchy, and centralized command and control. The sources of revenue that sustain the groups include commercial narcotics production, contraband trade, extortion, and kidnapping. The most successful DTOs have diversified portfolios that draw revenue from all of these activities. Those that become overly specialized, especially in urban settings, have proven somewhat more vulnerable. Even where the groups have been successfully disrupted, either by authorities or rivals, the reprieve has been fleeting. The underlying structure of the organizations readily enables new combinations to form or gaps in a hierarchy to be filled. The main effect of most arrests or killings has been to create opportunities for upward advancement within DTOs. In a few recent cases individual DTOs appear to have been weakened as a result of law enforcement efforts, but this has merely provided openings for rivals and resulted in elevated levels of violence.

Before surveying the specific DTOs operating in Guerrero and the policing methods that have been brought to bear on them, it is useful to survey the underlying resources upon which the groups depend. The role of violence in the exploitation of each of these resources is also briefly considered.

### Narcotics Production

Guerrero's rugged physiography and poorly developed transportation infrastructure sharply limit economic development possibilities while imposing high administrative costs for government services. The combination has left a substantial portion of the state's population economically impoverished and beyond the reach of most government services. At the same time, these factors make Guerrero a perfect setting for marijuana and poppy production and heroin manufacturing. The soils and climate are ideal for both crops; the low transport costs associated with marketing narcotics put producers at a comparative advantage when measured against alternative commercial opportunities; and the lack of government engagement in rural communities reduces the risk inherent in engaging in an illicit activity. The main effect of the weakly developed transportation

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<sup>3</sup> Unless specific sources are cited, the information upon which this report is based has been extracted from the Guerrero Violence Project (GVP) database. This project is an ongoing effort to document criminal violence and DTO activity in Guerrero using information collected from local media sources. Data are culled daily and entered into a GIS database (ArcGIS 10.2). The GVP records currently include data on nearly 10,000 homicides, hundreds of armed confrontations, arrests, marijuana and poppy eradication operations, and much more. A portion of the data is accessible through an interactive map, found here: <http://bit.ly/1wczk0u> (retrieved 1/10/2015).

system on narcotics production is simply to impede eradication and interdiction efforts by security forces.

There are no reliable numbers on the amount of arable surface sown in marijuana and poppy in Guerrero nor on the state's overall narcotics output. Government agencies likely have estimates derived from satellite reconnaissance but these data have never been made public. Instead, assumptions about production levels and trends have been derived from reported eradication activities conducted most especially by the army. These numbers have been remarkably constant since the mid-1990s, ebbing up and down between 7,000 to 11,000 hectares annually, despite convincing anecdotal evidence that production has expanded considerably, possibly dramatically, during this interval. What we know is that at any given time about two-thirds of the army troops regularly stationed in the state have been engaged in ground-based eradication activities.<sup>4</sup> The army has become a de facto agricultural workforce. Variation from one year to the next in the acreage eradicated reflects the size of this workforce, a function of the number of troops stationed in the state, not the dimensions of the cultivated surface.

Based on reported eradication and interdiction activities, it is possible to identify spatial patterns in the incidence of marijuana and poppy production. There is little or no marijuana or poppy produced in the areas of the state that are tightly integrated into legal markets. This includes the lowlands of the coastal plain, where the economy revolves around tourism and tree cropping, and the area of irrigated agribusiness in Tierra Caliente. Also, there is little or no marijuana or poppy grown in the immediate vicinity of urban centers and major highways, within a radius of a kilometer around most rural villages, or within few hundred meters of secondary roads. Setting these areas aside, however, there remains an enormous amount of territory available for marijuana and poppy production, which appears to be common through much of it. Marijuana can be grown throughout the state but is most commonly planted in lower elevations, especially on the slopes of the Sierra Madre del Sur below 1,000 meters above sea level (Figure 2). Poppy is grown only in higher elevations, above 1,000 meters.

Heroin production generally occurs in the area of poppy production or in the gateway cities immediately adjacent to the production zones. This minimizes the risk associated with transporting opium gum, a fragrant product that is easy to detect by security forces. There is some evidence of synthetic narcotics manufacturing in Guerrero but nothing on the scale found in the neighboring state of Michoacán.

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<sup>4</sup> Zacarías Cervantes, "Se disputan entre 7 y 8 bandas del narco el control del territorio en Guerrero, dice el general Moreno," *El Sur*, July 13, 2012. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/31269> (retrieved 1/9/2015). Note that this two-thirds figure applies only to the military forces normally deployed in the state. It does not apply to the often sizeable troops mobilizations for special security operations.

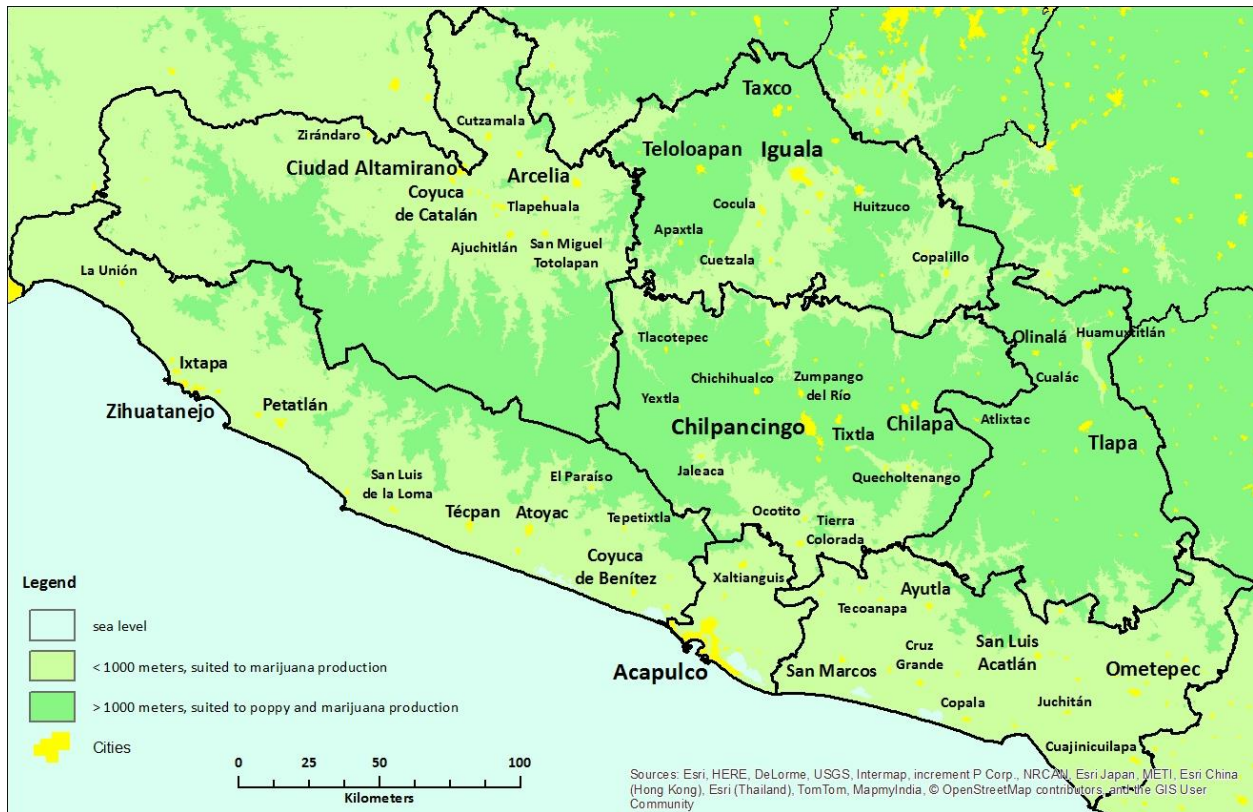


Figure 2 - Elevation Zones and Urban Centers

Again, there are no reliable numbers, but it is generally agreed that Guerrero is the source of somewhere between fifty and seventy percent of the heroin produced in Mexico. Guerrero’s output dwarfs that of the state of Durango, the next most important producer.<sup>5</sup> There has been recent reporting suggesting that land in Durango and Sinaloa that was previously sown with marijuana has been shifted to poppy production as a result of declining profit margins on exported marijuana and heightened demand in the United States for Mexican heroin. These remain anecdotal reports, however. For present purposes, it is enough to note that there is no sign in Guerrero that the state’s producers are facing novel competitive pressures or deteriorating market conditions. To the contrary, the only stress points in the opium fields of Guerrero that I can identify are localized labor shortages. Population dislocation in the Filo Mayor, especially in the municipios of San Miguel Totolapán (Tierra Caliente) and Heliodoro Castillo (El Centro) has depleted the local population and this recently induced traffickers to erect roadblocks to halt the exodus during the 2014 fall harvest season.<sup>6</sup> Comparable reports from November through January 2013 show a similar circumstance in Coahuayutla, in the far western portion of the Filo Mayor.<sup>7</sup> Since late summer 2014 there have also been persistent (albeit uncorroborated) rumors that young men from urban areas in El Centro and El Norte have been abducted and sent into the Filo Mayor to harvest opium gum.

<sup>5</sup> Centro Nacional de Planeación, *Análisis e Información para el Combate a la Delincuencia, Informe Sexenal de Resultados*, 2007-2012, p. 22. Available at [www.conadic.salud.gob.mx/pdfs/informe\\_sexenal.pdf](http://www.conadic.salud.gob.mx/pdfs/informe_sexenal.pdf) (retrieved 1/9/2015).

<sup>6</sup> “De San Miguel Totolapan suplica por ayuda: ‘solos no podemos, ellos son más que nosotros.’” *El Sur*, October 25, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/220077> (retrieved 1/9/2015).

<sup>7</sup> “Se intensifica la inseguridad en Coahuayutla; exigen intervención gubernamental.” *El Sur*, January 18, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/127863> (retrieved 1/9/2015).

## Narcotics Trafficking

There was a time when the Guerrero coastline was an important corridor for the bulk movement onshore of South American cocaine destined for markets in the United States. Pleasure boats were used to transport cocaine from offshore supply ships through the ports of Acapulco and Zihuatanejo and smaller speed boats were used in areas of open beach. There is no evidence that these routes have been used since 2006. Cocaine is readily available in retail markets in urban centers but Guerrero does not seem to be an active transit route for South American narcotics.

The expanding legalization movement in the United States has reportedly reduced the commercial appeal of marijuana production throughout Mexico but there remains widespread evidence of production and bulking activities in Guerrero. What is not clear is the extent to which the observed activity is linked to foreign markets. A sizeable percentage of the state's marijuana output is likely intended for domestic markets, including markets in Guerrero's urban centers. The domestic market for heroin, on the other hand, is quite small. It is produced mainly for export to the United States. With only a couple of known exceptions, the trafficking organizations operating in Guerrero apparently partner with groups operating in northern Mexico that specialize in cross-border trafficking.<sup>8</sup>

## Contraband Markets

Criminal organizations operating in Guerrero's largest urban centers derive significant income from the sale of a variety of forms of contraband. Easily the most important are narcotics. We have only fragmentary information on the subject but this is enough to give a sense of the dimensions of the trade. A protected witness in the trial of José Jorge Balderas Garza, an accountant who once handled financial affairs for the Beltrán Leyva group in Acapulco, reported revenue of just over \$300,000 US (around \$4,000,000 pesos) per week from weekend drug sales in the years 2008-09. Extended over a year, weekend sales amounted to \$15,670,700. Weekday sales were lower but still substantial. Of the amounts collected, \$1,958,830 annually (about 12.5 percent of the weekend-only revenue) was paid to a municipal police commander who distributed funds to key personnel in various local, state, and federal security agencies in exchange for their cooperation. The most important commodities involved in the trade included cocaine and marijuana.<sup>9</sup> I have no information relating to the sources or costs associated with the port's cocaine supply during this or any other period but for marijuana there is ample evidence that the Beltrán Leyva group and its successors (see discussion below) created a vertically integrated supply chain linking producers in adjacent municipios in both Costa Chica and Costa Grande to consumers in Acapulco. While Acapulco was clearly the most important retail market for narcotics sales, the same basic pattern arose in urban centers throughout Guerrero (including most of the urban centers appearing in Figure 2).

We know little about the role of DTOs in the sale of other forms of contraband. After narcotics, perhaps the next best documented case involves *piratería*, or pirated music and videos. State prisons

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<sup>8</sup> The DTO *Guerreros Unidos*, discussed below, once reputedly exported narcotics directly to Chicago. See "Capturan en el Estado de México al líder del grupo criminal Los Guerreros Unidos, El Sapo Guapo," *El Sur*, May 2, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/141312> (retrieved 1/9/2015). Another DTO operating in Guerrero, *Los Caballeros Templarios*, is known to have an extensive network of operatives in the north. The remaining groups active in heroin trafficking appear to work with DTOs in northern Mexico that have specialized cross-border smuggling capabilities.

<sup>9</sup> Ezequiel Flores Contreras, "Los Beltrán compraron todo Acapulco, revelan expedientes de la Siedo." *Proceso*, August 22, 2011. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=279258> (retrieved 1/9/2015).

are, or at least were, important DTO manufacturing centers. A search of prisons in Chilpancingo and Acapulco in January 2014, for example, yielded 36 and 45 recording devices, respectively, and inventories of thousands of pirated materials that were packaged and apparently ready for marketing.<sup>10</sup> The abundance of violence in Guerrero, the majority of it involving firearms, makes clear that there is also an active illicit trade in weaponry but I know of neither reporting on the subject nor instances of interdiction specifically targeting firearms or illegal explosives.

## Extortion and Kidnapping

Extortion and kidnapping are closely related activities. Both crimes target the cash earnings of individuals, households, and businesses. They are crimes that took root first in urban settings, among fully monetized sectors of the state's economy. Through the 1990s, both extortion and kidnapping differentially affected economic elites and professionals, but by the early 2000s, all socioeconomic sectors were targeted. It is not clear when these activities were merged with narcotics trafficking as components of the economic portfolios of DTOs. Different groups appear to have expanded from narcotics trafficking into extortion and kidnapping at different times in their maturation. Some, such as *La Familia Michoacana*, included extortion in their repertoire from the beginnings of their expansion in Guerrero while others, such as the Beltrán Leyva group, came to it more gradually. By 2008, all DTOs operating in the state appear to have had specialized branches devoted to extortion and kidnapping. More recently, there has been an expansion out of urban settings into the countryside, a process that had approached completion by 2012. As discussed below, this expansion of extortion operations into rural communities in the years 2011 and 2012 was the most important factor leading to the sudden creation of community policing groups in 2012 and 2013.

The basic form of extortion, known as the *derecho de piso*, involves periodic (generally weekly or monthly) cash payments charged to business enterprises under threat of property destruction, kidnapping, or murder. This crime is common to the point of ubiquity. Businesses throughout the state either make *derecho de piso* payments or operate under a *quid pro quo* that grants them an exemption.<sup>11</sup> Other forms of extortion target service workers, including priests,<sup>12</sup> teachers,<sup>13</sup> and

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<sup>10</sup> For Acapulco, see Javier Trujillo and Gerardo Torres, "Realizan cateo en penal de Acapulco." *Milenio*, January 11, 2014. Available at [http://www.milenio.com/policia/Realizan-cateo-penal-Acapulco\\_0\\_224977585.html](http://www.milenio.com/policia/Realizan-cateo-penal-Acapulco_0_224977585.html) (retrieved 1/9/2015). For Chilpancingo, see Rolando Aguilar and Carlos Coria, "Hallan armas y droga durante cateo en penal de Chilpancingo." *Excelsior*, January 11, 2014. Available at <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2014/01/11/937637> (retrieved 1/9/2015).

<sup>11</sup> To cite a single example, the journalist Israel Flores was recently found to have negotiated an exemption from extortion payments for a pharmacy in exchange for publishing planted stories in local media outlets. See "Los templarios' utilizan a medios contra el Ejército." *Milenio*, November 7, 2014. Available at [http://www.milenio.com/policia/Templarios\\_utilizan\\_medios\\_contra\\_Ejercito-Tierra\\_caliente-Rodolfo\\_Maldonado\\_Bustos\\_0\\_410958914.html](http://www.milenio.com/policia/Templarios_utilizan_medios_contra_Ejercito-Tierra_caliente-Rodolfo_Maldonado_Bustos_0_410958914.html) (retrieved 1/9/2014).

<sup>12</sup> Mariana Labastida, "Extorsionan a comerciantes; les piden 30 mil pesos, informa el obispo de Ciudad Altamirano." *El Sur*, January 11, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/60745> (retrieved 1/9/2015). Yee Trujillo, "Recibí 15 denuncias de sacerdotes que fueron extorsionados en 2012." *El Sur*, January 13, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/61074> (retrieved 1/9/2015). "Persisten intentos de extorsión contra sacerdotes en Guerrero," *Proceso*, January 8, 2015. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=392459> (retrieved 1/8/2015).

<sup>13</sup> This became a critical problem in Acapulco in the fall of 2011. Extortionists demanded payments of fifty percent of teachers' salaries and bonuses, with payments to begin in October. Teachers responded by walking out, shuddering schools across the city. Up to 70,000 students were affected. See Laura Reyes, "El temor a la extorsión que viven los maestros en Acapulco." *CNN México*, September 1, 2011. Available at <http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2011/09/01/el-temor-a-la-extorsion-que-viven-los-maestros-en-acapulco> (retrieved 1/9/2015). By the end of September, ninety percent of the schools had reopened. See Laura Reyes, "Guerrero anuncia

medical personnel.<sup>14</sup> Construction projects, including federally funded disaster reconstruction projects, are billed five to ten percent of the value of the project.<sup>15</sup> In the summer of 2014, a senior administrator of the state university, the *Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero*, was abducted, then released with a message to the rector demanding a monthly payment of \$3,000,000 (about \$232,000 US).<sup>16</sup>

Kidnapping is a closely related crime that likewise has antecedents in Guerrero that long predate the growth of DTOs. But the scope and scale of kidnapping operations changed in the last decade as DTOs brought their resources and organizational ingenuity to bear on the enterprise. Unlike extortion, the larger and better organized kidnapping operations leave a recognizable physical footprint in the form of clandestine cemeteries. These are found near safe-houses where victims are kept during the negotiation process and are used to dispose of the bodies of victims who, for one reason or another, are killed while in captivity. The dead include many whose family and friends were unable or unwilling to satisfy ransom demands, but the testimony of surviving family members leaves little doubt that kidnapping victims can be killed even when the kidnappers' demands are fully met. Large kidnapping operations produce a sufficient number of bodies to attract unwanted attention were they discovered, thus the incentive to bury the bodies. Although kidnapping occurs throughout Guerrero, the largest and most elaborate operations are in working class neighborhoods in the state's largest cities, including Acapulco, Chilpancingo, and Iguala, where anonymity is easier to preserve. In each of these cities, sophisticated kidnapping rings have arisen that operate networks of safe-houses, with multiple abductions happening daily. In some kidnapping operations, the turn-around time can be measured in hours, or perhaps a few days, and the general strategy seems to involve collecting a comparatively small return on a large number of victims. In smaller cities and rural communities, and in middle class urban neighborhoods, the reverse strategy is more common, with smaller numbers of victims and more exorbitant ransom demands.<sup>17</sup>

Until recently, the best documented kidnapping operations are found in Chilpancingo and Acapulco. The Chilpancingo groups most commonly operate safe-houses in the city's western suburbs and in

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reapertura del 90% de escuelas cerradas por extorsión." *CNN México*, October 1, 2011. Available at <http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2011/10/01/solo-8-delegaciones-no-quieren-volver-a-clases-en-acapulco-dice-gobierno> (retrieved 1/9/2015). The problem was repeated in the fall of 2012. See Adriana Covarrubias, "Paran más escuelas por inseguridad." *El Universal*, September 20, 2012. Available at <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/87823.html> (retrieved 1/8/2015). For a case of teachers extorted by their own students, see "Detienen a dos jóvenes presuntamente ligados al narco en Tlapa que amenazaron a maestros de una escuela." *El Sur*, May 9, 2012. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/18926> (retrieved 1/9/2015).

