

SOUTHWEST BORDER GANG RECOGNITION

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Lecture Outline

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Summary

The perpetual growth of gangs and active recruitment with the state of Texas, compounded by the continual influx of criminal illegal aliens crossing the Texas-Mexico border, threatens the security of all U.S. citizens. Furthermore, the established alliances between these prison and street gangs and various drug trafficking organizations pose a significant threat to the nation. Gangs now have access to a larger supply of narcotics, which will undoubtedly increase their influence over and presence in the drug trade, as well as increase the level of gang-related violence associated with illegal narcotics trafficking. Illegal alien smuggling has also become profitable for prison and other street gangs, and potentially may pose a major threat to national security.

Multi-agency collaboration and networking—supplemented with modern technology, analytical resources, and gang intervention and prevention programs—will be critical in the ongoing efforts to curtail the violence associated with the numerous gangs now thriving in Texas and the nation.¹

U.S.-based gang members are increasingly involved in cross-border criminal activities, particularly in areas of Texas and California along the U.S.—Mexico border. Much of this activity involves the trafficking of drugs and illegal aliens from Mexico into the United States and considerably adds to gang revenues. Further, gangs are increasingly smuggling weapons from the United States into Mexico as payment for drugs or to sell for a significant profit. Examples of such cross border activities include:

- Street and prison gang members have established networks that work closely with Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations in trafficking cocaine and marijuana from Mexico into the United States for distribution.
- Some Mexican DTOs contract with gangs in the Southwest Region to smuggle weapons from the United States to Mexico, according to open source information.
- Street gangs and Outlaw Motorcycle Gang members are trafficking cocaine and firearms from the United States to Canada and marijuana and MDMA from Canada to the United States; this is a growing concern to the U.S. and Canadian

¹ TDPS, CIS, Texas Gangs: An Overview of Security Threats Groups and Other Major Gangs in Texas, July 2007.

law enforcement officials, particularly as Canadian law enforcement officials report that street gang-related gun crimes in Canada are often committed using firearms that are illegally smuggled into the country from the United States.²

Mexico, a major drug producing and transit country, is the main foreign supplier of marijuana and a major supplier of methamphetamine to the United States. Although Mexico accounts for only a small share of worldwide heroin production, it supplies a large share of heroin consumed in the United States. An estimated 90% of cocaine entering the United States transits Mexico. Violence in the border region has affected U. S. citizens and many Americans have been kidnapped in Nuevo Laredo.³

Although Mexican drug cartels, or drug trafficking organizations, have existed for quite some time, they have become more powerful since the demise of Colombia's Cali and Medellin cartels in the 1990s. Mexican drug cartels now dominate the wholesale illicit drug market in the United States. Arrests of key cartel leaders, particularly in the Tijuana and Gulf cartels, have led to increasing drug violence as cartels fight for control of the trafficking routes into the United States. The Gulf and Sinaloa cartels reportedly use personal "enforcer gangs" to perpetrate violence and intimidate Mexican citizens and public officials. Mexican President Felipe Calderon has called drug violence a threat to the Mexican state.⁴

For the same reason, these cartels have now hired prison and street gangs to run their enforcement actions in the United States.

Rival prison gang members, including warring white supremacist and Hispanic groups, are brokering unusual criminal alliances outside prison to assist drug cartel operations in the United States and Mexico, according to federal law enforcement officials. The groups, including Aryan Brotherhood and Mexican Mafia, remain bitter enemies in prison, divided along racial and ethnic lines. Yet outside, the desire for profits is overcoming rivalries.⁵

² National Gang Intelligence Center, National Gang Threat Assessment 2009, January 2009.

³ Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, Updated February 25, 2008, Colleen W. Cook, Analyst in Latin American Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ USA Today, Kevin Johnson, March 16th, 2010.

