

Organization attributes Sheet: Arellano Felix Organization AFO aka Tijuana Cartel

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A. When the organization was formed + brief history

- In late 1980s, Felix Gallardo (AKA: “El Padrino” or the Godfather) divided trafficking routes among the members of his organization. The Arellano Felix brothers Benjamin, Ramon, Francisco Javier, Rafael, Eduardo and sister Enedina (Luis Fernando and Carlos did not participate and are not wanted by the authorities) were assigned by their uncle the border city of Tijuana in Baja California.¹
- Under Benjamin’s leadership and Ramón’s brutal enforcement methods, this organization quickly grew to be one of the most important drug trafficking organizations throughout the 1990s and the early years of the 2000s.
- The penchant for innovation (fake law enforcement vehicles and uniforms to conceal their movements around the city, as well as torture and extreme violent methods to kill members of other organization that Ramon started using) as well as the well-known battle against the Sinaloa organization, gave the AFO a legendary status.
- Ramon’s death in 2002 followed by Benjamin’s arrest (and recent extraction to United States²), were the beginning of this organization’s decay. Although Francisco Javier and Eduardo took the leadership of the organization, their arrest (in 2006 and 2008, respectively) sparked a battle between Teodoro García Simental (AKA: “Teo or Tres Letras” who was a former enforcer of the organization) and Fernando Sanchez Arellano (AKA: “El Ingeniero” who is Enedina’s son) for the leadership of the organization.
- After Teo’s arrest in January 2010, Sanchez Arellano became the current leader of the organization with his mother taking care of the finances of the organization.³
- Enedina’s role in the organization is quite particular since her involvement in the organization has varied as needed. When Benjamin and Ramon lead the organization, she took care of front companies that laundered money, but as her brothers were either captured or killed, she took more proactive control of the organization. Since she has studied business management, she tried to steer the organization towards a more entrepreneurial style with a less violent approach.⁴
- Although this organization cannot be considered as strong as it was, due to changes in its structure and to the move of Sinaloa Organization into AFO territory, Fernando and Enedina have managed to retain control of part of the territory and continue smuggling drugs and carry out other criminal activities.

B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,

a. In general

- Drug trafficking, retail illegal drug selling (in Mexico), extortion, kidnapping and human trafficking.⁵

b. *Specific detail: types of illicit trafficking activities engaged in*

- Cocaine smuggling from Colombia through Central America and Mexico into the United States.
- Marijuana smuggling from Mexico into the United States.

C. Scope and Size

a. Estimated size of network and membership

- As a result of arrests and clashes with Sinaloa organization, no good estimate of the size of the organization is available.

b. Countries / regions group is known to have operated in. (i.e. the group’s operating area)

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

- Tijuana and Mexicali in Baja California in Mexico, as well as southern California and Colombia.

D. Leader Characteristics

- a. Who is/are the leader(s)
 - Fernando Sánchez Arellano (AKA: “El Ingeniero”)
 - Enedina Arellano Felix
- b. Leadership timeline
 - Benjamin and Ramon (late 1980s to 2002)
 - Javier (AKA: “El Tigrillo”) (2002 – 2006)
 - Eduardo (2006-2008)
 - Fernando Sanchez Arellano and Enedina Arellano Felix (2008 – present)
- c. Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)
 - Although the organization is family based and somewhat autocratic, currently leadership is shared between Enedina who looks after finances and Fernando who is in charge of operational activities.

E. Organizational Structure

- a. Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)
 - Hierarchical with direct orders from lieutenants like Miguel Aguirre Galindo (AKA: “El caballo” or Edgardo Leyva Escandon (AKA: “El 24”).⁶
- b. Membership – is there formal or informal membership in the organization or network? What role do informal or nonmembers play in trafficking and other criminal activities?
 - Formal. This organization is probably the most family centered of all drug trafficking organizations in Mexico since its leadership has never been outside of the Arellano Felix family.
 - Despite this, its sophisticated multilayered form of organization insulates the leadership from law enforcement prosecution.⁷
- c. Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)
 - Centralized.

F. Resources

- a. Financial
 - Although there is no precise figure on the financial power of the organization it is thought to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars; the AFO is known to run front companies (drugstores, hotels and construction companies) in Tijuana as well as in southern California.⁸
- b. Human
 - Fernando has formed between 19 and 23 operative cells of 20 men each, both to fight off attacks from dissenting members (Teodoro Garcia Simental) and rival organizations (Sinaloa) and to perform smuggling operations.⁹
- c. Logistical
 - i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.
 - The Arellano Felix organization has safe houses along the Baja California border and in southern California.
 - ii. Key routes
 - From Colombia to Central America and from there to Mexican ports.
- d. Transportation
 - i. Land
 - Trailer Trucks

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.
All research conducted according to the project manual.