<sup>14</sup> Héctor Briseño, "La violencia contra los médicos va a la alza desde 2009, dice colegiada." *La Jornada Guerrero*, October 12, 2014. Available at <http://www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/2014/10/12/index.php?section=sociedad&article=008n1soc> (retrieved 1/8/2015). "Cierra clínica del IMSS en Altamirano por amenazas del crimen organizado," *Agencia de Noticias IRZA*, September 24, 2014. Available at <http://www.agenciairza.com/2014/09/cierra-clinica-del-imss-en-altamirano-por-amenazas-del-crimen-organizado/> (retrieved 1/9/2014).

<sup>15</sup> "Hasta las obras de reconstrucción son controladas por el narco en Guerrero," *Proceso*, August 17, 2014. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=379767> (retrieved 1/9/2015).

<sup>16</sup> Sergio Ocampo Arista, "Grupos del crimen organizado intentan extorsionar a la UAG." *La Jornada*, July 19, 2014. Available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2014/07/19/estados/027n1est> (retrieved 1/10/2015).

<sup>17</sup> In areas where kidnapping is less frequent it is not uncommon for kidnappers to openly display the bodies of victims killed after ransom demands are not satisfied. Janeth Mendoza Juárez, for example, was recently found dead with her hands bound and ligature marks on her neck. The body was left in prominent location in front of a health clinic in the city of Teloloapan, presumably as an object lesson to the community at large. In negotiations with the family, the kidnappers had lowered the ransom amount from \$500,000 to \$100,000 (\$38,500 to \$7,700 US) but the family was only able to produce \$16,000 (\$1,232 US). See Alejandro Guerrero, "Asesinan a una joven en Teloloapan; estaba secuestrada." *El Sur*, July 12, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/179745> (retrieved 1/10/2015).



the nearby city of Zumpango del Río. The preferred burial sites appear to be east and southeast of Zumpango, where a total of 31 bodies have been excavated from clandestine graves. In Acapulco, the two most important centers of kidnapping operations are located in Colonia Vista Hermosa, above Costa Azul, and Colonia Santa Cecilia. Excavations at the grave sites associated with these areas have revealed 32 bodies (at a site known as *Piedra del Chivo*) and 21 bodies (in the adjacent *Parque de Veladero*), respectively. Another important center of kidnapping operations in Guerrero is Iguala. It has long been known that the irregular settlements expanding up the slopes of Cerro Gordo on the western side of the city harbor extremely active kidnapping groups and numerous clandestine graveyards. At least 43 bodies had been excavated from burial sites in this area before the Ayotzinapa affair in late September of 2014. A sense of the scale of the operations was apparent in the summer of 2014. In May, a cemetery site with 19 bodies was discovered in a field near Colonia Monte Hored. As investigators excavated burials at one end of the field, two *peones* were busy digging new graves at the other end.<sup>18</sup> They were detained by incredulous police officers but were eventually released without charges; they had been hired to dig holes, for what purpose they claimed not to know. The attention drawn to the area by the Ayotzinapa affair in late September 2014 led investigators and community policing groups to mount the first systematic search of the area for clandestine burials. Thus far, an additional 68 buried bodies have been recovered at five sites bringing the total to 111. New discoveries are being reported almost daily.

With the exception of marijuana and poppy farming, homicide is a routine element in the business practice of the groups engaged in all of the criminal activities discussed in this section. Many homicide victims die in direct confrontations between groups of gunmen of rival DTOs or between DTO units and security forces. Larger numbers of victims are killed to convey a message to rivals, authorities, or to a community. In these cases, victims are selected for their perceived value as an instrument of communication rather than because of their involvement in DTO-related activity. Messages printed on poster board might be left with a body to refine the communication but more often the body itself suffices. The killing of a petty thief or an unauthorized drug retailer in an urban neighborhood conveys the message that the neighborhood is controlled by a DTO that protects its monopoly. An innocent bystander living in territory controlled by one DTO might be killed by rivals to make an assertion about the relative strength and weakness of the two groups. Traffickers monitor and regulate access to narcotics production zones and the supply routes leading to them. Gateway communities with gas stations are particular flashpoints of competition and violence. Each of the criminal activities upon which Guerrero's DTOs depend has a distinct signature in the patterning of violence that accompanies it. The temporal and regional variation that we see in the incidence and patterning of violence can be attributed to the different combinations of economic activities DTOs exploit in a particular area combined with the possible the presence or absence of inter-DTO competition. In the following sections I survey these variables, both historically and as they are currently manifest in the state's various regions.

## Criminal Organizations in Guerrero: Historical Overview

The history of DTO activity in Guerrero divides neatly into four periods. The onset of the first cannot be properly dated and is known more by inference than from evidence. José Antonio Ortega

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<sup>18</sup> "Detienen a presuntos "narco-sepultureros," *Diario de la Tarde*, May 22, 2014. Available at [http://eldiariodelatarde1.blogspot.com/2014/05/policiaca\\_6678.html#links](http://eldiariodelatarde1.blogspot.com/2014/05/policiaca_6678.html#links) (retrieved 1/10/2015).

Sánchez has recently argued that it began when the Beltrán Leyva brothers built the initial DTO network in the state in the mid-1990s. They worked with Amado Carrillo Fuentes, and later Joaquín Guzmán, to foster the expansion of poppy production in the mountains, establish retail narcotics markets in the cities, and build security and money laundering relationships with key political and economic elites.<sup>19</sup> They also established the first cocaine smuggling routes through the ports of Acapulco and Zihuatanejo and onto the beaches of Costa Grande.

The second period began in 2005 when Osiel Cárdenas, head of the Gulf Cartel based in northeast Mexico, agreed to support an effort urged by Heriberto Lazcano, the head of *Los Zetas*, the Gulf Cartel's enforcers, to compete for control of Guerrero's smuggling routes and heroin output. Edgar Valdés Villarreal and a group of gunmen under his command, *Los Pelones*, handled the defense of Guerrero on behalf of the Beltrán Leyva brothers. The earliest manifestations of violence that can be confidently linked to DTO activities date to this period. Aside from gunmen directly involved in the conflict, many of the casualties from this early period were police officers or other government officials who presumably worked on behalf of one side or the other. When compared to the violence of more recent years, the conflict between the Beltrán Leyva and Gulf DTOs produced relatively few confrontations and casualties. This can be seen in Figure 3, which shows only a slight uptick in homicides in 2006 and 2007 over the two previous years.

Though killings in the conflict between Los Pelones and Los Zetas were few in number when measured against what was to come, they were often highly choreographed; it was during this period that macabre ante-, peri-, and postmortem treatment of homicide victims emerged as a crude but unmistakable part of a communication strategy. To cite a representative example, on January 27, 2006 an exchange of gunfire between Zetas and Pelones on the Costera in Acapulco led to a running battle that ended at a major intersection in La Garita, where municipal, state, and federal police relieved the Zetas and engaged the Pelones. A four-hour firefight involving small arms and grenades ensued. During the battle, a municipal police commander, Mario Núñez Magaña, was reportedly seen executing an injured leader of the Pelones, one of four killed in the incident. The Pelones retaliated on April 20, 2006, when the heads of Núñez Magaña and another municipal police officer (Erick Juárez Martínez) were mounted on a fence in front of a government building at the intersection in La Garita where the earlier firefight occurred. Under the heads was a message saying that the killings and beheadings were intended to teach municipal authorities to show respect. These were the first DTO dismemberments in Guerrero.<sup>20</sup> The GVP database currently has records of 548 dismembered bodies that have been recovered in the state in the months and years that followed.

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<sup>19</sup> Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal A.C. (CCSPJP), *Guerrero: Atrapados en el círculo de la violencia* (Mexico, 2014). Pp. 34-36.

<sup>20</sup> Laura Reyes Maciel and Juan Cervantes Gómez, "Narcos decapitan a dos hombres in Acapulco." *El Universal*, April 21, 2006. Available at <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/estados/60953.html> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

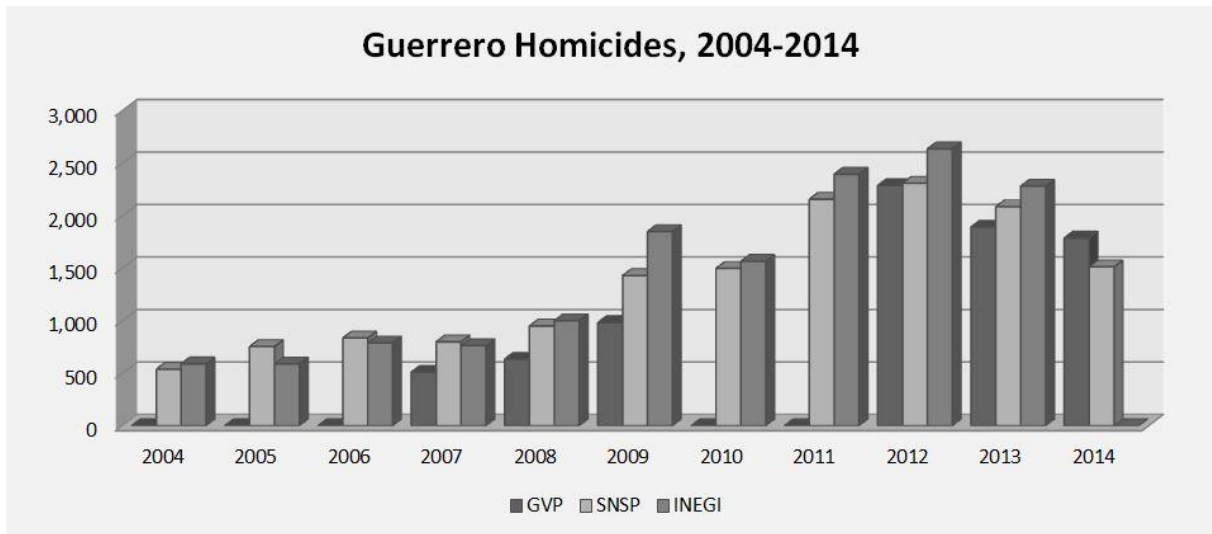


Figure 3 - Intentional Homicides in Guerrero, 2004-2014<sup>21</sup>

Although the Zetas continued to probe the Beltrán Leyva defenses in Acapulco, Taxco, Costa Grande, and Tierra Caliente through 2009, they never managed to displace or even seriously threaten the Beltrán Leyva monopoly on narcotics production and trafficking in the state. A more serious threat emerged in 2008 with the rupture in relations between Joaquín Guzmán and the Beltrán Leyva brothers. The Beltrán Leyva group had formed a part of the Sinaloa DTO since its formation in 2001 but the conflict that erupted with Guzmán in early 2008 led the brothers, especially Arturo, to strike out on their own. Guerrero was their home territory and they initially had little difficulty maintaining control. Killings intended as communicative acts, often with elements of the macabre, were aimed at those suspected of remaining loyal to Guzmán. The break in relations initially went well for the Beltrán Leyva DTO but Guzmán's Sinaloa operatives proved more meddlesome and more effective at recruiting local allies than the Zetas had before them. This set the stage for a significant increase in violence in 2009.

The third period of violence resulted from the formation of the Beltrán Leyva group as an independent DTO. In addition to an increase in scale and frequency, in this period there was also a change in the geographic distribution of violence related to DTO conflicts. Whereas the earlier focus of DTO attention centered on Acapulco and Zihuatanejo, after 2008 there was an expansion of the competition into smaller gateway cities in the central and western portions of the Filo Mayor and in the highlands of El Norte. Violence escalated sharply in 2009 in the cities of Atoyac, Tecpán, San Luis de la Loma, and Petatlán in Costa Grande, and Arcelia, Ajuchitlán, San Miguel Totolapán, and Ciudad Altamirano in Tierra Caliente. Sinaloa operatives and allies, including the newly arrived *La Familia Michoacana*, sought to gain access to the heroin output of central, western, and northern Guerrero in part by controlling food and fuel supplies of the poppy production zones. In Acapulco, the Beltrán Leyva DTO had comparatively little difficulty fending off challengers but elsewhere in the state the competition, and violence alongside it, escalated sharply in 2009.

<sup>21</sup> This table includes the available annual homicide totals from three sources, the GVP database, the SNSP, and the INEGI. The SNSP releases data on the number of homicide investigations opened monthly as reported by the *Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado* (PGJE - in late 2014 this organization was renamed the *Fiscalía General del Estado*). These data can be accessed here: <http://secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/incidencia-delictiva/incidencia-delictiva-fuero-comun.php> (retrieved 1/29/2015). The INEGI tallies are released less frequently and can be accessed here: [http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/lista\\_cubos/consulta.aspx?p=adm&c=4](http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/lista_cubos/consulta.aspx?p=adm&c=4) (retrieved 1/12/2015).

The fourth and ongoing period of conflict followed the killing of Arturo Beltrán Leyva on December 16, 2009. Edgar Valdés Villarreal used this occasion to attempt to wrest control of the organization from Héctor Beltrán Leyva, the only surviving brother who remained at liberty. Valdés had worked closely with Arturo Beltrán Leyva in managing day-to-day operations in Guerrero and was well positioned to preserve the local Beltrán Leyva organization, if not the franchise name. He had greater familiarity with the landscape than Héctor and closer personal ties to local plaza chiefs as well as business and political elites. He was also a local celebrity. But he proved unable to unite local plaza chiefs and the Sinaloa DTO's operatives and proxies gained ground even before Valdés' arrest on August 30, 2010. By this time, La Familia was strengthening its grip on Tierra Caliente and portions of El Norte and had made inroads into Costa Grande and El Centro. Local DTO chiefs in Costa Grande who had remained loyal to Guzmán also found new life after near extermination in the Beltrán Leyva purges of 2008-09. Finally, Héctor Beltrán Leyva found willing partners in Los Zetas.

By January 2011, the DTO landscape in Guerrero had come to be populated by a host of small and fiercely competitive groups. Some of the Beltrán Leyva plaza heads remained loyal to Héctor Beltrán Leyva and the partnership he formed with Los Zetas. Others joined with Valdés for a time but soon split, forming smaller groups that struck out on their own. While some of the small groups that emerged from the breakdown of the Valdés faction forged alliances with larger outside DTOs, others had (and in some cases still have) no known loyalties, alliances, or affiliations. Few of the new players in Guerrero had the extensive network of business and political connections that had helped sustain their predecessors. Nor did many of them have the luxury of running diversified, vertically integrated enterprises. Instead, the groups have survived by specializing and intensifying their exploitation of the opportunities found in their local territories. They have also come to rely to an unprecedented extent on the use of violence to forestall rivals and to keep state security forces at bay.

It was during this fourth period that we see the full development of a qualitative change in the nature of DTOs and the relationships they maintain with their host communities. Narcotics production and trafficking do not, in themselves, engender a great deal of violence. The DTO violence that was experienced in Guerrero in earlier periods resulted from efforts by one group to encroach on the production zones, trafficking routes, or retail markets controlled by a rival. Violence associated with these efforts, while often deliberately shocking, was intended to intimidate and disrupt the rival's support base, including its allied power brokers. Extortion and kidnapping, activities that penetrate more deeply into the local social fabric, were not unknown but these had not evolved into the efficient and large-scale operations that emerged with the break-up of the Beltrán Leyva DTO. Guerrero's new DTOs are more openly predatory than their predecessors. For these groups, violence is likewise used to communicate but the intended recipients of the messages have expanded to include nearly everyone living in the host communities; violence has come to be used to induce victimized populations to cooperate.

The emergence since 2010 of a multitude of criminal groups with unstable internal and external relations has had profound social consequences in Guerrero. Few groups have been more deeply affected than local political elites. In earlier years, there had been comparatively low risk and high rewards for politicians who struck deals that helped facilitate DTO activities. The risks included the potential exposure of the relationship by willing prosecutors, of whom there were few, or, more menacingly, the potential of becoming the target of a rival DTO. On the reward side, DTOs routinely provided campaign funding, if an elected official, and cash payments, which varied in

amount depending on the duties performed by incumbents to particular offices. DTOs were most keen on establishing relationships with customs officials, prosecutors, and personnel (including *alcaldes*) in the command structure of police and military forces. The DTOs probably never relied wholly upon these relationships, however, and they have receded further in importance as the risks to politicians have increased while the benefit to traffickers diminished. The risks to politicians have risen partly because of an increase in frequency in the periodic fits of anti-corruption enthusiasm that have swept up state and federal authorities. But a more serious problem is the lack of stability in the DTOs operating in particular areas; it is exceptionally dangerous to affiliate tightly to a DTO that has only a tenuous foothold in a community. In only a few areas of the state has a single DTO achieved sufficient local dominance to create a safe environment for overt collaboration with officeholders. And it is not only officials who have found diminished incentives associated with direct collaboration with DTOs. The return to DTOs on large payouts to power brokers has in most locations diminished as well. Municipal police forces throughout the state have “voluntarily” withdrawn from routine policing and the methods used by state and federal police and military forces (see discussion below) cause no significant or lasting disruption to DTO activities.

