References


Manufacturing Criminals: NAFTA’s Connection to the Mexican Drug Cartels

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Abstract

This paper examines how the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) led to the development of drug organizations in México. It utilizes a qualitative method to examine primary and secondary sources. The findings indicate how NAFTA disrupted the nation’s economy, which created high levels of unemployment, inequality, and an atmosphere of social competition over industrial jobs; these elements precipitated the growth of drug cartels. This research demonstrates that neoliberal policies in México, such as NAFTA, destabilized México’s economy and led to the development of drug cartels.

México is a nation of abundant natural resources, diverse rural communities, and a complex political structure. During the last twenty years, the Mexican government has sustained an aggressive war against drug trafficking. However, the efforts of the Mexican authorities have been futile against the cartels (Hernandez 2013). The extent to which these organizations maintain an active role in the social, political, and economic structures of the nation is difficult to measure. Yet, evidence suggests that these crime syndicates are in different nations around the globe such as Spain and Peru. In México, they manipulate political campaigns and have become great contributors to the economic structure (Florez and Espinosa 2009). Estimates show that between 2000 and 2013 these groups made $39 billion in profits, which represents approximately three percent of the nation’s GDP (Mercille 2011). In 2006, Mexican President Felipe Calderon Hinojosa launched a military campaign around the nation to exterminate drug cartels. After fifteen years of this conflict, more than 150,000 people have died and more than 40,000 have disappeared (US Department of Defense 2012). Investigations also demonstrate that these organizations are constantly changing their techniques and social hierarchies as a result of Calderon’s War on Drugs (Mercille 2011). While scholars have focused on how the political structure in México facilitated the empowerment of drug cartels, the effects of neoliberal economic reforms have not been taken into consideration.

During the 1980s, México experienced a period of economic instability that led the political elite to adopt “free market” policies. One of the most significant policies was the establishment of NAFTA on January 1, 1994. NAFTA tied together the economies of the United States, Canada, and México, and created
the largest free trade area in the world in terms of geographical dimension. For the Canadian and American governments NAFTA was an economic opportunity. For México, it was sold as an opportunity to become a “first world” economy. Under NAFTA, México has access to the American and Canadian markets. While there is an ongoing debate over the effects of these economic agreements in developing countries such as México, there is evidence that NAFTA did not deliver on its promises (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2004). Unemployment increased in México, slums grew around metropolitan centers, levels of forced migration increased, and the agriculture industry was destabilized.

To understand the recent proliferation of drug cartels in México, one must consider NAFTA’s negative effects. The rise of cartels points to a socioeconomic struggle that forces people into criminal activities. For México, the new era of neoliberalism not only gave rise to cartels but it also brought the war against drugs to new levels.

**Literature Review**

Historical analyses of Mexican drug organizations have primarily taken two different approaches: examining the main organizations that operated and are still operating in México; and writing about some of the main “actors” of this phenomenon, such as former Mexican President Felipe Calderon (2006-2012), who in 2006 officially declared war against the cartels (Rosen and Martinez 2015). There are few studies that investigate in detail how the establishment of NAFTA contributed to the rise of the drug cartels in México. A comprehensive examination of this topic must take into account the socioeconomic factors that have contributed to the proliferation of these organizations in the last twenty years.

