

MEXICAN NARCOS HAVE GROWN TWITTER PRESENCE SINCE THE MUSK TAKEOVER

Since the New CEO Dismantled Safety Work, Violent Criminal Networks Are Increasingly Utilizing the Platform to Spread Fear

By Dr. Nilda M. Garcia & ACCO Researchers
For Immediate Release 9 March 2023 0700 EST

Key Findings

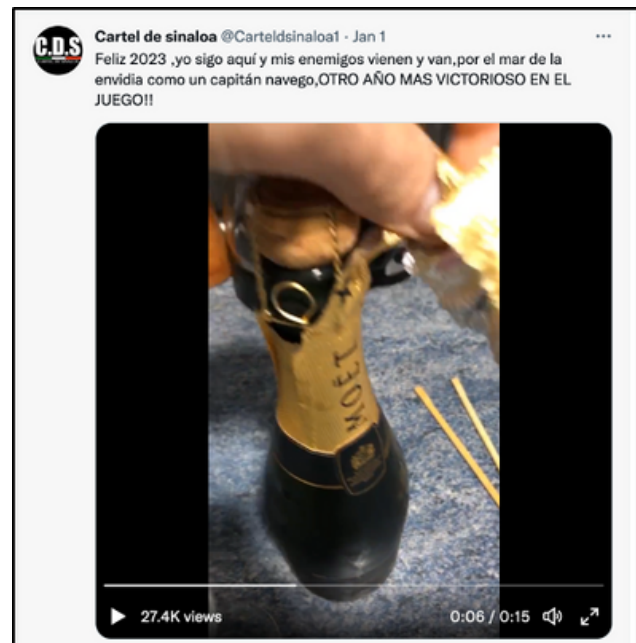
- Already scant efforts by Twitter to remove violating content and block accounts of high-profile Mexican cartel members appear to have declined further since Elon Musk took over the company and dismantled the platform's safety team.
- High-profile Mexican cartel members, many of whom have tens of thousands of followers, also appear to have increased their activity on Twitter.
- Well-established accounts of members of the Sinaloa Cartel, some created circa 2012-2015 and then banned, are active again, along with members of their criminal sub-cells, such as *los Chapitos*, *los Gallitos*, *los Antrax*, and *Gente Nueva*.
- Emergent drug cartels, including Cartel Jalisco Nueva General (CJNG), Cartel del Noreste (CDN), and their criminal sub-cells have also established accounts and become more active on Twitter.
- Twitter has enabled Mexican cartels to expand their public relations reach, glorify the narco lifestyle, send threats, and recruit new members.
- Mexican criminal organizations are not alone: Powerful gangs such as Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho (PV) in Brazil also have a strong presence on the platform.

Introduction

Mexican drug cartel activity on Twitter appears to be expanding since Elon Musk acquired the platform, sacked thousands of employees, and dismantled aspects of its trust and safety operations. Accounts representing previously banned Mexican narcos have re-appeared, while new accounts continue to be created on a regular basis.

Comparative analysis by ACCO has found that well-established accounts belonging to members of the Sinaloa Cartel, many of them created circa 2012-2015 and then banned by Twitter's Trust and Safety team, are again open and active.

For example, @carteldsinaloa1, an account with 12.9k followers that regularly tweets official pictures and news from the Sinaloa Cartel, tweeted a New Year's Greeting on January 1st (pictured right), featuring a video of a bottle of champagne.



Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/Carteldsinaloa1>

Emergent drug cartels such as Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion (CJNG) and Cartel del Noreste (CDN) have also planted their flag on Twitter, as have their criminal sub-cells, such as los Chapitos, los Gallitos, los Antrax, Gente Nueva from the Sinaloa cartel and Tropas del Infierno from the CDN.

We call on Twitter to immediately block and remove violent and inciteful narco content, and to suspend identified Mexican narco accounts that spread it
-Gretchen Peters, a co-founder of the Alliance to Counter Crime Online.

Under the Banner of 'Free Speech'

Twitter CEO Elon Musk claims he is aiming to turn the platform into a haven for “free speech.” Amid media reporting that Taliban officials and other extremist figures have received blue verification checks on their profiles, little attention has been paid to the thousands of members of violent criminal organizations, including Mexican cartels, that have weaponized the platform for publicity and recruitment.

