

The Role of Corruption, Economic Crisis and Drug Enforcement Policy on Violent Crime in Mexico

Understanding how these factors contribute to consistently increasing violent crime rates in Mexico since the beginning of the war on



drugs in 2006
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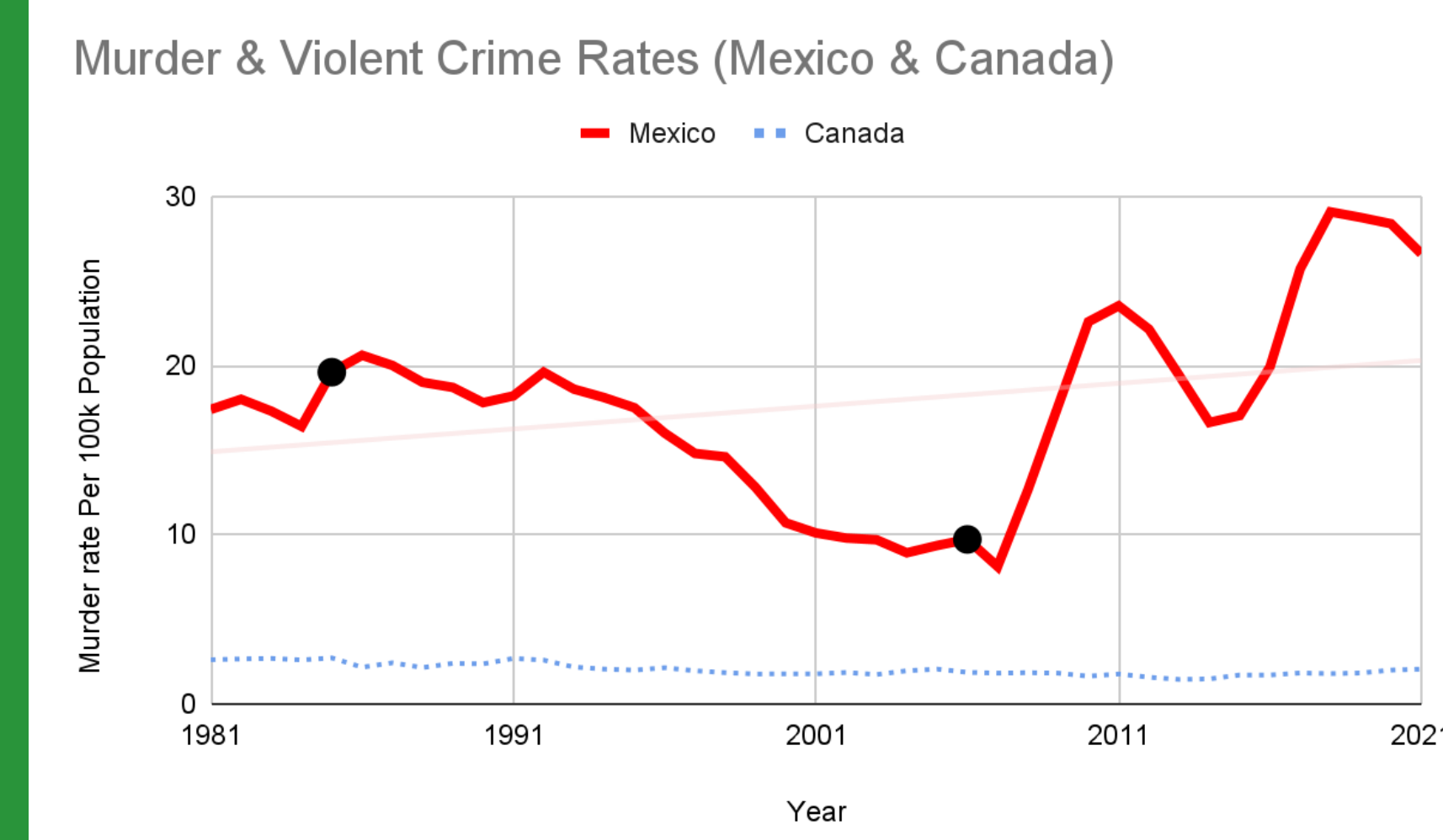
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Introduction

Since the start of Mexico's war on drugs in 2006, violent crime rates have steadily increased each year.

With the United States investing 1.5 billion dollars to fight violent cartels, and Mexico's investment of 179 billion between 2006 and 2013, more money than ever has been allocated to combat violent drug trafficking organizations (Peace Index 2014, p.2). However, despite this significant increase in military spending aimed at dismantling cartels, lawlessness in Mexico continues to increase.

The goal of this research is to investigate how drug enforcement policy, corruption, and the economic crisis have contributed to increased violent crime rates since the Mexican federal government's initiation of the war on drugs in 2006. Understanding both social effects leading to increased cartel presence, power and recruitment, as well as the role of direct violent government intervention is necessary. What is lost is the recognition of the need for increased funding and policy initiatives focusing on early intervention and poverty reduction instead of the demonization and attempted elimination of cartel groups. Inspired by US drug enforcement policy, Mexico's current strategies to lower cartel violence have achieved the opposite goal, showing the need for new methods to address the causal factors outlined within this research.