One expert on the Mexican drug cartels who has researched their relationship with NAFTA is George W. Grayson. He explored the dynamics of the main drug organizations in relation to the history of the country. Grayson’s works, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* and *The Cartels: The Story of Mexico’s Most Dangerous Criminal Organizations and Their Impact on the U.S. Security*, describe the social and economic conditions that encouraged local communities in México to allow criminal syndicates to operate. He points to NAFTA as an agreement responsible for making hundreds of people unemployed in the agriculture industry, giving them little choice but to work for the cartels. Building on Grayson’s argument, other authors such as Ioan Grillo, Tomas Kellner, and Francesco Pipitone have analyzed Mexican drug cartels with a similar approach. Their works describe the historical transformation of some of the drug cartels in México and how NAFTA is one of the leading causes of their development (Grillo 2010; Kellner and Pipitone 2010). Grillo’s (2010) work, *El Narco: Inside Mexico’s Criminal Organizations*, describes the social conditions that made people turn to criminal activities. This work demonstrates that the worsening socioeconomic situation of many communities in México had led to the production of illegal drugs. Tomas Kellner and Francesco Pipitone (2010) published a similar scholarly article titled, “Inside Mexico’s Drug War,” where they describe the historical transformation of some of the drug cartels in México. These are a few of the major works that have been written in the United States about the development of the Mexican drug cartels in relationship with the dynamics of the nation’s economy. These studies attribute NAFTA and the dynamics of the Mexican economy as factors leading to the rise of drug cartels. However, they do not emphasize NAFTA exclusively, but discuss a combination of factors. This leaves an incomplete interpretation of this economic policy’s role in the evolution of these criminal groups.

México is the epicenter of this problem and scholars have studied the history of the most influential figures. Ricardo Ravelo, Wilbert Torre, and Anabel Hernandez have analyzed the history of the Mexican drug cartels by telling their stories of the main “actors.” In 2011, Ravelo wrote the book titled, *Narcomex: Historia e Historias de una Guerra*, where he describes the history of the cartels in México. His key findings in this book emphasize that México’s political and economic systems has allowed drug cartels to flourish. Like Ravelos, Hernandez (2013) analyzes Mexican cartels in her book, *Mexico en Llamas: El Legado de Calderon*, and the painful history and consequences of the war against the cartels that President Calderon started in 2006. Hernandez’s work is considered controversial because it demonstrates that Calderon ignored the nation’s socioeconomic problems to combat the cartels. Together, their key findings demonstrate that the development of these organizations is connected to México’s corrupt political system. Moreover, while their focus is on the Mexican political system, these works also describe the nation’s difficult economic conditions when the cartels took control over communities around the nation. These works mention NAFTA as one element that produced this phenomenon (Esquivel 2016; Ravelo 2006, 2011; Torre 2013). These are some of the major books and scholarly articles that have been published on the Mexican drug organizations in México. While their arguments vary, they all identify NAFTA as a pivotal element that gave rise to the harvest of drug cartels.

Most studies on NAFTA do not pay attention to the evolution of the drug cartels in México. In 1996, William A. Ormer Jr. published a summary of NAFTA’s main components. He concludes that the policy would benefit the economies of the three nations involved in the short and long run. In 2006, Cary Clyde analyzed this agreement and its consequences on Mexican society in his book *NAFTA revisited: Achievements and Challenges*. He discovered that inequality and unemployment increased in México after establishing NAFTA. Ronald Mize
and Alicia Swords follow this approach to address how these negative effects are connected to México’s history. Their work emphasizes the negative effects of NAFTA on the Mexican agriculture sectors that dominate southern México. It shows that millions of Mexican farmers lost their jobs after the establishment of NAFTA because they could not compete against American agriculture companies (Mize and Swords 2011).

Christian Stracke, Carlos Salas, and Maximiliano Gracia Hernandez continue this break down of NAFTA in their respective studies. While NAFTA created an economic boom in México’s economy, they argue that, it did not last more than seven years. This led to a counterproductive agreement that caused unemployment and inequality, creating a weak Mexican economy (Hernandez 2010; Salas 2016; Stracke 2003). These authors support the argument that high levels of unemployment and the lack of social mobility in México came in part from the establishment of NAFTA. The results of these studies demonstrate that NAFTA created the social conditions necessary for criminal organizations to develop. The article, “Violent Narco-Cartels or US Hegemony? The Political Economy of the ‘War on Drugs’ in Mexico” by Julien Mercille, and the book, Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy by Peter Watt and Roberto Zepeda, are some of the only works that have linked the Mexican drug cartels with the nation’s economic history. These authors describe how the nation’s economy produced the conditions for the evolution of the cartels (Mercille 2011; Watt and Zepeda 2012). However, their argument does not propose that NAFTA is the main contributor to the rise of the cartels in México, but that it had an impact. In other words, the phenomenon of drug trafficking must be understood in context of the nation’s wider economic environment.