## DTOs in Contemporary Guerrero

### *Acapulco – Cártel Independiente de Acapulco, La Barredora and Beltrán Leyva*

At least three DTOs have competed for control over Acapulco’s lucrative retail drug and extortion markets since 2010. In the early months of 2010 both Valdés and Héctor Beltrán Leyva sought to preserve and control the existing Beltrán Leyva organization in the city but this began unraveling quickly. In the fall of 2010, following the arrest of Valdés, a number of his lieutenants united under the leadership of Moisés Montero Álvarez and adopted the name *Cártel Independiente de Acapulco* (CIDA). The group included several pretenders for leadership, however, and by the end of 2010 splinter groups had formed into a single group, *La Barredora*. Although *La Barredora* lacked the connections to Acapulco’s political and business elites of the other heirs of the original Beltrán Leyva DTO, by early 2011 they had found a strong backer in the Sinaloa DTO. Endowed with enormous firepower as a result of this alliance, *La Barredora* waged a ferocious war directed primarily at the CIDA and its supporters. The death toll unleashed by *La Barredora* in 2011 and 2012 was startling even by modern Mexican standards (Figure 4). The violence was distributed throughout the city but was especially common in the sprawling working class neighborhoods of Colonias Zapata, Renacimiento, Jardines, and Coloso. By 2012 Acapulco had earned the dubious distinction of being the most deadly city in Mexico, a position it retained at least through 2013.

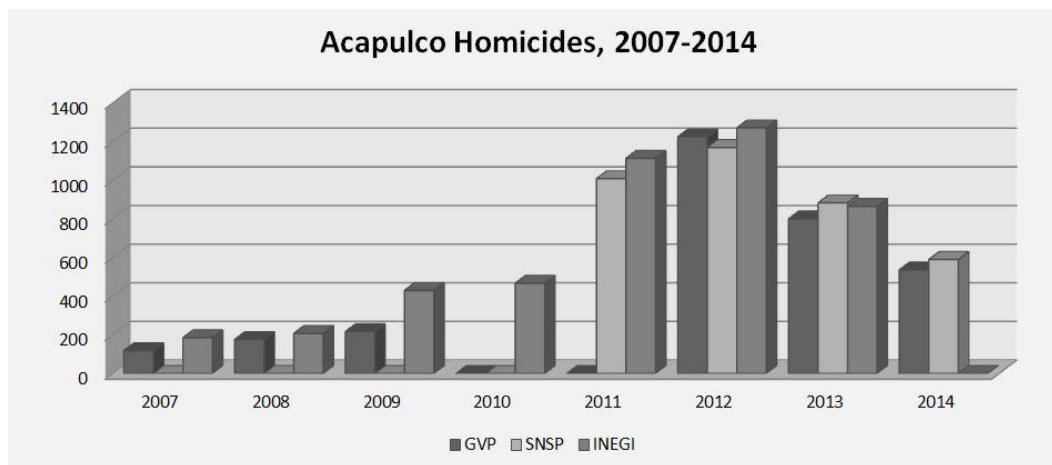


Figure 4 - Intentional Homicides in Acapulco, 2007-2014

The devastation wrought by the violence on Acapulco's tourism industry combined with La Barredora's lack of allies among political elites provoked a concerted effort by state and federal authorities to identify and arrest operatives at all levels of the organization.<sup>22</sup> The CIDA was also affected, though not to the same extent.<sup>23</sup> The impact of the arrest (and killings) of leaders on La Barredora is not clear but in most cases this appears to have been minimal. At least through mid-2012, each time a leader was detained a replacement immediately emerged. Then in late 2012, after nearly two years of extraordinary violence, La Barredora simply disappeared from the streets of Acapulco. There was a single reappearance, on November 13, 2013, when a message signed by La Barredora's last known leaders (José Francisco Sosa Vásquez, Eder Jair Sosa Carvajal, and Octavio Moreno Bernal) appeared along with three dismembered bodies on the north side of Acapulco.<sup>24</sup> But with only this exception, the DTO seems to have disbanded by the end of 2012.

La Barredora is the largest DTO to have disappeared in Guerrero since 2010 and it is worthwhile to consider the constellation of factors that contributed to its decline. Certainly the pressure applied by state and federal police after October 2011 was a contributing factor. So too was the group's failure to dislodge or even degrade the CIDA, their principal adversary. Perhaps the most important event was the arrest on July 31, 2012 of Gino Huerta Moreno in Sinaloa.<sup>25</sup> Huerta Moreno served as the intermediary between La Barredora and the group's Sinaloa backers following the arrest and

<sup>22</sup> There was no organized response by security forces to the initial rise of La Barredora in early 2011. State and federal authorities joined the conflict only with the implementation of the *Guerrero Seguro* program in October 2011.

<sup>23</sup> In a statement issued by federal authorities covering the period from early October 2011 through late May 2012, a total of 191 members of La Barredora and 44 members of the CIDA had been arrested. See Daniel Velázquez, "Aumentaron los secuestros de octubre a la fecha, según informe de García Luna." *El Sur*, May 31, 2012. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/22636> (retrieved 1/13/2015). Most of the arrests were low level operatives. The losses among the leadership of the two DTOs was more balanced. CIDA leaders who have been arrested include Benjamín Flores Reyes (March 2011), Moises Montero Álvarez (August 2011), Gilberto Castrejon Morales (December 2011), and José Galeana (February 2013). La Barredora leaders who have been arrested include Christian Arturo Hernández Tarín (March 2011), Víctor Manuel Rivera Galeana (August 2011), and José Francisco Sosa Vásquez (December 2013). Prominent leaders who remain at large include Carlos Antonio Barragán Hernández (CIDA), Eder (or Heber) Jair Sosa Carvajal (La Barredora), and Octavio Moreno Bernal (La Barredora).

<sup>24</sup> "Nueva jornada de violencia deja ocho muertos, tres de ellos encajuelados," *El Sur*, November 14, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/119630> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>25</sup> "Detienen en Sinaloa a 'El Winnie', líder de 'La Barredora'," *Proceso*, August 1, 2012. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=315793> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

detention of a predecessor, Jesús Ricardo Tapia López, on May 5, 2012. Huerta Moreno does not appear to have been replaced. Added to La Barredora's difficulties in Acapulco (or perhaps because of them), the withdrawal of support from the Sinaloa DTO appears to have been a death blow to the group.

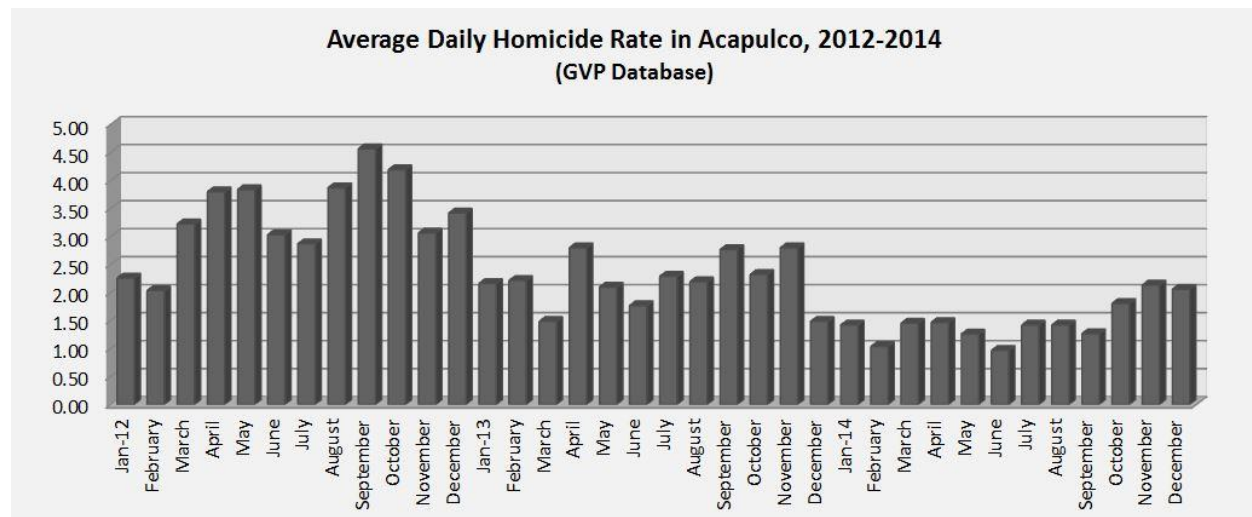


Figure 5 - Average Daily Homicide Rate in Acapulco, 2012-2014

While the CIDA was fending off the onslaught from La Barredora, operatives of Héctor Beltrán Leyva, with support from Los Zetas, worked in comparative obscurity to recover what they could of the Beltrán Leyva DTO. These efforts centered on preserving (or rebuilding) the vertically integrated narcotics operations that had been developed by the original Beltrán Leyva organization. The Costa Chica, east of the city, is the Beltrán Leyva DTO's best documented supply zone for the Acapulco market but the group likely works in production zones to the north and west as well. From the patterning of the violence known to have been perpetrated by the group, the Beltrán Leyva DTO seems to have been more focused on developing and protecting retail narcotics markets than its competitors. Though the CIDA was also reportedly active in marijuana production areas of Costa Chica and retail drug markets in Acapulco,<sup>26</sup> the group is best known for its extortion and kidnapping operations. With the disappearance of La Barredora, there was an initial increase in violence between the CIDA and Beltrán Leyva DTOs. But the violence dropped sharply in December 2013, presumably a result of some sort of accommodation between the two groups.<sup>27</sup> The terms of the agreement are unknown but the result was a significant decline in city's homicide rate. From an average of 3.35 killings per day in 2012, the daily average tumbled to 1.32 from December of 2013 through September of 2014 (Figure 5).

The arrest of Héctor Beltrán Leyva on October 1, 2014 has had an effect on the violence in Acapulco. The homicide rate has jumped since October and dismembered bodies and *narcomensajes*

<sup>26</sup> This can be seen in the arrest of Luis Álvaro León Morales, a CIDA operative who supplied narcotics markets on the east side of Acapulco. See "Aprehenden policías federales a un presunto integrante del Cida en La Poza," *El Sur*, January 12, 2015. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/244583> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>27</sup> It is not clear if the terms of the arrangement centered on a territorial division of the city or a division in the types business activities in which the two groups engaged. If the latter, CIDA is likely to have had priority in the areas of extortion and kidnapping while Beltrán Leyva retained priority in retail drug markets.

signed by Beltrán Leyva operatives, things that have not been seen in Acapulco since 2013, have reappeared. CIDA gunmen have been unusually active as well. The killings follow a familiar pattern, including a show of strength by the weakened Beltrán Leyva DTO and the reemergence of active competition with the CIDA over Acapulco's spoils.

### **Costa Grande – *La Guardia Guerrerense* and *Los Caballeros Templarios***

In Costa Grande DTO activity is dominated by efforts to control narcotics production on the southern slopes of the Filo Mayor. Access to the production zones is gained via secondary roads that follow the short, steep valleys draining sections of the ridgeline. Each of these valleys has a small city at the point where it empties onto the coastal plain. From east to west, they include: Coyuca de Benítez; Atoyac; Tépán; San Luis de la Loma; Papanoa; Petatlán; San Jeronimito; San José Ixtapa; and La Unión. There are a few large settlements in middle elevations, including Tixtlancingo and Tepetitla above Coyuca de Benítez, El Paraíso above Atoyac, and Vallecitos above San José Ixtapa, but none have gas stations which are fundamental for DTO operational bases. In addition to rural production zones and the associated cities, DTOs have competed for control over the port city of Zihuatanejo, which offers profitable extortion opportunities as well as a sizable retail narcotics market.

DTOs seeking to control the narcotics output of Costa Grande generally work through local economic and political power brokers, or *caciques*. Rogaciano Alba Álvarez of Petatlán is the best known and was probably the most important in the early development of the region's narcotics industry. When Alba declined the invitation to join Arturo Beltrán Leyva in breaking with Joaquín Guzmán in 2008, Beltrán Leyva threw support behind Rubén Granados Vargas of San Luis de la Loma, Tecpán. The fighting between the Granados and Alba groups in 2008-09 in the central Costa Grande was brutal and took the form of an extermination campaign. It not only targeted the families and supporters of Granados and Alba; communities in the home territories of the two groups were sacked and occasionally razed as well. Although both Alba and Granados were arrested, in 2008 and 2009, respectively, the fighting between their supporters survived the arrests. It was brought to a close, at least for the time being, in January of 2014 when the two jailed leaders negotiated an unlikely alliance that united their groups with the *Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación*, a Sinaloa affiliate, in an effort to drive *Los Caballeros Templarios* from the western portion of Costa Grande.<sup>28</sup> The allied groups have lately adopted the name *Guardia Guerrerense* and have aggressively pushed west through Zihuatanejo into the municipio of La Unión, which borders the Caballeros Templarios' stronghold of Lazaro Cardenas, Michoacán.

The presence of Los Caballeros Templarios in Costa Grande can be traced to 2009, when La Familia Michoacana appeared in Zihuatanejo as a proxy for the Sinaloa DTO. The sharp increase in homicides in 2009 in Costa Grande (Figure 6) was in large part a byproduct of a three-way conflict for control over Zihuatanejo and the surrounding municipios, with La Familia reinforcing the weakened Alba faction (Sinaloa affiliated) in the ongoing conflict that also involved Los Zetas and Los Granados (Beltrán Leyva affiliated). This was a last independent effort by Los Zetas to establish a stable foothold in Guerrero. Their disappearance from Guerrero in late 2009 came just before the collapse of the Beltrán Leyva DTO. La Familia was perfectly positioned to exploit the vacuum and they were able to go some distance in consolidating control of western Costa Grande before they had their own internal schism that halted further eastward expansion. In 2011 factional divisions

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<sup>28</sup> Ezequiel Flores Contreras, "La lucha se extiende a Guerrero." *Proceso*, January 21, 2014. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=362936> (retrieved 1/13/2015).



divided La Familia, with a dominant group adopting the name Los Caballeros Templarios. At least initially, in Costa Grande the transition from La Familia to Los Caballeros Templarios was seamless, perhaps because one of the principal leaders of the new group, Servando Gómez Martínez, has family connections in La Unión, Guerrero. The Caballeros Templarios followed the pattern of their predecessors in working with local caciques to control production zones. The most important of their supporters was Chano Arreola of Parotitas, Pantitlán, who operated out of the coastal town of Coyuquilla, Petatlán. This town is situated just to the west of the lower end of a large N-S trending spur off the crest of the Filo Mayor. The border between the municipios of Petatlán and Tecpán roughly follows this feature and it formed a natural barrier separating Los Caballeros Templarios territory to the west from Los Granados territory to the east (including the municipio of Tecpán and perhaps portions of Atoyac). From 2011 through 2013 this was a stable border, with cross-border raiding but no discernible change in territorial control. The formation of La Guardia Guerrerense in early 2014 altered the dynamic and Los Caballeros Templarios were in retreat throughout the year. By year's end they had lost control of Zihuatanejo and were clinging precariously to territory in La Unión.

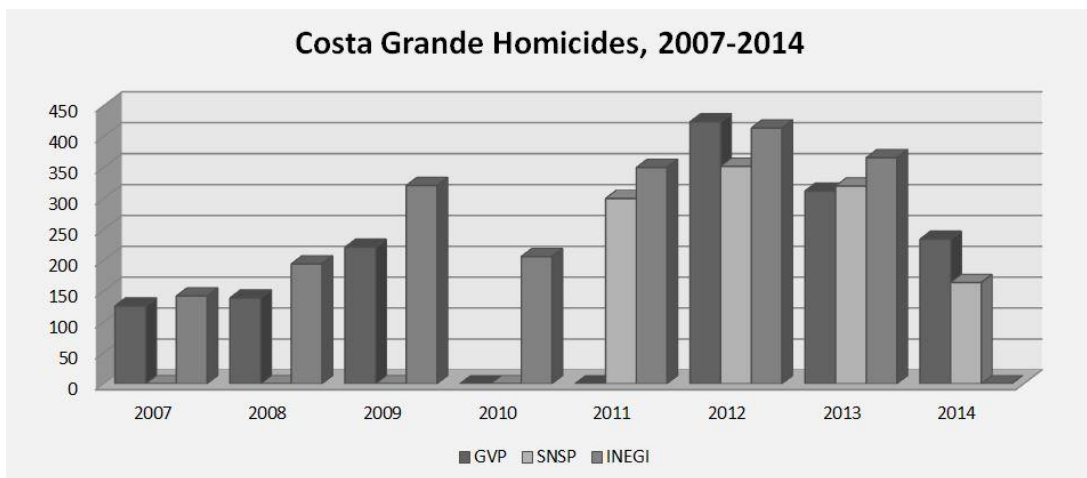


Figure 6 - Intentional Homicides in Costa Grande, 2007-2014

In the neighboring state of Michoacán federal police and military forces have applied sustained pressure on Los Caballeros Templarios since early 2013. Police and military deployments to combat the group have also occurred in Tierra Caliente in Guerrero, north of Costa Grande. But in Costa Grande the authorities have mounted no such effort and instead seem content to allow the Guardia Guerrerense to do the work of purging Los Caballeros Templarios from the region.

This discussion of Costa Grande has addressed the dynamics between DTOs operating in the central and western portions of the region. The eastern portion of Costa Grande, including the municipios of Coyuca de Benítez and Atoyac, are likewise important narcotics production zones. They are, if anything, more violent than the municipios to the west. I have not included them in this discussion because this is one of the few areas of the state where we have very little understanding of the relevant players or the dynamics between them. The killings follow no obvious pattern, nor is it common to find *narcomensajes* that would cast light on the identity of the players. Given the close proximity to Acapulco, it is likely that DTO activity in the area is related to the dynamics seen in Acapulco. But exactly how it is related and who is involved are mysteries.

## Tierra Caliente – *Los Caballeros Templarios* and *La Familia Michoacana*

Tierra Caliente has the smallest population and is among the most isolated of Guerrero's seven regions. As in Costa Grande, the resources most coveted by DTOs include highland production zones. Extortion operations in Tierra Caliente are also extensive, pervading both rural and urban settings. Population centers in Tierra Caliente are concentrated in the low elevations, at the bottom of a series of long drainages on the north slope of the Filo Mayor. The poorly developed road network between the gateway cities in the lowlands and the highland production zones to the south creates notable logistical difficulties for security forces as well as DTOs. The drive-time from municipal head towns (*cabeceras*) to highland villages can be a full day in the best of circumstances and is rarely attempted when rainy conditions prevail. There are two major entry and exit points to Tierra Caliente, an east-west highway through Arcelia which links the region with El Norte (at Iguala) and a north-south route through Ciudad Altamirano providing access to Michoacán and México in the north and Costa Grande (near Zihuatanejo) to the south.