Kevin O’Keefe, chief of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives criminal intelligence division, says investigators have linked the rival gangs to stolen vehicles, some loaded with currency and weapons, moving toward Mexico from Texas, Colorado, California and even Georgia. “They realize that the financial gain is so lucrative that they have been willing to work together,” O’Keefe says. “It’s all about business.”⁶

The section chief of the FBI’s gang division, Herb Brown, says the groups use tactics of intimidation and violence. “What has concerned us—and frankly, surprised us—is the increasing nexus between these gangs and the cartels,” he says.⁷

Most are involved with drugs, but officials say members also are moving into human smuggling. Hispanic security threat groups, or gangs, comprise the largest and most violent of the recognized gangs. However, the white and black gangs have also demonstrated a capacity and potential for the same propensity of violence.

Typically, when Mexican drug traffickers need someone killed or kidnapped, or drugs distributed in the United States, they increasingly call on American subcontractors—U.S.-based prison gangs that run criminal enterprises from behind bars, sometimes even from solitary confinement.

Prison gangs have long controlled armies of street toughs on the outside. But in interviews with the Associated Press, authorities say the gangs’ activity has expanded beyond street-level drug sales to establish a business alliance with Mexican cartels.

“They’ll do the dirty work that, say, the cartels they don’t want to do” in the United States. “They don’t want to get involved,” said a former member of Barrio Azteca, a U.S. prison gang member tied to Mexico’s Juarez cartel. The partnership benefits both sides: The gangs give drug traffickers a large pool of experienced criminals and established distribution networks in the U.S. And the cartels provide the prison gangs with discounted drugs and the logistical support of top criminal organizations.⁸

The latest annual National Drug Threat Assessment, released in February 2010 by the Justice Department, said prison gangs were operating in all 50 states and were increasing their influence over drug trafficking along the U.S.-Mexico border.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The Associated Press, Christopher Sherman, “Mexican traffickers get help from US prison gangs”, 05/02/10.

Federal authorities have documented numerous links between most of the major U.S. prison gangs and Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

Estimates put the number of active gang members in the U.S. near 1 million. Prison gangs like the Mexican Mafia, the Texas Syndicate, Hermandad de Pistoleros Latinos (the Brotherhood of Latino Gunmen), Raza Unida and Mexikanemi account for only about 145,000 gang members. But they control most of the local street gangs as well, particularly in southern California and south Texas.

As recently as April 2010, the United States Department of Justice, National Drug Intelligence Center, published a report revealing that there are 1,286 cities in the United States that have a Mexican Drug Trafficking Organization presence—up from 230 cities in 2008. The report indicates that most likely the difference simply reflects a significant change in information collection methodology.⁹

Kidnappings

Paramilitary groups, prison gangs, and street gangs that serve as enforcement arms of Mexican drug cartels often engage in violent criminal activity in U. S. and Mexican border communities at the behest of the cartels.¹⁰

Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) also use U.S.-based prison and street gangs to carry out enforcement-related activities, including kidnappings in the Southwest region. Drug-related kidnappings are increasing in some U.S. cities near the Mexico border. The actual number of kidnapping incidents is most likely higher, since many drug-related kidnappings are not reported because the victims are involved in drug trafficking or are fearful of deportation.¹¹

Mexico's drug cartels—primarily the Gulf Cartel—train enforcement groups and cell members to perpetrate kidnappings. Mexico's largest drug cartels train enforcement groups, cell members, and gang members at cartel-run training camps—typically located in northern Mexico. However, in October 2008, members of the Gulf

⁹ USDoJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, Situation Report, Cities Where Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations Operate Within the United States, April 2010.

¹⁰ USDoJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, Situation Report, January 2009.

¹¹ USDoJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, Situation Report, June 2009.