Methodology

This study employs different theories to examine the effects of NAFTA on the Mexican drug cartels. The nature of these illegal groups touches different aspects of society, and it requires an interdisciplinary approach for a better interpretation. Throughout this research, the Commodity Chain Approach and Intersectionality theories proved most effective (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986; McCall 2005).

Terrence K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein (1986) first presented the Commodity Chain Approach in their work, “Commodity Chains in the World-Economy Prior to 1800.” This approach focuses on the producer and distributor of a product at a micro level to analyze an economic system. In other words, this research methodology demonstrates how NAFTA affected people involved with the production and distribution of illegal drugs in México.

The Intersectionality approach permits one to determine how different socioeconomic classes and ethnic groups interact with each other in different scenarios (McCall 2005). In this case, how the adoption of NAFTA in México affected people and how they perceive the role of drug cartels in their society. This research helps to show how the decline of the agriculture industry and the spread of slums disproportionately affected lower levels of Mexican society. In return, this encouraged a large number of people to join drug trafficking groups.

This research contains a variety of different sources to support the main arguments: it examines archival material, newspaper publications from México and the United States, and governmental and institutional reports. Primary sources came in the form of interviews from participants of drug trafficking and propaganda materials from drug cartels. Secondary sources came in the form of books and scholarly articles from the most respected scholars and experts on this topic.

Agriculture Industry

The agricultural industry in México has a complex history, which NAFTA failed to recognize. During the Revolutionary War of 1910, small-scale farmers under the leadership of Emiliano Zapata revolted against the state to demand agrarian reform that divided up the haciendas (big portions of land owned by few individuals) (Joseph and Buchenau 2013). After the war ended, the Mexican government was forced to add Article 27 to its Constitution, promulgated in 1917, which instituted a system of land redistribution for the peasant population and the protection of their ownership (Joseph and Buchenau 2013). However, it took the Mexican government more than twenty years to enforce this article. It was President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) who finally honored it by creating a system of communal land ownership known as the ejido, and a credit bank named the Banco de Credito Ejidal (Joseph and Buchenau 2013). These measures allowed thousands of campesinos to protect the ownership of their lands and have access to private loans. Also, as part of the nation’s effort to protect this industry, the Mexican government installed a series of tariffs against foreign products (Joseph and Buchenau 2013). With these measures in place, the agricultural industry became a significant producer of jobs, even during difficult times such as the economic collapse of the 1980s. In fact, agricultural jobs increased in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, employing 8.1 million Mexicans by the end of 1993 (Polaski 2004). Most of these farmers were located in rural communities and the work of this peasant population allowed México to have complete food self-sovereignty (Polaski 2004). Overall, the agricultural sector in México was healthy and became a job producer and an incentive for farmers not to join criminal groups.

Nonetheless, in order to join NAFTA, the Mexican government had to deregulate its agricultural sector. The administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), which was responsible for NAFTA’s negotiations, eliminated the
power of Article 27 and facilitated the privatization of communal lands. Also, the Salinas government discontinued the protective reforms and subsidies that in the past supported small-scale farmers. Tariffs on vital agricultural products such as white corn and beans were taken out fourteen years after the adoption of NAFTA (Olson 2008). Moreover, the government lifted price regulations on most agriculture commodities. These measures in the past had protected farms against the destabilizing forces of international markets by limiting the importation of low priced commodities that would undercut domestic production and by protecting the ownership of small farmers’ lands against large foreign corporations. This reorganization brought social upheaval to the Mexican countryside and small towns. A notable movement that came out of this social uprising was the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN), which proclaimed the Mexican government was oppressing the indigenous people in México, especially in the south, in the name of globalization (Joseph and Buchenau 2013). The EZLN’s movement became a global symbol of push back against neoliberalism and free trade agreements.

