

Organization Attributes Sheet: The Latin Kings (AKA the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation; Motherland; and Bloodline)

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A. When the organization was formed + brief history

- The Latin Kings street gang first emerged in the Chicago metropolitan area in the mid-1960s as a social reform organization. The original group was formed by Mexican and Puerto Rican males dedicated to overcoming racial prejudice against Hispanic populations. By the 1970s, the Latin Kings had transformed into a for-profit criminal organization operating throughout the whole of the United States and the U.S. prison system. Two main factions under the Latin Kings umbrella can be identified: the Motherland (also known as KMC or King Motherland Chicago) based out of Chicago, IL; and the Bloodline based out of New York City. The Motherland is by far the larger of the two.¹ Since the 1980s, the deportation by U.S. authorities of Latin King members found to be foreign nationals, gang member migration, and the group's franchise structure have facilitated the transnational expansion of the organization.² Local chapters are now involved in criminal activity across a number of Latin American and European countries. The preponderance of Latin Kings' criminal revenue is generated by the retail distribution of illicit drugs. The group is considered to be a key North American partner to multiple Latin American drug trafficking organizations.³

B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,

a. In general

- Drug trafficking and distribution, homicide, armed robbery, carjacking, extortion, identity theft, fraud, document forgery, money laundering⁴

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

- Drug trafficking and distribution: The Latin Kings are allied to various Mexican and Latin American drug trafficking organizations and function as one of their major partners in the U.S. drug trade.⁵ The gang's primary source of income is street level sale of cocaine, crack cocaine, heroin, and marijuana.⁶

C. Scope and Size

a. Estimated size of network and membership

- In the United States alone, the Latin Kings network consists of 20,000-40,000 members organized into more than 190 chapters in 160 cities and 15 states.⁷
- The presence of the group has been documented in 15 countries throughout the Western Hemisphere and Europe.

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

- United States, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Canada, Spain, Italy, Belgium⁸

D. Leader Characteristics

a. Who is/are the leader(s)

- Gustavo Colón: aka "Lord Gino"
- Augustin Zambrano: aka "Big Tino"⁹
- Raul Gonzalez: aka the "Sun King"¹⁰
- Pedro Rey: aka "Forehead"

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

- Luis Felipe: aka “King Blood”
- Antonio Fernandez: aka “King Tone”¹¹

b. Leadership timeline

- The gang’s leadership has been the target of repeated arrests and convictions by U.S. authorities. New leaders have repeatedly emerged after each series of arrests, demonstrating the group’s resiliency and organizational strengths.
- Gustavo Colón, considered the highest-ranking leader of the Latin Kings national organization, is currently serving a life sentence in U.S. federal prisons. Despite his incarceration, Colón has continued to play an active role in directing the group’s activities.¹²
- Augustin Zambrano, until recently number two in the Latin Kings’ national organization and the highest ranking leader outside the prison system, was arrested by U.S. authorities on gang-related charges in 2009. Zambrano was convicted in 2011 and sentenced to 20 years in prison.¹³
- It is unclear who has assumed active leadership of the group in the wake of Zambrano’s arrest.

c. Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)

- The leadership style varies in accordance with the group’s unique structure. Both national leaders and the leaders of local chapters exert considerable influence over the organization. The group’s activities and characteristics vary across chapters with the idiosyncrasies of the local leadership.

E. Organizational Structure

a. Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)

- At the neighborhood level, each local branch is organized hierarchically with well-defined, standardized ranks and roles for group members.
- Regional councils at the city and state level provide leadership to the local groups and maintain contact with the national level organizations located in Chicago and New York.¹⁴
- The federated organization is unified by a written constitution and by-laws.¹⁵
- This franchise structure has facilitated the transnational spread of Latin Kings groups to numerous countries throughout the Western hemisphere and parts of Europe.¹⁶

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?

- Group membership is formal and member roles and promotions are standardized.
- In addition to local branches or chapters (the primary organizations), the Latin Kings also maintain sub-organizations for females, the Latin Queens, and youths, the Pee Wees.¹⁷
- Although members are predominantly Latino, membership is open to all nationalities and is not restricted to Latinos or those of Hispanic decent.¹⁸

c. Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)

- The management of such a large confederated organization is accomplished through a mix of centralized control via formal hierarchical command structures and decentralized local control of individual chapters.
- Gustavo Colón the group’s highest-ranking leader continues to exert substantial

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control despite incarceration by U.S. authorities.

