

## Chapter 2

# Rub Outs in the Territory: Killing Police Chiefs and Top-Level Commanders in Chihuahua

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines in detail the assassination of municipal police chiefs and top-level municipal commanders in the state of Chihuahua (2006–2012). The argument advanced in this chapter is that these murders are the result of the interaction between impunity in the political, legal and law enforcement systems and the goals and weapons of the criminal organizations. This thesis is presented in three sections.

Section 2.2 describes how the elements of opportunity and motivation for the killings of police chiefs were abundantly present in Northern Tier Mexico, especially in the post-2008 period. They consisted of insufficient protection of officials which facilitated opportunity for assassination. In addition, lack of municipal capacity to implement police reforms slowed institutional efforts to improve local security during this period.

Section 2.3 presents an analysis of the system of law-enforcement assassinations of local police chiefs by organized crime elements in the state of Chihuahua. Selective, often sequential, hits by cartels of chiefs and commanders in multiple towns along key drug-trafficking corridors has proven an effective strategy that serves several criminal goals. The goals achieved by organized crime include: (1) retaliation for federal, state and local prosecution, (2) the attempt to neutralize police chiefs, (3) to achieve intermittent local governance and/or to place corrupt police chiefs, and, (4) to reduce local governmental capacity in order to obtain greater freedom for movement of goods.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These four goals are presented as “ideal types” and should be understood as such. In the empirical exposition that follows, there is some overlap between ideal types, i.e. the attempt to achieve intermittent local governance may also involve the attempt to place police chiefs favorable to organized crime elements. However, the attempt to achieve intermittent local governance does not always include the assassination of the police chief or top-level commanders and therefore it is kept as a separate category in the analysis.

Section 2.4 presents a mapping and a discussion of the specific gains from law-enforcement assassination and their negative impact on the local rule of law. A geographical mapping of the assassinations of local police chiefs and top-commanders in Chihuahua also reveals that they are not random but follow a northbound pattern along drug-smuggling routes. Organized crime elements did take total temporary political control in some small towns near the U.S.-Mexican border and near the cross-roads of major drug-smuggling highways. In those instances, the concerted assassination campaigns in several of these towns can be understood as limited “governance” through organized crime (Sheptycki 2003; Sullivan and Elkus 2008).

## 2.2 Opportunity, Motivation and Law-Enforcement Assassination

### 2.2.1 Targeted, Strategic Hits

The strategic use of deception as one such “signature” element of a deliberate law-enforcement assassination (White 2008: 5) was evident in Chihuahua. Hit men, in small-town Allende (pop. 4,185 [2010]) were very effective in using treachery to assassinate the police chief. Assassins, playing on a still-existing sense of public duty, got the police chief’s family members to open their home door by knocking while politely asking for the chief by name. At that point, they then violently forced their way into the home, ambushed, shot the police chief in his own shower and then fled (Notimex 2011). The targeting of the Rosales municipal police chief (pop. 5,570 [2010]) was no accident. The chief was ambushed in a surprise attack by an armed commando just as he arrived at home after finishing his shift. The detonations from the high-caliber weapons used to assassinate the police chief were so powerful that they broke the windows of a store a block away (Tres Códigos 2012). In small town Balleza (pop. 2,087 [2010]), the police chief suffered and survived so many targeted assassination attempts (at his home, on the highway) that he earned the nickname “El Gato [The Cat]” for allegedly possessing nine lives (La Policiaca 2011g).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In Balleza, there were a series of assassination attempts on the police chiefs and top-commanders. The first (March 22, 2010) was unsuccessful because top-police commander Leoncio Loya Chavira who was ambushed in his vehicle along with the ex-mayor, Miguel Ángel Sandoval Prieto (2001–2004), survived the wounds from the armed attack on his vehicle. The attack came 1 h before the Army conducted an anti-organized crime operation on the nearby highway (XEPL 2010). The second set of assassination attempts happened to police chief Armando Sánchez [*El Gato*] in 2011. Sánchez would later flee the municipality with two municipal police officers after the State Attorney General’s Office issued a warrant for his arrest (for collusion with organized crime) in early 2012 (Al Contacto 2012) and was detained a year later (Nota Roja 2013). The subsequent police chief Federico Villas Brito resigned just after coming under investigation by the Federal PGR and the State Attorney General’s Office because of an anonymous tip linking the chief to armed groups and executions in the municipality (Nota Roja 2013). The assassination attempts on police chief Sánchez were preceded by a series of assassinations of the ex-mayor (2004–2007) who was assassinated along with the wife of another mayor at a funeral

Such planned hits on police chiefs do not look like the random result of the general disorder, havoc and the overall rise in homicide rates in the nation since 2006 (Olea 2011). Rather, strategic assassinations, designed to eliminate a target, are generally well-planned, complex events involving cooperation among several actors. They are often conducted in the context of intra-group and inter-group warfare in which killing leaders is seen as a useful war strategy (Palmer-Fernández 2000; David 2002).

### 2.2.2 *Gaps in the Data*

The killing of local law enforcement, especially small-town police chiefs and commanders is thus a serious, on-going issue which deserves historical treatment in its own right (WSJ 2010). Yet, many journalistic accounts are very urban-based and focused on high-profile figures such as standing governors (Michoacán) and gubernatorial candidates (Tamaulipas). Such assassinations and assassination attempts on high-ranking politicians are important and elicit a lot of press attention. Nevertheless, assassinations are actually often higher in rural municipalities. Criminal insurgency studies, also often urban-focused, have also neglected small-town contexts (LaPlanate 2011).

Yet, many Mexican small-towns have increasingly become sites of extortion, kidnappings or forced migration, places where fragmented DTOs order citizens to abandon their towns (AP 2010). This was true in the state of Chihuahua where a large number of rural municipalities that lie along its drug-smuggling highways registered very high rates of drug-related assassinations according to government data [SNSP-PGR 2011 (Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública-Procuraduría General de la República)] (Appendix).<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, however, the only existing large-scale government data set on assassinations at the municipal level (SNSP-PGR 2011) provides only partial insight into the problem of the killing of police chiefs and other law enforcement officials. The analysis of official municipal-level assassination data *does* tell us that cartel-related assassination is very wide-spread. 92 % of the municipalities in the state of Chihuahua recorded assassination events in 2011 (SNSP-PGR 2011, Appendix).

Nevertheless, the government evidence fails to specify whether the victim was a drug-cartel member, government official (or type of public official—police,

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Footnote (Continued)

for an assassinated man (La Policiaca 2011b). The ex-mayor's own husband, a PRI candidate for mayor, had been attacked and killed in 2004 and she then substituted for him and won the mayorship by a majority vote. Later, in Balleza in January 2010, the son of the new mayor was killed by gunmen. At that funeral, the nephew of the municipal police commander was also executed. In sum, in Balleza, the series of assassination attempts on the top-level commanders and police chiefs were accompanied by a string of killings of other local officials and their family members.

<sup>3</sup> The Chihuahua municipalities documented in the official SNSP-PGR (2011) data were Ascensión, Camargo, Cuauhtémoc, Guadalupe y Calvo, Guazapares, Hidalgo, Jiménez, Madera, Ojinaga) (n = 2,132 assassinations, 2006–2010).

mayor, other) or a by-stander. This leaves a gaping hole in the data set. Moreover, the oft-repeated Calderón government claim that 90 % of Mexico's assassinations consisted of inter or intra-cartel turf wars (The Guardian 2010) falls short. It does little to explain how the specific killing of local police chiefs and other law enforcement personnel benefits organized crime elements. Nor, according to Milenio (2013a) did the first 70 days of PRI President Enrique Peña Nieto's term in office register a drop in drug-related homicides ( $n = 2,097$ ) with ten police officer victims in January 2013 alone. By April 2013, La Jornada (2013) reported that municipal and state police continued to be killed at the same rate as in previous years under Mexican president Calderón.

A 2011 *Excelsior* (2011b) study reported that 174 public officials and politicians were assassinated across Mexico since 2006. 48 % of those killed were police chiefs in 23 states and 66 municipalities (Guerrero-Gutiérrez 2011: 45). The state-by-state breakdown of *Excelsior's* (2011b) data shows 80 public security officers were assassinated.<sup>4</sup> These law enforcement officers were directly involved in upholding the rule of law (police chiefs, State Secretaries of Public Security and Special Groups operations directors, Federal police). 24 mayors were assassinated.

### 2.2.3 Methods

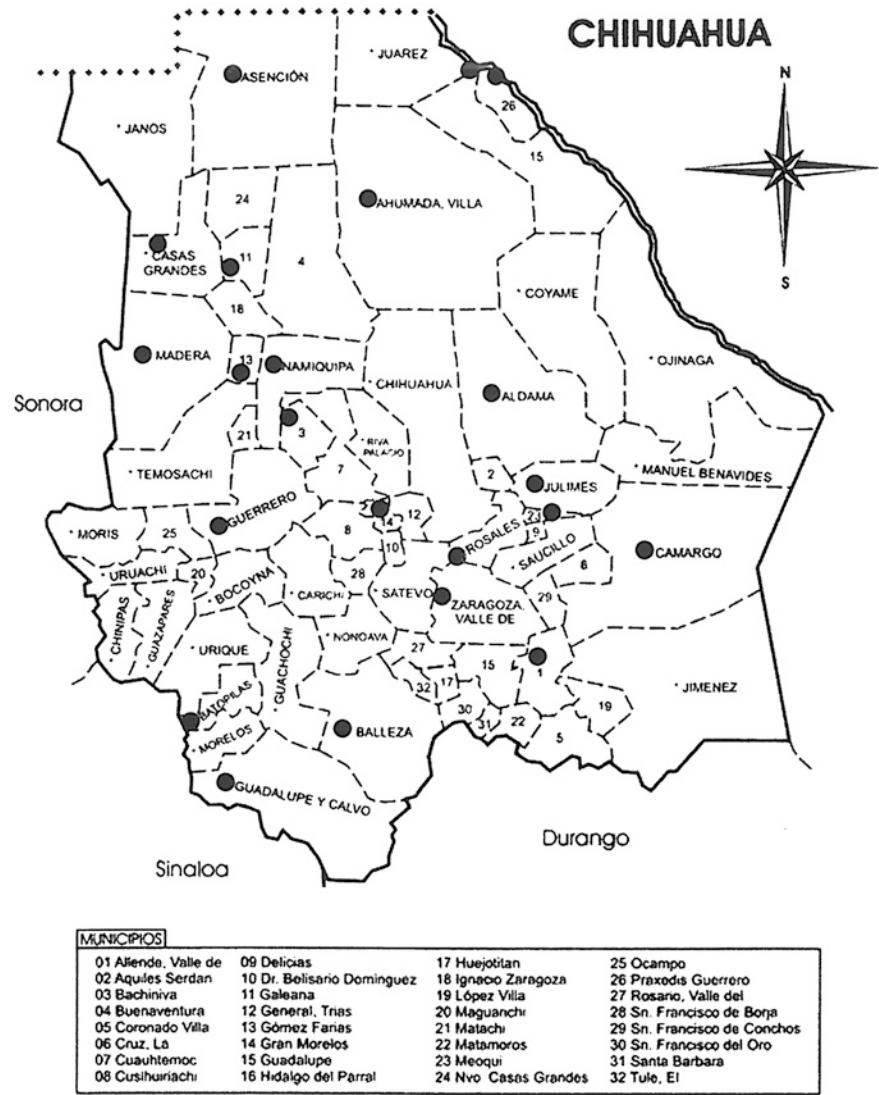
The author, to create an accurate data set of small town police chiefs and top-level commanders in Chihuahua, conducted an exhaustive search for such law-enforcement assassinations in all 65 of Chihuahua's municipalities (2006–2012) (Lexis/Nexis Academic, Mexican regional and crime press, see Appendix). A representative sociological data set of those municipalities *where the assassination of municipal police chiefs and top commanders actually occurred* was constructed. This data set provides a corrective to the official government assassination data where no description on the occupation of the victim is provided.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars have found that as long as a serious attempt is made (a weapon is fired), it is chance which often defines whether an assassination fails or succeeds and that both lead to an increase in conflict (Jones and Benjamin 2009: 25). Failed assassination attempts were often followed up upon with successful assassinations

