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Mexican Drug Cartel Influence
in Government, Society, and Culture

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Powerful drug cartels have left an indelible mark in Mexican history, and they continue to operate with relative impunity today. Efforts by authorities to curtail their influence have failed, largely because of their inability to learn from lessons of the past. This thesis examines the history of Mexican cartel influence- highlighting the problems in government, society and culture- to understand why and how cartel influence has spread. Authorities would benefit to use this knowledge to forge a more holistic approach in their war against Mexican cartels, as their current tactics lack much efficacy. Diminishing the formidable influence of Mexican drug cartels will likely reduce violence, corruption, sexism, drug use, crime, chauvinism, environmental damage, and human rights abuses. There is no singular method to make this happen. It would be beneficial for government and society to work together, using a variety of means and introducing new ideas as necessary, to combat drug cartels.

The thesis of Jacob JiHyong Kim is approved.

Bonnie Taub

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Steven Loza, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

DEDICATION PAGE

To my beautiful wife, Emily, who has worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure my success in this endeavor: Mi amor, tú eres mi todo

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Preface

This research is organized around snapshots of history, and it is entirely possible that the data set from which the snapshot is derived is inaccurate. As time passes, there are often revelations that prove old data sets false or misleading. Theories based on these data sets are consequently debunked, and new theories take shape based on data that is more accurate. The objective in this research is not to point out differences in new and old data, but rather to provide a complete picture of Mexican drug cartels and their **evolving increase in** influence throughout history. Even if older data is revealed to be spurious or misleading, it is worthwhile to examine the accompanying theories and perspectives. This thesis builds on past findings to provide potential solutions on the way ahead.

Introduction

On February 22, 2014, United States and Mexican authorities captured Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, a Mexican man considered the world's most powerful drug trafficker. His apprehension generated substantial amount of media interest and brought much-needed credit to the embattled Mexican government, which is constantly criticized for its inability to effectively handle drug cartels.[1] Media and government portrayal of El Chapo as an untouchable figure in the dark world of illegal drug trafficking raised his status to near mythological levels. Not only was he branded Public Enemy No. 1 by the city of Chicago, but he was also considered by many to be the godfather of a vast criminal underworld (McGahan, 2014).

Time will tell whether El Chapo's arrest can produce positive outcomes, but precedents in Mexican history indicate that it will do little to curb cartel power and influence. Despite the

[1] Major U.S. media outlets such as *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* covered Guzmán's arrest.

fall of notable drug lords throughout history, the drug trade always continued, and drug cartels remain a dominating influence today. Critics point out that El Chapo's previous incarceration was an embarrassing farce, complete with an escape that highlighted government ineptitude (Helman, 2014). Mexican drug cartels profit more than $40 billion annually, and they have been formidable forces in Mexico and the United States for over five decades ("Narcocultura," 2014).

Worldwide interest over El Chapo's 2014 arrest is just one example of how significant Mexican drug cartels have become throughout the years. While it is the undoubtedly the most visible event associated with drug trafficking in recent years, media reports of cartel activity are nothing new. A Google search of recent news with keywords, "Mexican cartel," normally produces results no older than a month. Drug seizures, drug tunnel discoveries, and cartel violence are routine near the border. Cartel violence has been relatively constant since the 1970s.

Even in the 21st century, it is evident that Mexico's drug cartels are intent on committing brazen acts of violence in defiance of authority. A February 2014 *Los Angeles Times* article described one recent example of cartel audacity: Four decapitated heads in the city of Michoácan (Sanchez & Faussett, 2014). Michoácan has been in a virtual state of war since January 2014, when vigilante citizens of the town armed themselves in an effort to drive out the Knights Templar cartel. Sensing that a bloodbath was imminent, the Mexican federal government sent in thousands of troops and police in order to maintain peace. Rather than bring peace, federal presence escalated violence with the cartel and created friction with the citizens, who refused to lay down their arms (Faussett, 2014).

Citizens apparently have little faith in government capabilities (Figure 2). Even as large swaths of Mexico confront cartel rule on a daily basis, authorities seem resigned to the status quo; unwilling to implement real change and attempting to use force that is rarely effective.

Authorities often cite high profile arrests and drug-busts as proof of progress against the illicit drug trade, but the very fact that those events continue to occur shows the power and resiliency of an industry that has existed for more than five decades.

The case of Michoácan displays how complex the situation has become. If only it were as simple as sending in armed forces to restore order, then perhaps Mexico would have less trouble with cartels. But decades of government corruption, societal influence, and billions of dollars in dirty money are too firmly entrenched in a system that remains critically flawed. Homicide and violence rates have decreased since 2011, but the numbers are still high enough to question the efficacy of armed tactics.[2] In fact, history shows that the arrest of thousands of cartel members is still insufficient to stop cartel influence.[3] And experts believe that the arrest of top cartel bosses does not necessarily have a positive effect, as new leaders emerge and networks are reconfigured (Molzahn, Ferreira & Shirk, 2013, p. 2).

Legal loopholes and bureaucracy protect corrupt figures from prosecution while law enforcement is woefully unequipped to counter cartel firepower. According to journalist Anabel Hernández, Mexico is a state on the verge of collapse that has failed to provide its citizens with basic rights (Hernández, 2012). Power hungry politicians and a political hegemony have deprived citizens of the right to vote while quashing all media attempts expose corruption and build public outrage. Freedom of press does not exist in Mexico today. Journalists who dare to expose corruption or cartel activities often face violent consequences and fear for their lives. This is not an environment that supports freedom and equality, but rather one that breeds fear and anarchy (Hernández, 2012).

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[2] After peaking in 2011, the number of homicides declined about four percent in 2012 to 26,037. The total number of homicides further declined by approximately 16 percent in 2013 to 18,146. As many as two-thirds of all intentional homicides were related to organized-crime killings (Heinle, Ferreira, & Shirk, 2014, p. 2).

[3] 28,651 cartel members were arrested in 2005 by the Fox administration, and over 47,000 cartel members were arrested during Calderón's administration (Molzahn, Ferreira, & Shirk, 2013, p. 33).

Part of the problem undoubtedly lies with the insatiable demand for illicit drugs in the United States, recently brought to headlines with the death of a notable U.S. actor. Forbes published an article tying actor Phillip Seymour Hoffman's early 2014 death, apparently caused by a heroin overdose, to the role Mexico's drug cartels play in bringing the heroin to the United States (Estévez, 2014). The article declares Mexico as the primary supplier of heroin to the U.S. and it states that the amount of heroin seized each year at the Mexican border has increased nearly four-fold since 2012 (Estévez, 2014).

Distribution of drugs in the U.S. is widespread, with pockets of cities such as metro Chicago capturing headlines as the "perfect storm" of drug activity (Goudie, 2014). Proclaimed as the transportation hub of America, Chicago is reported to be the Sinaloa cartel's number one destination for wholesale distribution of heroin and cocaine.[4] According to *The Weekly*, Sinaloa cartel's leader, Joaquín Guzmán, was branded Public Enemy No. 1 for precisely this reason (Bates, 2014).

Chicago is not the only city reeling from the effects of drug addiction. A USA Today article in April 2014 called heroin a growing threat across America, claiming more lives in many communities than violent crime and car crashes. Between 2009 and 2013, heroin seizures increased 87 percent (Johnson, 2014). This increasing demand in the U.S. is what has driven the drug industry for years. As long as this demand exists, it may be difficult, if not impossible, to extinguish the supply. If there is one thing Prohibition taught authorities, it is that supply and demand for illegal goods will always find ways to go around the law (Recio, 2002, p. 30).

U.S. demand for illegal drugs provides fuel for Mexican cartels to operate. But historically, Mexico has been more of a transport corridor for drugs rather than a production hub.

[4] A 2010 Department of Justice report named the Chicago metro area the number one destination for heroin shipments and number two destination for marijuana and cocaine (McGahan, 2014).

Latin American countries have held the distinction of being primary producers since the infant stages of Mexican cartel development. When these countries realized the mass consumer market waiting on the other side of Mexico's border, they entered into an uneasy alliance with Mexico's growing cartel organizations. It was not until the U.S. got involved that Mexican cartels reached their full potential. Clandestine operations by U.S. government agencies are arguably responsible for Mexican cartels' rise to power. Whether the operations had the desired results are uncertain. What is certain however, is the far reaching consequences; breeding generations of drug addicts in the U.S. and inadvertently pumping billions of dollars in drug money into international economies (Webb, 1996).

Mexico's drug cartels continue to collaborate with their counterparts in Latin American countries to be the primary transporters of cocaine to the United States. According to Drugpolicy.org, the Andean countries of Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia are still the world's primary producers of cocaine as of 2014, and Mexico is the main bridge crossed to reach U.S. consumers. Latin American countries that produce drugs suffer from environmental and communal damage stemming from forced eradication of coca crops. Insurgent groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and other cartels fight authorities for production and trafficking of drugs, causing violence, corruption, and essentially the same issues that Mexico faces ("Drug Trafficking in Latin America," 2014).

With a population of more than a 113 million people and one of the world's largest economies, Mexico seems to be a country ready to evolve into a world superpower. Yet, it struggles to control rampant corruption and violence stemming from drug trafficking. Many homicides are not even investigated, and even fewer are given closure in terms of justice

("Narcocultura," 2014).[5] The 2013 Failed State Index ranks Mexico 97th out of 178 for its well-publicized issues with drug cartels, and the Transparency International's measure of corruption ranks Mexico 106th out of 177 nations (Dowd, 2014). These facts and statistics cause pessimists to view Mexico not as a world power, but rather a failed state that will inevitably fall into cartel control.

With every passing day, Mexican cartels launder millions of dollars to legitimize their wealth, exponentially increasing their influence to international levels (Flitter & Horowitz, 2014).[6] A holistic approach is required to reduce Mexican cartel influence because force alone has proven to be insufficient (Heinle, Ferreira, & Shirk, 2014, p. 20).[7] Authorities are increasingly looking at the history of Mexican cartel influence, analyzing the reasons for their rise and the reasons for past failures to prevent that rise. This thesis will scrutinize Mexican cartel influence in government, journalism, music, and entertainment as a means to provide holistic, pragmatic solutions. El Chapo's arrest can be the beginning of something very productive, if the lessons from history are taken into account.