Key Aspects Leading to Elevated Violent Crime Rates

Drug Enforcement Policy

- Mexico's drug enforcement policy since the initiation of the "war on Drugs" focuses primarily on violent "drug raids" and seizures, as opposed to addressing causal societal factors, leading to the increase in cartel membership and violence.
- The proliferation of militarized Security groups (Carvalho 2022).
- 64% Increase in public security groups deployment in Mexico between 2021-2022.
- Under the leadership of Mexican president Filipe Calderon, private military groups engaged in armed conflicts every 24 hours on average.
- Under Lopez Obrador, the proliferation of public security forces engaging in armed conflicts was slightly reduced to every 36 hours on average.
- High reliance on military and security groups, directly leading to 47,500 deaths at the hands of the state military by 2012 (Moloznik 2013, 178)
- The movement away from community policing, in favour of state-loyal military and security groups, fails to address cartels' deep roots within their communities.
- 200% increase in military officers fighting cartels in major cities between 2009-2012 (Grayson 2013,5).
- A steady increase in military spending to combat cartels.
- 2006: Military spending was \$3 billion equal to 0.3% of GDP
- 2020: Military Spending was \$8 billion equal to 0.6% of GDP (World Bank, 2022)
- The arrest of high-level "narcos traficicos" often leads to fracturing within established cartels, leading to an influx of in-fighting for territory, manufacturing and smuggling routes. These in turn contribute to power vacuums, allowing the more violent and militarized cartel groups to size control through the use of violence (Grandmaison 2021, 170).

Corruption

- Patron-clientelism, among the Mexican elite and government actors between themselves and cartels, is systemic within the political fabric of Mexico, making it challenging to reduce violent crime (Hopkin 2003, 5).
- The number of individuals forced to pay a bribe to a government official between 2001 to 2007 increased by 2.7% from just 2.2% of respondents in 2001 reporting being forced to pay a bribe to 4.9% in 2007 (Asch et. al 2011, 35). Furthermore, amid the recent rise in violence in Mexico, over 26% of respondents reported being forced to pay bribes to government officials in 2021
- This proliferation of widespread corruption within government agencies, supports the outcome, of overall distrust of police, and politicians, leading to many communities favouring local cartels over federal or state officials. In 2005 87% of respondents, perceived the police as corrupt, 89% perceived politicians as corrupt and 84% perceived judges as corrupt (Asch et. al 2011, 35).
- For Police officers, the monetary incentive alone provided by cartels, which on average is double a police officer's monthly salary, provides further temptation for widespread corruption among law enforcement officers (El Universal 2019).

Economic Crisis

- During the 2008 global recession, which caused Mexico's GDP to fall 6% in one year, the number of young men with stable employment drastically dropped. During this crisis young workers aged 15-24 made up 60% of the jobs eliminated during the crisis (Hoyos et al. 2016, 2) which were predominantly unskilled manufacturing jobs.
- Similar to why economically unstable youth join gangs in the United States and Canada, the perceived lifestyle glorified by members of crime groups, entices young individuals to participate in an attempt to escape poverty. Additionally, "gifts" provided by cartel members to economically challenged communities further places trust in an illicit industry, and away from state and federal governments attempting to dismantle cartels (Garcia 2006, 202-204).
- "Mules" are able to make up to \$1,643 USD to traffic narcotics, and weapons across the border (Bjerk & Mason 2014, 18).

Conclusion

- A steady increase in military and police spending as part of Mexico's drug enforcement policy aimed to further militarize government agencies against cartels, as well as a steady increase in military and police deployment, has caused increased violent encounters between government actors and cartels.
- The proliferation, of violent raids designed to dismantle cartels, leads to more extreme confrontations between law enforcement. The resulting fracturing of existing cartels, leads to infighting and further violence.
- Overall poor perception and distrust of police and governmental actors, lead to distrust of drug enforcement policy by citizens.
- Lack of legislation, arrests and prosecution of the Mexican elite engaging in patron-clientelism with cartels, fails to address underlying corruption, allowing cartels to continue to operate as usual.
- The proliferation of corruption via bribes, on local levels, promotes increased cartel presence, followed by more violent encounters with violently motivated governmental armed groups.
- Cartels' active roles in communities by providing gifts and steady employment aids in the local perception of cartels, making persecution of violent cartel members extremely difficult within their own communities
- Lack of economic opportunity for young people, in Mexico, leads to increased cartel recruitment.
- The economic bonus alone, from engaging in drug trafficking, and corruption, especially for women and law enforcement, persuades many young Mexicans, to seek out illegal employment.

Research Question, Approach & Methodology

- **Research Question:** "How has drug enforcement policy, corruption and economic crisis led to an increase in violent crime rates in Mexico?"
- **Approach:** Historical institutionalism, using the concept of path dependency.
- The primary methodology I employed within my research was an inductive case study using qualitative academic research papers collected from the University of Victoria library database.
- **Secondary Sources:** Quantitative data sets, providing insight into the proliferation of violent crime, corruption, and economic instability in Mexico

Research Barriers

- **Access:** Due to the secretive, and illegal nature of cartels, many data points pertaining to violent crime, are underreported due to threats of retaliation, or simply unknown by authorities. It is estimated only 22% of violent crimes in 2008 were reported, making the endemic of cartel violence difficult to accurately research (Sabet 2012, 23).
- **Language:** Because I am unable to speak Spanish, a majority of primary sources, and interviews that provide first-hand experiences of the *lived* reality of individuals residing in Mexico and affected by cartel violence, are inaccessible.



Arrest of El Chapo's son on January 5, 2023. Leading to the death of 10 military personnel and 19 Sinaloa cartel members in response to Ovidio Guzman's arrest (Gollum 2023).

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