

Cartel and Gang-Related Violence: A 2026 Overview

Prepared for the Union of Saints

Purpose

This document provides a grounded, factual overview of cartel and gang-related violence as of 2026. It is intended to support awareness, discernment, and community protection within the Union of Saints, while maintaining understanding without exaggeration or minimization.

I. Global Context (2026)

There is no single authoritative global count of cartel and gang-related deaths. However, based on available data and trend analysis:

- **Estimated global deaths annually:**
~25,000 – 50,000+ individuals
- **These deaths are spread across:**
 - Mexico (largest concentration)
 - Central America
 - South America (especially Brazil)
 - The United States
 - Parts of Europe and other regions

Key Reality

- Organized violence is fragmented and underreported
- Many deaths are classified simply as “homicides,” not explicitly linked to gangs or cartels
- Power struggles, territorial control, and illicit economies drive the majority of these killings

II. Mexico: Primary Concentration of Cartel Violence

Mexico remains the global epicenter of cartel-related violence.

Current Estimates (2026 Pace)

- ~1,500+ cartel-related killings in January 2026 alone
- Approx. 50 deaths per day
- **Projected annual total:**
~18,000+ cartel-related deaths

Characteristics

- Violence is often:
 - Territorial (control of trafficking routes)
 - Retaliatory (cycles of revenge)
 - Public-facing (intended to influence perception and control)

Notable Pattern

- Leadership conflicts or arrests frequently trigger short-term spikes in mass violence

III. United States: Gang-Related Violence

The United States experiences lower levels of organized violence compared to cartel-dominated regions, but gang-related activity remains a serious and localized issue.

Total Homicides (Recent Trend)

- ~14,000–15,000 total homicides annually (2025–2026 trend)

Gang-Related Proportion

- Estimated 13%–25% of all homicides
- Higher concentrations (up to 40–60%) in certain urban areas

Estimated Gang-Related Deaths

- Low estimate: ~1,800 deaths/year
- Mid-range: ~2,500–3,000 deaths/year
- High-end: ~4,000 deaths/year

Characteristics

- Often localized and community-specific
- Includes:
 - Retaliatory violence
 - Drug-related conflicts
 - Loosely affiliated groups (not always formal gangs)

IV. Key Observations

1. Scale vs Perception

- Globally: tens of thousands of deaths annually
- US: similar patterns, gang and cartel related
- Violence is often concentrated geographically, not evenly distributed

2. Data Limitations

- Underreporting is common
- Misclassification (e.g., disappearances vs homicides)
- Lack of consistent definitions across jurisdictions

3. Structural Drivers

- Illicit economies (drug trafficking, human trafficking)
- Weak institutional control in certain regions
- Cycles of retaliation and power consolidation

V. Implications for the Union of Saints

Within the Union of Saints, these realities call for:

Awareness Without Fear

- Understanding the scale and nature of violence without internalizing instability

Strong Boundaries

- Clear rejection of:
 - Coercion
 - Exploitation
 - Violence as a means of control

Protection of Community

- Prioritizing:
 - Emotional and physical safety
 - Discernment in relationships and environments
 - Stability over exposure to chaotic systems

Grounded Perspective

- Recognizing:
 - Not all environments are equally affected
 - Many communities function outside of these systems
 - Fear-based narratives can distort reality just as much as denial

Police, Military, Federal Government

- US Calls for:
 - Stronger systems of violence control and data gathering
 - Unified secure systems for police (regional law contracts)
 - Public Awareness, Easier Reporting Systems, Digital Access Reporting

VI. Closing Understanding

Cartel and gang-related violence in 2026 remains a serious global issue.

- It is highly concentrated in specific regions
- It is driven by power, control, and illicit economies

For the Union of Saints, the response is protection and safety initiatives.

We do not support anti ICE, anti border patrol or anti government protests. We see a need for these government entities to combat cartel violence, gang violence, human trafficking and to secure our borders.

VII. Government Use of Cartels for Territorial Influence (Summary)

Purpose

This section provides a careful, grounded summary of how governments or state actors may interact with cartel or gang networks in ways that influence territorial control. This document helps with recognition of patterns observed in certain regions and historical contexts.

I. Core Concept

In some environments, governments, political actors, or state-aligned forces may indirectly or covertly benefit from cartel or gang activity to maintain or expand influence over territory, populations, or economic systems.

II. Common Mechanisms

1. Selective Enforcement

- Authorities may:
 - Target certain groups while ignoring others
 - Allow one organization to operate in exchange for reduced violence or cooperation

Result:

A “controlled” criminal presence that stabilizes territory under informal rules.

2. Informal Agreements / Corruption

- Local officials or agencies may:
 - Accept bribes
 - Share information
 - Avoid interference

Result:

Cartels gain operational freedom while officials maintain surface-level order or personal gain.

3. Proxy Control

- In areas where direct governance is weak:
 - Criminal groups may effectively act as governing bodies
 - They enforce rules, collect payments, and regulate daily life

Result:

Territory is controlled without formal state presence, but still indirectly influences broader power structures.

4. Intelligence and Leverage

- Governments may:
 - Use informants within cartels
 - Turn a blind eye to certain operations in exchange for information

Result:

Short-term intelligence gains, but long-term entanglement.

5. Destabilization or Containment Strategies

- In rare or controversial cases:
 - Allowing conflict between groups may weaken all parties

- Violence is contained within certain zones rather than eliminated

Result:

Violence becomes geographically “managed” rather than resolved.

III. Important Distinctions

- These dynamics:
 - Are not uniform across all governments
 - Exist on a spectrum from passive tolerance to active corruption
- Many governments actively fight cartel influence and incur significant loss and risk in doing so

IV. Risks and Consequences

- Erosion of public trust
- Expansion of criminal power
- Civilian harm and instability
- Long-term loss of institutional control

Even when intended as short-term strategy, these dynamics often strengthen the very groups they attempt to manage.

V. Grounded Perspective for the Union of Saints

- Recognize that:
 - Power systems can become entangled with harmful structures
 - Not all authority operates with full transparency or alignment
- Maintain:
 - Clear moral boundaries
 - Discernment without assumption
 - Commitment to non-violence and integrity

Closing

The relationship between governments and cartels, where it exists, is best understood not as a single conspiracy or uniform system, but as a complex, situational dynamic shaped by power, pressure, and limitation.

The appropriate response is neither fear nor denial, but awareness anchored in truth and principled boundaries.

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