As a result of this deregulatory campaign, the negative effects of NAFTA appeared in a matter of years from its formal establishment in 1994. Under NAFTA, ejido (or communal) lands were divided and converted into private parcels. R. Dennis Olson describes in his article, “NAFTA’s Food and Agriculture Lessons,” that NAFTA “cleared the way for multinational agribusiness cartels to dump agriculture commodities at below the cost of production into México, displacing farmers from their own markets” (2008, 418). This increased market concentration, and consolidated market power within and across sectors. An example of this accumulation of power is the new power of Grupo Industrial Maseca and Minsa; these two corporations shared 97 percent of the market in corn flour for tortillas (Watt and Zepeda 2012). These privatization measures led to an increase in unemployment in the agriculture industry. Between 1998 and 2007, the number of people employed in agriculture decreased by 24 percent, which equated to a loss of 1.8 million jobs (Otero 2011). This concentration of power is blocking any competition from small scale farming, which was the base of the Mexican agriculture industry under the ejido system.

While this immense loss of jobs took place in México, in the United States NAFTA was praised for creating agriculture jobs. Ellen Terpstra, administrator in the U. S. Department of Agriculture declared that NAFTA was an “unqualified success” because it turned México into “one of the fastest-growing agriculture imports” (Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, NAFTA: A Ten Year Perspective, 108). By adopting NAFTA, the Mexican government disempowered campesinos around the nation who had no say in the regulation of prices or other dynamics of its own industry. This left them no choice but to seek alternative sources of livelihood.

Legal and illegal migration to the United States became a popular alternative. Between 2000 and 2005, Mexican migration to the United States increased by 1.5 million; by 2005 and 2006 approximately 500,000 undocumented people entered the United States (Olson 2008). This forced migration led millions of farmers to abandon their lands in desperation (Watt and Zepeda 1986). Those who did not migrate and were not willing to join criminal organizations were left behind to fight to reform NAFTA. Social movements appeared around the nation made up of mostly indigenous groups and owners of small farms. One of these movements has been organizing protests under the slogan “Sin Maiz, No hay Pais” (“Without Corn, There is no Country”) (Olson 2008, 419).

The relationship between farmers and drug traffickers has a complex history, one that Mexican officials have known since 1971. As a result, an aggressive campaign was launched to eliminate these criminal groups, but the number of people involved was relatively few and the government was more concerned with going after leaders of leftist socialist groups (Olson 2008). Individuals associated with drug cartels with an agriculture background became known as Narcocampesinos and with their illegal activities they were able to sustain small communities (Hernandez 2015).

These narco-communities were rare but existed during the 1980s. The community La Tuna in the state of Sinaloa, for example, is widely seen as the cradle of drug traffickers and the Sinaloa Cartel (Hernandez 2015). Among the most famous Narcocampesinos that came out of La Tuna is Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera, leader of the Sinaloa Cartel. Guzmán Loera became a symbol of success for peasants in México because he shares the same agricultural and socioeconomic roots. He went to school as far as the third grade but dropped out to work in the marijuana and poppy harvests, something that is a common practice in isolated communities (Hernandez 2013). When Guzmán Loera was caught in the late 1990s he declared, “I have spent my whole life as a farmer” (Hernandez 2013, 37). Guzman’s story is not unique; he shares the same socioeconomic background with Rafael Caro Quintero, leader of the Guadalajara Cartel and Guzman’s childhood friend. On July 25, 2016, Anabel Hernandez, a Mexican journalist and expert on drug cartels, interviewed Quintero. In this interview, he shared his motives for getting involved in drug trafficking, “I was a younger person that was living in the mountains, here is normal to cultivate marijuana and poppy plants, that’s how it is today . . . we needed clothes and we needed to eat, there was no other way” (Proceso TV-Caro Quintero 2016). These stories strengthened the ideology that drug trafficking was an extension of the agricultural industry for Mexican farmers.