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<sup>4</sup> According to *Excelsior's* study (2011b), the police chiefs killed in these states and municipalities include: Aguascalientes ( $n = 7$ ), Baja California Norte ( $n = 1$ ), Baja California Sur ( $n = 1$ ), Campeche ( $n = 1$ ), Coahuila ( $n = 1$ ), Colima ( $n = 1$ ), Durango ( $n = 8$ ), Guanajuato ( $n = 6$ ), Hidalgo ( $n = 3$ ), Jalisco ( $n = 2$ ), Michoacán ( $n = 3$ ), Morelos ( $n = 2$ ), Mexico State ( $n = 4$ ), Puebla ( $n = 3$ ), San Luis Potosí ( $n = 1$ ), Sinaloa ( $n = 4$ ), Tabasco ( $n = 4$ ), Quintana Roo ( $n = 1$ ) and Veracruz ( $n = 14$ ).

<sup>5</sup> If the municipality is not included in Table 2.1, the author did *not* find documented the assassination(s) of the police chief(s) or top-level police commanders.



Map 2.1 Municipal map of Chihuahua with law-enforcement assassinations

in the Mexican drug-war dynamic. Thus, this book discusses both assassination and assassination attempts in tracing out a system of law-enforcement assassinations of municipal police chiefs and top-level commanders.

Map 2.1—Municipal Map of Chihuahua shows the political boundaries of Chihuahua’s municipalities (Source: Ponce 2013). The municipal seats where assassinations of top-level municipal police officials occurred are indicated.

### ***2.2.4 Simultaneousness and Opportunity***

A “system” of law-enforcement assassinations by drug-trafficking cartels is traced out in this chapter based on the assumption of “simultaneousness”. By simultaneousness, it is shown that although motives or gains may overlap, three elements are always present in each assassination event. These include: (1) the murder victims got involved in the enforcement of the rule of law before they were murdered, (2) the murders often had a “positive” effect for drug-trafficking cartels in the respective towns such as the closing of local police stations or the end of corresponding law-enforcement actions, and (3) the murders happened along drug-trafficking routes. Thus, the assassinations of local police chiefs and top commanders all share these three characteristics of simultaneousness.

Assassination behavior is centrally framed by both opportunity and motivation. Opportunity is a key element in the assassination of a government official because the act depends upon the assassin(s) ability to locate the target and to gain sufficient access to that person. Any “regime that hopes to protect their most politically important persons from motivated assassins must either conceal location, block access, or both” (White 2008: 5).

The key elements of opportunity to assassinate law enforcement in the Mexican drug-war have included: (a) insufficient protection of officials and (b) lack of municipal capacity. First, the protection of local law enforcement has been a problem in Mexico. As noted in the preface, the majority of the law enforcement officers killed by 2010 were municipal police ( $n = 915$ ) and state police ( $n = 698$ ) who were operating in various municipalities at the time of their death (García 2011: 260). International and domestic newspapers also continue to print the entire names of assassinated police chiefs and police officers; thereby providing organized crime elements potential access to the whereabouts of their family members.

In the face of these law-enforcement killings, as well as a total death toll of roughly 34,000 organized-crime related killings by 2010, President Calderón admitted that the Mexican government had been unable to combat narco violence successfully “with brute force alone” (García 2011: 261). He also noted that “the municipal police are the most vulnerable, the easiest to track down, the ones most co-opted, the ones most subjected to intimidation and of course vengeance by criminals who act with impunity” (Casey 2010).

Continued lack of financial and political capacity also hinders institutional efforts to improve and strengthen local police, especially in municipalities already heavily hit by organized crime. Federal legislation promoted by Calderón was passed in 2008 to establish a “unitary” police force to strengthen municipal police by advances in salary, recruitment, professionalization, crime data base sharing and confidence controls (Sabet 2010: 259–261; Moloeznik 2013). By mid-2011, however, 78 % of Mexico’s municipalities had not yet implemented the new unitary police system. By mid-2012, the majority of municipalities in the state of Tamaulipas had not yet incorporated into the new unitary police model (La Jornada

2011c; Horacero 2012).<sup>6</sup> By early 2013, in San Luis Potosí, the state's 58 municipalities had just signed the institutional agreement with the federal government to implement the unitary police force in the state (Milenio 2013b). Moreover, skeptics of the unitary police system fear that the policy may "simply concentrate problems of corruption and inefficiency under one roof, providing a one-stop-shop for traffickers to further compromise police integrity at the state level" (Shirk 2012: 14).

### ***2.2.5 Chihuahua and the Northern Mexican Tier (2008–2012): Cop-Killing Without Punishment?***

Mexico largely relies on federal forces such as the army, navy, federal police and the federal office of the attorney general [PGR] to fight criminal organizations, drug trafficking and organized crime. Local police are nevertheless in charge of minor crimes, transit regulation and public security in Mexico (Sabet 2009: 3). "Even though a municipal officer is not responsible for, nor authorized to, pursue and investigate drug trafficking, she nonetheless might be asked to look the other way, provide security for a shipment, provide weapons, information, and uniforms, or actively engage in transport and sale" (Sabet 2007: 5).

Drug-trafficking organizations have a primary interest in moving their product quickly and unimpeded, either by rival cartels and/or by local, state or federal officials who may attempt to prosecute them. This means, in Northern Mexico, movement along drug-smuggling routes up to U.S. Inter-State 10 which parallels the US-Mexican border (Stratfor 2010; Sullivan and Elkus 2008: 3; Guerrero-Gutiérrez 2011: 32). Corrupt municipal police can be valuable allies "for organized crime who need information on who is passing through the municipality military or federal police they control so they can protect local criminal operations and anticipate attacks by their rivals and by federal authorities" (Dell 2011: 7).

Research has repeatedly shown that honest Mexican policemen who refuse to participate in corruption are at high risk from assassination (from corrupt higher-ups, from fellow corrupt officers and from narcos outside the police) (García 2011: 260). Furthermore, the extensive narco-penetration of society (Díaz Cayeros et al. 2011) makes it extremely difficult and impractical for honest police to quit or hide from the Narcos (Sabet 2010). As assassination behavior is also importantly framed by motivation (White 2008: 4), one motive for killing honest, zealous prosecutors and police chiefs is to remove knowledgeable and effective opponents who might capture traffickers. Such assassinations can also serve as a deterrent on other prosecutors, police chiefs and police (Reuter 2009).

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<sup>6</sup> According to the Executive National Secretary of the National Public Security System, multiple Northern Tier municipalities simply lacked the local institutional capacity to implement the plan. In fact, many mayors "had gone to their respective governors and said: I have no financial, political or security capacity to have a police force, Governor, please take charge and give us police services" (Zacatecas Hoy 2011).

Existing data on fifty police killed in the state of Chihuahua during the first 6 months of 2008 strongly suggests that organized crime elements began to heavily target local police in small towns along strategic drug-trafficking routes. By mid-2008, 58 % of the assassinated police officers were killed *outside* of Ciudad Juárez with only 5 federal officials killed (2 Army, 2 federal police, 1 AFI official) (El Heraldo de Chihuahua 2008b). This means that the majority of law enforcement victims killed in early 2008 in Chihuahua was *municipal police officers* located outside of urban Ciudad Juárez followed by state-level rule of law personnel (members of the state attorney general's office (24 %). State security forces (8 %) constituted the remaining assassinated officers. By mid-2008, the targeting of federal forces (army, navy, federal police, AFI, Marines) was clearly less than the assault by organized crime elements on municipal police in Chihuahua.

In the face of these police killings, such was the concern with the Northern Tier security situation that by early 2008 Stratfor (2008) intelligence analysts asserted that the Mexican government had (deliberately) lost control of Northern Mexico to the drug-smuggling organizations.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the Calderón government did begin a surge in the deployment of military and federal troops in Chihuahua in early 2008, suggesting a concern for local security in the region. Map 2.2 displays available figures on the troop deployment of the Mexican Army in the state of Chihuahua and other border states (2008–2012).

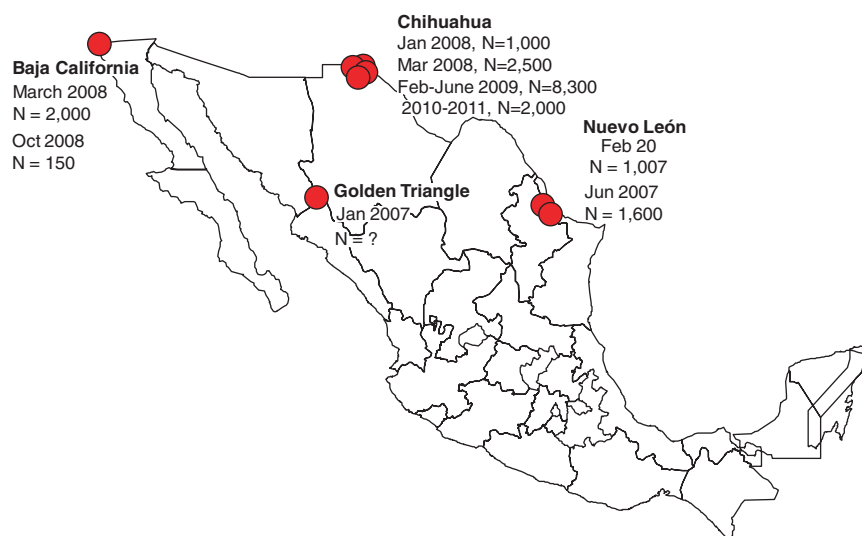
One problem, however, has been the heavily Ciudad Juárez-based urban focus of the deployments in Chihuahua. Almost exclusively, federal deployments concentrated on the urban city of Ciudad Juárez (Operación Chihuahua, 2008–2009) (Astorga and Shirk 2010). An additional 2,000 federal troops were deployed in Chihuahua with control transferred to the Federal Preventative Police in 2010–2011. This deployment also continued to show a largely urban concentration of military forces in and around urban Ciudad Juárez (El Universal 2010a; Sedena 2010, 2011).<sup>8</sup> By early 2013, except in the Chihuahua municipalities of Delicias and Ciudad Juárez, the state of Chihuahua was not on the list of 13 states receiving new Army deployments (Proceso 2012d; Reforma 2013) proceso.