F. Resources

a. Financial

- Group size and the range of profitable criminal activities indicate substantial financial resources. However, exact numbers are unknown and it is likely that financial resources vary across localities and countries.

b. Human

- In accordance with the group's well-defined structure and hierarchical stratification, each Latin Kings chapter includes individuals designated to perform specific functions related to group finances, criminal activities, security, and ideology.¹⁹
- The U.S. National Gang Intelligence Center (NGIC) lists the Latin Kings as a criminal organization whose members possess formal military training.²⁰

c. Logistical

i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.

- In the late 1990s, the Latin Kings were involved in the production and sale of false identity documents to illegal immigrants as part of a large-scale forgery operation with the Castorena-San Germán organization. The group likely maintains considerable document forgery capabilities.²¹

ii. Key routes

- Laredo, McAllen, and Brownsville, TX constitute key points of entry into the United States utilized by Latin Kings traffickers and their suppliers.²²

d. Transportation

i. Land

- Information not found.

ii. Sea

- Information not found.

iii. Air

- Information not found.

iv. Intermodal container

- Information not found.

G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities

a. Corruption

- Information not found.

b. Concealment

- Information not found.

c. Deception

- Information not found.

d. Circumvention (avoiding border entry points)

- Information not found.

H. Prior / Existing Relationships

a. Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)

- Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN).²³
- Jose Padilla, attempted terrorist and al Qaeda associate

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- Latin American drug trafficking organizations.²⁴
- Gulf drug trafficking organization.²⁵
- The Herrera Family drug trafficking organization.²⁶
- Mexican Mafia of Texas.²⁷

b. Corrupt politicians, law enforcement , political parties and other state entities, etc.

- In the mid-1990s a number of Chicago police officers were discovered to be active members of the Latin Kings.²⁸

c. *Specific detail: Any alliances / past dealings with terrorist groups.*

- Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN): The FALN, a clandestine leftwing militant organization advocating Puerto Rican independence responsible for numerous bombings in the U.S. mainland, was considered a terrorist group by the U.S. Department of State.²⁹ In the 1990s, contact between FALN and Latin King members inside the U.S. prison system eventually led to Latin Kings funneling money to the Puerto Rican organization.³⁰
- Jose Padilla: In 2002, Padilla was arrested in Chicago O’Hare airport on suspicion of plotting a radioactive “dirty bomb” attack inside the United States in association with al Qaeda. He was later convicted of supporting terrorism.³¹ A number of international media organizations have reported Padilla as having been a member of the Latin Kings in his youth before his conversion to Islam.³² Others media outlets report Padilla’s gang affiliation as the Latin Disciples.³³ It is unclear which version of the story is correct; however, Padilla’s gang membership appears to have had little direct connection with his later attempted terrorist activity.³⁴
- As one of the largest retail narcotics distribution groups in the United States, the Latin Kings are understood to have strong links with Latin American drug trafficking organizations, specifically Colombians and Mexicans. The exact groups, however, are often unknown.³⁵
- Gulf drug trafficking organization: The Mexican Gulf DTO constitutes one of the key wholesale suppliers of heroin and cocaine utilized by the Latin Kings.³⁶
- The Herrera Family drug trafficking organization: The Herrera Family DTO, based in Durango, Mexico is another major wholesale supplier of heroin and cocaine to the Latin Kings.³⁷

I. Ideological / Ethnic / Familial Orientation (if any)

- The Latin Kings ideological component stems from its origins as a social reformist organization involving variants of Latino nationalism, Third World radicalism, self-affirmation, and social justice. The group’s religious component involves aspects of Catholicism, Pentecostalism, Islam, and various syncretic religions such as Santería and Yorùbá mythology. The degree to which the group’s formal ideology and religion are more than nominal influences on local chapters is highly dependent on the idiosyncrasies of individual leaders.³⁸
- It should be noted, however, that the established ideology of the Latin Kings has motivated group actions in the past, specifically in the form of support for the FALN terrorist organization. The potential for similar actions in the future is significant.

J. Technical Sophistication

- The size, structure, and regulation of the group as well as its criminal activities, which include document forgery and identity theft, indicate a significant level of technical sophistication.

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However, technical capacities will likely vary across individual chapters.

K. Penchant for Innovation

- The history and range of criminal activities of the Latin Kings indicate a propensity for evolution, innovation, and adaptation.

