

Mexico's Drug War: A Rigged Fight? Npr News Investigation In Juarez And Mexico City

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NEW ([RPRN](#)) 05/18/10 — Finds Elements Of Mexican Army Favor Sinaloa Over Other Cartels

Npr Analysis Finds Arrests Target Sinaloan Rivals More Often, Corruption Extends To Higher Levels Of Government

A [four-month NPR News Investigation](#) examining the Mexican drug war finds federal forces are favoring the Sinaloa cartel, Mexico's largest, oldest and most powerful drug mafia. Reporting from Mexico City and Juarez, now the most violent city in North America, NPR News interviewed dozens of U.S. and Mexican law enforcement agents, military officials, organized crime experts and victims of the drug war to examine how elements of the Mexican army are working with the Sinaloans to take out its rivals – and thereby control lucrative drug corridors into the United States. NPR also analyzed the Mexican federal government's news releases about criminal action against cartels, which show that Sinaloan members are targeted less frequently than other cartels.

The investigation from NPR correspondent John Burnett and producer Marisa Peñaloza, together with the NPR News Investigative Unit, is airing in three parts: today on *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*, and tomorrow on *All Things Considered*. All reports, along with photo galleries, an audio slideshow and details about NPR's analysis, will also be available at [NPR.org](#).

The Mexican government has deployed some 45,000 federal troops and police to combat the drug mafias, with President Felipe Calderón making it a top priority and with \$1.3 billion of backing from the U.S. Yet, Burnett reports that in cities and towns across Mexico the story is the same: the fight against the cartels is rigged to favor the Sinaloa. As one federal police officer tells NPR: "The government is attacking all the cartels except [Sinaloan chief Joaquin] Chapo [Guzman]. ... That's why it's so eager to destroy the Gulf cartel and all the others that are not with the government." A former Juarez police commander describes a similar scenario: "When the army arrived in March 2008, we thought now all this violence is going to end. The number of deaths did drop for about three weeks. But during those three weeks, Chapo's people contacted the army and figured out what they were doing and how much money they wanted. They started to pay them off, and Chapo's people just kept working."

Burnett reports that, publicly, the U.S. government has nothing but praise for how Calderón is handling the drug war. But a senior government official involved in counter-drug policy in Latin America tells NPR that there is "great pushback" from the U.S. intelligence community. They are warning against sharing sensitive information with Mexico, out of fear that cartels have infiltrated the people under Calderón to the point of endangering U.S. sources.

An exclusive NPR analysis shows that the Sinaloa cartel benefits from fewer arrests than rival groups, and has more connections to high-level government. NPR analyzed the government's own news releases about criminal action they've taken against figures from seven major drug cartels, starting when Calderón took office in December 2006. These new findings contradict the government's own numbers: of more than 2,600 criminal defendants, 12 percent were Sinaloan members, about half the number the Mexican government claims.

Further, NPR found that since federal forces arrived in Juarez in February 2008, the government announced criminal action against 16 Sinaloan cartel

members, compared to 88 defendants associated with the rival Juarez cartel. The corruption doesn't stop on the streets: out of 19 cases that involved charges of Sinaloan cartel bribes of public officials, 14 of them involved federal and military officials. In contrast, the Juarez cartel allegedly bribed 10 officials and nine of them were at the municipal level.

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The NPR News Investigative Unit crosses all news desks and programs to build upon, and strengthen the commitment to, NPR's established investigative work. The team has been reporting extensively on the explosion that killed 29 miners at the Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia, this month's failed bombing attempt in Times Square and the continuing oil spill and clean-up in the Gulf of Mexico. Recent special investigations include a multipart collaboration with the Center for Public Integrity examining the [failure of colleges to protect women from sexual assault](#); a three-part series on the U.S. government's use of [confidential informants](#) produced in partnership with the Center for Investigative Reporting; and a series exploring the life and path of Christmas Day bomb suspect [Umar Farouk Abdulmatallab](#).

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