Through 2009 the pattern of DTO conflict in Tierra Caliente mirrored the experience of western and central Costa Grande. Los Zetas offered an initial but unsuccessful challenge to the Beltrán Leyva DTO's control of the area in 2006 through 2009. In 2009 La Familia joined the fray creating the same sort of three-way struggle seen in Costa Grande. The violence spiked even more sharply in 2009 in Tierra Caliente than it had in Costa Grande (Figure 7); the homicide rate in 2009 in the municipio of Pungarabato (Ciudad Altamirano) reached an astounding 192 killings per 100,000, the highest annual rate recorded in the state.<sup>29</sup> La Familia was more successful at wresting control from the Beltrán Leyva DTO in Tierra Caliente than elsewhere. Compared to Costa Grande, the highland production zones in Tierra Caliente were less developed, further from commercial centers, and had fewer entrenched caciques leaving the Beltrán Leyva DTOs with fewer local allies. La Familia also had logistical advantages over its rivals given Tierra Caliente's proximity to the group's strongholds in neighboring Michoacán.

In Costa Grande the split within La Familia in 2011 that led to the emergence of Los Caballeros Templarios was largely uneventful but this was less so in Tierra Caliente. The competition between factions within La Familia was on most graphic display in 2012 in the major gateway cities of Ciudad Altamirano and Coyuca de Catalán. The outcome, insofar as can be determined, was a partitioning of Tierra Caliente into a large western portion controlled by Los Caballeros Templarios and a much smaller territory to the east controlled by a group using the original La Familia name. Aside from this brief period in 2012, there has been surprisingly little violence linked to the division between the two groups. Instead, DTO competition in Tierra Caliente has centered on the defense of the region from intrusions by outside DTOs. Los Caballeros Templarios has faced challenges from the CJNG while La Familia has been engaged in protracted conflicts with Los Rojos in the southeast and, especially, with Guerreros Unidos along its entire eastern border.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>This figure was derived from the homicide total reported for Pungarabato in 2009 by the PGJE (71 – see citation in note 21) and the population of the municipio recorded by the INEGI in the 2010 census (see citation in note 2). I have been unable to locate and estimate of Pungarabato's 2009 population.

<sup>30</sup> At some point in 2012 a territorial accord was reached between Los Rojos and La Familia. After 2011 I have no record of La Familia activity in El Centro or Los Rojos activity in Tierra Caliente. The border zone (along the boundaries of the municipios of Heliodoro Castillo and San Miguel Totolapan) was briefly peaceful before Guerreros Unidos began pushing south into the border area from Apaxtla. Little is known about the accord between Los Rojos and La Familia. The only reference to it that I have seen can be found here: "What is Guerreros Unidos?" *Borderland*

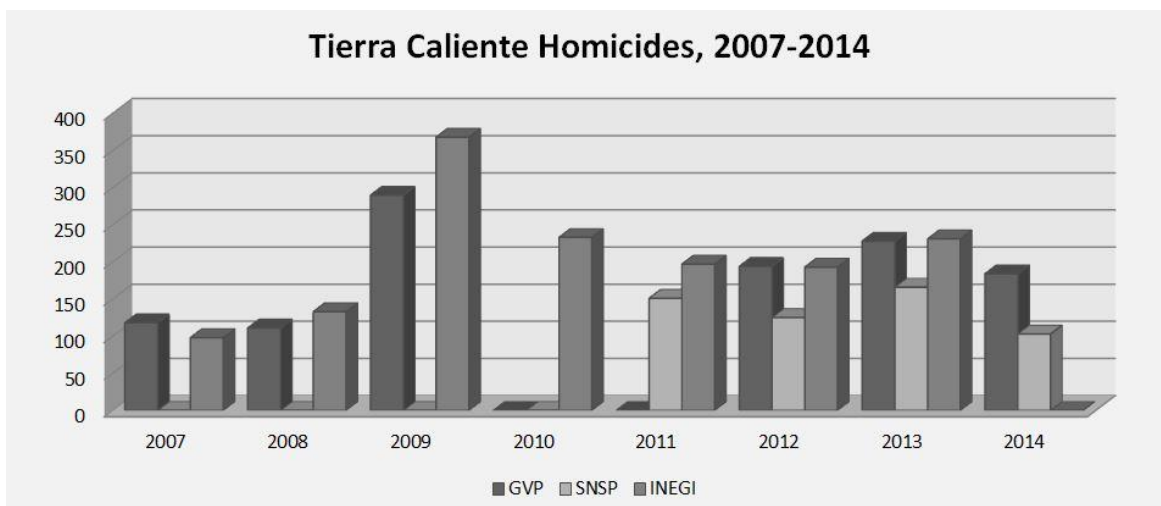


Figure 7 - Intentional Homicides in Tierra Caliente, 2007-2014

The scope of the control over Tierra Caliente exerted by La Familia and Los Caballeros Templarios is difficult to exaggerate. More than any other region in the state, in Tierra Caliente DTOs have thoroughly infiltrated not simply supplanted local governments, not only exercising policing functions but regulating a surprisingly broad swath of everyday life. The line between legitimate taxation and extortion can be fuzzy in Tierra Caliente; the region was purged several years ago of merchants who quibbled with this distinction. Those who mounted the most serious objections seem to have been the region's traditional commercial elites, who either died in a futile attempt at resistance or fled the region.<sup>31</sup> In either case, they left a multitude of shuttered storefronts in the central business districts of the region's major cities, especially Ciudad Altamirano. Smaller merchants and large national or multinational firms who conduct business in Tierra Caliente have been more accommodating, counting amounts paid to DTOs as a regular operating expense. Those who have tested DTO resolve have paid a steep price.<sup>32</sup>

In the countryside, DTOs wield power far in excess of anything seen elsewhere in the state. They maintain observation encampments at intersections on even minor roadways, monitoring commercial transportation and passenger movement as well as police and military patrols. In villages along roads in the drainages leading up the north slope of the Filo Mayor, DTOs requisition houses for their operatives, who reside among and are supported by the local population. In other areas they work through local residents who are allied with the group. DTOs in Tierra Caliente

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Beat, October 16, 2014. Available at <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2014/10/what-is-guerreros-unidos.html> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>31</sup> The pressure applied to merchants in Ciudad Altamirano can be seen in reporting on Salvador Palacios Reyes, a jeweler from a prominent family who was killed on March 18, 2011. See Israel Flores, "Asaltan y asesinan a comerciante de oro en Altamirano; pertenecía a una familia de políticos." *El Sur*, March 19, 2011. Available at [http://el-suracapulco.com.mx/nota1e.php?id\\_notas=98585](http://el-suracapulco.com.mx/nota1e.php?id_notas=98585) (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>32</sup> A clear example was the case of *Legumbreira San Luis*, an agribusiness concern specialized in melon production. After the owners resisted extortion demands, ten migrant laborers employed by the company were slaughtered by gunmen while working in a field in Ajuchitlán. See Ezequiel Flores Contreras, "Indígenas y menores de edad, entre los 10 masacrados en Guerrero." *Proceso*, March 4, 2013. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=335294> (retrieved 1/10/2015).

maintain their own communication infrastructure to facilitate communication and tactical coordination.<sup>33</sup> When needed, they can quickly assemble units of 150 or more gunmen, though the logistical difficulties involved in supporting large formations ensures that such mobilizations are rare and short-lived.

Although DTO conflict has been relatively rare in most areas of Tierra Caliente since 2012 there have been a few notable exceptions. The municipio cabeceras of Ajuchitlán, Arcelia, and San Miguel Totolapán have all witnessed high levels of violence since 2013. On repeated occasions in 2013 and 2014 large contingents of Guerreros Unidos gunmen have appeared in the Río Tehuehueta drainage in Ajuchitlán and western San Miguel Totolapán where they found and confronted La Familia gunmen. Similar engagements occurred along the eastern border of San Miguel Totolapán. The invading groups have also sacked numerous villages and produced repeated waves of refugees.<sup>34</sup> Similar incidents occurred in adjacent areas of El Centro and El Norte and are discussed below.

If there is a region in Guerrero where the “drug war” meets the common understanding of the word “war” it is Tierra Caliente. Federal and state police and military forces are effective at defending their fortified bases and the immediate surroundings of heavily armed ground patrols and checkpoints. But the ground patrols of police and military forces create no meaningful impediment to DTO control of the region. Fighting regularly erupts when DTO gunmen are caught in compromised circumstances at their observation encampments or highway checkpoints. But more often the DTOs simply monitor the police and military patrols, knowing that the security forces will shortly return to their fortified bases if they are left alone.

### **El Centro – Los Rojos and Los Ardillos**

The principal focal points of DTO attention in the center of the state include Chilpancingo (the state capital) and other cities along the Autopista del Sur corridor, the narcotics production zones of the eastern Filo Mayor, and the city of Chilapa, the main gateway to poppy production zones in La Montaña. All of these areas were securely under Beltrán Leyva control through 2009. Arturo Beltrán Leyva occasionally exploited the symbolic value of government officials and installations in or near Chilpancingo with spectacular displays of violence but the revenue generating resources of El Centro were not seriously disputed nor did DTO activities involve a great deal of violence. The Beltrán Leyva break from the Sinaloa DTO led to a modest escalation in violence targeting government officials and installations but the sharpest deterioration in the security situation in El Centro has come more recently. It has resulted from the diversification of DTO activities, especially the expanded participation in extortion and kidnapping operations, and occasional bouts of competition between rival DTOs.

The break-up of the original Beltrán Leyva DTO in 2010 created confusion throughout the state but nowhere more so than in El Centro. The competition between Héctor Beltrán Leyva and Edgar Valdés Villarreal was joined first by La Familia, who had by this time achieved control in Tierra

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<sup>33</sup> Israel Flores, “Destruye la Marina antenas de monitoreo de presas de la CFE y la Conagua en Tierra Caliente.” *El Sur*, September 10, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/205453> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>34</sup> For raids of late July 2013, see Israel Flores, “Incendian casas sicarios en comunidades de San Miguel Totolapan y desplazan a 100 vecinos.” *El Sur*, July 31, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/96324> (retrieved 1/13/2015). For June 2014 raids, see Ezequiel Flores Contreras, “Narcoviolencia desplaza a más de 250 habitantes de la sierra de Guerrero.” *Proceso*, June 6, 2014. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=373988>. (retrieved 1/13/2015). Witnesses to these events have reported occasions in which the attacking group numbered 500, through this seems implausible; even the army would have difficulty fielding a force this large in this particular area.

Caliente. La Familia gunmen made repeated forays east through 2011, along the Autopista del Sol from Acapulco north to El Norte (see below). Complicating matters still further, in the summer of 2010 José Ángel Nava Marino, after initially supporting Héctor Beltrán Leyva, appeared in Chilpancingo at the head of a new and independent group, the *Cártel de la Sierra*. Nava Marino was a nephew and had been in the service of Jesús Nava Romero, aka, “El Rojo,” a Beltrán Leyva lieutenant who died alongside Arturo Beltrán Leyva in 2009. Nava Marino was killed in a firefight between unknown parties in Iguala in early October 2010 but the group he formed continued under the leadership of two brothers and a sister of Jesús Nava Romero, José, Leonor, and María del Carmen. The group adopted various names over the next several years but eventually settled on “Los Rojos,” presumably as a tribute to Jesús.

From 2010 through early 2012 Los Rojos maintained a dominant position in El Centro as well as El Norte, successfully defending Iguala and Taxco from La Familia. This lasted through early 2012, when a new group, Guerreros Unidos, arose and ousted Los Rojos from El Norte. By late 2012 territorial boundaries that would prove durable had been established, with Los Rojos secure in its control over nearly all of the strategic resources of El Centro. They controlled the gateway cities of Tixtla, Chilapa, and Tlapa on Highway 93, which gave access to poppy production zones of La Montaña; they held the Autopista del Sur corridor from the Río Balsas (at *Puente Solidaridad*) through Chilpancingo to the southern end of the Ocotito Valley (at *Tierra Colorada*); and to the west, they held the poppy production zones of the eastern Filo Mayor, including high elevation zones in the municipios of Chilpancingo, Leonardo Bravo, Eduardo Neri, and Heliodoro Castillo.

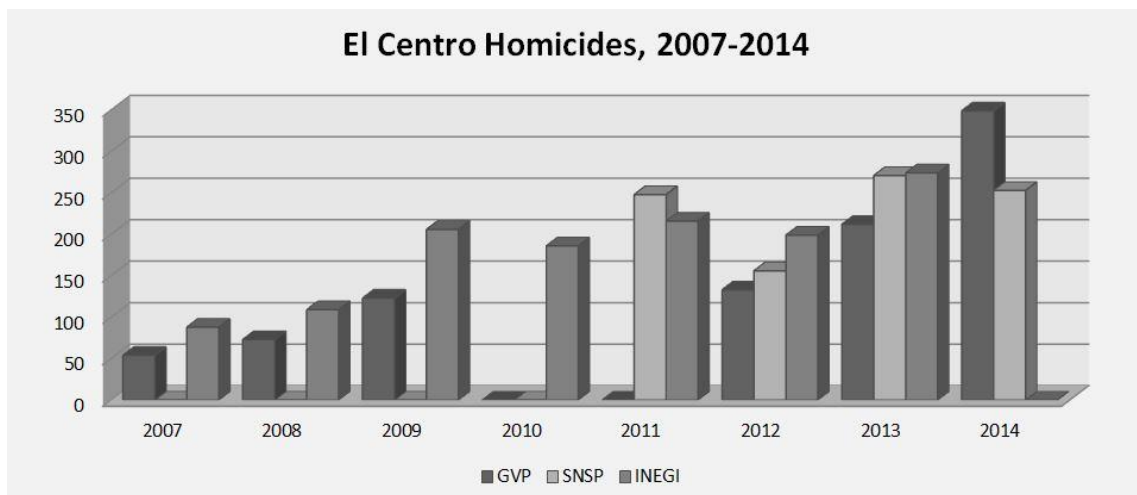


Figure 8 - Intentional Homicides in El Centro, 2007-2014

As with most DTOs operating in Guerrero, Los Rojos devoted considerable energy to building extortion and kidnapping operations. The crown jewel was the city of Chilpancingo. Though smaller than Acapulco, Chilpancingo has the highest per capita income in the state. The city has a major state university, a large army base, an abundance of salaried bureaucrats and politicians, and a vibrant business community. Los Rojos became proficient at devising techniques, all variations on extortion and kidnapping, to extract revenue from the multitude of targets the city offered. They were also among the first groups in the state to develop forms of extortion that could be applied in rural communities that lacked significant narcotics production potential. And they controlled lucrative retail contraband markets in Chilpancingo and the Ocotito Valley, Zumpango del Río,

Tixtla, Chilapa, and Tlapa. Taken together, Los Rojos probably developed the most diversified and lucrative portfolio of all the DTOs operating in Guerrero after 2010.

But their success has not gone unchallenged. In the northwest, Los Rojos has struggled to curb the expansion of Guerreros Unidos, whose gunmen have made repeated forays across the Río Balsas into Los Rojos territory. The river crossing at Mezcala and the mining settlement of Carrizalillo, both locations south of the Río Balsas, have been bitterly contested and had probably fallen to Guerreros Unidos by the summer of 2014. To the west, the border between the production zones controlled by Los Rojos and La Familia has also been unstable, with major confrontations erupting in 2013 and 2014 in the municipios of Heliodoro Castillo and San Miguel Totolapán.

In Chilpancingo, Los Rojos' extortion and kidnapping operations provoked an unusually vocal backlash from business elites.<sup>35</sup> The public attention induced state and federal authorities to target the group in security operations through late 2013 and 2014. Numerous extortion and kidnapping cells in the Chilpancingo were disrupted and disbanded and most of the group's senior leadership was eliminated. José Nava Romero was killed in a firefight in the city of Puebla in June 2013. Leonor Nava Romero was detained in September 2013, released inexplicably on \$13,238 bond (about \$1,020 US) two months later, then apprehended again in May 2014.<sup>36</sup> During the brief period between detentions there are signs of an internal rupture and active competition for leadership between Leonor and his sister, María del Carmen. As violence associated with the infighting escalated, it drew further press attention and pressure on federal authorities to intervene. They did so in early March 2014, when the Chilpancingo municipal police force was disbanded and policing authority taken over by federal authorities.

The expansion of extortion and kidnapping operations into rural communities provoked an even earlier backlash in the form of the emergence of community policing groups. The tripwire for the sudden appearance of self-defense groups in Guerrero (and neighboring Michoacán) in January 2013 was a series of events that occurred in Olinalá, in the eastern portion of Los Rojos territory. In late October 2012 over 250 residents of Olinalá banded together and attacked a safe-house that had been requisitioned by a group of five men who engaged in extortion, kidnapping, and narcotics trafficking. Fearing reprisals and having no confidence in local, state, or federal authorities, townsmen erected roadblocks at the entrance to the community. Residents checked the identification of everyone seeking entry into the community, turning away those who did not provide a satisfactory explanation for their presence. State authorities attempted to intervene and the result was a stand-off that persisted for several weeks and that received widespread press coverage.<sup>37</sup> Several weeks later, similar groups emerged in the Ocotito Valley, also in Los Rojos territory, as well as in Costa Chica, Costa Grande, and El Norte. In a few of these cases the community groups matured into organizations that cross-cut community boundaries and that have supplanted both DTOs and state authorities as the dominant policing power within their communities (see discussion below).

Other challenges to Los Rojos control of El Centro emerged in 2014 both Chilpancingo and Chilapa. Perhaps the most robust challenge has come from *Los Ardillos*, a small trafficking and

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<sup>35</sup> Ezequiel Flores Contreras, "Ejército captura en Guerrero al jefe de la banda de Los Rojos." *Proceso*, September 9, 2013. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=352366> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>36</sup> Ezequiel Flores Contreras, "Capturan en Nuxco, Guerrero a 'La Garra', líder de Los Rojos." *Proceso*, May 17, 2014. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=372522> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>37</sup> For a description of the initial incidents, see "Toman armas y ponen retenes en Olinalá para defenderse de un grupo delictivo," *El Sur*, October 31, 2012. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/49635> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

extortion DTO based in a pocket of territory in the municipios of Mochtitlán and Quecholtenango that has long been the only portion of El Centro not controlled by Los Rojos. Until recently, Los Ardillos showed no sign of expansionist tendencies. But the weakening of Los Rojos in 2013 appears to have been given Los Ardillos an opening. They have aggressively pushed north into Chilapa, sending gunmen into the city on repeated occasions while creating a string of fortified villages along the secondary roads that connect Quecholtenango and Chilapa. Los Rojos operatives in Chilapa have repelled the incursions into the city and fortified their own string of villages in the buffer zone to the south. But the resulting violence, all concentrated in and around Chilapa, has attracted the attention of state and federal authorities.<sup>38</sup> By year's end, there were contingents of 30 and 500 state police and soldiers, respectively, reinforcing the municipio's force of about 120 police.<sup>39</sup>

In and around Chilpancingo two new organizations appear to have emerged in 2014. The first, on the south side of the city, is a group that refers to itself as the "*Gente del Sur*." The location of killings and communications associated with the group, near the highway leading to Quecholtenango, suggests a link to Los Ardillos but too little is known to draw conclusions. The second refers to itself simply as "*La Verga*" (or sometimes "*Sierra Unida Revolucionaria – La Verga*") and is equally obscure. It was first seen as early as March 2013 but has escalated its level of activity in 2014 in and around Chilpancingo. I know of no arrests, reporting, or analysis that would shed light on the origins or composition of either of these groups. What is clear from the escalating violence in El Centro (Figure 8) is that Los Rojos' once firm grip on the region has slipped. But I have seen no data to show whether the new actors are dissident cells that reflect a fissioning of Los Rojos, operatives of known rivals, or wholly new groups.