Once the agriculture jobs disappeared in some communities around México, drug cartels began an intensive recruitment effort. One of these groups was Los Zetas, the organization that became infamously known around the world for...
its cruelty and military power (NBC News 2010). This group was founded by a group of individuals with a military background, but most of its members were country boys who went back to their communities to recruit more people when the war on drugs began in 2006. As a result, these individuals created small units around the nation, in every small town and village they came across. By 2010, it was estimated that the Zetas had more than ten thousand followers (Grillo 2011). The Zetas expanded around the nation and were able to increase their operations abroad because they were successful in growing their numbers so quickly. While Los Zetas were known for using violence to consolidate their power in small communities, it was the disappearance of agricultural jobs that forced thousands of people to join.

NAFTA not only contributed to the growth of criminal groups, but it also created the socioeconomic atmosphere necessary to allow another cartel to flourish in the state of Michoacán. The cartel of La Familia arose from one of the states that were most affected by the signing of NAFTA (Mize and Swords 2011). In this state, La Familia cartel was formed by a small group of individuals in 2001. At its height, it employed several thousand people and claimed to pay wages of at least $2,000 per month, a salary more than ten times México’s minimum wage and roughly four times the average wage (Grillo 2012). Moreover, this organization contributed even more to maintaining the economic stability of Michoacán by becoming the owner of several legitimate enterprises, which provided even more jobs (Carpenter 2012). Grayson (2010) describes in his special report, “La Familia Drug Cartel: Implications for U.S-Mexican Security,” that NAFTA turned drug trafficking into a lucrative business for young males who could not migrate to the United States. La Familia and Los Zetas are not active in the southern region of México. However, the socioeconomic atmosphere in this region remains, which combined with other factors led to the increase in the number of drug cartels from two major organizations to approximately seven (Alvarez 2017).

**Industrialization**

Foreign investment that came into México due to NAFTA began an industrialization campaign in multiple cities, but it also led drug cartels to strengthen their power. Under NAFTA, foreign investors had the ability to invest in any region of the Mexican territory. The northern states of the nation were particularly appealing for financial investment because of their proximity to the United States border and their manufacturing tradition. During the 1960s, the Borden Industrialization Program established the first series of manufacturing plants of electronics and clothes in México for the US Market (Milberg 2004 as cited in Watt and Zepeda 2012, 158). The evolution of this economic sector continued during the next decades and in 1990 the number of people employed reached 450,000. The establishment of NAFTA continued this economic trend. Throughout the end of the 1990s to 2000 the number of workers employed in the maquiladora sector reached over 1.3 million. However, by 2006 this sector registered a loss of 100,000 jobs, in part because factories moved to other nations with lower labor wages, such as China (Calderon as cited in Watt and Zepeda 2012, 160). Even with this phenomenon the manufacturing sector became indispensable for the Mexican economy.

Foreign investment led to the industrialization of multiple cities in the northern region of México such as Nuevo Leon and Ciudad Juárez, which attracted thousands of people from around the nation to this area. However, this wave of workers was not completely assimilated into the manufacturing sector because of a tendency of hiring female workers over males to cut labor costs. Also, it created an enormous labor pool that prevented the creating of labor organizations (Calderon 2006). Adding to this economic atmosphere, the infrastructure of these cities could not absorb this wave of people, which led to the spread of slums. These slums became highly valuable for drug cartels as recruitment centers because of their lack of security and their proximity to the U.S. border.