History of Government Corruption

Corruption in Mexican government is so ingrained and ubiquitous that it is practically an institutionalized component of their government. A system abhorred by a public and society that has bitterly come to accept it as an unavoidable norm. Government corruption, defined as the illegal or unethical use of public power for private gain, has existed in Mexico in various forms such as extortion, bribery, kickbacks, and taxes. Documented corruption at various levels of

[5] Only three out of every 100 homicides are investigated. 97 percent of the 10,000 murders in last four years have not been investigated ("Narcocultura," 2014).
[6] As of May 2014, U.S. regulators were investigating Charles Schwab Corp and Merrill Lynch brokerage for ties to drug cartels and millions in laundered funds (Flitter and Horowitz, 2014).
[7] Homicide and violence rates in Mexico remain relatively high in 2013 (Heinle et al., 2014, p. 20).

Mexican government existed since colonial times, as flaws in Mexico's political and legal system facilitated abuse of power in the federal government. Key events in history strengthened Mexican cartel power, consequently increasing the amount of corruption.

The early years of the 21st century have seen significant changes in Mexican politics, to include vast improvements in the people's ability to make civil servants accountable to the public. Prior to the 21st century, Mexico's flawed constitutional and political system, coupled with years of one party, and hegemonic rule, made it particularly susceptible to corruption. President Plutarco Elias Calles established the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) in 1929 after years of political turmoil in Mexico. The resulting consolidation of power in the PNR, which evolved to Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in 1946, resulted in a hegemonic monopoly over elections and government for more than seven decades (Morris, 2009, p. 24).

PRI's reign in the 20th century was complex, with elements of centralized and decentralized rule. In Mexico's capital and federal district, extreme centralization of political power often made it difficult for leaders to make even the most mundane decisions without contact with top officials. This was characterized by a dominant executive power and monopolistic control of job mobility in the PRI (Morris, 1991, pp. 43-44). Contrast this with the chaotic conditions in the provincial outposts, where one PRI appointee was often the executive, legislative, and judicial authority. With little oversight from the top and nobody to hold them accountable, mayors and governors of these regions quickly became corrupt with power.

In the 1999 film, "Herod's Law," director Luis Estrada satirizes the corruption of PRI and points out the flaws of decentralization. The protagonist, Juan Vargas, is appointed temporary mayor of a small village. Although he has good intentions in the beginning, he is quickly corrupted by the fact that he is free to govern as he pleases. Decentralization provides Vargas

with very few tools to govern, but also gives him complete authority with little oversight. Vargas kills, extorts, and bribes his way to financial success at the expense of village citizens ("Herod's Law," 1999).

20th century Mexican law prohibited reelection, resulting in the constant shuffling of positions within the government and issues of job security. This one-party, upward-flow political process caused civil servants to make decisions based on appeasing their bosses rather than serving their people. Government employees were "dependent on their good standing in the party or among upper level officials for any opportunities for mobility" (Morris, 1991, p. 43). Even if political figures such as congressmen discovered corruption at the higher level, the existence of loyalty patterns and job emplacement increased pressure to refrain from making noise. It is likely that political elites shared in corrupt gains with their subordinates in order to instill a deeper sense of loyalty and dependency.

Legal methods meant to deter corruption were fundamentally flawed. Laws inhibited reporting of corruption without substantial evidence, and there was a notable deficiency in juridical basis for punishment of officials charged with wrongdoing. The Mexican constitution grants immunity to senators, deputies, governors, and other state officials during their tenure in office. This immunity, also called *fuero* in Spanish, has been a black eye for the Mexican government since its inception and still exists today (Rodriguez, 2013).

It was inevitable that citizens grow weary of government corruption, and their votes increasingly went towards opposition parties such as the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and National Action Party (PAN). Until 1990, Mexican elections heavily favored PRI because of corporate channeling of political rewards and electoral fraud. Fraud techniques included intimidation of opposition, disqualification of opposition party poll-watchers, and the

relocation of poll places. A poll conducted in 1991 showed that more than half of Mexicans did not trust the validity of elections (McCann, 1998, pp. 486-487).[8]

A series of reforms in early 1990s created an autonomous electoral body with sweeping powers to prevent state interference and set the stage for fair elections. The consequent effects in the political arena of Mexico were significant. Henceforth, citizens wielded the power to fight back and make their voice heard, and the once hegemonic PRI became increasingly vulnerable to criticism.[9] Politicians re-designed their strategies, as it was clear that their career did not necessarily depend on pleasing their bosses. At this point, Mexican voters had the means to vote against parties and candidates they perceived as corrupt (Morris, 2009, p. 27).

The power of legitimate elections combined with steady reform brought about fundamental changes in Mexican government's distribution of power. PRI's hegemonic hold over the presidency dwindled, and the dominance of the president over the political system weakened (Bruhn, 2010, pp. 60, 311-312). In recent years, the growing presence of opposition political parties and a strengthening of Congress ensured that the president could not simply dictate terms.

Congress passed constitutional changes in 1997 that strengthened the autonomy of its auditing agency, enabling it to review federal funds used by states, municipalities, and autonomous organs. Further reforms in the following years expanded these powers to include audits on confidential information. In 1999, Congress passed measures to control executive spending and established rules that set the maximum amount that could be spent dependent on situation and prior approval. Today, Congress plays a significant role in budget negotiations, and

[8] The refusal of Mexican government to publicize the vote count in numerous *casillas* raised further suspicions on the validity of elections (Bruhn, 2010, p. 143).
[9] By 1991, the PRI faced considerable competition from at least one opposition party in more than half of all districts. By 1994, the PRI won more than 70 percent of the vote in less than three percent of districts (Bruhn, 2010, p. 302).

it has influence in how federal money is spent. And after decades of being powerless against sitting government officials, a majority vote now gives Congress the authority to strip them of their immunity (Morris, 2009, pp. 30-37).

Taking Advantage of Weak Government

The history of corruption in Mexican politics indicates that there were various factors contributing to the state's susceptibility to corruption by drug cartels. Among them, absolute power monopoly by a hegemonic party is clearly one of the most important. Drug cartels exploited this "weakness" of Mexican government and legal system by simply bribing the most powerful officials in the system. Since the system in Mexico made it nearly impossible for sitting officials to stand trial for wrongdoing, officials felt relatively safe in their crooked dealings with drug traffickers.

Drug traffickers may have engaged in corruption of state officials as early as the 1910s, when traffickers in Mexico made a fortune from smuggling alcohol and opium to the United States.[10] Trafficking of opium had already been a lucrative trade, but the additions of alcohol and U.S. Prohibition further increased profits for traffickers. Mexican state treasuries received significant fiscal revenues from the sale of various liquors, and officials pocketed thousands of dollars in corrupt kickbacks (Recio, 2002, p. 30). Esteban Cantú, governor of Baja California during that period, "not only obtained a considerable income from alcohol smuggling, but his earning were also vastly increased by opium trafficking (Recio, 2002, p. 34).

In addition to corrupt payments, state officials began to sell licenses and permits for traffickers to operate with relative impunity. Mexico had replaced tariffs with import permits and

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[10] U.S. enactment of the Volstead Act in 1919 created black markets worth millions of dollars, encouraging expansion of liquor and narcotics along the border (Recio, 2002, p. 27).

licenses by the late 1950s and relied on proceeds to sustain industrialization (Grayson, 2014, p. 13). The “drug trafficker bought his ‘license’ or ‘franchise’ from the local ‘jefes,’ the police comandante, the mayor, the military or in some situations after negotiations with the local patron, mine, owner, large land owner, rancher or major businessman” (Lupsha, 1991, p. 43). Payment in the form of the “mordida,” referring to lower-level bribes or extortions, was common, prompting presidential advisor Frank Tannenbuam to declare the mordida a principal impediment to good government and economic progress (Morris, 1999, p. 624).

When drug traffickers made large business transactions with local officials, the notoriety of the deal usually lead higher state officials to demand a piece of the profits. State judges were often bribed to grant “amparo,” an injunction issued on behalf of the citizen preventing prosecution for wrongdoing, if the drug trafficker was caught by authorities. As drug trafficking exploded in the late 1960s and early 1970s, criminal organizations and their extended familial ties controlled entire regions and estates. Their ties with corrupt elected officials granted them virtual immunity from the law, leading members of the press to label them as “Intocables” (Lupsha, 1991, p. 44).

When money alone was insufficient to corrupt state officials, drug cartels relied on intimidation tactics. Targets were kidnapped, threatened, and tortured into submission. Cartels exploited weaknesses of individuals -whether it be a friend, family member, or personal demon- to get them to comply with their demands. To prevent targets from going to authorities, cartels have employed spies and common denizens of city streets to serve as couriers and lookouts. Many cartels even had a female division which negotiated deals with state officials. Los Zetas employed a group of females called, “Las Panteras,” who “change their makeup and the color

and style of their hair according to the assignment they were undertaking" (Grayson, 2014, p. 62). When talks failed, female cartel members were encouraged to seduce or murder targets.

By the 1970s and '80s, Mexican drug cartels had entered into an informal alliance with the government. As long as they abided by the rules, the government did not take action against the import, storage, processing, and export of drugs. Included among an assortment of government rules were obligations for cartels to give large sums of money on demand, to grant favors such as assassinations, and to refrain from selling drugs to children. In return, cartels were granted protection from local police, military commanders, governors, and their representatives (Grayson, 2014, p. 22).

In a notorious system known as the "1-2-3 system," cartels allegedly paid authorities the following bribes for the ability to produce, store, or ship narcotics in lucrative locations: $1M for an interior location, $2M for a coastal zone, and $3M for a U.S.-Mexico border crossing. When both sides of this corrupt alliance kept their end of the bargain, it was common for drug barons to be openly friendly with public figures. Drug barons often attended public functions, weddings, and other prominent events with state officials (Grayson, 2014, pp. 23-24).

U.S. Ties with Mexican Drug Cartels

Had it not been for the demands of the United States, Mexico may not have been as corrupt or susceptible to drug cartel influence in its troubled history. During World War II, the U.S. sought to acquire an alternate source for opium to make morphine. Mexico was considered the ideal country, agriculturally and otherwise, and a partnership developed. The United States, in all its hypocrisy, urged Mexico to curb the drug trade while purchasing opium from Mexico at the same time. The resulting period of government sanctioned opium trade gave rise to a new

breed of opium and narcotics farmers in Mexico (Grayson, 2014, pp. 35-36). After World War II ended, the U.S. no longer needed the opium but farmers in Mexico continued to produce drugs. Mexican operations became more secretive and highly lucrative.

