



AP: Advisory Panel on the Question of Latin America

Student Officer: Kerim Williems

Issue: Curbing the power of organized crime in Mexico

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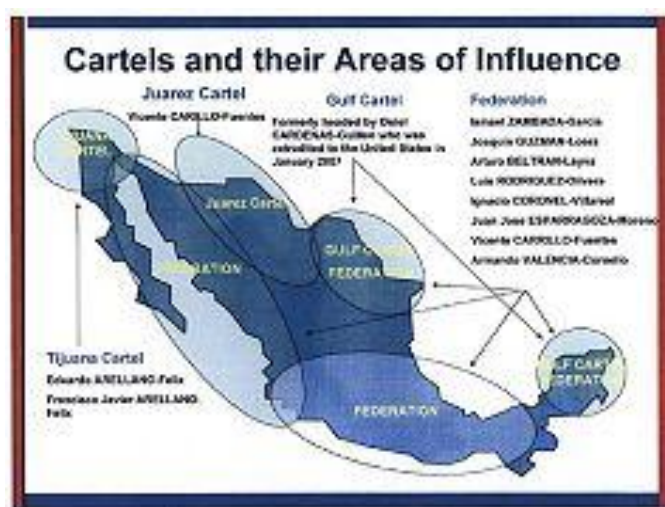
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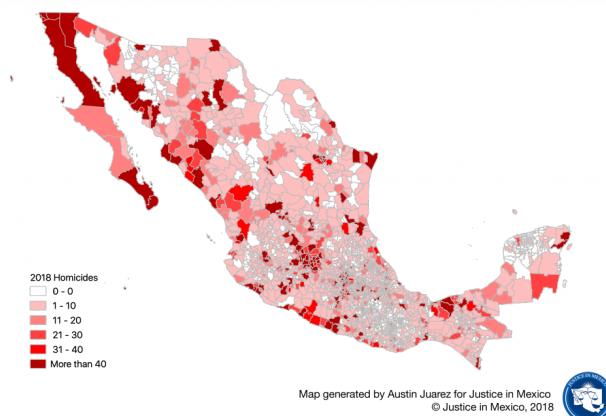
I. Introduction

A drug cartel is an independent criminal organization formed to supply drug trafficking organizations. A strong drug cartel usually controls everything when it comes to the illegal drug industry, has access to the necessary materials and can usually get away with their activities without being noticed by any law enforcement and also makes massive profits off it. Drug Cartels finance their activities through other crimes like human and sex trafficking. The world's strongest cartels are based in Mexico, and these groups threaten the safety of the Mexican people. To make matters worse, the governing bodies responsible for combating crime have failed to do so as corruption, social and economical problems have made it impossible for the Mexican government to curb the power of the cartels. To add more salt to the wounds, Mexico is not doing well in the ongoing global pandemic. With close to three Million cases and 245 thousand casualties,¹ the Member State's Covid policies are not looking hopeful. Mexico is currently seeking stability amongst all these uncertainties, organized crime and the global health crisis does not lay the groundwork for a stable nation. This report will give insight to experts on how to create sustainable solutions to battle organized crime while the nation of Mexico looks to recover from a deadly pandemic.



"Figure 1: The key drug cartels in Mexico as in 2021"

¹ "Mexico Coronavirus Map and Case Count - The New York Times." <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/mexico-covid-cases.html>. Accessed 13 Sep. 2021.



“Figure 2: Heatmap that indicates the homicide rates in Mexico in 2018”

II. Involved Countries and Organizations

United States of America

Mexican drug cartels are an important supply of drugs such as cocaine, heroin, and other illegal narcotics to the United States. Since the start of the drug war in 2006, the US has helped the country tremendously. The US has provided its allies with billions of dollars to fund their counter-terrorism acts, which has helped them track down and arrest key members of some major drug cartels like the leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, Joaquin Guzman.