A competition between criminal organizations began over control of these slums, which lead to the increase of the levels of violence in cities such as Ciudad Juárez (House Committee on Homeland Security, The Merida Initiative, 2008). This violence was present around the nation between criminal groups and the military, which displaced thousands. In a 2010 report by the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Internal Displacement Monitoring Center shows that in Juarez alone “estimates place the number of people who fled their homes at around 230,000. Roughly half of those are thought to have crossed into the United States, which would leave about 115,000 people living as internally displaced people (IDPs)”.

The IDPs became the drug cartels’ primary targets for recruitment.

Another problem that came from the spread of slums is the increase of homeless people, which the drug cartels would also capitalize on. Organizations such as Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel would enroll homeless children and those who live in extreme poverty. In many cases, they became hitmen (Cardenas 2007). While the development of industrialized cities can be perceived as a symbol of progress, the appearance of slums and poverty demonstrates that NAFTA was not the economic miracle that many analysts claim. Because of this phenomenon, the Mexican government militarized the region, which has turned people to fear the military more than the drug traffickers.

This industrialization turned México into a manufacturing export for the American public. Under NAFTA, the United States would have opened its border states to the Mexican trucking companies in 1995. However, the Clinton administration delayed this policy due to concerns about illegal trafficking of immigrants and drugs. The Bush administration responded to this delay by creating the pilot program. This program provided full access to American
highways for 100 Mexican trucking companies. Nevertheless, the Obama administration signed legislation to eliminate the funding for the pilot program, which ended this agreement (Carbaugh 2011). While Mexican corporations were limited, American and Canadian corporations moved between borders without problem or restrictions. According to the American Department of Transit there are around 425,000 enterprises transporting their commodities between these countries and there are around 500,000 private enterprises transporting goods for multinational businesses, such as Walmart and Home Depot. Moreover, there are about 500,000 corporations working in states on the Mexican-American border. Of the 500,000 transporting companies, around sixty percent have presence in the four states that share the frontier with México, representing millions of dollars in transport (Esquivel 2016). This complex system of transportation aided the drug cartels in transporting their products to the United States. Customs inspectors are incapable of examining each truck that is crossing the US-Mexican border. Instead, "one out of every five trucks in unloaded and inspected, [so] drug traffickers play the numbers game" (Burnett 2010). In 2010, agents from the Department of Homeland Security seized 96 tons of marijuana, twice as much as in 2006 (Burnett 2010). The establishment of NAFTA provided the medium for Mexican drug cartels to transport more quantities of drugs to the American market.

Maintaining NAFTA

The adoption of NAFTA secured neoliberal social relations in México. However, this financial ideology has brought negative effects, such as forced migration and unemployment. These outcomes created an atmosphere necessary for the rise of leftist social and political groups. To maintain a friendly economic atmosphere in the nation, the Mexican government turned to its military to eradicate the leftist opposition. The “War on Drugs” established by the Calderon administration in 2006 provided the pretext necessary to militarize the nation and maintain NAFTA’s neoliberal ideology, which in turn led the nation to violently oppose leftist groups.

The militarization of México began in the 1980s with an American counterdrug policy. The George H. W. Bush administration provided the Mexican army with $214 million in arms between 1988 and 1992 (Pailey 2014). This military aid was preparing México to adopt NAFTA and increase its economic ties with the United States. Once NAFTA was founded, the Clinton administration continued this strategy by providing its southern neighbor with $64 million in surveillance equipment and UH-1 helicopters (Pailey 2014). Finally, the administrations of President George W. Bush and President Calderon fortified this military alliance with the formation of the Merida Initiative. This was a bilateral agreement that presented itself as an effort to eliminate drug cartels, but was aimed at consolidating economic prosperity in México.