Meanwhile, in the United States, a generation of military personnel came back from war eager to expand their minds and continue opium use. Demand for opium and narcotics skyrocketed, and Mexico's drug trafficking industry was happy to comply. Drug cartels and opium farmers gained enormous fortunes, giving them the capability to bribe officials and hire their own armies of troops (Grayson, 2014, p. 36).

Rather than fight against this, the Mexican government set up an elaborate system of bribes and kickbacks in the 1970s. While the Mexican Army helped watch over drug plantations, the Federal Judicial Police (PJF) helped transport the drugs and the Mexican Federal Security Directorate (DFS) made direct transactions with drug lords. In return, drug cartels paid a tax of sorts- sixty dollars per kilo -to the federal government for immunity. This tax was divided up the chain of command, and everyone got a share. Testimony from informants allege that Mexico's president, attorney general, and secretary of defense were aware and supportive of these operations. In "the upper echelons of the state, everyone had a job to do and everyone was handsomely rewarded for doing it 'well' " (Hernández, 2013, p. 65).

The situation became complicated in the 1980s when the U.S. government involved the Mexican government in the Iran-Contra affair. Investigation into the U.S. Iran-Contra operations and the resulting report in 1986 uncovered an elaborate scheme between the U.S. government, Mexican government, and various drug cartels. As the Cold War with Russia continued in the early 1980s, the Reagan administration was intent on fighting the spread of Communism on all fronts. Convinced that the Sandinista government in Nicaragua was a Communist threat to the

region, President Reagan authorized the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to engage in operations to support the armed movement of Nicaraguan "Contras," who were attempting to overthrow the Sandinista government (Rubenberg, 1988, p. 1475).

In 1982, the CIA operation was hindered by an uncooperative Congress, which passed a constitutional amendment prohibiting the CIA from spending money on the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government.[11] This measure was strengthened further in 1985, when Congress prohibited all U.S. government agencies from lending direct or indirect support to any country. Undeterred by these measures, Reagan's administration directed the CIA to continue supporting the Contras through clandestine methods (Currie, 2008, p. 191).

With Congress cutting off funding, the CIA had little choice but to pursue alternate means to acquire money and support. First, U.S. officials involved in the operation brokered deals with Iran and Saudi Arabia to funnel funds, arms, and other lethal supplies to the Contras (Currie, 2008, pp. 194-195).[12] Second, they collaborated with top drug lords in Mexico and Colombia to support Contras in a scheme that also involved the Mexican government. Notable drug barons that collaborated with the CIA in this effort include Pablo Escobar of Colombia and drug traffickers of the Mexican Pacific organization such as Felix Gallardo, Caro Quintero, and Fonseca Carrillo (Hernández, 2013, p. 49).

In exchange for providing money, arms, and more to the Contras, the CIA helped these drug lords import massive amounts of drugs into the United States. Thousands of kilos of cocaine and heroin were transported on CIA planes bound for Miami, Florida and Mena, Arkansas, resulting in staggering profits for the cartels (Hernández, 2013, p. 72). These sales

[11] The Boland Amendment

[12] U.S. officials used a third party agent, Enterprise, for the direct sales of weapons to Iran beginning in 1986. Enterprise acted as a bank for foreign investors to deposit money for supporting the Contras. Secret donations by Saudi Arabia and other foreign countries topped $32 million (Walsh, 1993).

helped increase the power and influence of drug cartels for years to come, with disastrous consequences for Mexican society. In the United States, the CIA's importation of drugs poisoned a generation of Americans with narcotics and played a principal role in creating a culture of drug dependence (Webb, 1996).

The drug barons did their part by providing Contras with millions of dollars and military weapons (Leogrande, 1997, p. 16). There was even speculation based on testimony that Contras trained on the lands of Mexican drug lords prior to battling against the Sandinistas (Hernández, 2013, p. 55). Meanwhile, the CIA enlisted the aid of top officials in the Mexican government, leveraging the considerable power of the United States, by either bribing them or convincing them of the merits in their goals.[13] For their part, the Mexican government helped silence nosy reporters, turned a blind eye to drug trafficking, and employed law enforcement forces to streamline corrupt operations (Hernández, 2013, p. 65).

When a journalist from *Excélsior* discovered CIA collusion with drug traffickers and government officials, he was killed by member of the DFS and all evidence was destroyed (Hernández, 2013, pp. 52-59). The Mexican government employed the DFS as a cover to control, direct, and facilitate the majority of operations with drug cartels. United States involvement in this circle of corruption served to validate corrupt Mexican officials' rationale that their collusion with drug traffickers was somehow just. The Mexican government had already been corrupt prior to Iran-Contra, but the affair deepened their depravity and planted the seeds to long-term corruption. When the U.S. washed their hands of the unsuccessful affair, Mexico found itself rife with corruption, facing powerful cartels that were increasingly difficult to control.

[13] CIA agent Winston Scott set up a network called LITEMPO, through which top Mexican officials were paid handsomely to work on behalf of the U.S. government. Officials on the payroll included Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, Luis Echeverría, and leaders of the DFS (Hernández, 2013, p. 59).

Corruption in Military, Law Enforcement, and Governors

The Mexican federal government's law enforcement agencies were notorious for corruption. The DFS, PJF, and Anti-Narcotics Prosecution Office (FEADS) were all organizations created to supposedly crack down on drug trafficking and investigate matters of national security, but numerous members have been found in collusion with drug cartels. Many officers in these agencies were placed in enormously risky, but powerful positions to extract money from drug smugglers while still appearing to do their jobs. The lucrative nature of these positions made them subject to intense competition, where potential candidates jockeyed for advantages with drug lords and politicians (Andreas, 1998, p. 162). Corruption was made easier by the fact that it was difficult to distinguish between law enforcement and criminals, as the majority of agencies did not wear official uniforms and their legal statuses were purposely left vague (Lupsha, 1991, p. 45).

For the DFS, years of working with cartels for government-sanctioned operations inevitably produced high levels of corruption motivated by personal gain. One of the founders of DFS, Captain Rafael Chavarri, became a close aide to Jorge Moreno Chauvet, a man once known as the "Al Capone of Mexico." (Lupsha, 1991, p. 45). Another former founder of DFS, Rafael Guajardo, became a drug baron in the Chihuahua region for the Guadalajara cartel (Hernández, 2013, p. 19). Drug kingpins such as Felix Gallardo enjoyed the protection of the DFS. These drug lords carried their own DFS badge and worked closely with the DFS chief to achieve their needs (Corchado, 2013, p. 42).

President Miguel de la Madrid dismantled the DFS during his tenure, and the state henceforth leaned heavily on the PJF to conduct anti-drug trafficking operations. But the PJF quickly became saddled with corruption as well. A 1993 confession by El Chapo Guzmán

revealed that the head of the PJF in Sonora accepted bribes up to $500,000 to allow El Chapo to grow marijuana crop (Hernández, 2013, p. 31). PJF leadership became notorious for their underhanded dealings with cartels.

The chief of the PJF, Rodolfo León Aragón, who had a long-standing relationship with the Arellano Félix family of the Tijuana cartel, received regular payments of $1 million from cartels (Andreas, 1998, p. 162). He was infamous for his ability to play both sides of the field; he helped traffickers avoid capture in exchange for huge bribes while executing anti-drug trafficking orders from officials. There is speculation that León helped coordinate the alleged, state-ordered assassination of Cardinal Jesús Ocampo, who was killed because he allegedly knew too much about the connections between high state officials and drug cartels (Hernández, 2013, pp. 24-40).

Corruption plagued FEADS, the agency in charge of conducting investigations into drug trafficking. The head of FEADS, Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, was arrested for aiding and protecting notorious drug baron Amado Carillo Fuentes in 1997. The Fox administration dissolved FEADS in 2003 after an investigation found that agents were attempting to extort millions from a drug cartel in exchange for the release of two cartel members and five tons of marijuana. Over 700 antidrug agents were subsequently investigated for suspected corruption (Morris, 2009, p. 255).

With so many federal law enforcement agencies in their pockets, it was not too difficult for cartels to corrupt local police, who held considerably less power than federal agents did. Nevertheless, they were the ones making the greatest impact to the majority of the Mexican public. Drug cartels were “masters at bribing and intimidating local police, thousands of whom receive one paycheck from their municipality and another from the cartel” (Grayson, 2014, p. 60). Local police currently receive a meager salary between $9,000 and $10,000 a year. Cartel

bribery can double or triple that amount simply for looking the other way (Lee, 2014). It was common to find police officers doubling as drug enforcers and drug-smuggling protectors. When Sinaloa drug cartel leader Hector "El Geurro" Palma was apprehended in 1995, he was found in the home of a police commander and many of Palma's men were found to be members of the PJF (Andreas, 1998, p. 162).

Military forces fall under similar patterns of corruption. In 1991, authorities discovered that the navy secretary, Mauricio Schleske Sánchez, had accepted bribes from drug traffickers to purchase $700,000 worth of homes in Houston, Texas. From 2000-2001, officials arrested two generals for bribery and collaboration with drug cartels (Morris, 2009, p. 255). During President Felipe Calderón's war against drugs, over ten military officers were arrested for aiding narco-traffickers (Grayson, 2014, pp. 110-114).[14]

Mexico's history of centralized, hegemonic regimes left states outside of Mexico City susceptible to corruption and lacking in federal oversight. This is particularly true of the states along the gulf and borders of Mexico, where, not coincidentally, the majority of drug traffic flowed. Drug cartels have held enormous influence in these regions, where their private mercenary armies decisively outnumbered law enforcement officers (Sullivan, 2014, p. 2). Drug cartel corruption of governors in these states was a continuous issue throughout history.

Reports by journalists exposed governors of Guerrero, Quintana Roo, Jalisco, Veracruz, and Morelos of having corrupt ties to drug trafficking in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s (Morris, 2009, p. 256). In return for lavish bribes, governors facilitated the passage of drugs and provided drug traffickers virtual immunity from the law (Grayson, 2014, p. 53). The governor of Sinaloa in

[14] The majority of these generals arrested in 2012 were accused of having ties with the Beltrán Levya cartel. They were acquitted in January 2013, leading to renewed criticism of flaws in the Mexican legal system (Molzahn et al., 2013, p. 36).