L. Activities in United States

a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities

- Drug trafficking and distribution, homicide, armed robbery, carjacking, extortion, identity theft, fraud, document forgery, money laundering and business operations³⁹
- Money laundering and business operations: The group is known to own and operate numerous apparently legitimate business operations used to launder the proceeds of narcotics distribution. Examples include car washes, pool halls, and convenience stores.⁴⁰
- Armed robbery: In the late 1970s, the Latin Kings raided a U.S. National Guard armory in Chicago, IL in search of military ordinance. The group acquired several automatic rifles, ammunition, and hand grenades. The significance of the target in this incident is unique in the group's ongoing history of conventional armed robberies.⁴¹

b. *Specific detail: trafficking activities; logistical activities*

- Drug trafficking and distribution: The drug trade remains the most prominent and profitable activity of the Latin Kings organization. The group constitutes one of the largest retail distributors of heroin, cocaine, and marijuana in the United States.⁴²
- Document forgery: The group's involvement in the large-scale production and sale of false identity documents for illegal immigrants was discovered in the late 1990s. It is probable that the Latin Kings maintain some ongoing capacity and involvement in document forgery.⁴³

c. Linkages with US groups

i. Market/transaction links

- Information not found.

ii. Stable supplier

- Information not found.

iii. Franchise arrangement

- The structure of the Latin Kings has facilitated the proliferation of gang chapters throughout the United States and parts of Latin America and Europe.

iv. HQ and Branch office

- Chicago is considered the home of the largest and most important faction of the Latin Kings.
- Another significant headquarters branch is in New York.

M. Evaluations

a. Strengths

- The organization and structure of the Latin Kings has proven effective, resilient, and adaptive. The mix of centralized control and flexibility has allowed the group to proliferate throughout the United States, the U.S. prison system, and increasingly throughout Latin America and parts of Europe. The Latin Kings have demonstrated an ability to persist in the face of repeated arrests of the top leadership by U.S. law enforcement. The group's size and the scope of its criminal activities are a measure of Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

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its success. Moreover, the Latin Kings' ideological component has given the group a measure of legitimacy in parts of Latin America that it does not enjoy within the United States. In Ecuador, for example, the organization has achieved the status of a legal, non-profit organization despite its continuing criminal operations.⁴⁴

- Demographic and social trends – the growth of marginalized, impoverished, and urban Hispanic populations – will probably benefit and strengthen the group throughout the United States and Latin America in the coming decades.

b. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities

- The group's national and local leadership and rank and file have proven vulnerable to penetration by U.S. law enforcement and informants. However, the group's resiliency remains.

c. Additional insights

- The ideology, history, size, and diverse capabilities of the Latin Kings, both inside the United States and elsewhere, indicate the potential for future cooperation with politically or religiously motivated terrorist groups. The Latin Kings will therefore be of continuing interest to U.S. law enforcement, intelligence, and Homeland Security authorities.

Other Notes

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³ Andrew Papachristos, "Gang World," *Foreign Policy*, March 1, 2005. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2005/03/01/gang_world.

⁴ U.S. National Gang Intelligence Center, *National Gang Threat Assessment 2009*, 23.

⁵ Patrik Jonsson, "Gang arrests a blow to Mexican cartels' reach north of the border," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 1, 2011. <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Justice/2011/0301/Gang-arrests-a-blow-to-Mexican-cartels-reach-north-of-the-border>.

⁶ U.S. National Gang Intelligence Center, *National Gang Threat Assessment 2009*, 23.

⁷ U.S. National Gang Intelligence Center, *National Gang Threat Assessment 2009*, 23.

⁸ David Brotherton, "The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation," in *Encyclopedia of Gangs*, eds. Louis Contos and David Brotherton (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), 4; "Highlights: Colombia Crime and Narcotics Issues 23 Feb 10," *Colombia -- OSC Summary*, OSC# LAP20100223211001, February 23, 2010; and "Highlights: Northern Central America Press 29 Aug 08," *Central America -- OSC Summary*, OSC# LAP20080829026004, August 29, 2008.

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¹⁰ Gary Knox, "Gang Profile: The Latin Kings," National Gang Crime Research Center, 2000. <http://www.ngcrc.com/ngcrc/page15.htm>

¹¹ David Brotherton, "The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation," 3-5.

¹² Dirk Johnson, "A Jailed Chicago Gang Leader is Charged as a Criminal," *New York Times*, September 21, 1997. <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/09/21/us/a-jailed-chicago-gang-leader-is-charged-as-a-drug-criminal.html?pagewanted=1>.

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- ¹⁵ Gary Knox, "Gang Profile: The Latin Kings."
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- ¹⁷ David Brotherton, "The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation," 5.
- ¹⁸ U.S. National Gang Intelligence Center, *National Gang Threat Assessment 2009*, 23.
- ¹⁹ David Brotherton, "The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation," 5.
- ²⁰ U.S. National Gang Intelligence Center, *National Gang Threat Assessment 2009*, 11.
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- ²⁷ Ibid.
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- ⁴⁰ Knox, "Gang Profile: The Latin Kings."

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.
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⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "40 charged in Latin Kings drug ring," *Chicago Tribune*, September 25, 2008.

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