### **El Norte – *La Familia Michoacana* and *Guerreros Unidos***

El Norte is in most respects similar to El Centro in terms of the range of resources of interest to DTOs. As in El Centro, El Norte offers urban extortion and kidnapping opportunities, active retail contraband markets, and narcotics production and trafficking opportunities. The difference is that the resources in El Norte are in every respect more limited in remunerative potential. Iguala and Taxco, the principal cities, have fewer salaried employees, lower per capita income, and lower levels of commercial activity than Chilpancingo. Narcotics production zones in El Norte, which form an arc curving from the north to southwest around Iguala, are of more limited potential than the more isolated and extensive valleys and ridgelines of the Filo Mayor and La Montaña. A sizable portion of the land suited to poppy production lacks the necessary isolation and is unavailable to producers because the tourist center of Taxco is situated in its midst.

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<sup>38</sup> This is a textbook example of the strategy known as "calentando la plaza," or creating sufficient mayhem in the territory of a rival to draw state and federal authorities to assist in dismantling the resident DTO to create a vacuum for the aggressor to eventually fill. (For a description of this strategy, see Gary Moore, "Heating Up the Plaza: How Mexico's Gangs Use Scorched Earth Tactics." *InSight Crime*, December 6, 2011. Available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/heating-up-the-plaza-how-mexicos-gangs-use-scorched-earth-tactics> [retrieved 1/14/2015]). Since the raids into Chilapa began on January 1, 2014 at least 11 individuals have been arrested in Chilapa and charged with working for Los Rojos. A municipal director of Seguridad Pública was also relieved of his position (another incumbent to this office was assassinated). No one was arrested on charges of working for Los Ardillos, either in Chilapa or in the group's home territory of Quecholtenango.

<sup>39</sup> Chilapa's municipal police force was briefly suspended in late July, after failing to defend the city against an attack in early July that lasted two days and left 16 dead. After a brief period of vetting, the force was reinstated in the fall.

Through 2011 the experience of El Norte was intertwined with Tierra Caliente and, especially, El Centro. The collapse of the Beltrán Leyva DTO created a vacuum that La Familia and groups headed by Héctor Beltrán Leyva, Edgar Valdés Villarreal, and José Ángel Nava Marino sought to fill. By early 2011 the main contenders were La Familia and Nava Marino's *Cártel de la Sierra* (Los Rojos) but defections within both groups gave rise, in early 2012, to a new group headed by Mario Casarrubias Salgado that adopted the name *Guerreros Unidos*.<sup>40</sup> While *Guerreros Unidos* was active as far south as Acapulco, by the end of 2012 it had consolidated a degree of control only in El Norte.

Unlike Los Rojos, whose founding family was originally from a village in the municipio of Leonardo Bravo in El Centro, the leadership of *Guerreros Unidos* was composed of a miscellaneous assortment of defectors from several of Guerrero's DTOs, including Los Rojos, La Familia, the CIDA, La Barredora, and Héctor Beltrán Leyva's group. They lacked roots in El Norte, which in any case was marginally productive compared to the territory held by its neighbors. This may in part explain why *Guerreros Unidos* has, from its beginnings, exhibited unusually aggressive territorial ambitions. These ambitions originally included Chilpancingo but when it became clear that Los Rojos was not to be dislodged, the focus of attention came to be concentrated on poppy production zones west and southwest of Iguala and the eastern end of the Filo Mayor. By the middle of 2013 they had succeeded in ousting La Familia from the municipios of Cocula, Cuetzala, and Apaxtla but the effort stalled in the city and municipio of Teloloapan, which remains a peninsula of prime poppy country controlled by La Familia that juts into El Norte. South of the Río Balsas the boundaries are less clear but it appears that at some point in 2014 *Guerreros Unidos* managed to secure control of the strategic river crossing at Mezcala and adjacent territory in the municipio of Eduardo Neri. *Guerreros Unidos* gunmen have made repeated forays further west and southwest, into the municipios of Leonardo Bravo, Heliodoro Castillo, and San Miguel Totolapán, confronting both Los Rojos and La Familia. These efforts have produced repeated waves of refugees from the villages in their path<sup>41</sup> but they do not appear to have given *Guerreros Unidos* a stable foothold in the area.

Unable to secure control over the poppy fields of Teloloapan or territory in the Filo Mayor, *Guerreros Unidos* has been limited to less expansive narcotics production areas in Apaxtla, Cuetzala, Cocula, and the few pockets of suitably isolated territory that can be found in the highlands east and north of Iguala. It is perhaps for these reasons that the group tightened its grip on Iguala and Taxco where it developed among the most efficient extortion and kidnapping operations to be found in Guerrero. There are no good measures of the prevalence of these crimes. Among the few physical traces they leave behind are bodies buried in clandestine graves. Since January 2012, 482 bodies have been excavated from clandestine burials in Guerrero; 163 of these have been found in the

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<sup>40</sup> In its earliest appearance *Guerreros Unidos* was a local cell of La Familia headed by Mario Casarrubias Salgado, a former Beltrán Leyva gunman who had earlier broken with the *Cártel de la Sierra*. His break with La Familia came no later than March 2012, when ten decapitated bodies were left in Teloloapan with a note bearing his signature and the name *Guerreros Unidos*. The note attributed the killings to the victims' alleged affiliation with La Familia. For a discussion of the early history of *Guerreros Unidos*, see "What is *Guerreros Unidos*?" *Borderland Beat*, October 16, 2014. Available at <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2014/10/what-is-guerreros-unidos.html> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>41</sup> For a summary of the conflicts, see Jonathan Cuevas, "Deja pueblos fantasmas narcoviolencia sierreña." *La Crónica Vespertina de Chilpancingo*, September 9, 2014. Available at [http://lacronicavesperinodechilpancingo.blogspot.com/2014/09/principal-de-nota-roja\\_9.html#more](http://lacronicavesperinodechilpancingo.blogspot.com/2014/09/principal-de-nota-roja_9.html#more) (retrieved 1/13/2015).



immediate vicinity of Iguala and Taxco. This is thirty-four percent of the state’s clandestine burials yet the two cities have a combined total of only five percent of the state’s population.<sup>42</sup>

The events in the streets of Iguala involving students of Ayotzinapa on the evening of September 26, 2014 have altered the dynamic of DTO activity in El Norte, though perhaps not as much as might be supposed. The immediate response by state authorities was to saturate of the streets of central Iguala with federal police and army troops. Key leaders of Guerreros Unidos, including Sidronio Casarrubias Salgado and Salomón Pineda Villa, were arrested along with scores of others, including the *alcalde* of Iguala, José Luis Abarca, and some forty police officers from the municipios of Iguala and neighboring Cocula. It is too soon to discern the impact of these deployments and arrests on Guerreros Unidos, much less on the incidence of criminal violence in Iguala. Extortion and kidnapping operations in Iguala have almost certainly been significantly disrupted.<sup>43</sup> But Guerreros Unidos was never wholly dependent on these revenue sources and they can likely afford to mount a strategic retreat to allow the federal police deployment to run its course.<sup>44</sup>

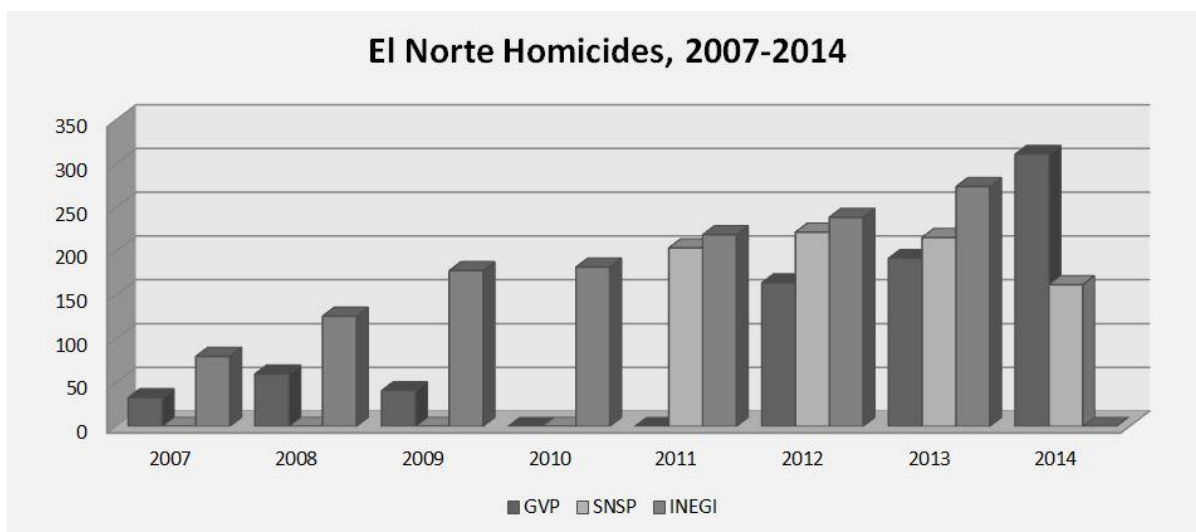


Figure 9 - Intentional Homicides in El Norte, 2007-2014

<sup>42</sup> The number of clandestine burials discovered in Iguala rose significantly following September 26, 2014. The search for the students who disappeared that night led to one of the first systematic searches for grave sites that has occurred in Guerrero. Seventy-four of the 163 bodies recovered in the Iguala area have been found since this incident. If these are subtracted from the totals, the percentage of buried homicide victims recovered in the Iguala area falls to 89, twenty-two percent of the total found in the state since 2012.

<sup>43</sup> These crimes have not ceased entirely, however. In the weeks after federal authorities assumed control of public security in Iguala there continued to be reports of kidnappings (e.g., Marcela Turati, “Han desaparecido 3 personas en Iguala desde que la federación asumió el control.” *Proceso*, December 5, 2014. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=389949>. Retrieved 1/13/2015) and extortion (e.g., “Dejan narcomensaje a vecino de la Jardín Campestre firmado por GU,” *Diario 21*, December 24, 2014. Available at [http://www.diario21.com.mx/?cmd=displaystory&story\\_id=138764&format=html](http://www.diario21.com.mx/?cmd=displaystory&story_id=138764&format=html). Retrieved 1/13/2015). A rash of petty robberies in Iguala in late November was attributed to a reduction in street patrols by federal police (e.g., Alejandro Guerrero, “Denuncian el aumento de robos a comercios en Iguala y menor presencia de policías federales.” *E/Sur*, November 21, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/229885>. Retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>44</sup> It is clearly too soon to forecast a “total demise” of Guerreros Unidos, as some have done (e.g., Patrick Corcoran, “Lingering Question from Mexico Student Massacre: Why?” *InSight Crime*, November 20, 2014, at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/question-mexico-massacre-why>. Retrieved 1/13/2015). Certainly a rebranding effort is in order. But from its beginnings Guerreros Unidos consisted of a loosely structured assemblage of cells, most of which were unaffected by the events in Iguala.

What was most impressive about the state of DTO activity in El Norte in the months following September 2014 is not what was seen but rather what was not seen. If federal law enforcement deployments and arrests had seriously disrupted Guerreros Unidos we might easily have seen indications of competitive jockeying among surviving cells. Yet there was no sign of internal discord, either in form of killings or narcomensajes, the typical communicative devices used by DTOs. Similarly, any significant weakening of Guerreros Unidos would surely have triggered a nearly instantaneous response from La Familia. This would have been most immediately apparent in the municipios of Apaxtla, Cuetzala, and Cocula, on the southern flank of La Familia's stronghold of Teloloapan, as well as in Arcelia, Ajuchitlán, San Miguel Totolapán, Iguala and Taxco. Yet nothing out of the ordinary occurred in any of these areas. A series of local press reports published in late October suggested that Guerreros Unidos gunmen had fled south across the Río Balsas to escape the police and army deployments in Iguala. The evidence cited in the reports included a number of small-arms confrontations in the municipios of Eduardo Neri, Leonardo Bravo, Heliodoro Castillo, and San Miguel Totolapán involving Guerreros Unidos gunmen, state and federal police, and gunmen from Los Rojos and La Familia.<sup>45</sup> But my data show no break in a pattern of violence that emerged in this area in early 2012. The only difference that I can discern between the armed confrontations in the area before and after late September 2014 has been the heightened level of press coverage of the more recent events.

### La Montaña and Costa Chica

The two remaining regions, La Montaña and Costa Chica, are similar in that both have narcotics production areas but in neither are there many traces of specific DTOs. Costa Chica has a larger number of small urban centers, with the attendant retail contraband markets and extortion opportunities. But in neither region has DTO activity generated violence on the scale seen elsewhere in the state.

La Montaña is the oldest narcotics production zone in the state.<sup>46</sup> It also has the lowest levels of violent crime in the state (see Figure 10). Very few improved roads enter the region and nearly all of its arable land can support the production of marijuana, poppy, or both. The region's residents, the majority living in isolated villages and many of indigenous ethnic background, have very few commercial alternatives. The typical economic strategy among households in La Montaña is to produce maize for subsistence and to supplement this with a combination of seasonal migration and/or small-scale poppy or marijuana production. Unlike the fields of the more commercialized producers of the Filo Mayor and El Norte, farmers in La Montaña commonly intercrop poppy or marijuana in maize fields. The result is a lower level of per capita production but this is partially offset by the much higher overall population density. The other feature of La Montaña that makes the region distinct from other narcotics production zones is the political organization of the producing communities. These are old communities with complex internal political organization that includes policing and adjudicative institutions. The *policía comunitaria* movement in Guerrero, discussed below, has its roots in these communities and consisted originally of a simple networking among regional blocks of preexisting village-based institutions. With few roads penetrating the region, it has been comparatively easy for cooperating community-based policing groups to limit access and generally create an inhospitable environment for unwelcome DTO operatives.

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<sup>45</sup> "De San Miguel Totolapan suplica por ayuda: 'solos no podemos, ellos son más que nosotros,'" El Sur, October 25, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/220077>, retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>46</sup> "Guerrero, primer lugar en producción de drogas," *Proceso* November 20, 2003. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=257755> (retrieved 1/15/2015).

Insofar as there is evidence of DTO activity in La Montaña it is concentrated in the gateway community of Tlapa.<sup>47</sup> This is the only city in the region with a sizeable contraband market and abundant extortion and kidnapping opportunities. In 2012 there were efforts, apparently by Guerreros Unidos, to expand into the smaller urban centers of Olinalá, Huamuxtitlán, and Cualac but these provoked a sharp backlash from vigilante groups that swiftly constituted themselves into policía comunitaria networks. Other violence that we see in La Montaña stems from community-based land disputes, many of ancient origin. The most active (and violent) are in the municipios of Atlixac, Zapotitlán Tablas, and Malinaltepec. It is not clear if these conflicts have been aggravated by the recent expansion of commercial poppy production.

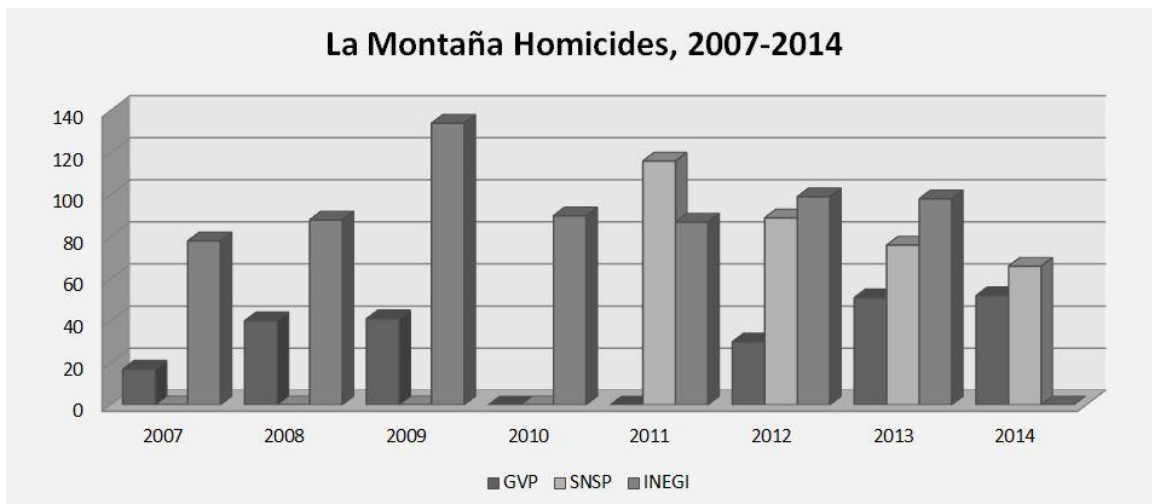


Figure 10 - Intentional Homicides in La Montaña

Much of La Montaña's opium output is controlled by Los Rojos via the main highway that enters the region through Chilapa. There are a small number of secondary roads leading into the southwest corner of La Montaña from Quecholtenango and these may give Los Ardillos a small foothold in the region. More significantly, the incursions by Los Ardillos into Chilapa are clearly an effort to displace Los Rojos and gain greater control over La Montaña's opium output.

In Costa Chica the landscape is dominated by a coastal plain that is generally broader than in Costa Grande, with a wider expanse of terrain suited to commercial agriculture, tree-crop production, and cattle ranching. Marijuana production is confined to a narrow band of territory along the lower slopes of the Sierra Madre del Sur. There are only a few areas of high elevations suitable for poppy production. Very little is known about the DTOs that are involved in the narcotics trade. Presumably it is controlled by the groups operating in the adjacent regions to the west, including Acapulco (the CIDA and Beltrán Leyva DTO) and El Centro (Los Rojos and Los Ardillos).