1962, Leopoldo Sanchez Celis, was close friends with notorious drug trafficker Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo. Their public interactions underscored drug cartel influence in elite, political and economic circles. In some areas, cartel influence was reflected in “foreign investments.” Jalisco in the early 1980s saw large, suspicious investments poured into hotels, restaurants, housing developments, foreign exchange agencies, and car dealerships. Jalisco state governor, Enrique Álvarez del Castillo, concealed the investments and authorities did not investigate the matter further (Hernández, 2013, p. 18).

Campaigns and Reforms against Corruption

In an attempt to shed the image of corruption, Mexican presidents have waged anti-corruption and anti-drug trafficking campaigns, but the results were rarely effective enough to make a noticeable difference. Corruption at all levels, particularly the most visible ones in local law enforcement, continued to plague the majority of Mexican regions. Public officials often swept into office with promises of change. Rather than make the changes, they blamed their predecessor and continued a pattern of hypocrisy. The trend among presidential administrations was to publicize anti-corruption success stories and use inflammatory rhetoric in an attempt to disassociate themselves from previous administrations.

President Luis Echeverría was one of the first presidents to take up a banner of anti-corruption. From 1970-76, he went on the offensive against a number of corrupt officials for laziness, incompetence and corruption. But years after Echeverría stepped down, critics charged his administration with corruption of “scandalous proportions” (Morris, 1991, p. 98). He was charged in 2006 with genocide relating to the 1968 Tlatelolco incident, becoming the first

president in Mexican history to be tried for a crime committed while in office (Morris, 2009, p. 250).[15]

President José López Portillo implemented various reforms for greater public oversight. These reforms included granting the Chamber of Deputies greater power to oversee and sanction money used by the executive, and an increase of opposition party representation to counter PRI hegemony. Portillo amended the law, requiring public disclosure of civil servant properties. By May 1978, the Justice Department investigated 903 public officials and handled 3,000 denunciations of corruption (Morris, 1991, pp. 91-96).

Portillo's tactics seemed to work. Officials suggested that his reforms were more effective than the Penal Code. However, similar to Echeverría, Portillo's term "ended in a free-for-all of corruption that many felt overshadowed that of previous administrations" (Morris, 1991, p. 98). A report released by the Mexican government in 2006 revealed that Echeverría and Portillo had abused their power to crush leftist dissidence during their tenures, resulting in over 1,650 cases of torture, massacres, disappearances, and other crimes (Morris, 2009, p. 251).

Miguel de la Madrid took a "revolutionary" approach after being elected in 1982. Going so far as to denounce efforts by previous administrations as "demagoguery," he launched a "Moral Revolution" meant to prevent, detect, correct, and punish immoral acts by public officials (Morris, 1991, p. 91). Madrid jailed prominent officials of the former administration, created a cabinet-level Comptroller's office, and set the legal guidelines and penalties for corruption (Morris, 1999, p. 625).[16] The highlight of anti-corruption prosecutions under Madrid included

[15] The Oct 2, 1968 Tlatelolco massacre occurred when government forces brutally suppressed a group of student protestors, killing at least 49 and injuring 500 (Braun, 1997, p. 533)

[16] Despite pursuing members of Portillo's administration, Miguel de la Madrid refused to go after Portillo himself (Saragoza, Ambrosi, & Zárate, 2012, p. 153).

cases against a former director of PEMEX and the former chief of Mexico police (Saragoza, Ambrosi, & Zárate, 2012, p. 153).

Mexico's Justice Department announced in 1983 that it had recovered more than 200 million pesos from officials jailed for corruption in the first few months of Madrid's presidency. The newly created Comptroller General bragged that it prosecuted 4,500 government employees and handled 7,000 complaints from 1983 to 1986. These highly sensationalized cases and statistics belied an effort that looked great on paper, but did not produce noticeable change. Citizens still suffered from rampant corruption and violence. The twilight of Madrid's presidency was marked by high-profile scandals and assassinations, which highlighted the failures of his revolution (Morris, 1991, pp. 93-98).

President Carlos Salinas began anticorruption efforts by jailing corrupt officials from Madrid's administration. He classified the drug trade as a national security issue and created various agencies for national security, intelligence, and drug enforcement. Salinas notably went after corrupt labor leaders, powerful leaders of the oil union, and financiers involved in a stock market scandal (Saragoza et al., 2012, p. 153).

Salinas' successor, Ernesto Zedillo, went after corrupt Supreme Court judges and prominent union leaders. Zedillo strengthened the autonomy of the judiciary, overhauled the organization of police agencies, and attempted to create agencies that would supervise and audit the use of federal funds (Morris, 1999, p. 626). Both Zedillo and Salinas invested millions of dollars on military and anti-drug operations, but the results failed to curb deep-seated corruption (Andreas, 1998, pp. 161-162).

Zedillo ended his term as the last of the uninterrupted, seven-decade line of PRI presidents of Mexico. Vincente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN) came into office in 2006.

He implemented massive crackdowns on corrupt officials affiliated with the Office of the General Prosecutor and the periodic rotation of judicial police. After claiming to have replaced more than 3,000 corrupt police officers and conducting over 2,000 investigations against others, Fox boasted that corruption had been reduced considerably during his tenure. External and unofficial assessments indicated that Fox's claims had merit. Unlike his predecessors, Fox's anticorruption effort had a greater impact because he did not have to conform to any hegemonic political party's machinations to remain in power. His anti-corruption reforms did not necessarily equate to a guaranteed reduction in corruption, but it certainly pointed towards progressive reform that showed effort and increased transparency (Morris, 2009, pp. 85-109).

President Felipe Calderón took the helm from Vincente Fox and declared war against drug cartels. Employing military assets at his disposal, Calderón sought to destroy drug lords, their illegal crops, and their armies. Mexican drug cartels with armies of their own. The subsequent bloodshed recorded some of the highest levels of homicide and brutality in Mexican history. Between 47,000 and 60,000 people died and over 25,000 people disappeared (Molzahn et al., 2013, p. 1). While the majority of deaths were those of cartel members, the sheer level of daily violence frightened the public and was bad for business (Flannery, p. 186).

Calderón utilized law enforcement to tackle corruption. In one case, the federal police rounded up 35 municipal governors, state officials, and other officials on charges of having ties to the cartel La Familia Michoacana. On another occasion the Attorney General's Office arrested ten former mayors for alleged links to drug trafficking (Felbab-Brown, 2013, pp. 2-6). Calderón faced criticism for his bloody, forceful tactics, particularly since the results were dubious at best; despite thousands of casualties, cartel violence increased and cartel power did not seem

diminished. Many of the anti-corruption arrests were ruled groundless, resulting in releases for the allegedly crooked politicians.

In order to distance himself from Calderón's bloody administration, President Enrique Peña Nieto assumed office in 2012 with an emphasis on reducing the use of military force against organized crime. However, the results from his first year in office show that he has continued his predecessor's strategy of targeted military strikes. Several significant cartel leaders have been killed or arrested in the last two years (Heinle et al., 2014, p. 3).[17]

Nieto has taken steps to change the organizational setup of Mexico's law enforcement. He dismantled the Secretariat of Public Security and placed the Federal Police under the control of the Ministry of Interior (Felbab-Brown, 2013, pp. 5-7). Nieto implemented a new network, the System of Coordination and Cooperation, which divides Mexico into five regions for sharing responsibilities of security. He established a 10,000 unified police command system at the state level (Molzahn et al., 2013, p. 39).

Like some of his predecessors, Nieto seems resolved to shuffling existing law enforcement agencies and creating new ones. And like his predecessors, Nieto's methods are likely to be unsuccessful. To be fair to past Mexican presidents, part of the reason for their unsuccessful methods "was that they did not fundamentally alter the nature of the state-society balance" (Morris, 1991, p. 101). Deep-rooted corruption in government can only change for the better with fundamental changes in society. So far, there is nothing novel in Nieto's methods. It is highly likely that widespread corruption exists in his administration today.

[17] Arrested: Miguel Angel "Z-40" Treviño and Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán. Killed: Nazario "El Chayo" González and Enrique "El Kike" Solís (Heinle et al., 2014, p. 3).

Trust in Public Officials

As corruption became prevalent, public trust in local and national authority corroded. A survey done in the mid-1980s found that over 70 percent of respondents felt that the payment of a bribe was necessary to deal with the government. Only 12 percent of those questioned in a 1991 poll expressed confidence in the police (Morris, 1999, p. 625). A 2001-2002 poll by the Encuesta Nacional de Corrupción y Buen Gobierno (ENCBG) portrayed public sentiment that corruption is greatest at the highest levels of government (Figure 1).

	2001	2002
Federal	38.0	35.0
State	19.5	22.5
Municipal	16.6	12.9
All Equal	21.3	25.5
Don't know	4.3	4.1

Figure 1: Perceived Frequency of Corruption by Level (% response)
(Morris, 2009, p. 181)

A more recent poll of registered voters conducted at the end of 2013 showed that 43 percent believe corruption to be a serious problem. Another 36 percent said it is a somewhat serious problem. Only 5 percent of those polled felt that corruption was no problem at all. The amount of money, especially large political campaign donations, flowing through government is of particular public concern. More than half the number polled considered money to be a very serious problem in government ("Common Cause New Mexico 2014 Poll," 2014, p. 9).[18] Figure two gives the obvious answer on why this is so. Rather than working for the common voter, politicians are more concerned with acquiring the support and money of powerful lobbyists (Figure 2). These statistics indicate that anticorruption campaigns have largely failed to assuage public perception of their elected officials.

[18] A random sample of 467 registered voters were interviewed by telephone between December 20, 2013 and January 2, 2014 ("Common Cause New Mexico 2014 Poll," 2014, p. 4).