Cartel's enforcement arm, at the time, Los Zetas, were operating a cartel-run training camp in South Texas.¹²

Mexican drug cartels employ U.S.—based gang members to commit violent acts—including kidnappings—within the United States. Mexican DTOs use U.S.-based street and prison gangs to carry out their kidnappings, and some of these U.S.-based gangs have established associate gangs or chapters in northern Mexico cities.¹³

The Arellano-Félix Organization employs Calle Treinta gang members from the Logan Heights area of San Diego to conduct drug-related kidnappings. Mexican DTOs employ the Westside gang in Nogales, Arizona, and the New Mexican Mafia prison gang in Tempe, Arizona, to carry out drug-related kidnappings. In the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, area, Mexican DTOs reportedly hire members of the Texas Syndicate prison gang to enforce drug-related activities, including kidnapping and contract killings. Other notable gangs involved in drug-related kidnappings and violence on behalf of Mexican DTOs include Tri-City Bombers in McAllen, Texas; Barrio Azteca in El Paso, Texas; and Tango Blasters in Houston, Texas.¹⁴

Kidnappings related to the Mexican drug trade are likely to increase in the Southwest Region. Mexican DTOs and their surrogate enforcement groups, as well as U.S.-based street and prison gangs, will quite likely continue to conduct kidnappings against rival members residing in U.S. communities near the border. Expanding border security initiatives and the subsequent inability of some DTOs to operate effectively will most likely result in more kidnappings and extortion attempts along the U.S.—Mexico border to counter potential financial losses from drug and alien smuggling.

Cartel members, surrogate enforcement groups, and gangs are unlikely to kidnap individuals or family members in the United States who are not engaged in drug trafficking. Typically, Mexican DTOs deploy kidnapping squads to U.S. cities to intimidate and kill traffickers or their family members because of unpaid drug debts or lost shipments. In the United States, traffickers can be expected to rely on kidnapping motives that have worked in the past and only target individuals affiliated with the drug trade. However, given the criminal elements operating in Mexico as well as the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

escalating drug violence there, U.S. citizens traveling to Mexico are susceptible to kidnapping squads and low-level and mid-level drug traffickers seeking an additional source of income.¹⁵

In a study conducted in Texas by the Texas Department of Public Safety, it was found that there are at least nine significant criminal gangs operating in Texas border and coastal areas with confirmed associations with major Mexican Drug Cartels, thereby qualifying as transnational gangs under the definition used in the study. These transnational gangs are the Bandidos, Barrio Azteca, Hermandad de Pistoleros Latinos (HPL), Latin Kings, Mexikanemi, MS-13, Texas Syndicate, and the Tri-City Bombers. Sensitive law enforcement reporting indicated that other gangs in Texas border and coastal areas may also have routine associations with Mexican Drug Cartels, but in these cases the reporting was insufficient to confirm these relationships.¹⁶

As noted in the USA Article written by Kevin Johnson on March 16th, 2010, the below gangs have shown a nexus to the notorious partnership with the Mexican cartels for purposes of both drug and human smuggling.

Gangs

ARYAN BROTHERHOOD

The Aryan Brotherhood was formed in 1967, in California's San Quentin State Prison, grown from the Blue Bird Gang of the 1950's and 1960's. The Aryan Brotherhood also operates in other states, such as Arizona AB and the California AB, which are apparently hostile towards each other. The Aryan Brotherhood is concerned with White-Supremacy and self-protection from black and Hispanic gangs.¹⁷

Some of the tattoos this gang is known to use are identified as a shamrock clover leaf, Initials "AB", Swastikas, double lightning bolts, and the numbers "666". Known to use Gaelic (old Irish) symbols as a method of coding communications, Aryan

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ State of Texas, Border Security Operations Center, Special Report: Transnational and Texas Gangs, 04/24/09.

¹⁷ <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/gangs/prison.html#ab>

Brotherhood groups from other states often accompany the symbols mentioned above with the name of the state.

ARYAN BROTHERHOOD OF TEXAS

The ABT was founded in the early 1980's in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice-Institutional Division when a group of white Texas inmates petitioned the California Aryan Brotherhood for permission to establish a chapter in Texas. Although the California Aryan Brotherhood refused the request, the Texas inmates still formed the ABT. Since its founding, the ABT has made several attempts to change its name or hide behind the umbrella of a religious organization, such as the Aryan Reich or the Church of Aryan Christian Heritage. Although the gang experienced severe internal problems and a high dropout rate shortly after these unsuccessful attempts, the ABT still remains a formidable group in and out of the Texas prison system.