The Army *had been* intermittently sent to different small cities and towns within Chihuahua to temporarily ensure public safety, make arrests and to confiscate illegal

<sup>7</sup> Stratfor analysts contended that (then) confinement of the war to the north's sparsely populated desert regions did not threaten the survival of the Mexican regime (in the southern heartland). This and the fact that the industry's \$35–\$40 billion revenue in sales (largely to US consumers) was simply too beneficial to the Mexican economy led Calderón to sacrifice the Northern Tier to organized crime-related violence, according to analysts (Friedman 2010).

<sup>8</sup> According to the Mexican Military (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional—SEDENA) and the US Department of Justice (2010), the Mexican military was temporarily deployed in drug interdictions and arrests of drug-traffickers in the following 8 municipalities in Chihuahua outside of Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua City (March 2008–August 2011): Ascensión; Villa Ahumada, Nuevo Casas Grandes, Guadalupe y Calvo, Batopilas, Janos, Parral, Delicias. According to Milenio (2012), there were 149 military operations in the state of Chihuahua between 2008 and 2010 (159 in Guerrero, 93 in Nuevo León, 92 in Coahuila, 72 in Sinaloa, 60 in Michoacán, 57 in Tamaulipas, 37 in Durango, 25 in Sonora, and 18 in Veracruz).

## Military and Federal Police Deployments in Border States



**Map 2.2** Military and federal police deployments in Border States. *Sources* Astorga and Shirk (2010), El Universal (2010a), SEDENA (2010, 2011)

weapons (New York Times 2009). Ultimately, however, responsibility for maintaining order is returned to local police in small cities and towns. The Mexican military also largely adopted a “hands off” strategy in rural Chihuahua and rural Sonora under Calderón because it did not possess the resources to win a protracted fight with the Sinaloa cartel (Danelo 2011).<sup>9</sup> The relative absence of a sustained federal presence in small towns where local officials are assassinated reduces the costs of using bullets as one strategic maneuver by organized crime elements (Lessing 2011: 18).

Sabet (2011) argued that many small towns in Northern border states by 2011 had already become the “strongholds” of Mexican organized crime with those local

<sup>9</sup> In small towns in Northern Sonora, a virtual state of siege between rival cartels (Sinaloa versus Beltrán Leyva) also led to the rise of de-populated “ghost towns” without police, schools, or businesses (LA Times 2010; Arizona Daily Star 2011). Cerro Prieto Sonora (pop. 500 in 2010, down from 1,750 in 2000) is located near the Altar-Sásabe highway 64 close to the U.S. border in Arizona. The last Army checkpoint is miles away, the town’s last policeman was murdered in mid-June 2011. The police station, schools and all local businesses closed then (NPR 2011). Just north up highway 64 in the small town of Saric, Sonora two mayors, a police chief and 10 police officers had all fled, leaving the town without police. No mail carriers, produce or soda distributors or even ambulances entered the town which was patrolled at night, according to residents, by 20–30 organized crime elements in 20–30 vehicles. With respect to cartel economic activities in the Sonoran village of Gila, cartel toll-takers monitor highway 64 toward the border and make sure each immigrant-loaded van has paid the \$100 passage fee (LA Times 2010: 2).

police officers who remained there are often charged with unclear authorities. In many instances, the remaining outgunned, and outmanned, municipal police officers in Northern Mexico were taken by surprise in ambushes by cartel gunmen while on-duty. The Army, in Ciudad Mier (Tamaulipas), for example, said it was stretched too thin to police the town for an extended period after feuding cartels emptied it of many of its residents, the schools, banks, pharmacies, stores and doctors (Osorno 2011). In a surprise raid on the town a few months after the Army's retreat, the six last remaining local police were simply grabbed from the police station by heavily armed Gulf Cartel operatives in 15 SUVs, beaten, bloodied and disappeared. The ambush was aimed at securing the key trafficking area (the *Frontera Chica*) in the corridor immediately between Tamaulipas and the US border. Order was later restored and some 4,800 residents returned with the construction of a 500 man Army base in the town. Nevertheless, the Army's presence was only temporary with local police ultimately required to regain control. Major gunfights continued between cartels and the military just outside the town (2012–2013) despite the restoration of calm within the town itself by early 2013 (Valley Central 2011; Red Noticias 2013).

## 2.3 Goals of Organized Crime Elements

### 2.3.1 A “Bird’s Eye” View of Law-Enforcement Assassination

In this section, the analysis introduces Table 2.1—Hits and Attempted Hits on Small-Town Police Chiefs and Top Commanders in Chihuahua. The aim of Table 2.1 is to summarize in tabular form a systematic view of the assassination of police chiefs and top commanders in Chihuahua's sixty-three non-metropolitan municipalities (see Methodological Considerations and Appendix). Table 2.1 also presents information on assassination attempts, instances where the entire municipal police force resigned and other rule of law officials assassinated in the municipality. This “bird’s-eye” view of the assassination of local police chiefs and top commanders precedes a more detailed discussion of the specific goals of organized crime elements for employing assassination in the municipalities.

The analysis will now demonstrate how retaliation is but *one* criminal goal pursued by organized crime elements in strategic towns. Table 2.1 shows that in 23 municipalities in Chihuahua (36.5 %) police chiefs or top-commanders were either assassinated ( $n = 25$  persons), kidnapped, still missing ( $n = 1$  persons) or victims of attempted assassination [threatened with death, resigned or fled after ambush] ( $n = 11$  persons). Other specific gains associated with these law-enforcement assassinations include the removal of new and/or neutral police chiefs and commanders, intermittent local government and a broader attack on rule of law personnel for greater freedom for movement of goods. Thus, this section identifies at least four motives for municipal-level law-enforcement assassinations in Chihuahua.

**Table 2.1** Hits and attempted hits on small-town police chiefs and top commanders in Chihuahua

Police chiefs/commanders	Assassinated	AA	AA/flees	Entire police force resigns	Other rule of law officials assassinated
<i>Municipality</i>					
Praxedis G. Guerrero	Y (1st)	Y (3rd)	Y (2nd)	Y	Councilman
Nuevo Casas Grandes	Y (1st/2nd)	Y			Agent State Attorney General's Office (AA)
Ascensión	Y (1st)		Y (2nd)	Y/Y	Police Chief's Bodyguards killed in attack on PC
Ahumada	Y (1st/2nd)			Y	2 Municipal Police
Guadalupe D.B.	Y (1st/2nd)			Y	Mayor, 1 Mun.Pol, 2 Councilmen, 3 City Worker
Meoqui	Y (1st/2nd)			Y	Ex-Councilman, State Police Commander
Guerrero	Y				Councilman (disappears)
Rosales	Y;Y;Y	Y			
Galeana	Y				Federal Police Invest. Officer; Mayor (DT/Flees)
Aldama	Y				3 police officers
Allende	Y				
Guadalupe y Calvo	Y (1st/2nd)			Y	Mayor/Prison Director; 2 Municipal Police
Valle de Zaragoza	Y				Mayor's assistant
Julimes	Y				
Madera	Y				
Gómez-Farías	Y				Public Works, Health Sector functionaries
Batopilas	Y				
Urique	Y				Senior Municipal Official
Gran Morelos		Y	Y	Y	Mayor (AA/Flees)
Camargo		Y			5 Mun. Police, Ex-Mun. Officer, PC Bodyguard
Balleza		Y;Y			Mayor/Mayor's Son; Nephew of PC
Namiquipa			Missing		Mayor/Town Treasurer
Bachíniva			Resigns	Y	City Treasurer Assaulted; 5 Rural Army Killed

*Key* AA Assassination Attempt; *PC* Police Chief; *Mun* Municipal; *Pol* police. Sources in bibliography

### 2.3.2 *Retaliation for Prosecution*

The execution of the police chief can be linked to revenge for prosecution of organized crime in the municipalities of Ascensión, Ciudad Camargo, Villa Ahumada and Namiquipa.<sup>10</sup>

Ascensión lies along highway 2, a key drug transit route for all types of drugs trafficked. It is located in a region of Chihuahua claimed to be contested between the Sinaloa and Juárez cartels (Stratfor 2011).

Ascensión's mayor in September 2010 fired 14 municipal police officers after an angry town mob took justice into their own hands, causing the death of two teenagers who were part of an on-going and unprosecuted local kidnapping ring associated with organized crime elements (El Paso Times 2010c). Subsequently, the new Ascensión police chief Manuel Martínez expanded his new police force by twenty-six officers, began to conduct bi-weekly "trust control" exams on police and caused a seventy percent drop in crime with no kidnappings or homicides. By mid-May 2011, Martínez and his two bodyguards were found dead with signs of torture. They had been abducted minutes after leaving a security meeting with the State Secretary of Public Security (La Policiaca 2011c). The entire 26 man police force resigned in early August 2011 after two more municipal cops were killed by organized crime. Mexican soldiers, state and federal police began to patrol the small rural town and the State Attorney General promised to find the killers (BBC 2011). Thus, in Ascensión, the targeted hit on the police chief appears to be an effort to stymie the capacity of local law enforcement to more effectively prosecute organized crime.