<sup>47</sup> Other important gateway communities to the region include Chilapa in El Centro and Ayutla, San Luis Acatlán, and Ometepec in Costa Chica.

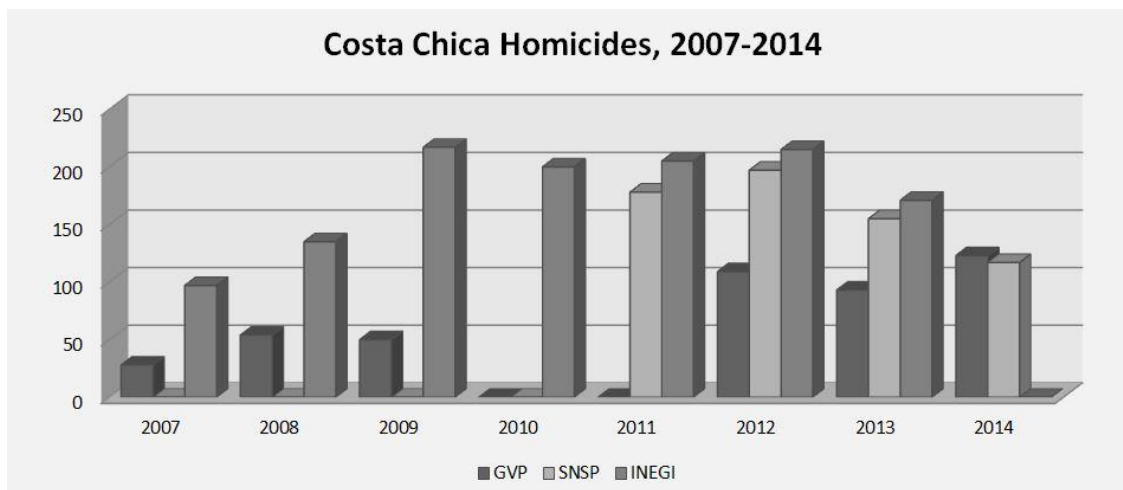


Figure 11 - Intentional Homicides in Costa Chica

There are more urban centers in Costa Chica than in La Montaña and a correspondingly higher incidence of extortion, kidnapping, and retail narcotics trafficking. The cities of Ayutla, Tecoanapa, San Marcos, Cruz Grande, Marquelia, Igualapa, and, especially, Ometepec all supported small extortion and kidnapping groups and had active retail contraband markets until 2013 when most of these were pushed out by policía comunitaria. The one city where DTOs continue to operate without apparent restraint is Ometepec. Not only is this the region's largest city, it is also a gateway to a lucrative poppy production zone along in the northwest corner of Costa Chica and adjacent areas of La Montaña (the municipios of Tlacoachistlahuaca and Xochistlahuaca in Costa Chica and Metlatonac and Cochoapa El Grande in La Montaña).

Of Guerrero's seven regions, La Montaña and Costa Chica have the lowest levels of DTO-related violence and the lowest homicide rates in the state. Narcotics production certainly occurs in both regions but production, bulking, and trafficking activities have not been accompanied by significant competition among rival DTOs. The efforts of DTOs to expand predatory extortion and kidnapping operations in both regions in 2011 and 2012 prompted the growth and expansion of policía comunitaria networks that have played an important part further reducing levels of violence and curbing DTO growth and expansion.<sup>48</sup>

## Law Enforcement and Federal Intervention

In 2013 there were reportedly 5,484 municipal police distributed among the state's eighty-one municipios.<sup>49</sup> The state police numbered 2,523<sup>50</sup> and there were another 775 ministerial police

<sup>48</sup> The clearest examples are probably the municipios of Ayutla and Tecoanapa, where homicides (according to the SNSP) fell, respectively, from 51 and 12 in 2012 to 17 and 4 in 2013. See citation in Note 21.

<sup>49</sup> INEGI, *Censo Nacional de Gobiernos Municipales y Delegacionales 2013*. Accessible at [http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/lista\\_cubos/consulta.aspx?p=gob&c=5](http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/lista_cubos/consulta.aspx?p=gob&c=5) (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>50</sup> INEGI, *Censo Nacional de Gobierno, Seguridad Pública y Sistema Penitenciario Estatales 2014*. Accessible at [http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/lista\\_cubos/consulta.aspx?p=gob&c=15](http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/lista_cubos/consulta.aspx?p=gob&c=15) (retrieved 1/13/2015).

engaged in law enforcement duties.<sup>51</sup> Guerrero also hosts detachments of federal police who have bases scattered throughout the state. Federal police deployments have varied and the numbers of officers involved are rarely reported. Reports suggest that there is a baseline number of fewer than 2,000 federal police stationed in the state, with additional numbers mobilized for special operations. In addition to police forces, there are nine army and one marine infantry battalions and an army artillery brigade permanently assigned to the state. The army infantry battalions are based in each of the state's seven regions, with two in both Acapulco and El Centro, and the artillery brigade and marine battalion are both based in Costa Grande. The minimum troop level for each of the infantry battalions is around 550, though the numbers are regularly augmented for special operations; individual battalions can be expanded to around 2,500 troops. Minimally, however, there are some 5,500 troops stationed at bases in Guerrero. The variable number of federal police and military assets assigned to Guerrero makes it difficult to pinpoint the exact number of security forces in the state. The combined municipal and state force (reportedly numbering 8,782 in 2013) is joined, by about 7,500 police and soldiers under federal control. This brings the number of security forces regularly assigned to the state to just over 16,000. Mobilizations of federal assets after the Ayotzinapa affair have drawn several thousand additional police and soldiers to Guerrero.

What these numbers do not reveal is the extent to which the various forces, especially municipal police, have been degraded by eight years of sustained conflict with DTOs. Indeed, in many jurisdictions the number of municipal police reported to the INEGI was more of an aspiration than an actual count of police officers. In Cuetzala (El Norte), for example, ten of twelve uniformed officers were abducted by a contingent of forty Guerreros Unidos gunmen on April 26, 2013. Two were found stabbed to death in Iguala a few days later and the other eight remain missing.<sup>52</sup> The two remaining officers apparently resigned and the *alcalde*, Feliciano Álvarez Mesino, was eventually arrested by federal authorities (on April 8, 2014) and charged with working with La Familia. As discussed above, this was the period when Guerreros Unidos (with the assistance of federal authorities in the case of Álvarez Mesino) was purging La Familia operatives and supporters from Cuetzala and the neighboring municipios of Apaxtla and Cocula. Of these two neighbors, the municipal police of Apaxtla resigned *en masse* while those of Cocula came to terms with, and perhaps became an extension of, Guerreros Unidos. In Apaxtla and Cuetzala the void created by the disappearance of municipal police was partly filled by *policía comunitaria*, discussed in the following section.

Mass resignations among municipal police have occurred repeatedly in jurisdictions throughout Guerrero but the most common survival strategy is simple avoidance; municipal police go to considerable lengths to avoid direct confrontations with DTOs. An illustrative example was an assault on the regional office of the state *policía ministerial* in Chilapa (El Centro) on June 16, 2011. The attack occurred as Los Rojos was consolidating its position in the region. A new commander, José Trinidad Zamora, had been assigned to Chilapa but he apparently did not meet the approval of Los Rojos. At 3:00 p.m. on his first day in office, fifteen gunmen in three SUVs launched an attack on his office in the center of Chilapa. Eyewitness accounts vary on the duration of the attack, with a reported range from a low of forty minutes to a high of an hour and a half. Three of the attacking gunmen as well as Trinidad Zamora were reportedly killed in the confrontation. The bodies of the

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<sup>51</sup> INEGI, *Censo Nacional de Procuración de Justicia Estatal 2014*. Accessible at [http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/lista\\_cubos/consulta.aspx?p=gob&c=16](http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/lista_cubos/consulta.aspx?p=gob&c=16) (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>52</sup> Ezequiel Flores Contreras, "Narco retiene, golpea y amenaza a alcalde en Guerrero; desaparecen a sus policías." *Proceso* May 26, 2013. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=343149> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

gunmen were never recovered (there was reporting on the funeral of one<sup>53</sup>). Most of Trinidad Zamora's body was recovered the next day in Chilpancingo on a highway overpass some 500 meters from the *Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado*.<sup>54</sup> His remains had been cut into at least twelve parts, eleven of which were recovered; the skin was removed from his head and was never found. Notably, Chilapa's municipal police force, with over 130 uniformed officers, failed to respond to direct appeals for assistance during the attack. Given that the incident consisted of a loud and sustained firefight only a few blocks from the municipal police headquarters, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that there was a deliberate decision not to respond to the appeal for assistance. Municipal police were not seen on the streets of Chilapa until state police and army troops mobilized from Chilpancingo arrived hours after the attack.

In the aftermath of the Ayotzinapa affair there has been much reporting and some analysis implying that Guerrero's government institutions, especially at the municipio level, are pervaded by corruption. The implication is that the exceptionally high rate of violent criminality in Guerrero is in some ways a result of DTO collusion with municipal governments.<sup>55</sup> This is a narrative that has been sustained most particularly by reporting on the unusually close relationship that existed between Iguala's municipal administration and the leadership of Guerreros Unidos. But it was a familiar refrain to those in Chilpancingo, for example, whose business elites through 2013 and 2014 had publically and vociferously accused the municipal administration of colluding with Los Rojos. Federal authorities have also contributed to the discussion through the selective disclosure of information allegedly obtained in the confessions of those detained after the Ayotzinapa incident.<sup>56</sup>

My research provides little support for the suggestion that the corruption of local governments is a driving force behind the violence. As noted above, the risks have increased and the returns have diminished to both DTOs and local politicians for maintaining overtly collaborative relationships. The heightened competition between DTOs has instead created a situation in which municipal governments are more likely to sit on the sidelines than to collaborate directly. This has been apparent for some time but was vividly illustrated with the September 29, 2012 release of a videotaped conversation between La Familia operatives and the alcalde-elect of Teloloapan, Ignacio de Jesús Valladares Salgado. The conversation occurred just as La Familia's control over Teloloapan was first being challenged by the rise of Guerreros Unidos. The spokesman for La Familia had only one request, that upon taking office the alcalde restrain the municipal police from interfering in the fighting that they correctly anticipated.<sup>57</sup> By the end of May 2013, a combination of killings and

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<sup>53</sup> "Policrónica," *La Crónica Vespertino de Chilpancingo*, June 23, 2011. Available at [http://lacronicavesperinodechilpancingo.blogspot.com/2011/06/policronica\\_23.html](http://lacronicavesperinodechilpancingo.blogspot.com/2011/06/policronica_23.html) (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>54</sup> Ezequiel Flores Contreras, "Hallan restos de jefe policiaco 'levantado' en Guerrero." *Proceso*, June 17, 2011. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=273104> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>55</sup> The most important recent contributions to this line of argument include: Juan Pablo Becerra Acosta, "12 alcaldes de Guerrero, bajo lupa 'antinarco.'" *Milenio*, November 17, 2014. Available at [http://www.milenio.com/politica/12\\_alcaldes\\_de\\_Guerrero\\_bajo\\_lupa\\_antinarco-alcaldes\\_relacionados\\_con\\_el\\_narco\\_0\\_410958901.html](http://www.milenio.com/politica/12_alcaldes_de_Guerrero_bajo_lupa_antinarco-alcaldes_relacionados_con_el_narco_0_410958901.html) (retrieved 1/13/2015); and, "Entregan a la PGR lista de 25 narcoalcaldes de Guerrero," *Proceso*, December 2, 2014. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=389647> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>56</sup> For example, in a confession reportedly extracted from an alleged Guerreros Unidos leader detained by authorities following the Ayotzinapa incident in Iguala, payments equaling about \$45,000 US were said to have been paid monthly to buy the cooperation of the municipal police. See "Guerreros Unidos daban \$600 mil al mes a Policía de Iguala por dejarlos operar," *Proceso*, October 15, 2014. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=384925> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>57</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhsiinD5LSg> (viewed 1/13/2015). A similar case was that of Eli Camacho Goicoechea, a state legislator and former alcalde of Coyuca de Catalán. In October 2012 he gave an interview with the

resignations had reduced the Teloloapan police force, reported to number 102 uniformed officers by INEGI, to 26 active officers, 15 of whom were assigned to protective duty at the regional hospital and other medical facilities. Only eleven officers were available for regular law enforcement duty.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps Francisco Javier García González, Chilapa's *alcalde*, best summarized the attitude of Guerrero's municipal governments. In an interview that followed a series of late November 2014 confrontations between Los Rojos and Los Ardillos gunmen that left at least sixteen dead, García explained that the municipality's force of 140 police simply lacked the capacity to provide security. Twenty-three officers had recently been dismissed, having failed background checks, leaving a force of fewer than 120 officers. Working twelve-hour shifts, only half the force could be fielded at a given moment leaving the municipality with an effective police force of under sixty in a jurisdiction that includes a city of 32,000 and nearly 200 rural towns and villages. At the time of the attacks, there were also 500 soldiers and 30 state police stationed in Chilapa. García began his summary of the security situation in unusually frank terms. It would be offensive and a lie to claim that the municipality had the capability to insure citizen security. He summarized the situation with a simple understatement: "in Chilapa, we're scared."<sup>59</sup>

The state's municipal police forces are not the only ones who have found it expedient to stay out of harm's way. If anything, state and federal forces have become even more adept at avoiding conflict. This can be seen in the numbers of casualties sustained by the various law enforcement corporations operating in Guerrero (see Figure 12). The numbers have fallen sharply over the last two years, especially among state and federal police and military forces. In 2014 over sixty percent of the casualties by law enforcement officers were sustained by municipal police, the highest percentage ever recorded.

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weekly *Proceso* in which he admitted that during his time as *alcalde* he communicated and had informal agreements with DTOs operating in the municipio. He argued that all of the state's *alcaldes* must strike such deals with DTOs given the relative power differentials that exist in the state.

Ezequiel Flores Contreras, "Revela exalcalde de Guerrero que 'negoció' con el narco para poder gobernar." *Proceso*, October 9, 2015. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=322111> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>58</sup> Rosalba Ramírez García, "Atacan a balazos la comandancia de la policía de Teloloapan; hay dos muertos y dos heridos." *El Sur*, May 26, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/82237> (retrieved 1/13/2015).

<sup>59</sup> "En Chilapa estamos espantados: *alcalde*," *Milenio*, November 28, 2014. Available at [http://www.milenio.com/estados/Chilapa-cuerpos\\_aparecidos\\_en\\_Chilapa-enfrentamientos\\_Rojos-Ardillos-crimen\\_0\\_417558328.html](http://www.milenio.com/estados/Chilapa-cuerpos_aparecidos_en_Chilapa-enfrentamientos_Rojos-Ardillos-crimen_0_417558328.html) (retrieved 1/14/2015).

## Police and Military Casualties, 2007-2014

GVP Database (data for 2010 and 2011 are incomplete)

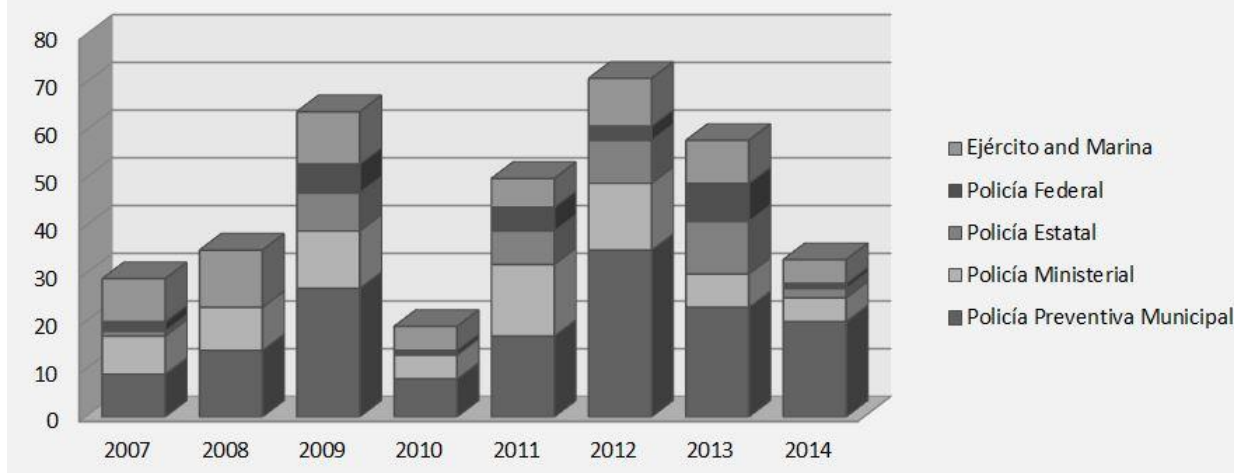


Figure 12 - Law Enforcement Casualties

Perhaps the strongest evidence that municipal police or their absence have little bearing on DTO activities or the patterning of DTO violence can be found in the recent experience of Acapulco. The city's municipal police, including transit police, went on strike on April 18, 2014 seeking higher wages, better life insurance policies, the ouster of municipal director of public security, and other lesser demands. Their weapons were seized by the army on April 23.<sup>60</sup> By year's end, they had not returned to active duty. When the strike began local authorities gave assurances that state and federal forces were available to perform law enforcement duties but patrol units were rarely seen outside of tourist zones. A few days after the strike began a consortium of *tortillerías* reported an increase in armed robberies and threatened to close shops throughout the city. But the following day a second group reported no increase in robberies, implying that the first group was fabricating a crisis in support of the striking policemen.<sup>61</sup> In the weeks that followed there were anecdotal accounts in the local press of an increased incidence of petty crimes but no supporting numbers were ever published. As for DTO violence, this was unaffected by the police strike. As I noted above, the recent increase in Acapulco's homicide rate was triggered by the October arrest of Héctor Beltrán Leyva, not by the April disappearance of the municipal police from the streets of Acapulco.