Although the ABT uses "Aryan Brotherhood" in its name, it is not associated with prison gangs in other state and federal correctional facilities that use the same name. It is considered a Texas prison gang and uses the word "of Texas" to distinguish itself from other similar groups. It should be noted that ABT members are incarcerated in various state and federal prisons.

The ABT insignia or tattoo depicts a shield with a Nordic dagger running through it, the letters "A" and "B" over the top of the shield, and the words "of Texas" located under the shield. All members are given the choice to put on the tattoo or not. Many have chosen to hide or disguise their tattoos in an effort to thwart detection by correctional and law enforcement agencies.¹⁸



Figure 1 - Tattoos used by Aryan Brotherhood of Texas.

¹⁸TDPS, CIS, Texas Gangs: An Overview of Security Threat Groups and Other Major Gangs in Texas, July 2007.

BARRIO AZTECA

In the mid-1980's, a few offenders from the El Paso, Texas, area began to heavily recruit offenders who were members of El Paso street gangs. As a result of their efforts, they managed to stop the fighting among the various El Paso street gangs both in prison and on the streets, and united incarcerated gang members from the El Paso area. Barrio Azteca (BA), as the group eventually called itself, was validated as a Security Threat Group in 1993 and after entering a war with the Texas Syndicate.

The intent and purpose of BA are consistent with those of all other Security Threat Groups—its members attempt to control their environment through illegal activities, including drugs, prostitution, extortion, staff intimidation, inmate assaults, and murder.

An FBI investigation showed high-level contact between the Barrio Azteca and the Juarez Cartel.¹⁹

Recently, the BA, along with the Aztecas from Juarez, Mexico, were implicated in the death of a U.S. embassy worker in Ciudad Juarez and her husband, an El Paso County Sheriff's Office Detention Officer, and the husband of another U.S. Embassy worker. They were shot numerous times after leaving a birthday party in Juarez. Recent investigative leads have indicated that the main target of the assassination was the El Paso County Sheriff's Office detention officer. It is believed that the killing was in retaliation for the services of a detention officer. This information has not been confirmed and the case is still deemed to be under investigation.

The BA uses various tattoos to identify its members, including the name "Barrio Azteca", the numbers "2-1" (which represents the numeric values for the letters "B" and "A"), and the Roman numeral "XXI" and the plumed Aztec warrior.



Figure 2 - Some Barrio Azteca tattoos.

¹⁹ The Associated Press, Christopher Sherman, "Mexican traffickers get help from US prison gangs", 05/02/10.

HERMANDAD DE PISTOLEROS LATINOS

This gang is a Hispanic prison gang founded in Texas during the late 1980s. The Spanish translation of the gang's name is "Brotherhood of Latin Gunmen." It operates in most prisons and on the streets in many communities in Texas, particularly Laredo. HPL is also active in several cities in Mexico, and its largest contingent in that country is located in Nuevo Laredo. The gang is structured and is estimated to have 1,000 members. Members maintain close ties to several Mexican DTOs and are involved in the trafficking of large quantities of cocaine and marijuana from Mexico into the United States for distribution.

The Pistoleros Latinos began to multiply in the 1990's after the gang began recruiting members from cities outside of the Rio Grande Valley. The original HPL members from the Rio Grande Valley resented the new members being recruited from San Antonio and Houston, Texas. A power struggle within the prison gang's ranks ensued causing the group to splinter into two separate chapters. The original HPL members decided to call themselves the HPL 45's, while the San Antonio and Houston members were known as the 16/12's. The two factions went to war and finally reunited under the name HPL in 1998.²⁰

The executive rules of the HPL state that "Pistoletos shall be of any Latin origin; Chicanos, Mexicanos, Puerto Ricans, Venezuelanos, and all persons that speak Latino or are descendants of Latin families." Law enforcement has also identified females as HPL members, which is unique among Hispanic prison gangs that traditionally have not allowed women to gain membership into their organizations.