Throughout this period of militarization, the Mexican state mobilized its military power to contain leftist groups and anti-capitalist movements. In the 1970s, the Mexican government used its military capabilities to combat the aforementioned leftist agrarian groups with a pretext that they were connected to drug trafficking activities. Once NAFTA was established another movement arose, the Zapatista group. This group had different sub-groups that directly challenged the capitalist ideology of NAFTA on the basis of indigenous rights. In 1997, 49 people from a small group of sympathizers with the Zapatista movement known as Las Abejas were massacred in Acteal, Guerrero. Declassified documents have demonstrated that a paramilitary group was responsible for the Acteal Massacre. The Mexican army supported this armed group and the Salinas administration approved its operations. Moreover, the administration of President Ernesto Zedillo sent thousands of soldiers to the region “to assist in the event of an uprising.” (Defense Intelligence Agency 1997, 3). This case demonstrates that the Mexican state was willing to target anti-capitalistic groups, such as the Zapatista movement with military force.

In 2014, the Mexican military was also blamed for another attack on a leftist group. However, this case was particularly shocking for the nation and the international community because the victims were a group of 43 students from a leftist educational institution in the city of Iguala, Guerrero. In contrast to past cases, Mexican officials utilized the rhetoric of the “War on Drugs” to blame the drug cartel Guerreros Unidos for kidnapping these students, killing them, and burning their bodies in a public dump (McDonnell and Sanchez 2016). Ernesto Guerrero, a student who survived the attack, described the event in an interview to the American channel VICE News. He said, “all of our peers that were taken... were nabbed, placed in hoods, and thrown on a curb.” Mr. Guerrero also mentioned that his fellow students “were taken away in patrol cars by the municipal police.” (Vice News 2014) Local citizens supported his testimony and confirmed the connection between local authorities and members of the cartel Guerreros Unidos (Vice News 2015). Additionally, some parents of these 43 victims affirmed that these students were carrying mobile phones and that they traced their signals to a military base located in the city Iguala, Guerrero. This military base belongs to the 27th Infantry Battalion, which also has large trash incinerators with the capability of burning the bodies of the 43 students (Goldman 2015). National or international authorities have not properly investigated this version of the story because it would confirm the Mexican government’s unethical silencing of NAFTA’s opposition.

The “War on Drugs” has provided the American government with the pretext necessary to militarize the Mexican state and violently confront leftist groups. The military forces in México became, not a fighter of drug traffickers, but a tool to maintain an unjust capitalist economic system in place.
Discussion

The historical analysis of Mexican drug cartels shows a literature review gap, in part, because scholars and experts have solely focused their attention on telling the stories of the “actors” of the “War on Drugs.” The lives of drug traffickers, such as Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman and Rafael Caro Quintero, have been researched over other significant factors that contribute to this problem. While the stories of these individuals have contributed to the understanding of these criminal groups, there are factors such as economic policies that have been neglected because the illegal nature of drug cartels make them difficult to research at a financial level.

On the other hand, scholars and experts are still debating NAFTA’s success because this agreement has created both positive and negative effects in México. For example, it disorganized the agriculture industry of the nation and made the nation dependent on American agriculture goods. However, it also led to the industrialization of multiple cities in México and created a strong manufacturing labor class. Also, it increased the number of foreign investments in the nation, which scholars have pointed to as a symbol of a healthy economy. Overall, campaigns are taking place in the three countries involved with NAFTA to renegotiate this agreement based on its negative effects.

The “War on Drugs” in México has proved to be a failure because it focuses far too much on the leaders of these organizations with a strategy commonly known as the “decapitation approach.” A strategy that aims to capture or eliminate the leaders of the main drug trafficking groups. However, while some of these leaders are crucial to these criminal groups, the regional or rival leaders rapidly replace them. By targeting these individuals, the Mexican government is ignoring the socioeconomic factors that contribute to the development of these groups. Moreover, at the center of this campaign is the militarization of the nation with the cooperation of the United States government. However, this policy does not address other factors such as the great levels of corruption among the military forces and the cases of military personnel been used to target leftist groups.