A similar attempt to employ law-enforcement assassination to thwart the more effective prosecution of organized crime was evident in the municipal seat of

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<sup>10</sup> In Namiquipa, Guerrero, Galeana and Guadalupe y Calvo, retaliation for federal prosecution was a central motive in a series of law-enforcement assassinations. Namiquipa, a remote village, became a disputed drug trafficking route between the Sinaloa and Juárez cartels (Ríos 2011b: 21). In Namiquipa, the kidnapped police chief had been missing since 2008, the year the town treasurer was assassinated (7/25/08) (Reuters 2009). The mayor was assassinated on his way to work the following year (7/15/09) (Ríos 2011b: 21) in what Shirk in (Justice in Mexico July 2009: 3) writes was clear retaliation for federal (the Army's) prosecution of organized crime elements. "In a ...targeting of a public official, gunmen assassinated Hector Meixueiro, the mayor of a ranching town in Chihuahua in clear retaliation for last month's [Army] arrest of 25 men suspected of belonging to a cell responsible for carrying out kidnappings, extortion, and killings in the area. Meixueiro was shot dead as he drove to work on the morning of July 14 in his home town of Namiquipa. The killing corresponded with "narco-banners" hung in nearby Ciudad Juárez calling out Meixueiro and the state attorney general for the arrest of 25 cartel members in June. Last year, gunmen killed the Namiquipa treasurer and kidnapped its police chief, who is still missing. Also killed in retaliation for the arrests was local Mormon leader and anti-crime activist Benjamin Le Barón, who was kidnapped from his home in a rural Chihuahua community [Galeana] along with his brother-in-law....According to military authorities, the killings were perpetrated by a cell of either the Juárez or Sinaloa cartel responsible for carrying out kidnappings, extortions, and killings in the surrounding areas" (Justice in Mexico July 2009: 3). In Galeana, the Army detained a Juárez cartel lieutenant and leader of a group of hit-men

Ciudad Camargo. Ciudad Camargo lies along an Eastern Chihuahua drug smuggling route (Guerrero-Gutiérrez 2011). Analysts place the municipal seat and municipality largely within the Juárez cartel sphere of influence (Stratfor 2011).

Three municipal police officers in the small city were murdered on the job, the town's homicide rose by 400 % in a single year and cases of the extortion of local ranchers were on the rise (BBC 2009b). By September 2009, in response to the crime wave, the Camargo mayor purged his police department of thirty municipal officers suspected of corruption; doubled the number of patrol cars in the streets and arrested some 20 suspects accused of a series of armed robberies of local homes and businesses (BBC 2009b). The assassinations followed. The head of the State Police unit based in Camargo survived an assassination attempt but lost a leg as a result of the attack (BBC 2009b). The Camargo police chief's bodyguard and his 13 year old daughter were less fortunate and were gunned down in their car by hit-men wielding AK-47s later that same month after a failed assassination attempt on the chief. It was not until 2 years later (early 2012) that the Unitary Police began to initiate operations in Camargo in response to continued localized violence in the town (Radiza 2012). Multiple state unitary police agents subsequently died in confrontations with organized crime elements in Camargo in 2012 (Redacción 2012).

The town of Villa Ahumada is roughly 80 miles south of Ciudad Juárez and is bisected by the Pan-Am Highway 45 headed north to Texas, making it geographically desirable for drug trafficking (Justice in Mexico News Report February 2009a). Journalist sources place it within the sphere of the Juárez cartel (New York Times 2011b) while scholars contend it is in dispute between the Juárez cartel and the Sinaloa cartel (Dávila 2010: 163–164). Still others note that the small town is a strategic point and is often used as a safe house for drug storage (Puente Libre 2011).

The reasons behind the single-event massacre of the police chief, two police officers and several civilians in the municipal seat of Ahumada municipality (Villa Ahumada, pop. 9,000 [2010]) were complex. The Army had swooped

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(Footnote 10 continued)

who operate in the Juárez valley and are housed in Guadalupe Distrito Bravo for the assassination of the high-level Federal Police intelligence agent José Alfredo Silly Peña (Marines). Silly Peña, along with 20 Federal Police elements, was in charge of the investigation of the kidnapping, extortion and murder of Galeana anti-crime activist Le Baron. Silly Peña was ambushed while leaving a hotel along with 2 other Federal police agents who are still disappeared (Noticias PV 2009). In November 2008, Galeana's police chief was assassinated just after receiving threatening calls from alleged organized crime elements that "the mayor was next" (El Paso Times 2011). The mayor subsequently fled to the US and went into hiding for 6 months. In Guerrero, the police chief was assassinated on a town street just after finishing a course on Public Safety when intercepted by an armed vehicle whose occupants shot at the chief multiple times (Xepl 2008 and Xepl 2009a). In the municipality of Julimes, police commander Villicaya Checo was kidnapped just outside the courtroom by an armed commando, tortured and left in a ditch by the side of a local highway (La Policiaca 2012c). He had just given legal testimony regarding municipal support for a recent police operation (Código Delicias 2012a).

down at the funeral for 19 year old Villa Ahumada gangster (killed in inter-cartel violence) and arrested dozens of individuals 2 days before the killings. The massacre occurred on May 17, 2008 when suspected cartel gunmen strafed a used car with multiple bullets before pumping more than 75 rounds into two men in a truck (Observador Chihuahua 2008; New York Times 2008). Hours later, the gunmen caught up with and assassinated the police chief and two municipal officers who were sitting in their patrol car at a gas station. Eyewitnesses identified the gunman as carrying multiple assault rifles and wearing masks and official forensic analysts found over 50 bullet-casing at the crime scene (Redacción 2008).

The subsequent resignation of the town's remaining twenty police officers immediately deteriorated local security conditions (Justice in Mexico News Report February 2009a). "Many say the town will never be able to afford the cost of a more professional force that could stop future attacks. 'One feels very disillusioned with the government,' said one town resident. 'There is no one who seems to be able to do anything'" (New York Times 2008: 3). Jesús Blanco Cano, the subsequent police chief of Villa Ahumada was also assassinated 3 months later (2008). He was shot to death on his first day on the job. He had been beaten, blindfolded and his hands were tied behind his back. 12 bullet casings were found at the scene. Reporters contended the assassination was in response to a recent government offensive action against drug cartels (AP 2008). Thus one gain for organized crime elements from the retaliatory killings of police chiefs, top commanders and other direct rule of law enforcement personnel is reduced local prosecution.

### ***2.3.3 Other Assassinated Police Chiefs and Commanders: The New, "Neutral" or Otherwise Unsuitable to Organized Crime***

Another positive gain for organized crime elements in assassinating police chiefs is the removal of new individuals who do not conform to criminal goals. A series of sequential attacks on police chiefs, commanders and state law enforcement officials in Nuevo Casas Grandes, at very least, caused temporary damage to the local government, in so far as new personnel had to be sequentially replaced. The first assassination of the police chief in Meoqui illustrates how DTOs will send a message that even turning a blind eye (by claiming neutrality toward criminal gangs) is unacceptable.

Nuevo Casas Grandes (seat of the municipality) is located on Chihuahua Highway 10 on-route to Ciudad Juárez. The 2008 fire-bombing of the police chief's home and his assassination while fighting the fire by presumed hit-men was preceded by several death threats to the chief, according to the mayor. These came after the chief decided to testify before a federal court regarding

a women who ran a local safe-house for narcotics in the town (El Heraldo de Chihuahua 2008a). According to the mayor, although it is not the task of the municipality to combat narco-trafficking, the municipality had suffered from multiple car robberies and “we attend to crimes that do not pertain to us [by jurisdiction] but they are cases we encounter in the street” (El Heraldo de Chihuahua 2008a).

This “revenge for prosecution” law-enforcement killing was immediately followed by an assassination attempt four months later however, when the subsequent Nuevo Casas Grandes police chief and his sub-director were ambushed in their vehicle on their way home and nearly died when armed men opened fire on them (La Jornada 2008). They were rushed to a U.S. hospital in El Paso for treatment. U.S. hospital officials placed the medical facility on a two-week security lock-down and later sought to charge the Mexican government for related costs in a similar incident (KFox 14 News 2008).

Another assassination attempt on law enforcement in Nuevo Casas Grandes took place in late 2009 when an armed commando attacked the installations of the AEI [Agencia Estatal de Investigaciones] of the State Attorney General’s Office located in the town (El Universal 2009b) by throwing a grenade inside the building and firing upon it. Finally, subsequent Nuevo Casas Grandes transit police director and ex-police chief of the municipality Jose Luis Padilla Arías’s house was shot up in late 2012 by presumed organized crime elements but the director received no protection and was not re-located (NotiMex 2012). The State Attorney General’s office stated that the director’s subsequent kidnapping and execution was organized crime related, as an armed commando of multiple vehicles stormed police headquarters grabbed Padilla Arias in front of his fellow officers. As these police officers were forced onto the ground by heavily armed gunmen, they stated that they were therefore unable to act to protect the director (Proceso 2012c; El Universal 2012). Padilla Arias was reported to have asked his kidnappers: “Why are you abducting me?” to which they allegedly responded with a vulgar remark in front of the station’s security cameras (La Policiaca 2012d).

In the municipal seat of Meoqui (located along Highway 45D, south-east of Chihuahua City), the assassination of the new police chief Hermila García Quiñones was clearly a targeted execution aimed at eliminating a “neutral” official (pop. 22,574 [2010]). Gunmen simply shot up her SUV while she was on her way to work a month after taking the job (UPI 2010). García Quiñones was the first of two assassinated female police chiefs. A new cohort of women police chiefs took on the job as part of an experiment to remain neutral in the face of drug-cartels and to have police departments do more social work and regain people’s trust.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> García Quiñones was part of the first wave of female officers in Chihuahua along with Guadalupe Distrito Bravos police chief Erika Gándara (disappeared 12/28/10), Praxedis G. Guerrero police chief Marisol Valles García (fled to US after death threats, 3/1/11), Veronica Ríos Ontiveros (El Vegel, Balleza municipality) and Olga Herrera Castillo (Villa Luz, Balleza municipality). As of 2012, there were no reports of the assassination of either Veronica Ríos Ontiveros or Olga Herrera Castillo.

Quiñones was a former lawyer with the State Attorney General's Office with limited policing experience when she took over but nobody else wanted the job. She refused to carry a gun or travel with bodyguards (El Paso Times 2010). The Meoqui mayor insisted that she had no enemies and had not received any death threats but the Meoqui municipal secretary told reporters (evasively) that nobody wanted the job because "things here are very hot" [in relationship to organized crime] (Ciudad Capital 2011). According to Stratfor analyst Burton (in Otis 2011: 2), Quiñones:

may not have done anything to trigger her death ... Cartels are constantly battling for control of border routes to ship crystal meth, marijuana and cocaine to the United States, and bring guns, cars and cash back. In the shifting territory, someone may simply have decided that a highly educated lawyer would get in the way. The nature of the cartel business is such that you are going to play by their rules or you don't play. You quit, resign or get killed.