The HPL tattoo consists of the letter, "HPL", sometimes with the "H" and "L" combined with the head of a parrot. Some tattoos incorporate the numbers "16" and "12", which represents the letters "P" and "L", or the number "45", which represents the caliber of a .45 handgun. In addition, a tattoo of a .45-caliber handgun is commonly placed in an area where a gun is normally found on or carried by a person.²¹

²⁰ <http://latinoprisongangs.blogspot.com/2009/09/hermanos-de-pistoleros-latinos.html>

²¹ Ibid and Texas DPS, CIS, Texas Gangs: An Overview of Security Threat Groups and Other Major Gangs in Texas, July 2007.

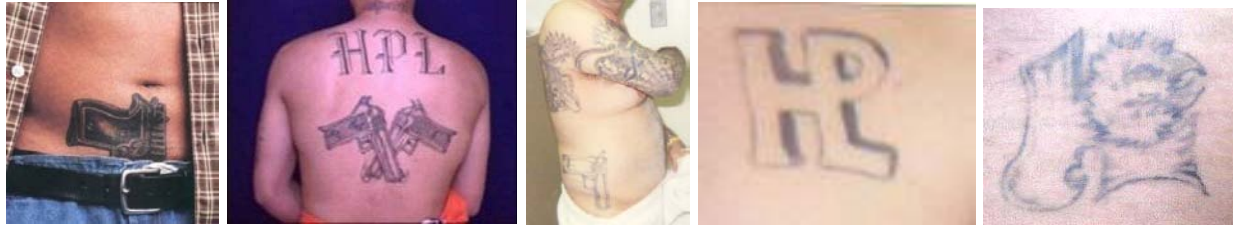


Figure 3 - Tattoos used by Hermandad de Pistoleros Latinos Gang.

MARA SALVATRUCHA (MS-13)

In the 1980's, more than a million refugees from the Central American country of El Salvador entered the United States as a result of the ongoing civil war in their home country and settled mainly in the Rampart area of Los Angeles, California, with a secondary cluster around Washington, DC. The California Salvadorans were not well accepted into the established Los Angeles Latino communities and were often targeted by members of the local Latino gangs, especially the Mexican gangs. This created the impetus for the formation of Mara Salvatrucha as a mechanism for protection within the new immigrant community. There are several background stories given for the name; however, the title appears to stem from a combination of the Salvadoran slang term for "mob/gang"- Mara (referencing the swarming behavior of jungle ants), the contraction of Salvadoran- Salva, and the slang term for "watch out"- Trucha, literally "watch out for the Salvadoran gang". Initially, MS began as a merger between these recent immigrants who had either been involved with "La Mara", an established criminal street gang in El Salvador, or were former members of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMNL), the central rebel paramilitary group during the civil war. These former FMNL affiliates were trained guerilla fighters, possessing organizational and weapons skills which they brought to the gang. Initially small and marginalized, the Mara Salvatrucha gained valuable turf as a result of the gang's rivalry with the 18th Street gang during the early 1990's. Although there was no clear winner, Mara Salvatrucha succeeded in gaining control of some drug distribution locations in the Rampart section of Los Angeles.

This led to an alliance between the Mexican Mafia prison gang and the Mara Salvatrucha in which MS cliques in Los Angeles agreed to serve as "street muscle" for the Mexican Mafia's drug operations. This alliance created a close relationship between the two groups, and Mara Salvatrucha gained a designation as a gang under the

Southern California alignment (Sureño 13) affiliated with the Mexican Mafia, adding the 13 moniker to the name. After a series of immigration initiatives in the 1990's, many MS-13 members who were illegally in the United States ended up being deported to their nation of origin, where they formed cliques that came to dominate the local street subculture. In turn, these new gang members followed the illegal migration routes back to the United States, creating a loop effect and cementing ties between the two nations. Currently, MS-13 is involved in a variety of criminal enterprises and is willing to commit almost any crime for monetary compensation. They have been involved in aggravated assaults, auto thefts, burglaries, carjacking, extortion, murder, narcotics sales, weapons smuggling and prostitution.