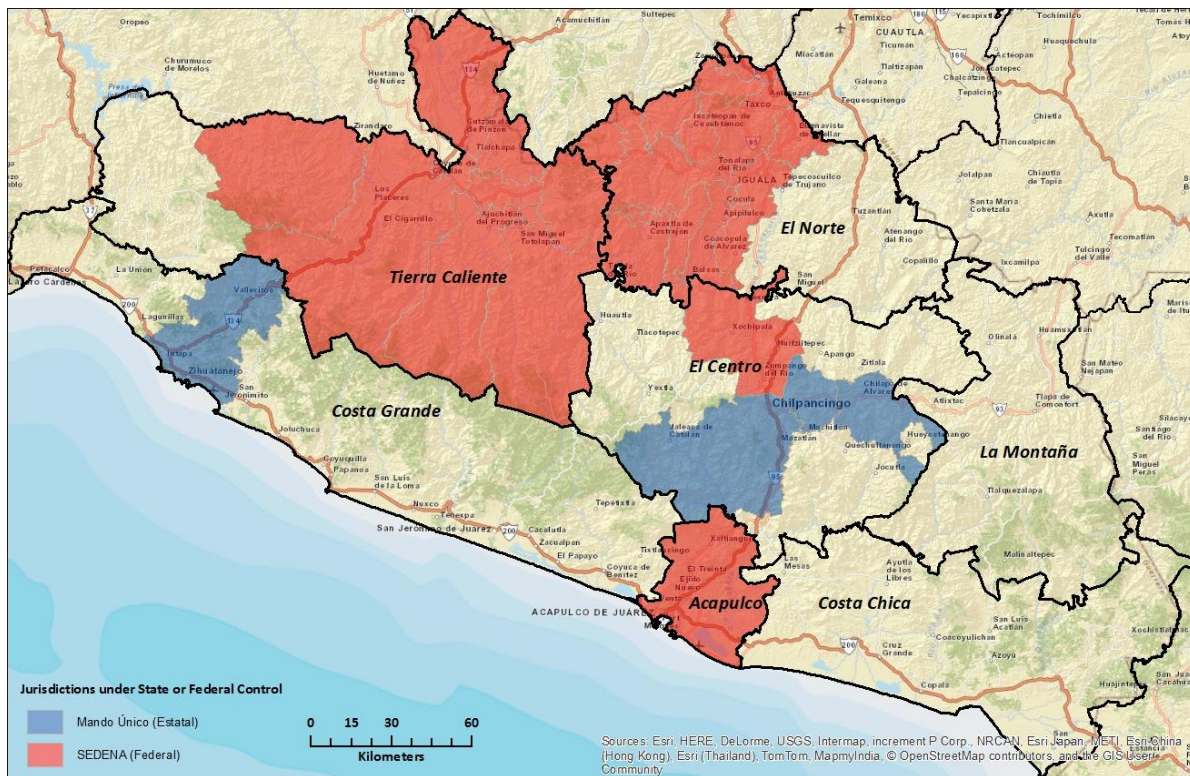
This idea that DTO violence can be attributed to corrupt municipal police forces does not die easily, however, and has led to repeated episodes in which state and federal authorities relieve municipalities of policing authority. The most recent example, known as *Operación Tierra Caliente*, covers twenty-two municipios in El Norte and Tierra Caliente and is among the largest federal take-over that has been attempted (see Figure 13). But it is hardly the first effort of its kind. State and federal authorities briefly took control of security in Chilapa in mid-July after fighting between Los Ardillos and Los Rojos left fourteen dead over a two-day period in early July. They took control of policing in Chilpancingo on March 3, 2014 (*Operación Juntos por Chilpancingo*) in response to pressure from the business community. Operations that differ only in size, territorial extent, and duration

<sup>60</sup> Carlos Moreno A., "Irrumpen soldados en la sede de la Policía Municipal y decomisan mil 800 armas." *El Sur*, April 24, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/140230> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

<sup>61</sup> Karina Contreras, "No cerrarán tortillerías, dicen molineros independientes al grupo de Arcadio Castro." *El Sur*, April 24, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/140206> (retrieved 1/14/2015).



can be traced back in a continuous string at least to *Operación Conjunta Guerrero*, the deployment of federal assets in Acapulco, Costa Grande, and Tierra Caliente that began the “drug war” in Guerrero in early 2007.<sup>62</sup>



**Figure 13 - Jurisdictions under State or Federal Control as of December 31, 2014**

When state and federal police and military forces relieve municipal police there follows a familiar pattern. First, the outside forces arrive in a municipal cabecera where they create an immediate logistics crisis. They are generally housed in hotels, municipal auditoriums, or anywhere adequate space can be found. Their vehicles and equipment are positioned as close to their lodgings as possible, at a nearby airport, soccer field, or other suitable location. Everything about the deployment is conspicuously temporary.<sup>63</sup> While deployed, the forces will generally maintain roadblocks on major highways and checkpoints in urban neighborhoods. In some cases they run patrols on secondary roads in rural zones but these do not occur with sufficient frequency to have discernible effect. Wherever they go, they travel in large, heavily armed convoys.

DTO activity in the jurisdictions targeted by these operations likewise follows a familiar pattern. There is commonly, though not inevitably, an immediate decrease in the homicide rate as DTO operatives shift their attention to the study of the contours of the deployment, learning the security forces’ new patrol patterns. Extortion and kidnapping operations might also be temporarily

<sup>62</sup> See Adriana Covarrubias, “Inicia con anticipación la Operación Guerrero.” *Crónica*, January 11, 2007. Available at <http://www.cronica.com.mx/notas/2007/280146.html> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

<sup>63</sup> When soldiers and federal police took control of security in Ayutla in January 2013, they were mockingly referred to as “touristas” by representatives of a newly created policía comunitaria group. See Mariana Labastida, “Toman el Ejército y la Federal la seguridad en Ayutla; se repliegan los ciudadanos armados.” *El Sur*, January 13, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/61092> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

suspended, though these too resume once the required adjustments are made. The small numbers of detentions that are made by security forces seem never to seriously disrupt DTO operations.

In addition to continuing logistical difficulties and a progressive decline in morale among officers and soldiers, the most serious problems the security forces face is the discontent that inevitably arises in the local population. Any initial enthusiasm that greets the arrival of a force promising to bring security to a community fades rapidly as people grow weary of restrictions on their movement while being treated with suspicion and hostility by the police and soldiers. Within a few weeks complaints of unlawful searches and detentions arise. The longer the deployments go on, the more frayed relations with local communities become. And once the killings, extortion, and kidnappings resume the futility of the operations come into open view. When victims report crimes to the security forces they are met with varying degrees of indifference. Local commanders tell victims they must await orders from their superiors before they can respond. But the orders never come. Other victims are met with a cyclical set of referrals, with commanders of each corporation passing the complainants off to the next. Meanwhile, security forces continue to conduct the same patrols and maintain the same checkpoints, looking for a war that they never find. At this point the frustration among the populace boils over and there arise calls for the outside forces to withdraw. The police and military are only too happy to comply and the deployment gradually ends. Within a few weeks (or months, at most) only a skeleton force remains and life has returned to normal. Upon their final departure state or federal authorities will generally settle on a statistic that allows them to declare victory while announcing that a newly vetted municipal police force has been left to provide security.

Outside municipal cabeceras and other large population centers neither municipal nor state or federal police maintain a regular presence. Serious crimes that occur in rural communities are reported to municipal authorities by village *comisarios*, elected officials who represent communities before the municipal government. In principal, municipal or other available police should take immediate custody of the crime scene until an official from the office of the *ministerio público* arrives to oversee the collection of physical evidence. In remote locations this process rarely occurs and instead the *ministerio público* simply issues a case number and delegates responsibility for collecting evidence to the *comisario*. Except in the rare instances when a rural police or military patrol happens to be in the vicinity, it generally takes many hours, and not uncommonly more than a day, for police to mobilize and arrive at the scene of a reported crime. Part of the reason it takes so long is because of the distances and poor quality of the roads in rural regions. But another reason is because police or military units can safely travel into rural areas only in large convoys and these take time to assemble.

There can be no more powerful illustration of the abject failure of law enforcement and the criminal justice system in Guerrero than the record of arrests and convictions. In the last two months of 2014, for example, the GVP database has records of 297 homicides and in only eight cases can we show that arrest warrants have been issued. Two of the eight were cases of domestic violence, one was a killing associated with an attempted rape, and three were a result of fights that erupted at late-night fiestas. The remaining two were DTO gunmen who were injured and captured *in flagrante* by state police during a firefight in Acapulco that left two dead. In none of the other 289 cases did the reporting suggest that authorities had any particular suspect or suspects in mind. Judging from statistics released by the INEGI, there will eventually be arrests and convictions in a few more cases,

but not many. In 2012, for example, state prosecutors obtained 265 homicide convictions; in the same year, they initiated 2,310 homicide investigations.<sup>64</sup>

## The *Policía Comunitaria* Movement in Guerrero

The events of late October 2012 in Olinalá that set in motion the expansion of the *policía comunitaria* movement have provided about the only significant break in the dynamic of DTO violence in Guerrero that has occurred since the death of Arturo Beltrán Leyva in 2009. In looking at the locations where groups loosely termed “*policía comunitaria*” (also, “*fuerzas autodefensas*,” and variations on these themes) have emerged and the behavior of the groups themselves, two patterns are evident. One set of groups arose in areas that were new to extortion in 2011-2012. Most often these were villages that had little or no prior experience with DTOs or narcotics production, either because they were situated near a city or major road, or because they were in a location with more attractive commercial opportunities than either marijuana or poppy. These are areas of the state that had been underexploited by DTOs until forms of extortion were adapted to settings where wealth takes the form of livestock, grain, and arable land rather than cash receipts and monthly paychecks. Where *policía comunitaria* groups emerged in this sort of setting their aim was clear, to prevent the spread of extortion and related activities. This was and remains a rural movement, though some groups have entered cities in pursuit of persons suspected of engaging in criminal activity in rural communities or at the invitation of urban residents. In only a small number of cases have citizen policing groups taken root in urban neighborhoods. The few cases are all working-class neighborhoods populated primarily by recent migrants from rural communities.

A second pattern found with the *policía comunitaria* movement is much more deeply intertwined with DTO activity and, especially, DTO rivalries. In at least one case DTOs themselves took advantage of the favorable press coverage the movement had received and conducted operations under the guise of community policing. This was a short-lived affair that ended after press accounts questioned the groups’ authenticity and examined their operations. But in other cases the line between DTO sponsorship and independence is much more difficult to pinpoint. Villagers in narcotics production areas along the territorial boundaries of rival DTOs have formed groups to defend against raids conducted by the outside group. It is possible that in such cases the *policía comunitaria* are funded or otherwise sponsored by the resident DTO but it is perhaps equally possible that they are not. The uncomfortable reality of the Guerrero countryside is that for many villagers there is a unity of purpose linking villagers to the resident DTO.

The state of Guerrero has had experience with *policía comunitaria* that long predates the Olinalá case. The most important precedent dates to 1995 when dozens of indigenous communities in Costa Chica and La Montaña joined to create the *Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias y Policía Comunitaria* (CRAC-PC) in response to apparent state indifference to rampant highway banditry and cattle rustling. From its inception the CRAC-PC developed on indigenous foundations, creating a parallel legal apparatus that derived legitimacy from the international indigenous rights movement and related legal reforms in Guerrero. The reforms culminated in *Ley 701*, passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor in 2011, which legalized most elements of the CRAC-PC’s policing and judicial practices and institutions. These reforms granted

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<sup>64</sup> INEGI, *Censo Nacional de Impartición de Justicia Estatal 2013*. Accessible at [http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/lista\\_cubos/consulta.aspx?p=gob&c=8](http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/lista_cubos/consulta.aspx?p=gob&c=8) (retrieved 1/14/2015).

indigenous communities the legal right to administer a significant portion of social life in their communities in accordance with traditional “usos y costumbres.” In addition to the CRAC-PC, another precedent for the contemporary movement was the *Coordinadora Regional de Seguridad y Justicia-Policía Ciudadana y Popular* (CRSJ-PCP), which arose in the summer of 2012 in response to DTO activity in the municipio of Huamuxtitlán (La Montaña). This too was an indigenous organization that invoked “usos y costumbres” and operated with Ley 701 authority.

While clearly providing inspiration, neither the CRAC-PC nor the CRSJ-PCP offered a model that could easily (or legally) be expanded out of ethnically indigenous zones into the state’s more expansive mestizo regions, much less into urban settings.<sup>65</sup> This is what made the Olinalá case so exceptional. Olinalá is a small mestizo city. What began as an armed mob action aimed at ridding the community of a small group of criminals gradually formed into a movement that drew substantial attention from the national press.<sup>66</sup> It also drew the attention of the state and federal governments as well as an unholy assortment of opportunistic politicians and DTO operatives.

When the Olinalá activists refused to dismantle roadblocks and began detaining suspected DTO collaborators, including the municipal *síndico* (the chief legal official of the municipal government), a stand-off ensued during which fissures that were latent within the distant CRAC-PC erupted into public view. The CRAC-PC is formally divided into four units, each centered on a *Casa de Justicia* that participates in an annual assembly of the full organization. A dominant faction among the leadership of one of the four, based in El Paraíso, Ayutla (Costa Chica), invited the Olinalá activists to formally join the CRAC-PC.<sup>67</sup> The Olinalá activist accepted this invitation but these were decisions that were opposed by the other segments of the CRAC-PC as well as by a substantial majority of the population of Olinalá.<sup>68</sup> It is easy to see why. For residents of Olinalá, incorporation into the CRAC-PC had the effect, at least in principle, of placing the city in a legal system designed to enforce the “usos y costumbres” of a small clutch of villages located five or six hours away. For the CRAC-PC, the expansion out of indigenous communities put at risk the Casa de Justicia of El Paraíso’s standing under Ley 701.

The controversial decisions made by the Paraíso faction of the CRAC-PC did not stop with the invitation to incorporate the Olinalá group. They also negotiated with the leader of the *Unión de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Estado de Guerrero* (UPOEG), an organization that until January 2013 was best known for mobilizing protests among rural villagers in Costa Chica and La Montaña against electricity rate hikes. In early January 2013 the leader of the UPOEG, Bruno Plácido Valerio,

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<sup>65</sup> An earlier episode in which this was considered occurred in mestizo communities of the eastern Filo Mayor in the municipio of Chilpancingo. In October 2011 the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Guerrero* (APPG), representing sixteen communities, briefly held discussions with CRAC officials about the possibility of formal incorporation. This never came to pass but it did result in consultations that helped the APPG establish a small policía comunitaria network of their own. See Citlal Giles Sánchez, “Crearé la APPG una policía rural para las comunidades de la sierra de Chilpancingo.” *La Jornada*, October 29, 2011. Available at <http://www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/2011/10/29/index.php?section=sociedad&article=005n1soc> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

<sup>66</sup> A good example of the general tone of the national coverage can be seen here: Ezequiel Flores Contreras, “Olinalá, también en armas.” *Proceso*, November 14, 2012. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=325184> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

<sup>67</sup> Sergio Ferrer, “Se incorpora la Policía Ciudadana de Olinalá al sistema de justicia de la CRAC.” *El Sur*, May 19, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/81030> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

<sup>68</sup> Salomón Cruz Gallardo, “Vecinos de Olinalá exigieron el desarme de policía comunitaria.” *Agencia de Noticias IRZA*, June 26, 2013. Available at <http://www.agenciairza.com/2013/06/vecinos-de-olinala-exigieron-el-desarme-de-policia-comunitaria/> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

harnessed the existing organizational structure of the UPOEG to create a policing group, the *Sistema de Seguridad y Justicia Ciudadana* (UPOEG-SSJC). This new organization drew members from communities in El Paraíso's jurisdiction as well as adjacent areas in the municipios of Ayutla, Tecoanapa, San Marcos, and Juan Escudero. After the Paraíso group offered to incorporate the UPOEG-SSJC into the CRAC-PC a special assembly of the full CRAC voted to sever ties with the UPOEG-SSJC.<sup>69</sup> The discord within the CRAC-PC continued, however, and by late summer a movement arose to expel the entire Paraíso Casa de Justicia.<sup>70</sup> The eventual outcome was the creation of the UPOEG-SSJC as an independent community policing network and lingering internal discord within the CRAC-PC.

Unlike the CRAC-PC and the CRSJ-PCP, the UPOEG-SSJC made no claims under Ley 701 or any other law. Their sole purpose was to thwart the expansion of DTO extortion and kidnapping operations in communities in the Costa Chica and the southern portions of El Centro. Their legitimacy derived from the common sense observation that there were no alternative means of providing security and from the widespread public support found within the communities from which they emerged. None of the villages where this movement arose appear to have been situated directly in a narcotics production zone. Their targets were extortionists, kidnapers, and retail narcotics vendors<sup>71</sup>. The methods they used mirrored those in Olinalá but on a greatly expanded scale. They established roadblocks throughout the territory in which they operated and they relentlessly pursued those they suspected of involvement in extortion, kidnapping, or drug trafficking. As in the Olinalá case, the result was repeated confrontations between the UPOEG-SSJC and state authorities. Roadblocks and other restrictions on freedom of movement have been points of contention but the most serious conflicts have arisen when UPOEG-SSJC personnel raid suspected safe-houses and detain those they suspect of having links to DTOs, including government officials. This has exposed UPOEG-SSJC leaders to charges of kidnapping, among other things.<sup>72</sup> With the exception of the Casa de Justicia of El Paraíso, the CRAC-PC has been better at avoiding overt confrontations with authorities. In part this is because DTOs were never as entrenched in their territories so their operations are more limited in scope and involve fewer detentions. But the CRAC-PC also has more policing experience, a functioning judiciary, and more collective skill in dealing with state authorities.

Since January 2013 the CRAC-PC and UPOEG-SSJC have been the dominant policing power in an unknown but clearly sizeable portion of rural Costa Chica and La Montaña, with urban outposts in Olinalá, Tixtla (El Centro), and the towns of the Ocotito Valley (also El Centro). The CRSJ-PCP controls the municipio of Cualac, portions of the municipios of Huamuxtlán and Olinalá, and an urban neighborhood in Tlapa. Figure 14 shows the approximate area of operations of these groups,

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<sup>69</sup> Sergio Ocampo Arista, "Expulsa la CRAC-PC de sus filas a los hermanos Bruno y Plácido Valerio." *La Jornada*, May 29, 2013. Available at <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2013/05/29/politica/006n1pol> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

<sup>70</sup> Zacarías Cervantes, "Hoy decidirá la CRAC en asamblea si expulsa a la Casa de Justicia de El Paraíso." *El Sur*, August 31, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/104340> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

<sup>71</sup> Several descriptions were published chronicling the recent spread of DTO activity into new territories and the expansion of their extortion and kidnapping operations. The accounts are strikingly similar in a wide variety of locations. In Ayutla and Tecoanapa: "Los delincuentes extorsionan a los ganaderos y hostigan sexualmente a alumnas en Tecoanapa y Ayutla, dice la UPOEG," *El Sur*, January 8, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/60207> (retrieved 1/14/2015). In Atliaca, Tixtla: "El secuestro y asesinato de un joven, extorsiones y robos, las causas del movimiento en Atliaca," *El Sur*, January 23, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/62798> (retrieved 1/14/2015). See also the description above of the Olinalá case.