Subsequent acting Meoqui police chief José Guadalupe Álvarez Roelo was also assassinated. The acting chief was killed as he got into his car after shopping at a local supermarket (La Policiaca 2012e; Tiempo Digital 2012). This targeted hit marked the tenth law enforcement killing in the municipality within two years (Código Delicias 2012b).

In Aldama (pop. 18,642 [2010]), there was also a sequential elimination of municipal police personnel. The 2008 assassination of the police chief Sostenes Gómez Arzate was attributed officially to organized crime elements (El Universal 2008). This assassination was followed by the execution of a former senior police official 3 years later (2011) (National Association of Former Border Patrol Officers (M3 Report) 2011). In 2012, multiple telephone death threats against the entire police force culminated in the assassination of three agents, including the police chief's son—also a municipal policeman (La Policiaca 2012a).<sup>12</sup>

### 2.3.4 *Intermittent Local Governance*

There were also some serious instances where selected law-enforcement assassination attempts went beyond retaliation and the attempt to eliminate new, neutral or other local police chiefs and top commanders unsuitable to organized crime elements. In Gran Morelos and Jicamorchí, fragmented cartels were also able (briefly) to take-over the town's entire political structure and, in Gran Morelos, to temporarily "place" a police chief in office.

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<sup>12</sup> In Aldama, the police chief's son was attacked and pulled out of his vehicle on the highway by an armed commando, then tortured, executed with his hands bound and dumped. The assassins left his wallet, cell phone and personal papers in his patrol vehicle untouched (La Policiaca 2010a). In Batopilas and Gómez-Farías, police chiefs were ambushed on highways (Al Contacto 2011; Xepel 2009b).

The hamlet and seat of Gran Morelos municipality (San Nicolás de Carretas, pop. 725 [2010]) is located along Highway 16D, south-west of Chihuahua city. It is a town where La Línea (the Juárez cartel enforcer wing) has been allegedly active (El Economista 2011). Fragmented cartels finally managed to seriously wound the PRI mayor (Ricardo Solís Manríquez) and eventually caused him to flee the town for the US to ask for asylum (La Jornada 2011b) after two assassination attempts and a series of death threats. Two weeks later, gunmen simply stormed Gran Morelos, shot up the town, and ordered all officials to leave. Municipal facilities were closed, the police chief and other town officials including the interim mayor rapidly left, leaving the town in the hands of cartel gunmen (MexicoRojo 2011b).

Having gained (temporary) political control over Gran Morelos, organized crime elements apparently installed a new police chief in line with their goals. Nevertheless, this new police chief along with a Gran Morelos police officer and the police chief of the neighboring municipality of Dr. Belisario Domínguez were subsequently detained by the Army for alleged ties to DTOs. This detention occurred while the chiefs were accompanying Raul Hernandez Ortega (“El Bolas”), a leader of La Línea gang in southern Chihuahua at a local dance hall (El Diario Mexico 2011). After the arrest of the allegedly corrupt Gran Morelos police chief, the previous mayor who fled to the U.S.—mayor Ricardo Solís Manríquez—returned the next day under heavy Army protection (La Red Noticias 2011). The Gran Morelos mayor then replaced the entire twelve-man police force.

Organized crime elements then reverted back to the pattern of assassinating or attempting to assassinate new police chiefs presumably not to the liking of their criminal organizations. After a month on the job, the next Gran Morelos police chief barely survived an armed ambush on his vehicle. His escort and secretary, both traveling in a nearby vehicle, perished in the assassination attempt on the chief (Al Día Sonora 2011). [For a similar story in the village of Jicamorchi, see Footnote.<sup>13</sup>]

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<sup>13</sup> Armed cartel men also stormed the town, closed the streets, burned and/or looted eight houses including the doctor’s and beat up a teacher in the village of Jicamorchi (pop. 374 [2010]), in the hills in Uruachi municipality. This action caused 110 families to flee to nearby mountains and the town was left, temporarily, in the hands of cartel men (Código Delicias 2011a, b). By September 2011, the remaining town’s people had begun to arm themselves to confront cartel assassins that returned to surround the community. The PAN mayor Aldo Alejandro Campos said that the council only had 10 policemen but there were more than 60 armed men who fired at the police and then took refuge in forest outside of town (La Jornada 2011d). He also noted that the presence of soldiers and police investigators had not put the situation under control (Fox News Latino 2011) and stated: “These criminal groups have besieged us. If federal and state governments do not respond, people are willing to take some action on their own, because here there are left-over weapons. I do not want to do what is illegal, but if we have no other choice, we will”. A month later, the medical clinic and the schools remained closed and many families still refused to return. Some Jicamorachi residents also filed a complaint for property damage with legal authorities in Cuauhtémoc but omitted their names out of fear (Código Delicias 2011a). La Jornada (2011d) reported evidence of the emergence of rival DTOs (Juárez versus Sinaloa) in the town.

### ***2.3.5 A Broader Attack on Rule of Law Personnel for Greater Freedom for Movement of Goods***

The Juárez Valley of Chihuahua is a stretch of border fifty miles east of Ciudad Juárez which lies along a major drug-smuggling highway. A broader attack on the rule of law by organized crime elements is evident in certain strategic towns located along the Juárez Valley. Organized crime elements there have sought, and been able, to minimize interference with their operations by simply emptying the towns (AP 2010). In the small border town of El Porvenir, located near Fort Hancock, Texas along US Highway 10, cartels were very clear about this process leaving notes which said, “You have just a few hours to get out” (AP 2010). The local police all fled.

Assassinations by organized crime elements in such border towns targeted a broad spectrum of town officials who got involved in the enforcement of the rule of law before they were murdered. Guadalupe, for example, is the municipal seat of Guadalupe Distrito Bravos, located just east of Ciudad Juárez. The town is a significant drug-trafficking transport and storage site, according to Mexico’s Organized Crime Unit of the National Attorney General’s Office—SIEDO (PGR 2012).

A series of killings of local officials had the effect of virtually crippling the local rule of law. The murders began in 2009 with the assassination of Guadalupe’s police chief (1/20/09) and the (temporary) mass resignation of the entire municipal police force. This was followed by the surprise killing of two female council members (2/09) who had allegedly denounced the activities of organized crime (El Mexicano 2010). The first councilwoman was assassinated at her business and the second, 2 days later, in her auto by hired guns, according to official forensics. A municipal policeman was subsequently murdered (6/09) (El Mexicano 2010).

The arrival of 2,000 federal troops by early 2010 to combat the drug gangs in nearby Ciudad Juárez caused a surge in violence in Guadalupe. Houses and shops were destroyed by arson, and threats by organized crime elements forced out residents by March. Guadalupe’s law enforcement was affected, meanwhile, as its police force was further reduced from 40 to 4 officers by the June 19, 2010 assassination of PRI Mayor Manuel Lara Rodríguez. DTOs subsequently threatened to kill residents who might refuse to emigrate from the town (La Jornada 2011a).

Fragmented cartels also subsequently “disappeared” the next Guadalupe Distrito Bravos police chief (a woman) (12/23/10) with the family reporting that her body was later found (Brewer 2012). Her uncle (the new mayor) had appointed her and warned her to keep a low profile but she appeared in the press posing with a semiautomatic rifle, talking openly about the importance of her new job. “I am the only police in this town, the authority”, she told reporters (New York Times 2011a: 3). The next government victims executed were three city workers sweeping the city plaza (2/22/11); one of whom was the nephew of the murdered mayor. There were reportedly no police, no fire department, and no social services left in the town by early 2011. The local municipal population had been reduced by 40 %

(from 2005 to 2010) (Tiempo Digital 2011; Ríos 2011b: 16). By 2012, there were *simply no municipal police left* in Guadalupe Distrito Bravo. Soldiers and federal police intermittently provided security at random checkpoints on the highways that connect the town and other farming towns with Ciudad Juárez (AP 2011b).

A similar pattern of the weakening of the local rule of law occurred in nearby Praxedis G. Guerrero (pop. 2,128 [2010]), a border municipality that lies further east of Ciudad Juárez. The assassinations began, as in Guadalupe Distrito Bravo, with the murder of the police chief. Three days after assuming the post in 2009, the new police chief in the municipal seat was decapitated. Grabbed by heavily armed men along with seven police officers and several civilians, the chief's severed head was then dumped in an ice box in front of the police station. It was accompanied by a threatening message aimed at a rival criminal gang (Latin American Herald Tribune 2009). The subsequent Praxedis G. Guerrero police chief, criminology student Marisol García Valles age 20, fled to the US after 5 months on the job (El Pueblo Chihuahua 2011b). García Valles stated that she had received repeated death threats from organized crime elements for attempting to remain neutral in the face of competing cartels (El Paso Times 2011).

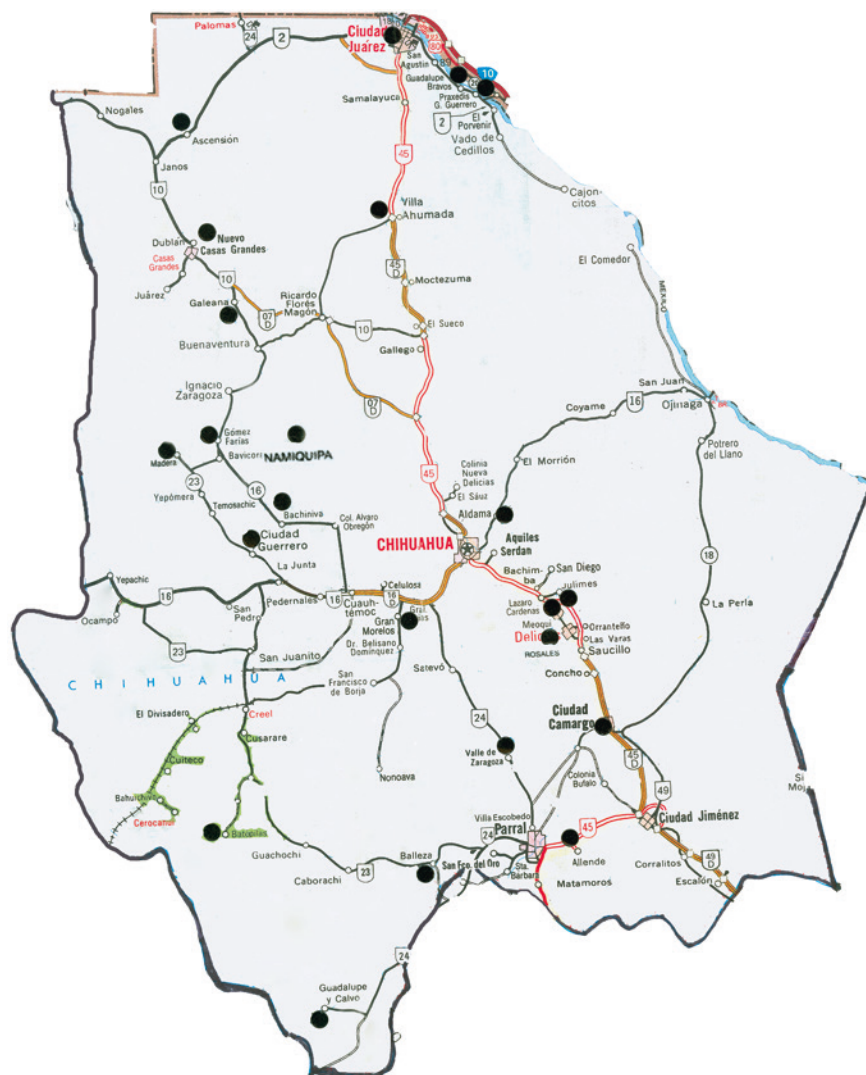
The attempted assassination of the third Praxedis police chief occurred on June 21, 2011 when armed men stormed the house of Rosario Rosales at dawn, seriously wounding her, her husband and their son (Excelsior 2011a; El Pueblo Chihuahua 2011c). The last agent of the State Attorney General's Office had left the municipalities of Praxedis G. Guerrero and Guadalupe Distrito Bravos without access to judicial institutions by 2011 (El Pueblo Chihuahua 2011a). Official census figures by mid-2010 listed 61 % of the 3,616 homes in Praxedis G. Guerrero as uninhabited (AP 2011a). Local capacity to uphold even a semblance of the rule of law was significantly diminished with the elimination of judicial institutions and repeated assassinations, death threats and attempted assassinations on police chiefs. By mid-2012, the town of Praxedis G. Guerrero had no armed police and was being served by six unarmed civilians (Proceso 2012b).