As previous ACCO research has shown, Mexican cartels have long utilized social media platforms, in particular Instagram, Twitter and TikTok, to amplify their public relations strategies.

Mexican cartels mainly use Twitter to recruit new members and glorify the gangster lifestyle.

Narco Twitter accounts have also utilized Twitter to announce new policies and operations, to send threatening messages to government authorities, civilians, and rivals, and even to make official cartel announcements, such as reporting new targeted killings (see the image, right, from 2018).



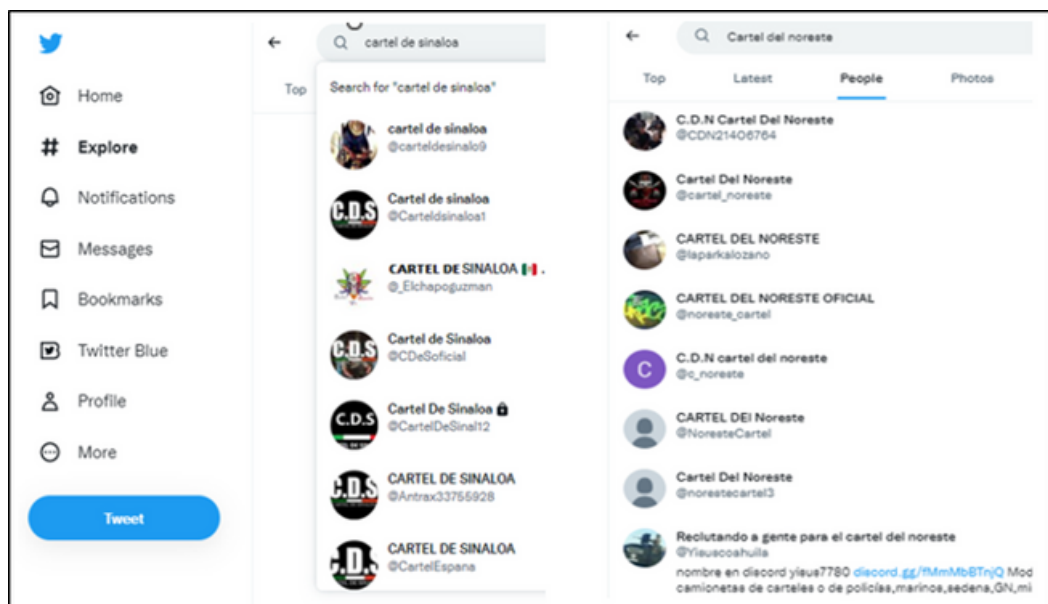
Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/ismaelmayozamba>

Official Policy vs. Enforcement

Twitter's Violent and Hateful Entities policy, last updated in January 2023, states that, "There is no place on Twitter for violent organizations, including terrorist organizations, violent extremist groups, or individuals who affiliate with and promote their illicit activities." Violations of this policy include: "engaging in or promoting acts on behalf of a violent organizations, recruiting for a violent organization, providing, or distributing services to further a violent organization's stated goals; and using insignia or symbols or violent organizations to promote them or indicate affiliation or support."

However, a significant gap exists between the stated policy, and Twitter's capacity or willingness to enforce it. ACCO found evidence of a strong and growing presence of Mexican drug cartels and their members on Twitter who posted content that was in regular violation of Twitter's stated policy, both because it provides a public platform for wanted fugitives, and also since it often displays horrifying violence.

Cartel activity on Twitter is hiding in plain sight. Narco accounts are mostly open to the public and not difficult to find. Conducting a quick search on key cartel names produces dozens of results (screenshot of search results below). It is important to acknowledge that not all the accounts on the search results contain relevant content, some of them are inactive or post little substantial information.





Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/LaRanaCDS>

Not only do high-profile, wanted cartel members remain active on Twitter, many narco Twitter accounts openly flaunt their criminality. Rene “la Rana” Arzate Garcia, a member of the Sinaloa Cartel, features his own FBI wanted poster on his Twitter profile (above) for example.