The Sinaloa Cartel

The Sinaloa Cartel is one of the most powerful drug cartels in the world. The Sinaloa-based syndicate's roots can be traced back to the early 1990s where the cartel was originally a subgroup of a larger syndicate named the Guadalajara Cartel. Ever since its premature 'formation', the Sinaloa Cartel established an illegal drug industry locally that eventually branched out to the entire country. The group is considered the strongest financially among the cartels based in South America; it has an annual revenue ranging between 3-35 billion dollars. Their former leader Joaquin Guzman helped the cartel control every single drug market in Mexico. He is currently spending the rest of his days behind bars, however, this does



not mean the cartel alongside others will stop functioning. The Sinaloa Cartel is still operating to this day, as it still has a leader (Ivan Guzman Salazar²³) and they still carry out their activities.

The Jalisco Cartel New Generation

The Jalisco Cartel New Generation is a drug cartel that was formed by the result of rifts in other cartels. The cartel is known to be one of the bloodiest cartels in Mexico, as their notorious use of violence helped them rise to prominence and gain control of cities like Guadalajara, Jalisco and the state of Michoacan. Their most notable hit came on June 27 2020, as their attack in New Mexico killed 3 people and New Mexico's police chief almost died in the crossfire, getting shot 3 times. The cartel has allies in the city of Tijuana. Tijuana is very important as it is a coastal city and it is close to the California/Mexico border. The US border is strategically very important for the cartels, as they take advantage of the woeful restrictions of Mexico (Mentioned in section III).

Colombia

Drug Cartels use nearby surroundings to their advantage, as Mexico does not always satisfy their needs when it comes to the production of drugs. In the production of some drugs, certain materials that are not found in Mexico are needed. For example, the coca seed. It is a crucial part in the production of cocaine and only in Colombia is one of the few countries that allows the growth of the seeds.⁴ Rafael Guarin told Reuters in an interview that "The Mexicans are the principal buyers of the coca produced in Colombia"⁵. He also implied that Mexican cartels run the "drug industry" in Latin America, that they are responsible for selling, buying, and transferring illicit substances throughout many parts of the continent.

Mexico

Mexico is the country that has suffered the most from organized crime, many people living in the rural areas have chosen to be a part of the cartels. Mexican society is divided into social classes by income and education level, the jarring socioeconomic contrast between the citizens living in the urban areas and in the rural areas is clear. While the living conditions in the urban areas are formidable at best, widespread rural poverty is certainly a relevant issue in Mexico. As the people living in rural areas are relying on day labor for minimum wages for survival. For people living under the poverty line in Mexico, joining the cartels and

² "A never-before-seen photo of Chapo's son, Iván Archivaldo appears." 31 Oct. 2020, <https://en.mundohispanico.com/a-never-before-seen-photo-of-chapos-son-ivan-archivaldo-appears-and-impacts-how-he-looks/>. Accessed 13 Sep. 2021.

³ "Ivan Archivaldo Guzmán Salazar - Biography Mask." 25 Aug. 2021, <https://biographymask.com/ivan-archivaldo-guzman-salazar/>. Accessed 13 Sep. 2021.

⁴ "Colombia Is Growing Record Amounts Of Coca, The Key Ingredient" 22 Oct. 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/22/658547337/colombia-is-growing-record-amounts-of-coca-the-key-ingredient-in-cocaine>. Accessed 20 Sep. 2021.

⁵ "Four Mexican drug cartels top buyers and traffickers of Colombian" 22 Oct. 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-mexico-drugs-idUSKBN2772G6>. Accessed 20 Sep. 2021.



engaging in their profitable activities is a lifeline for them. A drug cartel has a very complex structure, and they take advantage of people who can not find a job within the Mexican system.

III. Focused Overview of the Issue

1. How does a cartel work?

Cartels are stronger financially than most people think. Their activities in the illegal “drug industry” have allowed them to generate billions of dollars each year. This enormous revenue allows them to control certain key parts of the industry, most importantly, the materials needed to produce a certain drug . Cocaine is a prime example as the cartels mainly profit off of cocaine since it is perceived as a “rich man’s drug” and is the 4th most expensive illegal drug in the world.