Organized crime elements in these selected towns were clearly attempting to gain territorial (and possible political) control over specific Mexican border communities by hollowing out the rule of law in these towns. This broader attack on the rule of law combined with the attempt to empty small towns of its residents is a phenomenon that could be understood as a specific criminal insurgency in some selected strategic communities that lie along key drug trafficking corridors (Sullivan and Elkus 2008: 2–6).

## 2.4 Law-Enforcement Assassinations in Strategic Towns

### 2.4.1 Highway Routes Where Assassinations Occur

The analysis will now present a detailed map of the towns along the highway routes where the assassinations of municipal police chiefs and top-commanders in Chihuahua occurred. Map 2.3—Highway Routes and the Assassinations of Police



**Map 2.3** Highways routes and assassinations of police chiefs and top-commanders in Chihuahua

Chiefs and Top-Commanders in Chihuahua—is focused on the state of Chihuahua alone. The map delineates the state’s boundaries from the neighboring states of Sonora (to the west), Coahuila (to the east), Durango and Sinaloa (to the south and south-west) and shows the state’s major and minor state highways.

Map 2.3 illustrates that local police chiefs and top commanders are indeed being assassinated in strategic towns and cities that lie along the major Chihuahua

state highways. These highways represent drug-smuggling routes which cross in and out of separate territories (*plaza* designations) contested by fragmented cartels.

Map 2.3 presents a close highway mapping of the pattern of law-enforcement assassinations in Chihuahua. It strongly suggests that at each of the nodules of the main South-North Chihuahua highways from Durango to Ciudad Juárez (49, 45, 45D), police chiefs and top commanders have been victims of assassination or assassination attempts (45-Allende, 45D-Ciudad Camargo, 45D-Rosales, 45D-Meoqui, 45D-Julimes, 16-45-Aldama, 45D/45-Villa Ahumada). A similar pattern is evident along each of the lesser Chihuahua highways which run South to North from Sinaloa (24-Guadalupe y Calvo, 23-Batopilas/Bahuichivo, Balleza, 23/24, Valle de Zaragoza, 24) and (16D-Gran Morelos, 16-Bachíniva, 16-Guerrero, 23-Madera, 16-Gomez Farías, 15/10 Namiquipa, 10-Galeana, 10-Nuevo Casas Grandes and 2-Ascensión) and which run northward to and around Ciudad Juárez (2-Guadalupe Distrito Bravos, Praxedis G. Guerrero).

Similarly, the (relative) absence of law-enforcement assassination in towns along Federal Highway 45 linking Chihuahua City to Ciudad Juárez can be attributed to the frequent, routine inspections and anti-assault patrolling of federal police. This is a component of Operation Conjunto Chihuahua (PGR-Tercer Informe 2009: 30, 37; PGR-Cuarto Informe 2010: 22, 34; PGR-Quinto Informe 2011: 26).

Map 2.3 presents a pattern of killings which strongly suggests that law-enforcement assassinations are dosed out in selected towns; a practice paralleled in political assassinations related to electoral-political disputes (Rojas-Alba 1994: 31). While not every small city and town that borders these highways is subject to law-enforcement assassination, those located at highway cross-roads and along the US-Mexican border are more vulnerable to it as drug trafficking route structures and the territories (*plazas*) shift in the face of intermittent government crackdowns (Dell 2011). The specific gains derived from assassinating the police chiefs and top-level commanders in each of these towns is idiosyncratic, and depends upon the calculus of organized crime elements within each community, as now discussed below.

### ***2.4.2 Influencing the Selection of Police Chiefs/Mass Police Resignations***

The killings of top level municipal police officials in Chihuahua suggests that while retaliation for prosecution remains a very salient motive for law-enforcement assassination (White 2008: 4; Ríos 2011b: 21; Dell 2011), other pay-offs include neutralizing police personnel, intermittent local governance and greater freedom for movement of goods.

The relative “success” of the assassination of police chiefs and commanders will likely to continue to motivate some organized crime elements to use “bullets” in certain towns along strategic drug-trafficking routes in Chihuahua. There existed seven municipalities (10 % of the state) where there were, simply, no police chiefs left by late 2012. In Ascensión, Galeana, Guadalupe Distrito Bravos,

Praxedis G. Guerrero, Meoqui, Bocoyna and Namiquipa, the municipal population was being attended to by intermittent brigades of the Unitary Police, and, in Guadalupe Distrito Bravo, by social workers (El Herald de Chihuahua 2011). The total elimination of 10 % of Chihuahua's municipal police chiefs who do not conform to organized criminal goals represents one gain from the use of law-enforcement assassination by organized crime elements.

Another gain from repeated assassination and assassination attempts is the potential capacity to influence and/or sustain the choice of police chiefs. In Gran Morelos, Aldama and Meoqui, there was significant turn-over in top law enforcement personnel due to assassinations (Excelsior 2011c; El Universal 2008; UPI 2010).

More subtly, the assassination of "neutral" police chiefs can have an indirect damaging effect. The repeated, targeted assassination of police chiefs dissuaded new applicants from taking the job and/or, at best, required the government to repeatedly search and hire new applicants for the post in Meoqui, Praxedis G. Guerrero, Guadalupe Distrito Bravo and Rosales. In Rosales, a total of three police chiefs and commanders were assassinated and one police chief survived an assassination attempt over the course of a single year alone (2012).

The murders also had a "positive" effect for organized crime elements in the municipalities of Ascensión and Ciudad Camargo where police chiefs who had effectively reduced crime (by 70 % in Ascensión) were assassinated, thereby ending (if only temporarily) corresponding law enforcement (La Policiaca 2011d). In Guadalupe y Calvo, the first assassination attempt on the police chief had a "positive" effect for drug-trafficking cartels in the municipality in reducing rule of law personnel. Just after a meeting with President Calderon, the Guadalupe y Calvo mayor and his bodyguard were killed and the chief gravely wounded in a vehicular ambush attack on the highway (El Economista 2010). Ríos (2011a: 21) understands this assassination/assassination attempt as a "signal" to the federal government that prosecution of organized crime in the municipality would not be tolerated. The assassination of the next Guadalupe y Calvo police chief was combined with the installation of 200 "narco-blockades" by cartel operatives in the municipality who threatened authorities (Noticias de Chihuahua 2012). This led to the resignation of the next mayor, the entire police force and the subsequent police chief (El Sol de Parral 2012; La Parada 2012; La Jornada 2012b).

Indeed, in a total of eight municipalities in Chihuahua (13 %), the entire police force resigned en masse at least once following the assassination or assassination attempt on the police chief (Table 2.1).

### ***2.4.3 Broader Attacks on Rule of Law Enforcement for the Movement of Goods***

In municipalities located on strategic drug-trafficking corridors on the U.S.-Mexican border, the assassinations of a series of law-enforcement officials involved in the enforcement of the rule of law before their murder reduced local governmental

capacity and facilitated the ability to move goods without interference. After the assassination of the police chief, the next targeted hit in the municipality of Guadalupe Distrito Bravo was on the municipal council tax collector; an assassination followed up 4 days later with the murder of the municipal council health officer (in charge of drug crimes) (El Mexicano 2010). These town officials were killed over a year before the PRI mayor and then the next chief (the last remaining police officer) were assassinated.

This town lies precisely along the most direct port of entry into the US drug market (Dell 2011; Ríos 2011b: 13) and most of the towns where police chiefs and top commanders were assassinated are located along Chihuahua's strategic drug-smuggling corridors (Guerrero-Gutiérrez 2011: 39). The "emptying" of towns near Ciudad Juárez, instances of municipalities where the entire police forces quit en masse and/or where all local government officials leave the town in the hands of cartel gunmen represent concerted efforts by organized crime elements to gain control over specific communities (Sullivan and Elkus 2008).

Nevertheless, while these instances of the municipal breakdown of the rule of law are severe, they are also often intermittent. Federal forces have (re-)intervened to (re-)establish order in the town, or around the highways associated with certain "hot spots" (Gran Morelos, Guadalupe Distrito Bravo). The continued capacity of federal forces to reassume (if only temporarily) government control over such contested municipalities suggests that the broader contention that assassination is a criminal insurgency strategy aimed at severing the regulatory arm of the state (Sullivan and Elkus 2008: 7) must be nuanced and contextualized within a given municipality and specific time period.

Finally, in five of the six municipalities where mayors were assassinated in Chihuahua, the police chief was also assassinated and in the sixth (Balleza), the chief survived multiple assassination attempts. In Chihuahua then, where mayors are assassinated, a closer look suggests that the police chiefs was nearly always also assassinated. As Grayson and Logan note, Mexican cartels are eager to act with impunity and will seek the "failure of the rule of law", especially in those areas along key routes for the smuggling of drugs (Proceso 2012a).