ACCO found no evidence that Mexican narcos had obtained blue checks, as have senior members of the Taliban and various right-wing extremist groups, however it remains apparent that the microblog platform remains an important mechanism for established and emergent Mexican cartels to communicate with the public, grow their influence and membership, and distribute announcements about their activities and plans.

Twitter Reflects Changing Nature of Cartels

As the drug war in Mexico has evolved, so too has the landscape of drug trafficking organizations. Tracking changes in narco Twitter accounts provides insights into the shifting stature of the Mexican cartels and their key members.

Circa 2012-2015, there was strong presence on Twitter from members of the Sinaloa Cartel, and a moderate presence of the Zetas, Gulf Cartel, and Caballeros Templarios, at the time, the most powerful criminal organizations in Mexico.

The most followed account of the Mexican Cartel Twitterverse was the one that allegedly belonged to Joaquin Guzman Loera “El Chapo,” which had 592K followers. This account was suspended more than a year after El Chapo’s last arrest in 2015, and remains blocked to this day.

After El Chapo’s incarceration and extradition to the U.S., the centrality of the Sinaloa Cartel’s Twitter network shifted to the accounts belonging to El Chapo’s sons and heirs apparent: Ivan Archivaldo, Alfredo Guzman, Ovidio Guzman, all of whose Twitter accounts remain open and active today, with more than 140k followers between them.

Twitter also reflects the changing nature of the Sinaloa cartel: Newer accounts representing the Sinaloa cartel’s distinct factions, including La Gente Nueva or GxnX, are now active on Twitter, and they too boast significant followings (images are displayed on the next pages).

Twitter provides a window into the changing landscape of the Mexican cartel landscape.

-Dr. Nilda Garcia, ACCO member and expert on cartel activity

← **Iván Guzmán.**
128 Tweets



⋮ Follow

Iván Guzmán.
@IvanArchivaldo

📍 Culiacán, Sinaloa [🔗 instagram.com/ivanarchivaldo](https://www.instagram.com/ivanarchivaldo)
📅 Joined January 2016

10 Following 34.3K Followers

Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/IvanArchivaldo>

← **Alfredo Guzmán**
22 Tweets



⋮ Follow

Alfredo Guzmán
@_AlfredoGuzman

📍 Culiacán, Sinaloa 📅 Joined January 2016

7 Following 13.5K Followers

Screenshot of: https://twitter.com/_AlfredoGuzman

← **Ovidio Guzmán López**
617 Tweets



... Follow

Ovidio Guzmán López
@OvidioGuzmanL

Yo no soy de lujos y ni de carros deportivos, a mi me gustan los caballos y los gallos finos, siempre con una y con otra me verán pasear.
[Translate bio](#)

📍 En la Sierra de Badiraguato 📅 Joined March 2014

7 Following 92.4K Followers

Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/OvidioGuzmanL>

← **GENTE DE LA GENTE GxNx**
8,326 Tweets



... 📧 Follow

GENTE DE LA GENTE GxNx
@gentedlagente

SI EN UN MINUTO NACEMOS EN UN MINUTO NOS VAMOS #BarbaNorteña ROSSONERI
[Translate bio](#)

📍 CHIHUAHUA 📅 Joined January 2013

355 Following 13.4K Followers

Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/gentedlagente>

Newer Narco Groups Ascendent on Twitter



Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/CDN21406764>

More recently, relatively newer illicit groups, such as Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion (CJNG), Cartel del Noreste (CDN) and some criminal cells working for these groups (i.e., Tropas del infierno), have joined the platform, and appear to be posting similar content. Some of these newer accounts still have miniscule followings, such as the Cartel del Noreste account pictured (left).

Their unique and violent photo and video content suggests they are legitimate accounts run by cartel members, however.

Other more recently established accounts, such as Versace CJNG have steadily grown their following, although they still have nowhere near the presence of the big Sinaloa cartel names.



Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/VersaceCJNG>

Extremely Violent Content is Again Present

The very fact that newer criminal subgroups perceive the need to establish and build a presence on Twitter is an important indication that the social media platform continues to be an important tool for emergent Mexican cartels in establishing and growing their brand, and asserting their strength.