The first step in the chain is the coca plant, an essential material to produce the drug. The plant grows only in an equatorial climate, which makes Latin America the perfect spot to grow the plant. Colombia, Peru, Chile, and Bolivia are the main producers of the coca plant. To link these factors to the agenda item, according to Tom Wainwright, the columnist of Mexico on The Economist, the cartels, such as the Zetas Cartel, have ties with local criminals. The local criminals would do the drug dealing and they would be armed by the cartel, which would contribute to the cartel’s rapid growth. The cartels just collect the revenue and the “dirty work” is done by the locals. The driving force behind the local criminals is the aforementioned social and economic differences mentioned in section 2, as the profitable activities of the cartels offer financial stability instead of the daily labor jobs that pay below the minimum wage.

2. Why are the cartels not stopped?

One of the main reasons why Mexico was not able to deal with the threat of drug cartels is because of corruption. The Corruption Perceptions Index has ranked the country 130th out of 180 countries in 2019. In the 1st uninterrupted 71 years in power, hierarchization was the norm for the leading party. The PRI came to power in a democratic and peaceful manner, however, it is argued that the main reason why they were able to stay in power for so long is that every PRI administration used the power of the government for their personal benefits. The abuse of power and lack of transparency allowed the party to stay in power for 71 years. Until 2000, the country ruled as a one-party state. A one-party state usually has little to no political competition so the elections basically serve as ballots to re-elect the administration in power and the system



was characterized by bribery and low transparency. The political and personalistic grip over the country meant social and economic downfall and weak internal security.^{6 7}

3. The borders laws of Mexico and the effects on cartel activities

A country known for its high drug smuggling rates usually has loose border restrictions. Mexico is no different and serves as a bridge across the world's largest illicit substance market (the United States) and the countries in which drugs are in high demand (Central and South America). The demand for drugs is not simply confined to Mexico, it extends to countries in the continent. With that being said, the Mexican borders are crucial for the cartels because they can very easily exploit the corrupt system to take advantage and use the borders as their passageway to profit. Over the years, the cartels have grown so much that they have taken control of areas that they felt were important for their business. The cartels carried out other crimes such as Human Trafficking to fund their activities.

The presence of the blood and money-thirsty cartels made rural areas very unsafe to live in as the women and children living in the area were used in the cartels' trafficking activities for money. As clearly seen in figure 2, the rural areas of Mexico have the highest homicide rates. The ones who were caught in the crossfire died and were added to the tally of the thousands of casualties of the drug war.



"Figure 3: The US-Mexico border"

The Government's response

Mexico has failed miserably in the drug war;. The first battle against the drug cartels came in 2006 under the Calderon administration as he started a local operation in his hometown Michoacan. He slowly focused on the border areas, in which the cartels mainly transported drugs in and out of the country . In the first six years of the war, Mexico obtained moderate success in capturing drug lords. However, the aggressive military practices have made the border areas even more unsafe. In his 6 years in power, more

⁶ "Mexico Corruption Report & Profile - GAN Integrity." 9 Jul. 2020, <https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/mexico/>. Accessed 26 Sep. 2021.

⁷ "Corruption in Mexico: Linking Criminals and Public Officials." <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/corruption-violence-mexico/>. Accessed 26 Sep. 2021.



than two hundred thousand casualties were registered with no considerable progress being made whatsoever.

Then came the Pena Nieto administration who had promised a safe and stable Mexico; however, the circumstances of the country made this promise impossible to fulfill. Cartel violence was at an all-time high, Mexico from top to bottom was still a very corrupt country, and the drug industry was still a profitable business. With these issues still prominent, it was close to impossible to form a transparent government. The corruption problems were even more evident when Pena and his family got mixed up in multiple scandals. They were accused of buying multi-million dollar houses from government contractors, even an investigation was launched and the man who was in charge of this case Virgilio Andrade, the secretary of civil service and lawyer was coincidentally a very close friend of Pena. Pena's stance on the drug war was much more aggressive than his predecessor. Unlike the Calderon administration, Pena wanted no help from the United States and he focused on training the Mexican Military in countering irregular and disorganized forces. His aggressive practices proved disastrous, as in the first 14 months in office 23 thousand people were killed during the drug wars. A huge red flag raised during the Pena administration is the handling of the *Grupos de Autodefensa Comunitaria* (In which the government tried to get them on their side in the fight against) which were semi-militarized groups that took arms against the cartels. This strategy, advised by his security advisor, fell apart when the group had internal problems and some affiliations to criminal groups came to the surface. At the end of his term, Pena had achieved mixed success. There were ups, such as the arrest of the Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquin Guzman and downs such as the 2014 Iguala mass kidnapping in which 43 male students were abducted by the police for "allegedly" being involved with organized crime.^{8 9}