#### ***2.4.4 Law-Enforcement Assassinations, Reducing Police Presence and Halting of the Rule of Law in Other Northern Tier States***

The killing of police chiefs, top-level commanders and other law enforcement can directly halt, even if only temporarily, the on-going enforcement of the rule of law. In the state of Durango, there was also a similar initial pattern as in Chihuahua of a string of fifty assassinations in 2008 of law enforcement personnel (police chiefs, municipal police, state police, federal drug-crime investigators (AFI), and investigators from the state attorney general's office) (El Siglo de Durango 2009).

This halting of the on-going enforcement of the rule of law also helps explain why it is possible to begin to generalize a pattern of municipal police chief and top-level commander killings to municipalities outside the state of Chihuahua. There were also instances of small-towns in Nuevo León and Tamaulipas where the municipal police chief was also assassinated, and/or police stations violently attacked and then the entire local police force quit, leaving the towns at least temporarily without any police (General Terán, Los Ramones and Los Aldama [Nuevo León]) (Houston Chronicle 2011; El Universal 2010b).

In Hidalgo (Tamaulipas), other intimidation tactics that preceded the elimination of key rule of law enforcement personnel at the municipal level included throwing grenades at the police station (2010). This violent act calcified one policeman and led to a mass resignation of the local police force and virtually no public security in the municipality for over a year until the arrival of the Army (El Norte 2011). The March 2010 attack on the Hidalgo police station was followed by the assassination of the police chief (2010) and then the mayor (2010) by suspected organized crime elements (Milenio 2010b, c, d).

#### ***2.4.5 Law-Enforcement Assassinations, Attacks on Police Stations in Strategic Small-Towns and Message Sending in Other Northern Tier States***

Small town police chiefs and commanders in other Northern Tier states were also among those assassinated in strategic towns which lie along the Sinaloa, Gulf and Zeta cartel drug-smuggling corridors (for example, Poanas [Durango] (Highway 45) (Guerrero-Gutiérrez 2011: 32–33). In Tamaulipas and Nuevo León, a series of assassinations of small-town police chiefs and top-level commanders also took place in strategic towns (Ciudad Mante, Linares, General Terán, Sabinas Hidalgo) located along Highway 85. This highway is a strategic *Zeta* drug trafficking route which runs north from Tamaulipas through the state of Nuevo León to the border city of Nuevo Laredo (Guerrero-Gutiérrez 2011: 33; Stratfor 2012).

In General Terán (Nuevo León), the police station was deserted with the windows broken, door ajar and with the walls perforated with bullet holes and punctured by grenade attacks on January 28, 2011. The police chief and a fellow police officer had been abducted from the station the day before and their bodies were found mutilated by the highway along with a “narco-message” from the Gulf Cartel stating it was “cleaning the area of *Zetas*” (Periodismo de Investigación 2011). The municipal palace had also been attacked, the mayor was nowhere to be found, all schools and most businesses were closed.

In the state of San Luis Potosí, the surge in organized crime related violence did not begin until 2010 (La Policiaca 2012c). Subsequently, there were four successive attacks on police stations within a one week period (Tamasopo, Ébano, Tamuín, San Vicente). Grenades were thrown at the Tamasopo and Ébano stations and in Tamuín,

390 high caliber bullets were shot with 262 impacting the exterior of the building (MexicoRojo 2011a). Although there were no law enforcement casualties reported, several semi-nude, decapitated mutilated bodies were dumped at two police stations (Ébano, Tamuín) as a message to local law enforcement (La Policiaca 2011a).

#### ***2.4.6 The Removal of New, Neutral and/or Police Chiefs and Commanders Unsuitable to Organized Crime/Broader Attacks on Rule of Law Enforcement for the Movement of Goods in Other Northern Tier States***

Also generalizable outside the state of Chihuahua are cases of the strategic elimination of “new” police chiefs and commanders and their “replacement” (sometimes temporarily) with those linked as informants of drug-cartels. In Sabinas Hidalgo, Tamaulipas (an alleged *Zeta* safe house), following the assassination of the police chief, the subsequent police chief and eight officers were detained as alleged *Zeta* informants tied to the murder of two federal police (El Porvenir 2006; The Monitor 2011). In Saltillo (Coahuila), a police commander who had passed department confidence tests was assassinated along with his 11 year old son while driving through a neighborhood in the state capital. He was later found to be on the *Zeta* payroll according to a SIEDO investigation (Proceso 2012).

A similarity is illustrated by the emptying (Ríos 2011a: 18) and then “re-taking” by federal forces of the border town of Ciudad Mier, Tamaulipas located at the US border in the contested *Zeta* vs. Gulf “*Frontera Chica*” drug corridor (Guerrero-Gutiérrez 2011: 33). This represents a parallel to the emptying of strategic towns in Chihuahua near Ciudad Juárez to allow for greater freedom of movement of goods.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The second chapter of this book presented a short historical introduction of how “opportunity” was present for the assassination of police chiefs and commanders in Northern Tier Mexico in terms of discontinuous law enforcement. It was argued that intermittent Army/federal police presence combined with insufficient protection of officials provided opportunity for law-enforcement assassination to occur. Efforts to reduce this “opportunity” through institutional reforms to improve local policing conditions (the creation of a unitary police) while a potentially positive step, were slowed by lack of municipal implementation capacity (La Jornada 2011c; En Línea Directa 2013). By mid-2012, a few “success” stories of a significant drop in crime were being reported in certain municipalities as the result of such police reforms (Guadalupe, Nuevo

León) (Reuters 2012). After 5 years without a single local policeman in Villa Ahumada, Chihuahua (the town saw intermittent policing by federal and state forces, 2008–2012), the subsequent police chief claimed optimistically that “the worst is over” and noted that his new department was about to receive high-caliber arms (Milenio 2013c).

Yet, in other Northern Tier municipalities (San Francisco de Conchos, Guadalupe Distrito Bravo, Guadalupe y Calvo, Jiménez, Guachochi [Chihuahua], Ciudad Victoria, [Tamaulipas]), entire police forces continued to resign after organized crime elements threatened to kill them leaving their local populations at least temporarily without public security personnel (Proceso 2012, In Sight Crime 2012; La Policiaca 2011f; Excelsior 2013). The state of Chihuahua, by early 2013, was one of the slowest in the nation to implement the new certification measures required to move toward the unitary police system with only 25 % of the police force tested under the new “confidence tests”, according to SNSP (Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública) (Norte Digital 2013).

This chapter also addressed the issue of motivation for law-enforcement assassination. This was done by tracing out a detailed systematic of the assassination of small-town police chiefs and top-level commanders in Chihuahua to study the diverse strategic motives of organized crime elements who employ assassination as a tactic. It was found that selective, often sequential, hits by cartels on chiefs and top local commanders in towns along key drug-trafficking corridors serve *not only* as retaliation for federal, state and local prosecution but also exploit several other strategic goals. Such “pay-offs” from the assassination of police chiefs and commanders can also include, depending upon the town, the attempt to neutralize police chiefs, to seed corrupt police chiefs, to achieve intermittent local governance, and/or to ensure greater freedom for movement of goods.

The geographical mapping of the assassination of top level municipal police officials in this chapter also revealed a related aspect of motivation. The particular geography of such murders is not random but follows a pattern along drug-smuggling routes. Police chiefs and commanders have been victims of assassination or assassination attempts at each of the nodules of the main South-North Chihuahua highways from Durango to Ciudad Juárez and along each of the lesser Chihuahua highways which run South to North from Sinaloa.

The mapping of the assassination of police chiefs and top-commanders also demonstrates how each town which lies along a drug-smuggling route possesses a unique set of conditions for the particular strategic goals of organized crime elements. In the strategic U.S.-Mexican border town of Praxedis G. Guerrero, a series of three police chiefs were assassinated, fled death threats or suffered assassination attempts because they refused to take sides between competing cartels. In Valle de Zaragoza, a town along Chihuahua Highway 24 and its tributaries known as drug-trafficking routes used by organized crime elements according to the State of Chihuahua’s Prosecutor’s Office, two of three consecutive police chiefs were under criminal investigation (El Diario Digital 2012). The only police chief *not* under criminal investigation was assassinated one month after taking the job (La

Jornada 2012a).<sup>14</sup> In the town of Villa Ahumada (Chihuahua) (a safe house for drug storage located along strategic highway 45), the series of assassinations of the police chiefs (5/31/08 and 8/22/08) occurred within the context of likely retaliation for federal prosecution (Puente Libre 2011).

Thus, while all of these towns share the common characteristic of being located along a key drug-smuggling corridor, the concrete motives for assassinating the police chief or top-commander varied by town.

This is why municipal police chiefs and top-level commanders were not killed in every town along these trafficking routes. As aforementioned in the introduction, along major portions of the drug-smuggling corridor of Highway 1 along the Baja California Sur Peninsula (Guerrero Negros to Los Cabos), there was evidence of bribery and/or the placement of local corrupt police chiefs (Zeta Reportaje 2009). Federal prosecutors also charged multiple police chiefs and police as working for the organized crime (often specified as the *Zetas*) in multiple municipalities in Tamaulipas (San Fernando, Jiménez, Sota la Marina, Valle Hermoso) (Observador Global 2011; Proceso 2010; El Universal 2009a; La Policiaca 2011e).

The calculus to use bullets over bribes in a strategic town depends upon the specific circumstances of organized crime elements within that town. Intermittent federal control and lack of rigorous prosecution of police assassins are key institutional elements which increase target access to police personnel. A calculus to use lethal force is, however, very importantly facilitated by the rise in the armed power of organized crime over local police.

Goodman and Marizo (2010: 163) note that while the flow of firearms and ammunition to organized crime groups in Mexico does not on its own “cause violence, it can contribute to a group’s decision to attack a rival [and can] increase the lethality of such an attack... [or] pose a serious challenge to the government’s ability to curb such extreme violence”. The opportunity of assassins to get close to targets to commit law-enforcement assassination, their calculation of the relative pay-off of a specific assassination in a given town and the access to weaponry are all factors influenced by a complex, inter-related system of institutional processes. Thus, a specific lethal attack on a given police chief or commander in a particular town is not random. It is shaped both by the unique strategic circumstances of that town for criminal goals (operational considerations) as well as the opportunities that facilitate the choice of lethal force (tactical considerations). The next chapter, while closely focusing on the

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<sup>14</sup> The Chihuahua State Attorney General’s Office reported the incidence of significant organized crime related drug-trafficking and homicides along the Rosales-Satévo spur which feeds into Highway 24 (Valle de Zaragoza to Chihuahua) near Satévo (El Diario Digital 2012). In Valle de Zaragoza, police chief Carlos Rodolfo Güereque Hernández was the second of three consecutive chiefs in 2012 and the only one assassinated. The first chief, Carlos Miguel Vega Cazares, was tried and convicted for 8 years and 6 months for the abuse of authority and homicide of a civilian (El Monitor de Parral 2013). After the assassination of Güereque Hernández, the next Valle de Zaragoza police chief—Jorge Arturo Morales (took office 5/25/12)—fell under investigation by the PGR and State Attorney General’s Office. This is because the police chief accepted as a police officer an individual who had been detained and investigated for rape, marijuana trafficking and illegal border crossing on three different occasions by U.S. Marshalls (Nota Roja 2013).

tactical advantage of organized crime elements, also addresses the larger dynamic institutional processes in which such lethal calculations are embedded.