Content posted across narco Twitter is similar, regardless of which criminal group is posting. It often features information about their missions, such as the image (right) posted by an operative from Mayo Zambada's faction of the Sinaloa Cartel. Like this one, the images are often punctuated with Spanish messages, as well as emojis.

Of late, narco Twitter has increasingly featured extremely violent content that has not been flagged or removed. For example, a member of the CJNG, recently posted a video where the decapitated heads of rival cartel members killed during a battle were shown to the camera and then tossed into a bonfire.



Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/EI12GxNx>

Twitter Posts Warnings, But Leaves Up Content

Many cartels use Twitter for recruitment. Cartel del Noreste actually opened a Twitter account with the title, "Recruiting people for the Northeast Cartel" (below). This account explains the specialized training that new members go through in order to reach high ranks in the organization. They also invite interested parties to join them on discord.com to chat with cartel members.

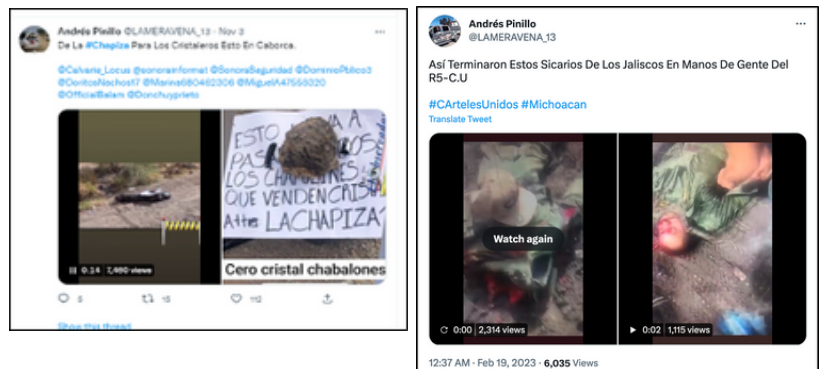
Many narco Twitter accounts feature gruesome pictures and menacing messages to rival cartels that have dared to encroach on another group's turf.

In two examples (below right), members of La Chapisa, a faction of the Sinaloa Cartel, posted Tweets featuring pictures of rivals they apparently murdered. One even features the scalp of their victim on top of a message that reads: "This is what happens to traitors who are selling crystal."

Twitter sometimes posts a prompt on such accounts warning they are engaged in problematic behavior that "includes sensitive content." But the content is neither blocked, nor are the accounts suspended, despite clearly violating Twitter policies.



Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/Yisuscoahuila>



Screenshot of: https://twitter.com/LAMERAVENA_13



alliance to counter crime online

Narco-Twitter Used for Official Announcements

Cartels also utilize Twitter to make announcements about new territorial reach and strategy. Searching on the hashtag #CJNG, the initials for the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion, leads to videos of the cartel sending threatening messages to rival cartels, and politicians, and also announcing their arrival to a new Mexican state for them to “conquer.”

In one recent video (pictured below), the Cartel Jalisco New Generation declares its expansionist strategy by announcing their arrival in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, a key territory in the south of Mexico covering the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz.



Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/OfficialBalam>

Mexico is Not Alone: Brazil and Beyond

Other criminal organizations throughout Latin America have copied the social media strategies of Mexican cartels. Powerful gangs in Brazil such as Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho (PV) also have strong presence on Twitter and they post very similar content as members of Mexican cartels (below).



Screenshot of: <https://twitter.com/queridin33333>, <https://twitter.com/cvraiz2>

Conclusion

Violent criminal gangs terrorizing communities across Mexico and beyond should not be enabled to broadcast their violence and issue threats against others using Twitter and other social media platforms. ACCO calls on Twitter's new management to enforce their stated security policies by:

- Conducting a study to better assess and reduce the scale of narco Twitter.
- Suspend accounts of apparent members of drug cartels in Mexico, some of which are on U.S. and Mexico most-wanted lists.
- Recruit specialized Spanish-speaking moderators who can scrutinize and remove the incendiary content that glorifies violence, recruits, or contains threats and violent directives.