After the ruling president, Andres Obrador came to power in 2018, he stated that his plans were to end the war and make efforts for peace. Although it is still too early to judge his performance because it has only been 3 years since he took office, so far he seems to be heading in the right direction. Obrador identified the problem as a social disparity, as he believed that the low-income people who struggled with every aspect of their lives resorted to joining these cartels. The first two months of his presidency was as usual, chaotic. The levels of violence caused by cartels remained the same for the first two months of his presidency. However, on January 30 2019, Obrador prematurely ended the war against drug cartels. It is unclear if the next administration will continue the war against the cartels, but for now the conflict is over.

⁸ "What Happened To Mexico's Missing 43 Students In 'A Massacre In' 21 Oct. 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/21/658900014/what-happened-to-mexicos-missing-43-students-in-a-massacre-in-mexico>. Accessed 26 Sep. 2021.

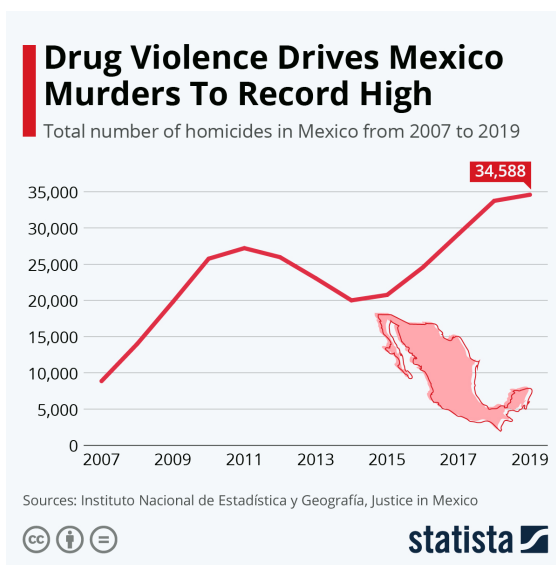
⁹ "Mexico missing students: Questions remain five years on - BBC News." 19 Sep. 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35539727>. Accessed 26 Sep. 2021.



4. The consequences of the Drug War on Mexico

Calling the policies of Calderon and Pena redundant and ineffective wouldn't be harsh at all. The reason why they failed in the war is that their office couldn't determine the core problem that was causing chaos. Their desired solution was to give the military all the power during the war, in theory, this should not be a problem as this issue is not a diplomatic conflict.

The drug war that Mexico fought through for years had an adverse effect on human rights. Not only did the aforementioned military have the authority to push out drug control policies, they also had the authority to conduct violent operations. The Mexican police and military were accused of committing serious human rights violations by the International Community. The marginalized groups (Injected Drug Users and the rural citizens of Mexico) were especially vulnerable towards the actions of the anti-drug system that Mexico had. In the Southern Mexican states, in which the drug related violence is usually very high it was very common for law enforcements to go out on man-hunts and violate the rights of innocent citizens.



"Figure 4: Drug-related murders in Mexico"

These violations included, unwarranted and illegal arrests, rape, torture, fabrication and discarding of evidence.