### *Methodological Considerations*

The definition used by this author and the Office of the Mexican presidency in defining an assassination or execution as allegedly caused by organized crime, includes meeting at least two of six specific criteria resulting from official investigations into the activities of individuals presumed to be involved in organized crime. As Molzahn et al. (2012: 5) note, “among the relevant characteristics used to identify such homicides are signs of torture, the caliber of the arms used, and other particular characteristics of the modus operandi of Mexican criminal groups, such as wrapping the body with sheets or leaving written messages with the body. The six government criteria for classifying organized crime homicides include:

1. The victim was killed by high caliber firearms.
2. The victim presents signs of torture or severe lesions.
3. The victim was killed where the body was found, or the body was located in a vehicle.
4. The body was wrapped with sheets (*cobijas*), taped, or gagged.
5. The homicide occurred within a penitentiary and involved criminal organizations”.

Special circumstances (criteria 6) also include: victim was abducted prior to assassination (*levantón*), ambushed or chased, an alleged member of a criminal organization, or found with a narco-message (*narcomensaje*) on or near the body. In addition to meeting at least two of these six criterion for an organized-crime related homicide, this book also adds the criteria that the victim was a municipal police chief or top-level commander.

In places with small populations, it is preferable to average murder rates over a number of years since an unusual homicide rate drawn from a single year could “leave a false impression of the general level of violence in a community” (Roth et al. 2011: 177). Since the execution rate rose annually in all of Chihuahua’s 65 municipalities from December 2006 to December 2010, the execution rate per 100,000 inhabitants was calculated taking into account the number of reported executions *and* the population size of the towns during the 4 year period (12/06–12/10) that the SNSP-PGR (2011) data was collected. The formula used was: [municipal population \* 4 years/100,000 = A]; number of executions in the municipality/A = average municipal execution rate per 100,000].

The official INEGI Mexican census is taken every 5 years but there was a significant drop in the population in multiple Northern Chihuahua municipalities after the drug-war began in late 2006. While introducing potential inflation in the execution rate, the 2010 INEGI municipal population figures nevertheless represent a more accurate measure of the actual rural and semi-rural population in Chihuahua in the period analyzed herein. Therefore, the author utilized the 2010 municipal population figures in this study.

Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO), INEGI and Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL) define a “metropolitan” area as a city with over

1 million residents (e.g., Ciudad Juárez) (SEDESOL 2004). Outside of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua is the Mexican state with the third lowest population density (13.7 per square mile) in the nation. There are only six municipalities with populations over 50,000, excluding the capital city (Chihuahua). Hinderink and Titus (2002) simply define the entire state of Chihuahua outside of Ciudad Juárez as containing small and medium-sized communities. Following Hinderink and Titus (2002), this chapter analyzes both municipalities with less than 2,500 residents and small and medium-sized communities with populations of 2,500–50,000 (together, representing 88 % of the state of Chihuahua). Standing police chiefs and top-commanders were also assassinated in Chihuahua City (El Heraldo de Chihuahua 2012) and Ciudad Juárez (El Paso Times 2011) or survived assassination attempts (El Paso Times 2011b—Ciudad Juárez).

This book employs the “rule of five”. This means that for every assassination event, the author compiled a minimum of five different English and/or Spanish-speaking news stories documenting the same assassination before the murder was included in the analysis. This “rule of five” ensures the reliability of the news account by verifying the details of the assassination by multiple different sources. In the English-speaking newspapers, the following sources were used—*Associated Press*, *BBC*, *Arizona Daily Star*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Latin American Herald Tribune*, *Wall Street Journal*, *El Paso Times*, *Reuter*, *UPI* and *National Public Radio*, among others. To further avoid possible bias, exaggeration or mis-reporting, the author also heavily relied on multiple Spanish-speaking Chihuahua regional newspapers, including: (*XEPL*, *El Ágora*, *Tiempo Digital*, *Chihuahua al Instante*, *Código Delicias*, *El Heraldo de Chihuahua*, *La Crónica de Chihuahua*, *Noticias de Chihuahua*, *El Pueblo Chihuahua*, *El Sol de Parral*, *Observador Chihuahua*, *El Diario de Juárez*), Mexican national newspapers and news magazines used included (*La Jornada*, *El Universal*, *Excelsior*, *Milenio*, *Proceso*, *El Economista*), and crime-focused newspapers (*La Policiaca*, *MexicoRojo*), among others. For other Northern Tier states, multiple regional Mexican and US border-state newspapers were also utilized to obtain accounts on small towns and cities not covered by national newspapers. Among others, such Spanish language regional news sources include *Zeta Reportaje* (Baja California), *El Siglo de Durango*, *El Sol de Durango* (Durango), *Al Día Sonora*, *El Imparcial*, *Cajeme Hoy*, *Noroeste* (Sonora), *El Siglo de Torreón* (Coahuila), *El Sol de Tijuana* (Baja California Norte), *Hoy Tamaulipas*, *El Mañana de Tamaulipas* (Nuevo León, Tamaulipas), *Zacatecas Hoy* (Zacatecas) among others.

## Appendix

The Office of the Mexican Presidency released new drug-related homicide data in 2010 on all of Mexico’s municipalities (SNSP-PGR data base 2011). These official statistics on organized-crime related homicides from December 2006 to December 2010 were compiled by the PGR for the National Public Security System (SNSP) under Mexican President Felipe Calderón. The data is

**Table 2.2** Executions in Chihuahua, by municipality (Dec. 2006–Dec. 2010)

Town	Pop.	Total	Per 100,000
Huejotitán	1,049	1	–
Manuel Benavides	1,601	n/d	–
Coyame del Sotol	1,681	n/d	–
El Tule	1,869	n/d	–
Maguarichi	1,921	56	800
Rosario	2,235	n/d	–
Coronado	2,284	4	44
S.F. de Borja	2,290	0	0
Dr. B. Domínguez	2,911	6	54
S.F. de Conchos	2,983	1	9
Matachí	3,104	1	8
<b>Gran Morelos</b>	3,209	14	116
Satevó	3,662	14	100
Santa Isabel	3,937	12	80
La Cruz	3,982	4	80
López	4,025	10	62
Matamoros	4,499	40	235
S.F. del Oro	4,753	7	37
<b>Prax. G. Guerrero</b>	4,799	71	374
<b>Julimes</b>	4,953	5	26
Zaragoza	5,105	12	60
Morris	5,312	26	130
Cusihuirachi	5,414	25	500
<b>Galeana</b>	5,892	9	39
<b>Bachíniva</b>	6,011	14	58
Temósachic	6,211	16	67
<b>Guadalupe DB</b>	6,458	135	540
<b>Ig. Zaragoza</b>	6,934	4	15
Ocampo	7,546	16	53
Riva Palacio	8,012	39	121
Uruachi	8,200	27	84
Morelos	8,343	14	42
<b>Allende</b>	8,409	14	42
Chínipas	8,441	10	30
<b>Gómez Farías</b>	8,624	7	20
Carichí	8,795	13	37
Guazapares	8,998	13	37
Santa Bárbara	10,427	9	22
Casas Grandes	10,587	22	55
Aquiles Serdán	10,688	17	40
Janos	10,953	25	58

(continued)

**Table 2.2** (continued)

Town	Pop.	Total	Per 100,000
<b>Ahumada</b>	11,457	8	20
<b>Batopilas</b>	14,362	15	26
<b>Rosales</b>	16,785	26	43
<b>Balleza</b>	17,672	27	38
<b>Urique</b>	20,386	38	47
<b>Aldama</b>	22,302	18	20
Buenaventura	22,378	14	15
<b>Namiquipa</b>	22,880	22	24
<b>Ascensión</b>	23,975	92	95
Ojinaga	26,304	51	48
Bocoyna	28,766	41	35
<b>Madera</b>	29,611	65	59
Saucillo	32,325	31	16
<b>Guerrero</b>	39,626	39	24
Jiménez	41,265	79	48
<b>Meoqui</b>	43,833	76	45
<b>Camargo</b>	48,748	110	229
Guachochi	49,689	30	15
<b>Guad. y Calvo</b>	53,499	111	53
<b>N. Casas Grandes</b>	59,337	120	52
Hid.del Parral	107,061	187	44
Delicias	137,935	122	22
Cuauhtémoc	154,639	97	16
<b>Chihuahua</b>	819,543	1,348	41
<b>Juárez</b>	1,332,131	6,150	116

Listed in ascending order by 2010 municipal population size. *Sources* INEGI (2010), SNSP-PGR data base (2011). See also: Methodological Considerations. **Bold** Indicates an Assassination of a Police Chief or Top-Level Commander in the Municipality

sub-categorized into four categories (total “drug-related homicides”, “aggressive homicides”, “confrontational homicides” and “executions”). Ríos and Shirk (2011: 6) contend that the SNSP methodology closely correlates with INEGI [*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*] and the newspaper *Reforma*’s drug-related homicide data bases. The SNSP-PGR executions data (2011) does not detail whether the victim of an execution was a state official, a drug-cartel member or a by-stander.

An examination of the execution rate in urban versus rural municipalities in Chihuahua shows that urban areas are, in fact, not significantly more violent than rural areas. The data in Table 2.2 “Executions in Chihuahua, By Municipality (2006–2010)” show that 46 % of Chihuahua’s municipalities (pop. less than 50,000) had execution rates worse than more urban Chihuahua City (41.22 per 100,000, pop. 819,543). Even more to the point, 14.5 % of Chihuahua’s municipalities (pop. less

than 50,000) register execution rates worse than metropolitan Ciudad Juárez (116 per 100,000, pop. 1,332,131). Yet, Ciudad Juárez was the city frequently named by the press as the most violent city in the world (El Paso Times 2010a; BBC 2009a). In many of the smaller Chihuahua's municipalities (pop. less than 4,000), the execution rates in the 2006–2010 period far exceed the United Nation's definition of an epidemic rate of homicides (10 per 100,000), e.g. (Maguarichi, 800 per 100,000; Gran Morelos, 116 per 100,000 Satevó, 100 per 100,000; Santa Isabel and La Cruz, 80 per 100,000, Dr. Belisario Domínguez, 54 per 100,000; Coronado 44 per 100,000).

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