MS-13 members favor prominent tattoos on their chest, back, and arms. Most tattoos are a form of "MS" or "MS-13" and can be in standard numerals, roman numerals or any combination of the two. They may also include a clique name or telephone area code, "Salvadoran Pride," or "Mara". Also popular are Mickey Mouse tattoos, which indicates the gang's affiliation with the Mexican Mafia (Mickey Mouse = MM = Mexican Mafia) as well as graphical representations of the "Devils Horns". Many MS tattoos also incorporate some satanic imagery which follows on the theme of the "devils horns" in instilling fear among the largely Catholic Hispanic population. On the East Coast, some members may use "EME" or "ESE" as tattoos (Spanish for the letters M & S). Some members may display "SWP" (Salvadorans With Pride), as well as common general Hispanic gang tattoo motifs such as the three dots, theatrical faces, *pachuco* cross and teardrops.²²



Figure 4 - Some Mara Salvatrucha Tattoos.

²² Department of State Police, Commonwealth of Virginia, Mara Salvatrucha 13 Intelligence Report, July 2008.

MEXICAN MAFIA (La Eme)

La Eme is the most powerful and influential prison gang operating in the United States. The gang was formed within the California prison system in 1957 by a group of Hispanic street gang members wishing to protect themselves from inmates of other ethnic groups. La Eme quickly established a reputation for using brutal violence when dealing with its enemies as well as with infractions by members or trusted associates. The gang has evolved from a small group of ruthlessly violent inmates intent on surviving prison life to an international criminal organization that directs drug and arms trafficking operations, extortion schemes, and money laundering networks and exacts violence against rivals within the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the U.S. Bureau of Prisons and on the streets of southern California communities.²³

Individual La Eme members have established mutually beneficial working relationships with major Mexican DTOs and alien smuggling organizations (ASOs) throughout the southwest border of the United States.

It has been found that La Eme (The “M”) directs the criminal activities of *Sureño*²⁴ street gangs in southern California and in the custody of the California prison system and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. La Eme works with Mexican DTOs to facilitate the smuggling of wholesale quantities of cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine through California ports of entry (POEs) into the United States. La Eme generates some of its income by extorting funds from legitimate and illegitimate businesses operating in areas controlled by Sureño gang members. La Eme launders illicit proceeds through front companies, fraudulent nonprofit organizations, and real estate fraud. La Eme is establishing agreements and truces with state-based Hispanic prison gangs such as the Arizona-based New Mexican Mafia.²⁵

²³ USDoJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, Situation Report, January 2009.

²⁴ Sureño (Spanish for “southern”) street gangs are Hispanic street gangs that are active throughout southern California, collectively referred to as Sureños or Sur 13. “Sur” is a shortened form of the word “Sureño”, and 13 indicates loyalty toward La Eme. On the streets, each Sureño, or Sur 13, gang maintains its own identity (gang name) and is organizationally separate from other Sureño gangs; however, all are loyal to La Eme on the streets within the California and federal prison systems.

²⁵ USDoJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, Situation Report, January 2009.

The Eme is a predominantly Hispanic prison gang that originated in TDCJ's Retrieve Unit in the early 1980's and rapidly spread throughout the system. Initially, this security threat group attempted to masquerade as a cultural awareness group and not a criminal organization. It should be noted, however, that its constitution states in part: "In being a criminal organization we will function in any aspect of criminal interest for the benefit of advancement of Mexikanemi. We will traffic in drugs, contracts of assassination, prostitution, robbery of high magnitude and in anything we can imagine."

La Eme is extremely influential on the streets, committing crimes such as kidnapping, extortion, narcotics trafficking, and murder. This group is not to be confused with other prison gangs with the same name found in other state and federal correctional institutions.²⁶

TEXAS MEXICAN MAFIA

Over the past few months, reports have surfaced stating that members of Mexikanemi (Texas Mexican Mafia) will target and harm law enforcement officials due to recent successful enforcement efforts against the organization. Most Mexikanemi members can be identified by a variety of tattoos, such as a double-headed snake in the shape of the letter "M", Mexican mountain ranges, and Aztec pyramids and symbols. The official Mexikanemi tattoo includes two crossed daggers behind a burning sun or Aztlan warrior shield. Within this sun or shield is the Mexican national emblem: an eagle clutching a snake in its beak on top of a cactus plant. Other tattoos used by the gang are the initials "EME" or "MM", the number 13 (which represents the 13th letter in the alphabet, "M"), and "MEXIKAN", spelled with a "K" instead of a "C".