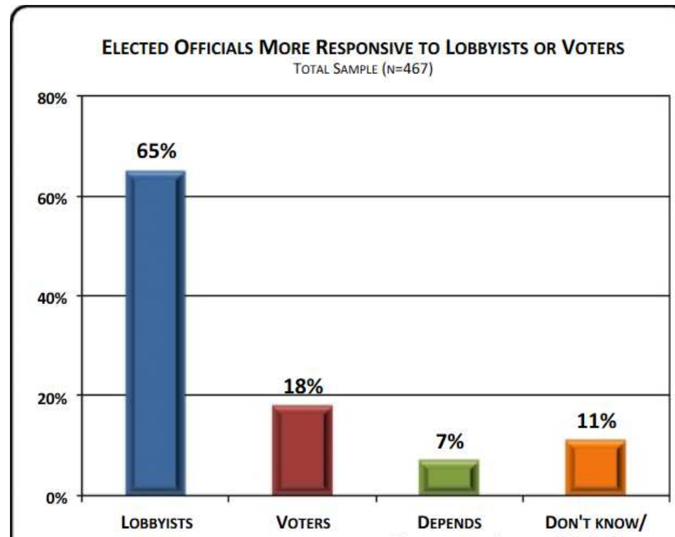

Figure 2: Elected Officials more Responsive to Lobbyists or Voters
Total Sample (n=467)
("Common Cause New Mexico 2014 Poll," 2014, p. 8)

A 2005 poll breaks down public perception of corruption by individuals:

	2005
Politicians	8.93
Prisons	8.79
Deputies	8.69
Police	8.68
Government	8.62
Judges	8.43
Justice System	8.08
Union Leaders	8.02
Unions	7.97
Bureaucrats	7.67
Big Business	7.57
Citizens	6.81
Commerce	6.80
Media	6.55
Journalists	6.32
Teachers	5.58
Religious institutions	5.02
Priests	4.64

Figure 3: Perceived Frequency of Corruption by Actor
(scale 1-10: 1=clean, to 10=corrupt)
Morris, 2009, p. 182)

According to these statistics (Figure 3), only priests received relatively low marks for perceived corruption. Everyone else, including teachers were considered moderately to extremely corrupt. State officials at all level were perceived to be the most corrupt, followed by business and media. In a separate question, a survey asked businesses to name the groups capable of having the greatest influence through bribery. The top answers were drug traffickers, followed by multinational corporations and national businesses. The majority of respondents "felt that politicians exploit public office with impunity, that the police system is highly corrupt, and that the payment of the mordida is a routine institutional feature in dealing with the government" (Morris, 1991, p. 111).

Cartel Significance to Local and International Economies

After years of growth, drug cartels have become powerful enough to be a principal player in world markets. By the time the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was in place under President Carlos Salinas' administration, drug money had become an integral part of Mexican economy. Mexican public figures did not mention this fact because it would have been tantamount to government complicity in an illicit enterprise. But it was clearly the truth. Nearly 70 percent of South American cocaine funneled through Mexico by the 1990s. Mexico produced 80 percent of marijuana and 30 percent of the heroin imported into the United States. All of this equated to over $7 billion in annual earnings for Mexico and billions in revenues for drug traffickers (Andreas, 1998, p. 160).

Cartel influence has become a quandary for Mexico because of the positive and negative effects on economy. On the negative side is the exodus of businesses and skilled workers. In cities such as Ciudad Juárez, cartel violence has caused people to leave in droves. They leave

behind empty offices, shuttered restaurants, and vacant malls. Major companies such as Caterpillar have urged their employees to return to the U.S. for the sake of safety, and many others refuse to invest in Mexico. As prominent businesses, leaders, and skilled workers flee Mexico, it becomes increasingly difficult for the Mexican government to provide the public with basic goods and services (Carpenter, 2012, pp. 123-125).

On the positive side, the illegal drug trade has directly employed- albeit for corrupt purposes- hundreds of thousands of people with jobs ranging from farmer to banker and journalist.[19] It has been a key influence in creating countless jobs in anti-drug trafficking agencies, police, and military. From 1987 to 1989, Mexico tripled its federal anti-drug budget, and tripled it again in the 1990s (Andreas, 1998, p. 161). It is estimated that cartels spend as much as $500 million a year on bribery. The amount of money spent to corrupt officials increased or decreased depending on the intensity of law enforcement (Andreas, 1998, p. 162).

Considering the number of people employed and the amount of money generated, a collapse of the drug trade could be equivalent to a financial collapse of Mexico.[20] Aftershocks would be felt in worldwide stock markets. The illicit drug trade is worth an estimated $400 billion per annum, and nearly $200 billion of that is successfully laundered across the world each year (Lilley, 2003, p. 3). Experts suspect that billions of dollars of drug cartel money are invested in legitimate enterprises and investments such as stocks. Once the dirty money is "cleaned," they are re-invested in illicit drug activities for further profits.

In the 1980s, Mexico implemented an ambitious program that privatized state resources. The government owned nearly 40 percent of the national economy. With little regard for the source of payments and zero input from the public, the Mexican government proceeded to sell a

[19] Officials estimate that the drug trade employs at least half a million people (Lee, 2014)
[20] Officials estimate that the drug trade makes up almost 4 percent of Mexico's $1.2 trillion annual GDP (Lee, 2014)

large amount of state resources- often at discounted prices. Mexico's richest families purchased these resources and exponentially increased their wealth. They acquired controlling shares of the majority of banks, food sectors, and communications. Not surprisingly, many of these rich families had ties to drugs cartels, and they had built their original wealth from illicit activities. The purchase of legitimate state resources allowed them to mix illicit funds with legitimate funds, facilitating the infiltration of organized crime into the larger Mexican economy (Shelley, 2001, p. 218).

Drug cartel influence on economy is significant because it contributes to the decision-making of top officials in government, who recognize the important role drug money plays in the big picture. As one top Mexican official acknowledged in 1994, "Mexico's leading drug traffickers [had] become 'driving forces, pillars even, of [Mexico's] economic growth' " (Andreas, 1998, p. 160). It is not surprising then, that high level Mexican officials throughout history conspired to increase drug production. In public appearances, their rhetoric has claimed a desire to end the scourge of drug influence. But officials who understood the importance of the drug trade to economy turned a blind eye towards cartel activity and indulged in corruption. Despite high profile captures of cartel leaders and the destruction of illicit crops, "the reality is that the drug trade has not only survived but has thrived in the face of intensified Mexican drug control efforts" (Andreas, 1998, p. 161). Drug traffickers could not have prospered unless they operated with the blessing of the state.

Successes and Failures of Reforms

Previous Mexican presidents failed to make meaningful impact on government corruption and cartel influence because of several reasons. One, many of them targeted individuals and

small groups rather than making systemic changes in government. When presidents made it their personal agenda to prosecute corrupt, high-profile figures, they forgot that it is the fundamental flaws in law and justice that put those figures there in the first place. In other words, prosecuting the few does nothing to fix the flaws in the system. Two, taking the fight to drug cartels does nothing to fix the rampant problems in Mexican society. Killing or capturing cartel members- even if they are leaders- does little to curb the influence of a multi-billion dollar industry. It also does not change the views of a society that idolizes cartel lifestyle and violence. Three, reforms in government systems do not work well unless they fix corruptive influences at the top levels of government. Presidents created agencies designed to prosecute and prevent corruption, but these agencies were too often hindered or corrupted by the fact that they had to answer to a higher power. Four, presidents too often forgot about the average Mexican citizen. The majority of past reforms have done little to affect corruption in local police, who continue to work with drug cartels to terrorize millions of middle class and poor Mexican citizens.

It does not help the government's case when the very presidents that are elected on platforms of anti-corruption are guilty of corruption themselves. This irony understandably causes public distrust in government and political rhetoric. López Portillo used his position as president to find lucrative government positions for his family and mistress. He purchased or helped build mansions for himself and others. Experts estimate that he embezzled from one to three billion dollars (Saragoza et al., 2012, p. 153). Miguel de la Madrid was accused of illegal finance activity after it was discovered that he had transferred between $10 and $20 million out of the country into foreign banks. Demands for investigations into his privatization of public firms and the cover-up of a journalist assassination were never realized due to PRI opposition (Morris, 1991, p. 98). Raúl Salinas was the subject of corruption probes when it was discovered

that his brother, Raul, had funneled vast amounts of government funds to overseas accounts (Le & Rishi, 2006, p. 525). Vincente Fox was accused of embezzling government funds to bankroll a lavish lifestyle that included new cars and upgrades to his personal ranch (Morris, 2009, p. 267).

Any concern that the *fuero* could be used to lob bogus charges against unpopular officials should be put to rest in favor of accountability. This law of immunity essentially allows sitting officials to commit crimes without fear of reprisal. The fact that it still exists is proof of Mexico's inability to rise from its corruption-plagued past. Mexican Congress and Senate have voted to remove *fuero* in 2011 and 2013, but the results were inconclusive (Rodriguez, 2013).

In the past, PRI control of Congress restricted investigation of corruption because members were unwilling to file charges against members of their own party. PRI members used this hegemonic dominance along with *fuero* to freely commit acts of corruption. Although loss of PRI majority in Congress has offered the possibility of investigations into corrupt politicians, *fuero* remains hindrance for progress (Saragoza et al., 2012, p. 154). Elimination of *fuero* would allow corruption to decrease by holding all state officials accountable during and after their tenure in office.

Mexican history has shown that government, cartels, and economy are inextricably intertwined. In order to free Mexico from the chains of corruption, it will take a new generation of untainted youth to take the helm of government. Mexican citizens have the responsibility to organize in order to struggle against corruption and struggle for individual rights. On the other side of the border, it will require a new generation of Americans untainted by drugs to destroy the power of drug cartels. As long as there is high demand, cartels will continue to rake in substantial profits used to perpetuate the cycle of corruption (Bernards, 1990, pp. 201-202)

Changes will only take place with patience and methodical improvement. While the state could do little to reverse damage done from decades of dirty money, they could attempt to set the right tone by prosecuting all cases of money laundering by illegitimate enterprises. The Mexican government stands to benefit from creating a justice system with sufficient funding that is not beholden to higher authorities. Loopholes that cater to those in power should be reformed to ensure that all public servants are held accountable for their actions.

Drug Cartel and Government Influence in Journalism and Media

Mexico's drug cartels have been a powerful force in journalism and media. For decades, Mexico has consistently ranked among the most dangerous in the world for the press. Journalists are high priority targets because their investigations tend to uncover illicit activity or corruption. The Mexican Constitution of 1917 defends freedom of speech and expression in Articles six and seven (Estévez, 2010, p. 7). Throughout the history of Mexico and even today, these Articles have rarely been enforced. Evidence has indicated that corruption exists at the highest levels of Mexican government, and illicit cartel activity has continued to be a large source of that corruption. This puts the journalist in the precarious position of reporting against powerful, dangerous people.

