



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on May 4, 2012

Five Years Later - Calderon's War Has Failed

On April 21, *Borderland Beat* (BB) posted an article reviewing the effectiveness of Mexican President Felipe [Calderon's "war on drugs."](#) BB is an online publication reflecting issues on the international border between the United States and Mexico and the 12 million people who populate the region. Its reporters write anonymously and cover topics related only to cartel crime and drugs, and the staggering amount of resultant violence. Since Calderon took office late in 2006, the issue has dominated his administration.



The article entitled "Five Years of War: What has Changed?" notes that Calderon's efforts have failed, and in fact, drug-related crimes, extortion, and drug use have only increased.

Calderon's fight back against the drug cartels has not only not ended violence, drug and gang crime, but since Calderon issued his declaration after assuming the presidency, the number of drug-related murders has also increased. Cartels have viciously retaliated. In 2006, the country's count of drug-related murders was around 3,000. But by 2010, organized crime-related murders numbered almost 3,000 Ciudad Juarez (across the border from El Paso, Texas) alone. In one year, from 2009-2010, cartel-related murders nationwide rose from 10,000 to 15,000, an increase of about 60%. In 2011, the estimated number of murders released by Mexican officials was 16,700. The writer noted that averages nearly 50 per day.

"The government that took power in 2006 vowed to take the cartels apart, and bring an end to the bribery and corruption within the police and government. As it stands now, the cartels are still getting drugs into America, and murder victims are being found every day. They are taking advantage of every possible way to keep their businesses running, and deadly violence is a daily part of their lives."

And it is now well-known that Mexican drug cartels live and work in U.S. cities. [Homeland Security Today](#) reported in November, 2011 that many cartel members live quietly in South Texas, even owning homes. One in particular, Cárdenas Vela was operating his business from Brownsville, Texas. Not surprisingly, he earned the ire of his competitors. The article reported, "Cárdenas Vela has received considerable criticism from fellow TCO [transnational crime organizations] members in Mexico who've claimed he runs his business — which is estimated to be a multimillion dollar and multi-ton marijuana and cocaine smuggling operation — from safe havens in south Texas. Someone high up in the rival Gulf Cartel faction, 'Los Metros,' reportedly sold him out by providing his location in Texas to US authorities." His presence was discovered after a routine traffic stop that ended peacefully, but that is rarely the case.

Murders of US citizens and law enforcement officers are becoming routine as drug crime spills over the border. In fact, the National Drug Threat Assessment (NDTA) 2011, published by the US Department of Justice, reported that "Mexican Based TCOs were operating in more than a thousand U.S cities during 2009 and 2010." And the problems aren't limited to bringing drugs into the country, but in getting the



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cash back out. "The NDTA 2011 stated that 'bulk cash seizures totaled \$798 million from January 2008 through August 2010.'"

What brings cartels members here? The NDTA reported that the overall availability of illicit drugs in the U.S. is increasing — an estimated "\$40 billion a year is spent by Americans on drugs, and all the cartels want a piece of it."

Two cartels, the Pacific and Los Zetas have emerged as leaders. When they're not killing each other in turf wars, smaller cartels are resorting to other tactics to generate revenue, including kidnapping of non-cartel individuals. Others, according to BB have emerged as specialists in extortion; Mexican gangs regularly collect protection payments from the public to provide what is certainly false security against cartel violence.

BB continued, "US Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, went on the record to defend the American policy that supports the Mexican drug war. Insisting that is was not a failure." For instance, the US is now offering a \$5 million dollar bounty for the capture of Joaquin "Shorty" Guzman, the leader of one of Mexico's largest and most powerful cartels [who was arrested and imprisoned but later escaped]. When questioned by Mexican Interior Alejandro Poire about why he had not been captured yet, she replied, "It took us 10 years to find Osama Bin Laden and we found him."

Not comforting news for Calderon. Mexican presidential elections are approaching in July, and Calderon's popularity has plummeted with his failure to fix the problem.

Photo: Mexico's President Felipe Calderon speaks to journalists before leaving for Haiti at the Jose Marti International Airport in Havana, Cuba, April 12, 2012.: AP Images



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