<sup>72</sup> Lourdes Chávez, "En 2013 promueve el gobierno los desacuerdos en la CRAC y hostiga a la Casa de Justicia de El Paraíso." *El Sur*, January 2, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/125894> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

though in all cases the territory under the actual control of the specified group is smaller and patchier than it appears, with blocks of participating villages alongside blocks of nonparticipating villages. Factional divisions and conflicts have regularly erupted, sometimes violently, between and within groups. Disagreements have centered on relations with state and federal authorities, policing tactics, and the disposition of those they detain. Both the CRAC-PC and the UPOEG-SSJC have struggled to stay focused on their original purpose and to avoid becoming instruments for the furtherance of the political ambitions of factional leaders. The CRSJ-PCP seems to have avoided most of these difficult, though this perception could be an artifact of differential press coverage. In any case, all three of these groups can properly claim that they have succeeded in significantly reducing DTO extortion activities in the areas they control.

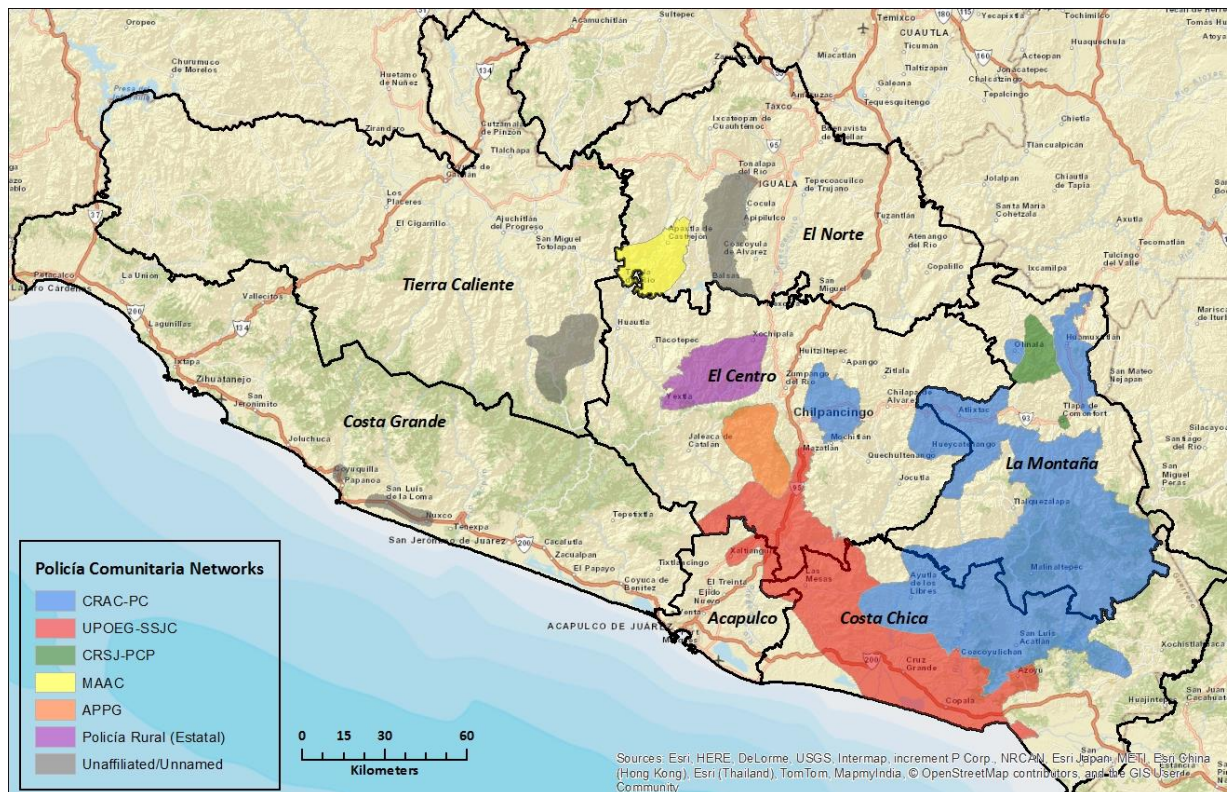


Figure 14 - Community Policing Networks in Guerrero

One question that cannot be answered at present is the posture of the three groups vis-à-vis marijuana and poppy production by villagers in their areas of operations. This is an issue that most acutely faces the CRAC-PC, which operates in more remote locations and in the higher elevations of Costa Chica and La Montaña where marijuana and, especially, poppy are the dominant cash crops. There has been limited reporting on sanctions leveled by the CRAC-PC on narcotics traffickers, producers, and the comisarios of villages where marijuana or poppy cultivation been discovered.<sup>73</sup> The UPOEG-SSJC, on the other hand, has explicitly rejected the notion that the organization

<sup>73</sup> E.g., Rosenda Betancourt Radilla, “Buscan 30 pueblos de Ayutla integrarse a la Policía Comunitaria; define la CRAC en abril, informan.” *El Sur*, March 27, 2012. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/12131> (retrieved 1/14/2015). and <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/62436>. Also, “Piden a la CRAC que libere a un hombre detenido por tráfico de marihuana en 2011,” *El Sur*, January 21, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/62436> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

formed to combat narcotics production and trafficking rather than extortion and kidnapping.<sup>74</sup> It is difficult to imagine that there has been a systematic attempt to prohibit villagers in the CRAC-PC's territory from exploiting what for many households is the only viable commercial opportunity open to them.

In this regard, the case of the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Guerrero* (APPG) in the mountains west of Chilpancingo is instructive and perhaps represents something of a warning. This group was originally founded in 2006 to advocate for schools and other social welfare projects. It created a small *policía comunitaria* network in the spring and summer of 2012 to combat illegal logging on their lands.<sup>75</sup> They recruited consultants from the CRAC-PC to assist in developing the inter-village policing network, though the group made no claims under Ley 701 and both organizations declined when the idea of incorporating the APPG into the CRAC-PC was raised in the fall of 2012. Neither did they join the UPOEG-SSJC when this group appeared in early 2013 in the adjacent Ocotito Valley. In fact, subsequent reporting on the APPG has been scant and its policing branch might well have disappeared. What we do know is that the lands associated with the villages that were the most active in establishing the policing network (e.g., Amojileca, San Vicente, and Omiltemi) are a frequent target of the poppy eradication efforts of the Chilpancingo-based 50th Infantry Battalion. The army has also found and destroyed clandestine heroin labs in or near the same villages. The lack of reports of extortion and the continuing cultivation of poppy in the area suggests that the group has no particular problems with Los Rojos, the dominant DTO operating in the area.

The clearest example of the opportunistic use of the *policía comunitaria* movement by DTOs occurred in mid-2013 in Costa Grande along the border between the municipios of Tecpán and Petatlán. This was a time before the emergence of the Guardia Guerrerense alliance. Los Granados were alone in struggling to defend their home territory in the mountains above San Luis de la Loma, Tecpán from Los Caballeros Templarios who had expanded east along the coast through Petatlán to the Tecpán border. Gunmen from both groups masquerading as *policía comunitaria* established roadblocks on the coastal highway on either side of the frontier. The groups disbanded not long after they formed, after the publication of press reports on the discovery of the bodies of detained individuals.<sup>76</sup> Before the groups disappeared, however, Los Caballeros Templarios' "policía" went on a brief scorched earth campaign in the Río Balsamar Valley, north of San Luis de la Loma, where they looted and burned more than a dozen villages.<sup>77</sup>

In the mountains of San Miguel Totolapán (Tierra Caliente), Apaxtla, Cuetzala, and Teloloapan (El Norte) a more opaque situation emerged after the police forces of the three municipios in El Norte were eviscerated in the fighting between Guerreros Unidos and La Familia. The municipal police of San Miguel Totolapán has fared slightly better than the others but this municipio has an especially poor transportation infrastructure and is exceedingly difficult to police. Most of its southern highlands, including the strategic Río Tehuehuetla Valley, are more accessible from the cabeceras of neighboring municipios (including Ajuchitlán, Apaxtla, and Heliodoro Castillo) than from San

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<sup>74</sup> Misael Damián, "Ante la violencia, crean en Marquelia un grupo de autodefensa; no perseguirá al narco." *El Sur*, February 28, 2015. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/69041> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

<sup>75</sup> See <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/21845>.

<sup>76</sup> E.g., Francisco Magaña and Brenda Escobar, "Levantán el bloqueo contra la autodefensa en Tecpan, sin acuerdos, luego de 38 horas." *El Sur*, July 6, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/90373> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

<sup>77</sup> "Policías y soldados, coludidos con los Caballeros Templarios en la zona de Tecpan, acusan ciudadanos," *El Sur*, June 23, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/87804> (retrieved 1/14/2015). See also, "Acusan en narcomantas a la autodefensa de Tecpan de que opera para los Granados," *El Sur*, June 24, 2013. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/87930> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

Miguel Totolapán itself. In all four municipios there are large swaths of countryside that lack even a shadow of police protection. This is not especially remarkable in contemporary Guerrero but when coupled with the bitter conflict that exists in this area between Guerreros Unidos and La Familia it has created a notably insecure environment. At least three separate policía comunitaria networks have arisen in the conflict zone. The best organized is the *Movimiento Apaxtlense Adrián Castrejón* (MAAC) in Apaxtla. Another unaffiliated (and unnamed) network arose in villages in Cuetzala and a handful of villages in neighboring Teloloapan. The third arose in San Miguel Totolapán. What all three groups have in common is that they are dedicated to preventing incursions into their territories by an outside DTO while apparently tolerating the resident group. In Apaxtla, Cuetzala, and southern Teloloapan the problem faced by villagers is violence accompanying La Familia incursions into their villages.<sup>78</sup> In San Miguel Totolapán the problem is created by the incursions of Guerreros Unidos.<sup>79</sup> A similar situation seems to have emerged in villages along the southern edge of the municipio of Chilapa, in El Centro, where roadblocks maintained by villagers to the south are intended to thwart entry by Los Rojos while those just to the north are aimed at Los Ardillos.

In an effort to contain the growth of autonomous policing groups operating without training or legal authority, the state Congress crafted legislation in late 2013 that provides a pathway for the incorporation of the various policía comunitaria networks into the state's formal legal system. The legislation allowed for the creation of a *policía rural* that would operate under the authority and supervision of the *Secretaría de Seguridad Pública y Protección Civil del Estado*. Both the UPOEG-SSJC and the CRAC-PC, the two largest and politically important groups, opposed the legislation, fearing the groups would lose effectiveness if they were placed under state control. Smaller and newer groups, especially those operating without Ley 701 authority, have expressed interest. Thus far, only one group has been recognized as an official rural police force. This was a group that arose in the fall of 2013 in the conflict zone between Los Rojos and Guerreros Unidos in the municipio of Leonardo Bravo and a small portion of Eduardo Neri, northwest of Chilpancingo. A group of 200 residents of eighteen communities received training at a state police facility in Chilpancingo and were issued legal recognition and weapons in early 2014. Despite complaints about the quality of the weapons they were issued and the level of financial support they have received, there has been less violence in their area of operations in 2014 as compared to 2013.<sup>80</sup>

## Obstacles, Options, and Concluding Thoughts

The central problems facing Guerrero are not hard to identify. First, without the support of a functioning judiciary and adequate penal facilities there can be no legitimate system of accountability in Guerrero. The state's law enforcement apparatus currently has the capacity to deal with few

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<sup>78</sup> Ezequiel Flores Contreras, "Autodefensas desplazan a la autoridad y asumen seguridad en Apaxtla, Guerrero." *Proceso*, November 29, 2013. Available at <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=359206> (retrieved 1/14/2015). Alejandro Guerrero, "La familia Michoacana instala retenes entre los de policías y militares, dicen apaxtlenses." *El Sur*, April 18, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/139095> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

<sup>79</sup> Rosalba Ramírez García, "El alcalde de Totolapan dio refugio a Guerreros Unidos, acusan autodefensas." *El Sur*, November 18, 2014. Available at <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/228623> (retrieved 1/14/2015).

<sup>80</sup> In the area within which this group operates, the GVP database has records of a combined total of 21 homicides in 2013 and 10 in 2014, including one member of the policía rural. This decrease was a departure from the broader trend in the Los Rojos-Guerreros Unidos conflict zone, encompassing the three municipios of Heliodoro Castillo, Leonardo Bravo, and Eduardo Neri. The GVP database has records of a combined total of 67 homicides in the three municipios in 2013 and 89 in 2014.



violent criminals beyond perpetrators of domestic violence who make no particular effort to escape or those too impaired or injured to flee the scene of their crimes. At the moment, DTOs are clearly more effective at deterring petty crime in urban settings than the state's criminal justice system. This became obvious when crime rates were unaffected by the police strike in Acapulco. The most effective force countering the growth of extortionists and kidnapers have been rural vigilante groups that operate with the same impunity enjoyed by the DTOs they arose to combat. In the state's vast narcotics production zones, social life is regulated by DTOs, except in combat zones between rival groups where exceptionally violent lawlessness prevails.

The current response by state and federal authorities to the security situation in Guerrero is both inadequate and inappropriate. This is because it consists of the same strategy that has been employed since the outset of the drug war in early 2007. One could argue that it was a successful approach against the types of DTOs that existed in 2007 but those that emerged in Guerrero after 2010 did so in an environment characterized by the exact constellation of policing practices that we find today. From their beginnings, today's DTOs developed an organizational structure and a set of methods of operation designed to work in an environment in which policing consists of periodic highway checkpoints and heavily armed patrols. One key to DTO success was to insure that local police forces were ineffective. They did this by several means, including bribery, intimidation, and battlefield confrontations that effectively exterminated whole municipal police forces. The fact that effective local police are essential ingredients to combatting DTO activity is clear from the recent successes of the CRAC-PC, the CRSJ-PCP, and the UPOEG-SSJC. For that matter, one could look to the practices of DTOs operating in urban neighborhoods and narcotics production zones for successful models of policing. In all of these cases the key is to develop social ties in particular communities and to maintain credibility by holding violators accountable for their actions. Neither of these things are a focus of particular attention for the state and federal police and military forces currently deployed in Guerrero.

If there is a bright side it is the recent changes to Ley 281 and the state's tiny experiment with developing a *policía rural*. This is encouraging partly because the existing *policía rural* appears to be among the most effective forces operating in the state to reduce levels of violence. But another positive sign has been the encouraging public response. Notwithstanding the opposition of the leadership, for example, dissident factions of the UPOEG-SSJC have entered discussions with municipal and state authorities about converting their groups into forces that comply with Ley 281. A large number of *alcaldes* have also expressed interest in the program. At the moment, the resources that have been provided for training and equipping additional *policía rural* are woefully inadequate. Guerrero offers a veritable laboratory for the study of policing practices and techniques and state authorities should look carefully and be prepared to adapt to localized successes and failures. Whether the political skill and motivation exists in the state and federal government to take advantage of these opportunities is unclear.

A second major problem facing Guerrero is probably more intractable than the inadequacy of the criminal justice system. It should go without saying that a lack of economic opportunity, especially among young adults, contributes to the problems by feeding the ranks of the DTOs with a steady stream of otherwise unemployed manpower. But the problem is bigger than this. This report has emphasized the predatory nature of DTOs and the deleterious consequences of their actions for public security. But there is another side of DTOs that we know far less about but that needs to be understood before the problems facing the state can be fully addressed. For the last decade or more, narcotics production has been the most dynamic and profitable sector of the state's economy.

The multiplier effect of the revenue generated by the industry and the diversification of DTO activities has created a near seamless integration of DTOs into the fabric of economic life in the state. In urban areas, DTO money laundering efforts almost certainly exploit a void created by a banking system adapted to large multinational corporations and insensitive to the needs and realities of small and middle sized firms. DTO money entering the economy in the form of salaries, bribes, campaign contributions, loans, and direct investment has almost certainly become so integrated into the state's economy that the consequences of a sudden disappearance of the revenue streams are difficult to fathom.

The situation is worse in rural areas. In the 1990s on the eve of the agricultural revolution that converted Guerrero into the major narcotics supplier that it is today, the state's rural economy was in a condition of collapse.<sup>81</sup> Except for those fortunate enough to hold land in privileged zones of commercial agriculture, farmers had come to depend on subsistence production and government subsidy programs that were increasingly aimed at facilitating their departure from subsistence-based rural villages into industrialized and urban settings. This process was arrested by the expansion of poppy cultivation, which breathed new life into what had been a dying sector of the economy. Outside of narcotics production, the prospects for Guerrero's farmers are probably worse today than they were a decade ago. Eliminating marijuana and poppy would leave a sizable percentage of Guerrero's rural population without means of support. Were this done precipitously, the exodus from the countryside would dwarf the current stream of refugees fleeing conflict zones.

The circumstances that produce and sustain DTO violence in Guerrero are not difficult to identify. The solutions are likewise apparent. But the solutions require two things that seem in limited supply in contemporary Mexico. The first includes the substantial resources that are required. Resources are needed to build a functioning law enforcement apparatus with supporting judicial and penal institutions. Unfortunately, this effort will be beginning nearly from scratch. The institutional infrastructure for employment, training, and other social services required to address economic dislocation are more fully present but more resources will be necessary to handle the increased demand. The second is the more difficult. Guerrero, and perhaps Mexico as a whole, is in desperate need of competent and inspiring political leadership. Before the Ayotzinapa incident there was widespread mistrust and frustration with all levels of government; what we are now seeing looks much more like open despair and contempt from the populace and paralysis of the state. One need not look deep below the surface to see a desperate craving for security and stability in the vast majority of Guerrero's population. It remains to be seen whether these desires can be harnessed and made into a constructive force for the difficult challenges to come.

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<sup>81</sup> See Chris Kyle, *Feeding Chilapa: The Birth, Life, and Death of a Regional Economy* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2008).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### CHRIS KYLE

**Chris Kyle** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He is the author of *Feeding Chilapa: The Birth, Life, and Death of a Mexican Region* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), the coeditor (with Rani T. Alexander) of “Beyond the Hacienda: Agrarian relations and socioeconomic change in rural Mesoamerica” (special theme issue of *Ethnohistory*, 2003), and the author of several articles on economic and political aspects of rural Mexico. Dr. Kyle’s current research, the Guerrero Violence Project, is supported by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. The core of the project is a GIS database holding thousands of records of the ongoing violence associated with criminal organizations in Guerrero. Dr. Kyle has a Ph.D., M.A., and MPhil in Anthropology from Columbia University and a B.A. in Humanities from Fort Lewis College.