History has shown that the Mexican government has its own purposes for silencing the press. While the government uses relatively discreet methods to influence journalists, drug cartels often use deadly force to reach their public relations goals. Despite the dangers, many journalists have risen to the occasion to fight for justice- or so it seems. While their stories have exposed corrupt officials and cartel leaders alike, many of their works have also been the result of sinister machinations by rival cartels and powerful leaders (Campbell, 2012, p. 5). Plenty of

journalists have fallen victim to the temptation of bribery or coercion (Figure 5). Over the years, drug cartels have come to embrace the press, seeking to use it to their advantage. Stories are published to send cartel messages, boost cartel image, and expose rival cartels to danger.

Mexican journalists have been threatened, coerced, assaulted, and killed by drug cartels or those in collusion with cartels. Mexico is considered the most dangerous country in the Americas for journalists and the eighth most dangerous in the world (Brophy, 2008, p. 255). More than 30 journalists have been killed or disappeared since 2006, with numbers rising in recent years (Lauría & O' Connor, 2010, p. 5). However, various organizations tally the number of journalist homicides using different criteria. Justice in Mexico identified 74 journalists and media-support workers who were killed between 2006 and 2012 (Molzahn et al., 2013, pp. 29-30).[21]

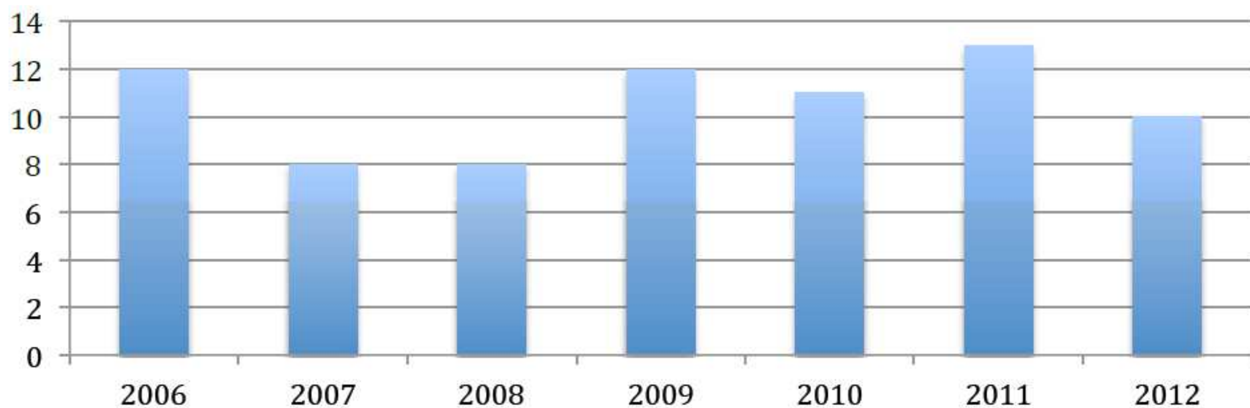

Figure 4: Justice in Mexico Tally of Journalists and Media-Support Workers Killed in Mexico, 2006-2012

(Molzahn et al., 2013, p. 30)

[21] This figure includes independent, free-lance, former journalists, and media-support workers (Molzahn et al., 2013, p. 30)

Disturbing trends present themselves when analyzing these homicides. One trend is that authorities fail or refuse to protect the journalist despite warnings or pleas for protection. Whether this occurs because of corrupt officials or because of insufficient evidence is hardly debatable, particularly when authorities usually have the last word. The alternate excuse would be incompetence, which authorities understandably have trouble admitting.

A reporter for *El Tiempo de Durango*, Bladimir Antuna, was found beaten and strangled in November 2009. Antuna had filed a complaint with the state attorney general's office that cartel gunmen had attempted to shoot him on an earlier occasion. Authorities had dismissed the case, using the ridiculous rationale that the bullets were only coincidentally shot in Antuna's direction (Carpenter, 2012, p. 74). According to the Committee for Protecting Journalists, over 90 percent of press-related crimes have failed to be prosecuted. Investigations are fraught with negligent and unlawful activities such as fabrication of evidence and complicity (Lauría & O' Connor, 2010, p. 2).

Another trend is the temerity of cartels in their disregard of authorities, which spurs them to commit their heinous acts in public, media centers as well as dark alleyways. It is a clear indicator that Mexico's criminals are rarely caught and brought to justice. In September 2009, five suspected cartel members shot reporter Norberto Miranda Madrid at a public radio station in Chihuahua. Days before he was killed, Madrid had told Mexico's Center of Journalism and Public Ethics that he had received death threats. Authorities dismissed the warning, and Madrid was riddled with bullets right in front of his colleagues. Both Madrid and Antuna wrote stories on drug cartels. Madrid published details on the arrest of a high-ranking member of the Juárez cartel, and Antuna covered various stories on violent drug crimes (Carpenter, 2012, pp. 73-74). It is no coincidence that both men were targets of cartel violence.

Perhaps the most disturbing trend is the apparent capitulation of journalism to organized crime, where the majority of news agencies fear repercussion so much that they make a concerted effort to not report cartel activity. In the Mexican border city of Reynosa, the local press refused to report on kidnappings of some of their own reporters out of fear of further cartel violence (Lauría & O' Connor, 2010, p. 6). *Zócolo*, a major news outlet located in Mexico's northern city of Saltillo, announced in 2010 that they would stop covering drug violence entirely.

News agencies participate in what is known as "news blackouts," where they do not cover any issue stemming from cartel violence. This is particularly the case in border cities such as Reynosa, where weddings and traffic stories are given preference over gunfights and executions (Carpenter, 2012, pp. 74-75). A prominent news outlet in Ciudad Juárez, a Mexican city devastated by cartel violence, published an open editorial to the heads of drug cartels. The editorial recognized the cartels as the true political force in Juárez, and requested clear guidance on what the cartels expected from the news organizations as a medium:

> We say to you that we are in the communications business, and not mind-readers. Therefore, as information workers, we want you to explain to us what you want from us, what it is your aim that we should publish or refrain from publishing…. You are, at the moment, the de facto authorities in this city, because the legally constituted authorities in city have been unable to do anything to prevent the continuing murder of our colleagues, despite our repeated demand…. We do not want more dead. We do not want more wounded nor further intimidations. It is impossible for us to fulfill our duty in these conditions. Therefore, tell us what you expect from us as a medium…
>
> (Campbell, 2012, pp. 4-5)

This example of media capitulation is astounding not only because a news outlet publicly offered its services to drug cartels, but also because it demonstrates just how powerless the state government is in the face of drug cartel adversity. According to an editor of a daily newspaper in Tamaulipas, cartels simply "send word on what they want and don't want published" (Carpenter, 2012, p. 75).

This does not necessarily mean the government is powerless when it comes to the press. In fact, the government has had tremendous influence over the press throughout history- just not in a positive way. For years, the government controlled major news organizations with methods strikingly similar to those used by drug cartels. Evidence has exposed multiple members of government officials in collusion with drug cartels. It should come as no surprise then that both the government and cartel contribute to a trend of corruption in Mexican journalism.

Corruption in the press is hardly novel. Monetary and political decisions made at the top levels of government constantly compromise the reporting integrity of Mexican news outlets. This has historically been the case, particularly because a one-party hegemony ruled Mexico for so long. The PRI held such absolute power prior to the 1990s that it was difficult for the press to report anything defamatory towards the party.

Presidents Manuel Avila-Camacho (1940-46) and Miguel Alemán (1946-52) encouraged corruption of the news media and pulled the strings necessary to consolidate media ownership under owners sympathetic to the regime. For five decades henceforth, the PRI utilized a variety of methods to control Mexican media, including physical repression, stringent regulations, threats, funding, direct government ownership, and official punishment (Lawson, 2002, p. 26).

Government funding has always been a key factor in control, as was essential to the operations of a news organization. Rather than use it to expand freedom of the press, PRI elite conspired with media owners to use funding for personal gain in a corrupt system that made the rich richer. According to Dennis and Heuvel, “about thirty to forty families own the Mexican media and they are predisposed to agree with the PRI. They are conservative, status quo businessmen who basically concede, ‘This system works for me’ ” (Dennis & Heuvel, 1990, p.

21). The Mexican elite used the press “as a vehicle for private gain and political legitimization” (Lawson, 2002, p. 25).

Another source of government funding to news outlets is advertising, which has been critical as it provides nearly half of all advertising revenue for print media. Presidents have openly declared their power to leverage this against antagonistic news agencies. In 1982, President Portillo declared that his administration would not provide advertising funds to newspapers hostile to his administration. Years later, President Salinas’ administration withdrew advertising funding from *El Economista* after the news outlet criticized government economic policies (Lawson, 2002, p. 32).

When threatening to withdraw advertising funds was not enough to coerce news agencies, the government also used tax incentives and subsidized utilities as leverage. Use of violence was rare, but the government had few qualms with getting their hands dirty if monetary methods did not succeed. Thinly veiled threats usually preceded outright harassment. Numerous journalists have been fired after exposing corrupt officials. Even owners and prominent leaders of news outlets were coerced to resign or sell their company after they did not comply with government demands (Lawson, 2002, pp. 40-43).

Mexican politicians made pro-business policies that allowed media companies to thrive in exchange for millions in campaign support and compliance in media standards. Perhaps the best example of this is Televisa, a Mexican television company that contributed a substantial amount of money to Carlos Salinas’ campaign for presidency in 1988. The Chief Executive Officer of Televisa publicly admitted that he profited so well from Salinas’ term that he was prepared to donate even more campaign money for the subsequent PRI candidate (Lawson, 2002, p. 30).

Efforts to pursue justice for murdered journalists are short-lived and insufficient. In most cases, the news outlet that employs the journalist declines to investigate the matter because they fear further bloodshed (Hastings, 2013a). When Valentín Valdéz Espinosa, a reporter for the newspaper *Zócalo de Saltillo*, was killed, his agency did not push authorities for a thorough investigation. Espinosa had written an article in December 2009 about military raids against several leaders of Los Zetas. His story mentioned the name of a cartel leader by name. Shortly thereafter, his lifeless corpse was found in a motel with signs of torture. Leaders at *Zócalo de Saltillo* simply felt that an investigation would not produce results given the powerlessness of authorities (Lauría & O' Connor, 2010, p. 34). This is indicative of the "narco-silence" that has paralyzed Mexican media.