Common vehicles used by (but most certainly not exclusive to) Mexikanemi gang members are sport utility vehicles (SUVs) of any make and model. Violence may not necessarily be executed by a team of assassins but could be carried out by one or more members based solely on opportunity.²⁷

As of November 2009, Texas Mexican Mafia is known to make serious threats against law enforcement officers in Texas, specifically along the Texas-Mexico border area.

²⁶ TDPS, CIS, Texas Gangs: An Overview of Security Threat Groups and Other Major Gangs in Texas, July 2007.

²⁷ Texas DPS, Intelligence Bulletin, 12/04/09.



Figure 5 - Tattoos used by Mexikanemi Gang Members.

PARTIDO REVOLUCIONARIO MEXICANO

The PRM was founded in 1987-1988 in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's Coffield Unit by six inmates who wanted to protect themselves from other offenders and prison groups. Unit 1994, the PRM was comprised of only Mexican nationals and individuals of Mexican descent. After 1994, recruitment was opened to individuals of Latin descent from Central and South America. In July 2005, TDCJ formally identified the PRM as a Security Threat Group.

The PRM tattoo often incorporates the letters "PRM" and/or the emblem on the Mexican flag (i.e. eagle, snake, cactus, and half wreath). The words "Estados Unidos Mexicanos" may be added above the eagle. The number "6" is a code number used to identify membership (Note: There are six letters in the word "Mexico" and "Mezcal") and the tattoo "P31" is also used ("R" is the 18th letter of the alphabet and "M" is the 13th letter; thus "P"+18+13=P31). In addition, since the group has used the word "*borracho*" (Spanish for "drunk") to denote membership, some members may bear a tattoo of a Mexican male sitting on the ground, wearing a sombrero tilted forward, with a bottle of mescal or tequila in his hand or besides him.²⁸



Figure 6 - Tattoos used by PRM gang members.

TANGOS

The Tangos are one of the fastest growing groups in Texas, both within the prison system and on the streets, and are attaining near fad status. The term "Tango" is derived from Spanish slang and indicates a "town or hometown clique." Membership is usually voluntary and based on the geographic location where the offender resides. The rules governing Tango membership are less stringent than those required for

²⁸ TDPS, CIS, Texas Gangs: An Overview of Security Threat Groups and Other Major Gangs in Texas, July 2007.

Security Threat Groups, which have historically adhered to a “blood in-blood out” philosophy. Tangos also abide by an existing set of basic written rules that specifically outline the expectations of their members.

The four largest Tango groups, known collectively as the “Four Horsemen”, are “Houstone” from Houston; “D-Town” from Dallas; “Foritos” from Fort Worth; and “ATX” or “Capirucha” from Austin. Other Tango groups include the “Vallucos” from the Rio Grande Valley; the West Texas Tangos (WTX) from West Texas and the Texas Panhandle; “Corpitos” from Corpus Christi; “San Anto” or “Orejones” from San Antonio; and “EPT” from El Paso.

Some Tangos may also identify themselves as being “Tango Blast” (TB), which is not so much a separate organization as it is an indication that the offender has participated in heightened criminal activity on behalf of the organization. The term “blasting” refers to involvement in violent or disruptive criminal behavior against other gang members or criminal justice personnel, particularly inside the Texas prison system.