ii. Sea
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fishing vessels
iii. Air
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not found.
iv. Intermodal container
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some
G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities
a. Corruption
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This organization has relied heavily on corrupting local and state law enforcement to facilitate its activities and even act against other organizations.¹⁰
b. Concealment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not found.
c. Deception
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not found.
d. Circumvention (avoiding border entry points)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not found.
H. Prior / Existing Relationships
a. Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the early years of 2000, AFO were also known to have a steady relationship with FARC in which they exchanged cocaine for arms.¹¹ To combat the attacks from the Sinaloa organization, the AFO has relied on alliances with different organizations like the Gulf or currently the Zetas.¹²
b. Corrupt politicians, law enforcement , political parties and other state entities, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The AFO is known to have gained protections from higher echelons of the Baja California's Attorney's Office.¹³
c. <i>Specific detail: Any alliances / past dealings with terrorist groups.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No indication has been found that this organization has had a connection with a terrorist organization.
I. Ideological / Ethnic / Familial Orientation (if any)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family based organization
J. Technical Sophistication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information not found.
K. Penchant for Innovation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This organization was the first one to form death squads in the early 1990s (the Narco Juniors) and also to disguise its activities by using fake law enforcement automobiles and uniforms. The organization was also the first to threaten journalists who were giving the organization bad press and rewarding those who provided positive coverage.¹⁴
L. Activities in United States
a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drug trafficking
b. <i>Specific detail: trafficking activities ; logistical activities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cocaine and Marijuana
c. Linkages with US groups
i. Market/transaction links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bloods Florencia 13 Hells Angels

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.
All research conducted according to the project manual.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mexican Mafia • Nortenos • Surenos • Vagos¹⁵
ii. Stable supplier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cocaine: Colombian • Marijuana: Mexican producers
iii. Franchise arrangement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information not found.
iv. HQ and Branch office
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • California (Sacramento, Stockton, Porterville, Tulare, Goshen, Los Angeles, San Diego Calexico), Nevada (Las Vegas), Washington (Seattle), Alaska (Anchorage), South Dakota (Sioux Falls), Minnesota (St. Paul, Minneapolis), Ohio (Cleveland), Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), New Jersey (Camden), New York and Massachusetts (Boston).¹⁶
M. Evaluations
a. Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a family organization, the Arellano Felix Organization has managed to remain in business for over two decades. • The entrepreneurial approach that Enedina is trying to imprint, as well as the mix experience (old and young lieutenants) that Fernando is bringing into the organization could re-establish the organization as one of the main transnational organized crime players.
b. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fact that Enedina and Fernando are the only family members left to run the organization makes them an easy target and their arrest or death could permanently cripple the organization.
c. Additional insights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As one of the most traditional organizations in Mexico, and with its entrepreneurial emphasis, it seems highly unlikely that this organization would be willing to jeopardize its profits and resilience by engaging activities related to terrorists.
Other Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

¹ Rafael was arrested in late 1990s, and extradited to the US. After serving his time in jail, he was released in March 2008 and returned to Mexico without being required by any authority. "Obtiene su libertad Francisco Rafael Arellano Félix en EU", El Universal, 4 de marzo 2008, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/487474.html>

² Press Release, "Former Leader of the Arellano-Felix Organization Extradited from Mexico to United States to Face Charges", Department of Justice, April 29th, 2011, <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2011/April/11-crm-549.html>

³ Tijuana Cartel, Insightcrime, <http://www.insightcrime.org/criminal-groups/mexico/tijuana-cartel/item/193-tijuana-cartel-profile>

⁴ "Enedina Arellano Felix, la Reina del Narco", YouTube, August, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrQEvnI7xsE>

⁵ "Mexico: Tijuana Drug War Rages on Despite High-Profile Arellano Felix Arrest", Semanario Zeta, (Internet Version-WWW in Spanish), November 2008, OSC: [LAP20081110470003](http://www.state.gov/p/inl/narc/rewards/115368.htm).

⁶ "Narcotics Reward Program: Arellano Felix Organization", Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/narc/rewards/115368.htm>

⁷ Tijuana Cartel, Op Cit.

⁸“Enedina Arellano Felix, La Reina del Narco”, Op Cit.

⁹ “Mexico: Tijuana Drug War Rages on Despite High-Profile Arellano Felix Arrest”, Op Cit.

¹⁰ “Federal Forces Find Three Police Officers Involved With Kidnappers in Tijuana”, (Internet Version-WWW in Spanish), January 2008, OSC: [LAP20080126345001](#)

¹¹ “Top Leadership of Arellano-Felix Drug Trafficking Organization Indicted”, Federal Bureau of Investigation, July 9th, 2003, <http://www2.fbi.gov/page2/july03/070903arellano.htm>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Tijuana Cartel, Op Cit.

¹⁴ “Former Leader of the Arellano-Felix Organization Extradited from Mexico to United States to Face Charges”, Op Cit.

¹⁵ “National Drug Threat Assessment”, *National Drug Intelligence Center*, February 2010, pp. 64-65, <http://www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs38/38661/index.htm>

¹⁶ National Drug Intelligence Center, Situation Report: Cities in which Mexican DTOs operate within the United States, Department of Justice, April 11th, 2008