Cartels control media to the extent that journalists can only report stories sanctioned by cartels. Los Zetas even "have a press chief and a deputy press chief whose jobs are to monitor what news outlets in Tamaulipas are reporting and to ensure that there are no negative accounts of the cartel" (Carpenter, 2012, p. 75). In many cases, cartels give journalists specific stories to write in order to spread propaganda or debilitate rival cartels. It has come to the point where the public do not believe what they read. Widespread belief that news is controlled by cartels has significantly eroded public trust in news organizations to tell the real story (Lauría & O' Connor, 2010, p. 2).

Cartels use a variety of means to assert their dominance over the media. One common practice is the use of public spectacles. They torture and brutalize their enemies, then leave the grisly corpses at public venues. Los Zetas are infamous for their brutality in this practice, often piling multiple cadavers with butchered limbs in plain view. News outlets and social media are

quick to cover the story, uploading gruesome footage for the public. In such instances, media inadvertently broadcasts cartel propaganda.

Cartels use graffiti scrawls, signs, and banners in order to send specific messages to rivals, enemies, and the public. Some messages contain direct threats to the president, journalists, and various authorities. A desecrated body is sometimes a message on its own. For example, a cut-off finger implied that the dead person was a snitch and encouraged cartel members to stay silent (Campbell, 2012, pp. 7-9).

Actions Taken to Protect the Press

After years of cartel violence against the press, the government attempted, on several occasions, to provide measures that protect the press and prosecute cartels. The irony of this is not lost on historians, who understand that many of the perpetrators of crimes against the press are government officials. In 2006, President Vincente Fox's administration created the Federal Special Prosecutor's Office to investigate, supervise, and prosecute crimes against the press (Lauría & O' Connor, 2010, p. 1). This office was assigned to the Assistant Attorney General for Human Rights, and the Attorney General had the power to remove the Special Prosecutor from power. This meant that the Special Prosecutor had no autonomy to act without approval from higher, producing a scenario where the Special Prosecutor would be especially powerless in the face of a corrupt Attorney General.

The Special Prosecutor's Office was further hindered by the fact that they had no law enforcement or prosecutorial mandate to bring criminals to justice. It could only investigate, which meant that it lacked "teeth." In the first four years of its existence, the Special Prosecutor's Office was a grand failure, averaging only one investigation per year (Estévez, 2010, p. 10). The

fact that this measure was ineffective is hardly surprising considering it comes from an administration that squandered hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars on the remodeling of a private presidential cabin. This so called, "Toallagate," reported by intrepid reporters of the *Milenio*, came on the heels of President Fox's launching of a website intended to make government purchases transparent (Castillo, 2013, p. 67).

During his presidency, President Felipe Calderón accused the press of helping cartels with their propaganda and deteriorating Mexico's image abroad (Estévez, 2010, p. 9). Nevertheless, he attempted to pass legislation through Congress to give federal authorities broader freedom to investigate crimes against freedom of expression. Calderón was not able to see the legislation through to enactment.

President Enrique Peña Nieto's administration picked up the pieces of Calderón's legislation and implemented it in 2013 ("CPJ Commends new Mexican Legislation," 2013). Hailed as a step in the right direction, the measure gives federal authorities powerful means to investigate crimes against freedom of expression. However, so far the legislation has been relatively effective. The Special Prosecutor's Office has inexplicably dragged its feet in the use of its newfound powers on hundreds of potential cases ("Attacks on the Press in 2013-Mexico," 2014).

Given the restraints against freedom of expression and the violence against journalists, one might wonder why media companies and journalists do not confront the government for protection. As mentioned before, one of the primary reasons is because the rich owners of the media conspire with the political elite to keep status quo. Government plays a large role in lining the pockets of media owners with money, and it holds the purse string for much of the advertising revenue.

The financial crisis of 2007-2008 left media companies significantly weaker and dependent on government funding to survive. In this delicate situation, media companies and journalists were hesitant to test the waters in hopes for new protection measures. In addition, "battle fatigue" has set in in the world of journalism. As journalists grow accustomed to the murders and violence around them, each killing is less brutal than that of yesterday. The death and disappearances of journalists has become so common, that it is no longer front-page-news material. It has become a tragic norm of society (Estévez, 2010, p. 11). As notable journalist Anabel Hernández notes, this is "not only a reflection of the fact that it is nearly impossible to exercise freedom of the press and expression in [Mexico]- it is also an indication of how Mexicans' rights in general are curtailed" (Hernández, 2012).

With the government providing scant support, the issue of safety against cartel violence is often left up to media owners. News outlets take several different approaches to try to protect their journalists. They can reassign reporters to cover a different story or physically reassign them to a different location. Prized journalists that are threatened sometimes receive full security details, complete with private guards, surveillance cameras, and armored vehicles. News organizations take steps to fortify their buildings and allow their journalists to sleep in the building during dangerous situations (Relly & de Bustamante, 2014, p. 117). When reporters go out to the field in dangerous areas, they are given bulletproof jackets and helmets. Measures are taken to protect the identity of their journalists by removing bylines and by having stories written strictly on factual bases. Journalists are even trained to take on dangerous assignments by taking safety courses (Estévez, 2010, p. 16).

These measures can be effective but are usually costly, meaning that not all news organizations are capable of using them. Budget restraints limit media owners' abilities to protect

their people. As one veteran reporter in the city of Juárez noted, the lack of support from companies is bigger than the problems faced by the violence from outside (Relly & de Bustamante, 2014, p. 117). This "tough financial environment also resulted in some news outlets trimming journalists' fringe benefits, such as stipends for gasoline, training, and continuing education in an already strained work environment" (Relly & de Bustamante, 2014, p. 118).

Bribery in Journalism

Evidence suggest that journalists in Mexico are highly susceptible to bribes. The "bad working conditions, low wages, a lack of health insurance, and long hours of work with scarce resources, also act as deterrents for developing high standards of professional ethics among journalists" (Estévez, 2010, p. 15). The average journalist in Mexico City earns a monthly salary between $700 and $1,500. In the provinces, the base salary range is a paltry $300 to $500 (Estévez, 2010, p. 15). Commissions, typically between eight and 15 percent, are collected not from the number or quality of stories the journalist completes, but rather from the advertising revenue procured. This causes journalists to want to sell their page for advertisement more than report on the news for the sake of income.

The most important catalyst for journalist bribery is the source of income commonly referred to as "chayos," which are regular cash payments from government agencies for politically favored stories. Chayos can net a journalist from $75-$1,500, and are capable of exceeding monthly salaries from one payment alone. An eager, sycophantic journalist writing favorable stories of a prominent politician or executive could theoretically make a fortune from chayos. Although chayos declined after President Salinas ended cash payments to journalists in 1992, alternate methods of funneling money increased considerably (Lawson, 2002, p. 35).

Other forms of bribery include favors, blandishments, and access to information. Officials and cartels often paid journalist family members to go through college or get medical treatment. More ostentatious forms of bribery include gifts of cars, houses, and jewelry (Lawson, 2002, pp. 35-37). Polls conducted by the ENCBG in 2005-2006 found that more journalists are perceived corrupt than not by citizens of Mexico (Morris, 2009, p. 182).

Newspaper	Avg Independence Rating (%)	Est % reporters who received bribes
El Diario de México	26	90
El Economista	31	15
El Día	25	91
Excélsior	25	90
El Financiero	37	27
El Heraldo	28	91
La Jornada	49	28
El Nacional	24	90
Novedades	33	75
Reforma	50	8
El Sol	25	90
El Universal	31	53
Unomasuno	36	90

Figure 5: Estimated Percentage of Reporters who Received Bribes
(Lawson, 2002, Appendix Data for Chapter 5)

As evident in the figure above, not all journalists accepted bribes, and many are far from corrupt. Despite the odds against them, notable journalists worked to expose the corruption of the system. Unfortunately, many of these journalists were murdered for their efforts. Since President Felipe Calderón declared his “war on drugs” in 2006, more journalists have been slain or disappeared than ever before (Estévez, 2010, p. 4). They are part of a long line of Mexican journalists who did exemplary work in their field, and paid the ultimate price due to a corrupt system.

Internet Use and Social Media Footprint

As internet use became universal in the late 1990s, cartels have adapted. Online venues such as Youtube are used by cartels to showcase their power and blatant disregard for authority. Cartels have uploaded videos of torture because control over bodies- both live and dead -are methods of engendering political power (Campbell, 2012, p. 11). So called “narco-videos” are prime examples of cartel propaganda. Beyond the grisly, destructive nature of the material, viewers can distinguish the themes of respect and glory that all cartels desire.

The internet has other uses for drug cartels. Websites are used to inform cartel members of important meetings and events. They often feature bulletin boards and chat rooms where cartel members can host discussion forums or engage in inter-city banter. An analysis of cartel websites showed that they had a surprising degree of security sophistication. Many of the sites are password-protected for members only, and there is false information intended to mislead rival gangs and law enforcement (Womer & Bunker, 2010, pp. 82-83). Cartels have used websites to boast of their illicit activity, regardless of the potential to self-incriminate.

Not all activities involve violence and murder, and some cartels have tried to re-brand their image in a favorable light through the internet. For example, the Gulf Cartel posted a Youtube video showing them distributing aid to the needy after the destruction of Hurricane Ingrid (Cox, 2013). Image is important for cartels, particularly as they seek to advertise their unique culture, religion and way of life. To this end, cartel members post pictures of themselves with elaborate gang-signs, guns, money, drugs, and women. While websites generally do not openly advertise member recruitment, they make an effort to appeal to outside visitors in every way possible (Womer & Bunker, 2010, pp. 85-86).

With the rise of social media in the 21st century, cartels face new challenges in media. Social networking sites give cartels the platform to advertise their exploits. However, they struggle to maintain a balance between the need for public exposure and overexposure. Limited public exposure can serve to boost cartel image of strength and recruit potential members. Overexposure can provide authorities valuable information to capture cartel members and hinder cartel operations.

Cartels have successfully harnessed social media to advertise their activities, communicate, and conduct public relations initiatives. Those with enough tech savvy have even utilized social media to hunt targets by tracking their social media activity (Cox, 2013). Experts have discovered cartel presence in social media sites MySpace, Youtube, Facebook, and even online gaming communities such as Zynga (Womer & Bunker, 2010, p. 87). MySpace has several hundred pages dedicated to Mexican drug cartels, and popular Youtube videos posted by purported cartel members have generated a considerable number of views. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have been gaining in popularity. The Knights Templar, a notorious cartel based in the Mexican state of Michoacán, used to run a Facebook page that garnered thousands of "likes" and support from the public before it was taken down (Cox, 2013).