To properly contain the growth of these groups there has to be a deeper understanding of how these organizations maintain control over communities and regions. This research demonstrates that the growth of these criminal syndicates is connected to the establishment of NAFTA, which calls for new approaches in eliminating these drug trafficking groups. A greater understanding of this topic would lead to the creation of better strategies in curtailing the development of drug cartels. One strategy could be the regulation and protection of the agriculture industry in México, because communities throughout the country are dependent on this economic sector. However, without having a national market to sell their product the local agriculture industry of the nation is condemned to fail. It is clear that factors such as poverty and unemployment are needed for drug trafficking groups to operate. The Mexican government must take this argument into consideration for future changes to its “War on Drugs.”

Conclusion

NAFTA negatively affected the agriculture industry in México because it failed to recognize the significance and success of the ejido system. Consequently, millions of Mexican campesinos were forced to migrate out of their communities in search for jobs. A considerable number of these farm workers could not find a formal profession, so they joined drug trafficking organizations. This transition is explained by understanding how drug traffickers such as Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman connected their profession to the Mexican agriculture tradition, which attracted farmers to their illegal activities. However, it is difficult to measure the exact number of campesinos that turned to criminal groups after NAFTA was established because of the illegal nature of the drug trafficking organizations.

The industrialization process that NAFTA started in the northern states of México contributed to the spread of slums. These slums became valuable for drug cartels because of their close proximity to the Mexican-American border. These places were poorly equipped to provide the society with security, which allowed drug trafficking groups to conduct their operations and recruitments. Moreover, drug cartels recognized that NAFTA led to an increase of the number of vehicles that were crossing the border each day, which allowed them to transport large amounts of illegal drugs to the United States. Once the “War on Drugs” started in 2006, drug cartels began an aggressive campaign to take control of these slums. Consequently, the levels of violence in northern cities such as Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, and Reynoza increased.

Organized crime in México is a multidimensional problem that needs to be addressed immediately. Even though the Mexican government has recognized that the nation faces poverty in slums and the deregulation of the agriculture industry, there is not an official program that addresses these social problems to stop the rise of drug trafficking groups. Instead, the Mexican government continues its militarization of the “War on Drugs” to eliminate these drug trafficking groups. The United States government has supported this campaign since the 1980s and by doing so has contributed to the spread of violence in México.
References


The Mexican drug-trafficking organizations are a collection of criminal enterprises. Some, such as the Gulf cartel, have existed for decades; others, such as Los Gueros, are relative newcomers. Because of shifting alliances and breakaway cells, it is almost impossible to state definitively which cartels are in operation at any one time, and the extent of the crime, corruption, and instability associated with them has been difficult to quantify precisely. Without a clearer idea of what the DTOs are doing, the violence will only continue. Cartels also use violence to further less concrete objectives. Spectacular acts, such as rolling severed heads onto a nightclub dance floor (as La Familia Michoacana did in 2006), are designed to shock and frighten, not to move product or attract customers. Manufacturing Criminals: NAFTA’s Connection to the Mexican Drug Cartels. Jose Guzman Dominguez. Faculty Mentor: Dr. Joseph Palermo. Abstract. This paper examines how the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) led to the development of drug organizations in México. It utilizes a qualitative method to examine primary and secondary sources. The findings indicate how NAFTA disrupted the nation’s economy, which created high levels of unemployment, inequality, and an atmosphere of social competition over industrial jobs; these elements precipitated the growth of drug cartel... Drug cartels in Mexico are one of the frequently discussed issues in international relations. With the rise of these cartels has come violence such as kidnappings and killings. Looking at the influence of drug cartels in Mexico, many Mexican criminal organizations date their origins to the 1960s when the volume of contraband goods being smuggled into the United States achieved significant volumes. However, as cocaine from South America began transiting the country in the 1970s and 1980s, Mexican criminal organizations grew in importance and complexity (Dudley, 2012: 1). At the time, the criminal enterprise activity began in Columbia with cocaine. These groups would move the product north to Mexico.