Due to the corrupt and totalitarian nature of the judiciary and legislative branches of Mexico, the units that committed these crimes were not tried for their actions. In addition to all of this, indigenous prejudices arose during the rise of the cartels. In Mexico it is noted that there are 68 Indigenous groups currently



present in the country, and in 2001 nearly a third of Mexico's prisoners were from indigenous groups imprisoned due to drug related crimes.^{10 11}

The lack of transparency also hit the media as well, as the journalists who would not support the agenda of the ruling party would be sent to jail as political prisoners and the journalists who would cover stories related to drugs would usually get killed. The violence against journalists got so bad that none of the local handprint newspapers and TV networks cover drug-related stories. That is left to anonymous bloggers and the now-defunct Blog del Narco.

IV. Key Vocabulary

Drug Cartel: A drug cartel is any local or international criminal organization that is responsible for drug trafficking.

Smuggling: The illegal transportation of objects.

Transnational Organized Crime: Transnational Organized Crime groups engage in any kind of illegal activities throughout the world without targeting a single geography.

The Drug War: The Mexican drug war is a national battle against drug cartels, the government has been fighting since 2006 to curb the power of the drug cartels. Over the course of the war, major drug lords were caught. However this war was not without its failures, as corruption was the biggest obstacle for Mexico applying a sustainable plan to battle the groups.

V. Important Events & Chronology

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
December 11 2006	New President elect Calderon starts a war against drug cartels by deploying thousands of soldiers to Michoacan
2007	2,837 people are killed in the first full year
November 1st 2008	Mexico's head of police resigns amidst corruption rumours

¹⁰ "Situation of Human Rights in Mexico - Organization of American States." 31 Dec. 2015, <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/mexico2016-en.pdf>. Accessed 26 Sep. 2021.

¹¹ "Violence, Insecurity and Disappearances in Mexico - Organization of" <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/multimedia/2016/mexico/mexico-en.html>. Accessed 26 Sep. 2021.



2008	Nearly 7 thousand people are killed in the drug war
May 26 2010	The leader of the Beltran Cartel is killed in a shootout with authorities
February 2014	Joaquin Guzman was arrested in Mexico and got taken into custody in a high security prison.
July 2015	Guzman escapes from prison for the second time
January 2016	Guzman gets arrested for the third time in Sinaloa
May 2017	A highly wanted associate of the Sinaloa Cartel gets arrested in the US
2018	Luis Obrador comes to power
February 2018	Mexican Authorities arrest a key member of the Zetas Cartel
January 2019	The president of Mexico, Luis Obrador declares the end of the war against drug cartels

VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

[A/RES/74/178:](#)

Calling upon the International Community to recognize drug trafficking as a major problem, not necessarily related to the Mexican War

[Resolution 59/6 \(CND\):](#)

Promoting prevention and recovery strategies

[Resolution 59/7 \(CND\):](#)

Proportional sentencing regarding drug related offences and appropriate methods to implement drug control policies

VIII. Failed Solution Attempts



Since President Calderon took office in 2006, Mexico has been fighting a grueling war against drug cartels. Since Calderon's administration, the government has deployed more than 45,000 soldiers. The most obvious goal of the war was to ensure public safety, however the Mexican government failed to ensure stability as the crime and violence rates continued to grow and rural areas still being practically inhabitable due to the presence of the drug cartels.

Another area that Mexico has failed in is ensuring stability amidst uncertainty, the country invested heavily in its military. So much so that other areas such as their economy and education were neglected, according to the World Economic Forum, which noted that Mexico invested fairly well in its education system. As of 2009 they invested 5% of their GDP per capita for education^{12 13}. However their education system still ranked 116th out of 134 countries. This statistic suggests that the problem is not the scarce resources allocated. The WEF further states that a powerful teachers union is responsible for preventing reforms that would help ensure equal education by investing in necessary materials, teachers and quality campuses. The consequences of a failed education system are severe, as the country is left with a generation of drop-out kids whose families are living under the poverty line.

Another red-flag of the Mexican Government's battle against organized crime was the press. Over the course of its history, censorship was always a big issue with the country. In 2016, Reporters Without Borders ranked Mexico 149. out of 180 countries when it comes to freedom of press. Also the country is synonymous with being the worst nation in solving crimes against Journalists. As information that the citizens had the right to obtain and view was hidden from the public, and the situation worsened with the rise of the drug war. Covering narcotic related news stories would put the journalists in great danger as the drug cartels would threaten and kill the journalists that would cover the stories. The government has failed to protect their journalists; between 2000 and 2012 many journalists were killed for covering drug related stories. Journalists are tasked with delivering and reporting the truth, according to the Mexican Constitution Article 6.

