

TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Mexican Criminal Organizations Poised To Dominate South America's Illicit Economies

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OE Watch Commentary

Mexico's drug cartels have been marching through South America and consolidating their gains across the hemisphere. As previously reported (see "Mexican Criminal Organizations Consolidate Their Positions in South America," Issue 5, 2022 and "Mexican Cartels Buying Land on Colombia – Venezuela Border," *OE Watch*, Issue 6, 2022), cartels have cut out middlemen in Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. According to Spain's center-left daily *El País*, the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel are both now physically present in Chile. The article notes that Chilean authorities have uncovered plans for several large drug shipments linked to the two groups. The establishment of a physical presence in Chile has also been blamed for an uptick in homicides and violent crime, as Mexican cartels push out local criminal organizations. Chilean digital publication *Pauta* mentions a report from an investigatory unit in the public prosecutor's office confirming the arrival of Mexican cartels in the country. The report notes the presence of Mexican cartels in relation to the increase in drug users, as well as increasing involvement in other illicit economies, such as illegal logging and mining. A strong physical presence in Chile for the Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation Cartels would represent a criminal environment in Latin America dominated by two Mexican groups, with an uninterrupted physical presence from the United States southern border to the southern tip of Patagonia.



Mexican Police stand guard on the back of a truck in Mexico City

Source: <https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/en/view-image.php?image=88661&picture=mexican-police-force-on-truck>, Attribution: CC0 1.0 Universal (CC0 1.0)

The Sinaloa Cartel's tentacles stretch across almost the entire globe... It does not have a hierarchical structure, but rather is made up of cells independent of each other, which facilitates its deployment.

Source: "Los dos principales cárteles de la droga mexicanos aterrizan en Chile (The two main Mexican drug cartels land in Chile)," *El País* (Spain's major daily generally considered center-left), 29 June 2022. <https://elpais.com/mexico/2022-06-29/los-dos-principales-carteles-de-la-droga-mexicanos-aterrizan-en-chile.html>

A plane from the Sinaloa Cartel tried to send 665 kilograms of cocaine from Chile to the port of Rotterdam, in the Netherlands. The CJNG established a laboratory in the Chilean city of Iquique. It was also discovered trying to introduce 3.5 tons of marijuana into the country through the port of San Antonio, according to the Chilean Prosecutor's Office. The evidence and sightings of cartel operatives no longer leave room for doubt about their presence in the region. The Sinaloa Cartel's tentacles stretch across almost the entire globe... It does not have a hierarchical structure, but rather is made up of cells independent of each other, which facilitates its deployment.

Source: "Tres carteles internacionales de droga ya llegaron a Chile (Three international drug cartels have already arrived in Chile)," *Pauta* (a Chilean digital publication), 8 September 2021. <https://www.pauta.cl/nacional/narcotrafico-chile-carteles-de-droga-fiscalia-informe>

This is part of the alerts that the 2021 Report of the Drug Trafficking Observatory discovered. "Our country faces for the first time the threat of the installation in Chile of international drug cartels, which we did not know about until now."