Tangos are involved in a variety of criminal activity, including auto theft, burglaries, narcotics trafficking, illegal alien smuggling, home invasions, robberies, kidnappings, and homicides—all offenses that have historically been committed by Security Threat Groups.²⁹

Tango members can be identified by their tattoos, which usually depict a hometown sports team and/or the team logo, a city skyline, area code numbers representing their hometowns, or the slang term for their hometown. Tangos who claim to be TB members may also use the tattoo “16-20-2” to represent the 16th, 20th, and 2nd letters of the alphabet, or “PTB”, which stands for “Puro Tango Blast”.

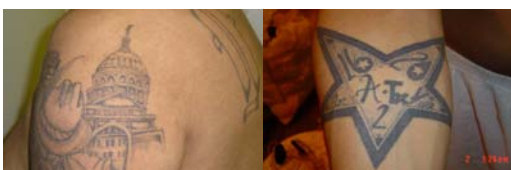


Figure 7 - Tango Blast Tattoos-Austin



Figure 8 - Tango Blast Tattoos-Corpus Christi

²⁹TDPS, CIS, Texas Gangs: An Overview of Security Threat Groups and Other Major Gangs in Texas, July 2007.

TEXAS SYNDICATE

The Texas Syndicate (TS) originated in the California prison system in the early 1970's, primarily to protect the smaller number of native Texas Mexican-American inmates from existing prison gangs. These Texas offenders banded together for protection and soon grew in sufficient numbers to be formerly recognized in California as a prison gang. According to California officials in 2007, the TS quickly became the group "most feared by all offenders in the California prison system, even prior to them becoming organized, due to their fierce loyalty to one another and their swift and absolute retaliation without any regard for their own safety or consequence." Predictably, a large number of TS members who were released from their custodial commitments in California returned to Texas and continued their criminal activities. The TS surfaced in the Texas prison system in the late 1970's.

The illegal activities of the TS includes, but is not limited to, drug trafficking, extortion, prostitution, assault, and murder. Members of the TS are also known to exist in several state and federal correctional systems across the country. The TS has two additional factions: the Texas Syndicate United (TSU) and The Syndicate Originals (TSO).

The Texas Syndicate is a prison gang with members incarcerated in the United States federal and state corrections institutions. However, their criminal activities extend beyond prisons and across the international border with Mexico.

Their tattoos and clothing typically contain the following: TS, Cuerno=Horn(s), Ese Te=Sindicato Tejano, University of Texas Longhorns Logo, NFL Houston Texans Logo. The TS specific tattoo consists of a large "T" superimposed over an "S". The term "Cuerno(s)" is the Spanish word for "horn(s)" and is an identifier or indicator of possible TS membership. Although many members will tattoo themselves with horns to signify their membership in the TS, not all offenders who have horns are affiliated with this gang.³⁰

³⁰ Ibid.



Figure 9 - Tattoos used by Texas Syndicate gang members.

Overview

Prison and street gangs pose a serious and growing cross-border criminal threat along the southwest border. Gangs in both the United States and Mexico smuggle aliens, bulk cash, drugs, and weapons across the U.S.—Mexico border. Additionally, these gangs engage in myriad acts of drug-related violence. The number of gangs and gang members active along the border is high, elevating the threat to law enforcement and local communities. According to 2008 NDIC data and interviews with local law enforcement officials, more than 9,000 gangs and 266,000 gang members are criminally active on the U.S. side of the southwest border. In addition to transporting contraband across the border, these gangs operate stash houses and perform security and enforcement duties from DTOs and ASOs. Some of these gangs have formed business relationships with major Mexican DTOs and ASOs, which facilitate these criminal activities.³¹

Gang involvement in cross-border criminal activities will most likely intensify as Mexican DTOs increase their use of gang members in their trafficking operations. Some of the more structured prison gangs that operate in the Southwest border area will quite likely strengthen their relationships with Mexican DTOs, allowing them to evolve into higher-level criminal organizations. The increased organization of these gangs will make it more difficult for law enforcement to infiltrate and dismantle them. Some U.S.-based gangs are also likely to expand their operations in Mexico to better facilitate their cross-border smuggling ventures.

³¹ USDoJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, Intelligence Bulletin, Cross-Border Gang Activity Along the Southwest Border, February 2009.