"The expression of ideas shall not be subjected to any judicial or administrative investigation, unless it offends good morals, infringes the rights of others, incites to crime or disturbs public order"¹⁴

In times of uncertainty like war, the public deserves to know the truth. After all, each and every day their lives can be taken away at any moment because of the cartels. The Mexican government has failed to

¹² "The Global Competitiveness Report 2009–2010 - Weforum - The"
http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2009-10.pdf. Accessed 26 Sep. 2021.

¹³ "The Mexico Competitiveness Report 2009." https://growthlab.cid.harvard.edu/files/growthlab/files/mcr_2009.pdf. Accessed 26 Sep. 2021.

¹⁴ "Formats and Editions of Constitution of the United Mexican States"
<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/2986936/editions?editionsView=true&referer=di>. Accessed 26 Sep. 2021.



protect the people who are responsible for delivering the truth, thus depriving the Mexican people of one of their fundamental rights.

VIII. Possible Solutions

This report hopefully gave experts some insight into this agenda item. This issue is very tricky as it requires experts to write clauses that do not interfere with the Domestic policies of Mexico. Determining a key problem will be crucial because there are many topics that could be touched on.

Following Obrador's policies would be more logical because Mexico is currently a country that deals with social disparity and is in the process of recovery from war. It should be kept in mind that although armed conflict is over, the presence of the cartels is still looming.

Focusing on a stable education system is very important, as the new generations need a solid foundation which would prevent them joining the cartels. Working on an inclusive education system is crucial, as it would include everyone from all around Mexico while ushering in a new generation which is ready to contribute to society instead of engaging in criminal activity. While building a stable future is absolutely necessary, the current administration needs to focus on post war economic development. Specifically finding long term solutions for poverty, as according to the Borgen Project around half of the population in Mexico is living in poverty and ever since the drug war started that number has steadily increased since then. Although Mexico has a pretty formidable GDP of 1.283 trillion, the GDP per person is 14 thousand dollars. This suggests that there is a sizable wealth difference between the rich and the poor. To analyze the jarring contrast between the poor and the rich, the wealth gap between the urban and rural citizens is a great indication as the average salary in rural areas is 3 to 4 times less than in urban areas. So decreasing the wealth gap between the rich and the poor has to be one of the administration's key focuses. After all, organized crime is like a lifeline for the locals who can not find a job within the Mexican system.¹⁵

Poverty is a big issue in Mexico, and it is a very hard problem to solve. There are certain methods that Mexico can opt to in order to decrease poverty, first of all Civil Societies have to get involved. Now that the authoritarian regime of the PRI is not in power, Civil Societies have more room to operate, these non profit organizations are key as they can easily reach out to people in need without seeking anything in return. The notable organizations are United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which works towards socioeconomic development in Latin America and Un Techo para mi País

¹⁵ "Tag Archive for: Poverty In Mexico - The Borgen Project." <https://borgenproject.org/tag/poverty-in-mexico/>. Accessed 26 Sep. 2021.



(TECHO), a youth lead non profit organization which seeks to overcome poverty through the work of volunteers.

In addition to having civil society organizations get engaged, Mexico needs to focus on decreasing the wealth gap between the rich and poor. The problem with the Mexican economy is that the minimum wage is barely enough to survive so it is not only the unemployed that fall into poverty. According to the Mexican constitution, the minimum salary determined by the government must give citizens a decent standard of living. However, it has been far from that, as the annual salary of an average Mexican citizen is only 12 thousand dollars. To put this into perspective, if that same citizen worked the same number of hours in the US, they would earn 57 thousand dollars. If the government does not want to lose more people to the cartels, they need to create more job opportunities, increase the annual salary of workers and distribute income in a more efficient way.

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