According to the 2009 National Gang Threat Assessment, cartel members commonly use social media sites for nearly the same uses as they use stand-alone websites- to communicate with one another as well as with drug customers, and to boast about cartel-related activity (Womer & Bunker, 2010, p. 82). Los Zetas have proficiently used "such social media as the Internet, Twitter, and YouTube to recruit cadres, disseminate information about their horrendous deeds, and denounce competing organizations" (Grayson, 2014, p. 61). But cartel use of social media has become a double edged sword. While cartels have taken advantage of internet sites

such as Youtube to promulgate their propaganda, they have also been crippled by the egos of their young members who use social media without considering potential repercussions. Like millions of youth around the world, cartel members are apparently compelled to share their lives to the world via social media.

Jose Rodrigo Arechiga Gamboa, one of the top enforcers for the Sinaloa cartel, was arrested after police pieced together his travel plans from his social media postings. The 23-year-old had over 11,000 Twitter followers, and he routinely used Instagram to boast his luxurious life-style (Kelley & Ingersoll, 2014). Young, impressionable cartel members often post "selfies" showing off their cars, guns, and illicit activities (Figure 6). In doing so, they inadvertently incriminate themselves and sometimes reveal their location. Authorities have been quick to capitalize.

Figure 6: Cartel members strike a proud pose for social media
(Nouvet, unknown date)

Blogs and Blogdelnarco

Unlike most print or television journalism, the internet does not necessarily require editing or approval for mass dissemination. It allows anybody with a connection to efficiently

post articles for public consumption. Online journals called, “blogs,” claiming to have insider or eyewitness information about drug cartel activity have made a significant social-political impact in Mexico. At least half a dozen exist today. As journalists in print and television media are more likely to be corrupted or afraid to report on cartel activity, the public now relies more on the raw reality of these “bloggers” to deliver unscripted news.

One particular blog, the Blogdelnarco, features up-to-the-minute photographs and videos of cartel violence. It does not censor, and it does not seek to investigate the material they publish. According to the author of the website, the idea behind the site came “because the media and government in Mexico try to pretend that nothing is happening” (Gutierrez, 2010). Blogs such as Blogdelnarco are the citizens’ response to counter drug cartels, corrupt politicians, and corrupt journalism. It is a fight against the “narco-censorship” imposed on the media. Many blogs are “city based and allow for real time reports to be filed in order to alert others to cartel violence, roadblocks, and patrols taking place in specific locations” (Bunker, 2011, p. 4).

The benefits of narco-blogs include greater public awareness to criminal activity and the capability of exposing corruption and capturing cartel members. However, critics point out that narco-blogs can have a detrimental effect on society by glorifying cartel lifestyle and instilling fear in the public with their heinous crimes. Gruesome photographs and videos sometimes serve as taunting reminders to the public that their authorities are incapable of capturing cartel members even when they brazenly reveal so much on the internet.

Blogdelnarco receives more than three million unique visitors a week. Just as law enforcement monitors the site for clues on cases, drug traffickers also visit the site to look for warning messages and dangers of exposure. In this sense, blogs may serve drug-traffickers as

much as they do law enforcement and the public. Cartels have attempted to use blog sites to their advantage by posting messages of intimidation (Carpenter, 2012, p. 76).

Bloggers assume risk of reprisal for their amateur reporting, but they can usually hide behind the relative anonymous nature of the internet. Sometimes, it is not enough. In September 2011, Los Zetas cartel members mutilated and killed two bloggers, then hung their corpses from an overpass in the Mexican border town of Nuevo Laredo (Bunker, 2011, p. 4). And in May 2013, one of the authors behind Blogdelnarco disappeared after receiving warning of imminent danger (Cox, 2013).

It is probable that the internet and social media have dramatically affected the social, economic, and cultural landscape for Mexican drug cartels. The growing use of mobile platforms and increased internet activity will likely produce cartels that are more adept at utilizing the internet for illicit activity. With proper funding and training, it is feasible that cartels will evolve into cyber terrorists capable of hacking techniques such as network enumeration and exploitation. Internet sales of drugs will likely increase, particularly as online payment methods gain more sophistication and credibility. All signs point towards an increase in cartel influence in online media. The good news is that Mexican cartels are currently behind the power curve in this department compared to international terrorist groups (Womer & Bunker, 2010, pp. 91-92). However, given the financial resources of drug cartels, it would be unwise to underestimate their ability to adapt rapidly.

Solutions to Protect Free Speech and the Significance of the Internet

History has shown that journalists and media outlets are important targets for both government and drug cartels. This is because the press has the power to influence public opinion

and spread propaganda. On paper, laws and regulations already exist for journalists to function without fear of reprisal. They simply are not enforced and protected. In order to curb cartel influence, it would behoove the Mexican government to protect the press and free speech. State officials should utilize law enforcement to effectively protect journalists that cover high risk stories, particularly if they receive death threats. Media outlets have a responsibility to take care of their own; they should provide better pay and benefits for their journalists, who often risk life and limb for their stories. Incentives for corruption in journalism would decline once journalists knew their employer and government had their best interest in mind. These changes will take time to occur, and the media and public can do their part by continuing to fight against corruption regardless of potential reprisal. Whatever the means, whether it be through anonymous blogs or through social media, there should continue to be a voice against drug cartel influence. As notable Mexican journalist Anabel Hernández says, "Silence kills democracy, but a free press talks" (Hernández, 2012).

As cartels recognize the importance of the internet, it is likely that they will invest more into learning and utilizing cyber-warfare tactics. Mexican authorities should do the same or risk losing an incredibly important battle for internet dominance. The internet is a frontier that can be used for everything from illicit drug transactions to control of banks, businesses, and government functions. The Mexican government cannot afford to allow Mexican cartels to gain the upper hand in this frontier.

The double-edged nature of social media is something that law enforcement can take advantage of to curb cartel influence. As more cartel members use social media, mistakes of overexposure leading to valuable information will become more likely. Anti-drug trafficking agents can also find a way to counter cartel propaganda through internet and social media

platforms. Everything from pictures to videos on the internet are used to glamorize cartel lifestyle, likely influencing the minds of millions of youth to favor the illicit underground rather than the law. Authorities should build their own presence on social media to fight this. Campaigns to educate youth against the use of violence and drugs can make a difference in curbing cartel influence.

The Cartel in Society, Culture, and Entertainment

Mexican cartel notoriety has made them the topic of many films and documentaries in United States and Mexico. Its influence has become a hot topic in films, novelas, documentaries, shows, music, and popular art. The rise of new vocabulary, where common nouns are given a prefix of "narco," is further proof of cartel influence; words such as narcoculture, narconovelas, and narcoreligion are commonly used along the border (Cabañas, 2014, p. 4).

In Mexico, cartel lifestyle is glamorized and machismo reigns. Even when news media report cartel activity, usually at the behest of cartels, "fantasy serves as a mask that distorts the real violence" (García, 2011, p. 34). Newspapers in Mexico sensationalize cartel violence to a public that has, to a great degree, already been desensitized by the sheer number of daily occurrences. In an effort to be profitable, media mixes cartel violence with images of half-naked women and titillating stories of sex and betrayal. This combination of sex and violence sells well enough that it has become central to Mexico's B-movie industry. Narcocinema plots center around macho drug lords and sexualized young women who desire men for their money and power (García, 2011, p. 35). Similar to the news articles where they conceive their plots, films are fraught with superficiality and do little to investigate social issues stemming from cartel violence.

Telenovelas such as the popular *Todo por Amor*, which aired on Mexico's TV Azteca in 2000, portray drug traffickers who are romantically involved with beautiful and virtuous women from respected families (Palaversich, 2006, p. 86). The main characters in *Todo por Amor* practically ooze sensuality, causing swooning audiences to sympathize for drug traffickers and their muddled love lives. Part of the problem is the notion that anything other than sex and violence is simply not as appealing to a Mexican public that has grown up on machismo. Mexico has somehow negated the majority of positive connotations of machismo in favor of negative ones such as sexism, chauvinism, and hypermasculinity. Mexican music, film, and television are filled with these ideas. In music, the genre known as narcocorrido has exploded in popularity on both sides of the border. Narcocorridos are ballads of drug trafficking that glorify drug cartel culture and activity. They are part of a steady stream of pornographic violence affecting generations of Mexican youth who feel it is cool to subjugate women, kill, and become drug lords.

Media coverage of drug trafficking in the United States is different, but striking similarities exist as well. Films such as "Traffic" intend to expose the damage caused by cartels in all levels of society, while other films such as "Desperado" generally revel in violence. Hollywood productions throughout history tend to portray Mexico as a place of moral inferiority, filled with opportunities to acquire sex and drugs (Dell'Agnese, 2005, pp. 207-208). While certain United States films and documentaries of Mexico do a good job of investigating the horrors of drug trafficking, others use sex and violence, not unlike narcocinemas in Mexico, as a means to sell tickets.

United States journalism, rarely affected by the political and cartel corruption that handicaps their Mexican counterpart, is nevertheless still subject to bias and political agendas.

Issues ranging from immigration to border security are politically charged and highly controversial, causing journalists to toe the line between political parties. Although United States journalists do a superb job of covering societal issues caused by Mexican drug trafficking, there is still a notable trend of sensationalizing sex and violence as a means to sell stories. The media, both in the United States and Mexico, caters to the desire for sensationalism so "upper-class people can get certain kinds of vicarious titillation from the spectacles of lower-class violence" (García, 2011, p. 35).

The Significance of Narcocorridos

In live concerts throughout Mexico and the United States, a particular genre of music has performed to sold-out crowds and dedicated fans since 1972: Narcocorridos. They are ballads of drug trafficking, and their meteoric rise in popularity is testament to the appeal of the criminal underworld. Narcocorridos are proof of Mexican drug cartels' powerful influence in society and culture. The history of narcocorridos shows why and how cartel influence has flourished in Mexico. Understanding these aspects of narcocorrido history is an important first step for authorities to take countermeasures to reduce cartel influence.

The popularity of narcocorridos is a troubling paradox considering Mexico's violent past. For years, drug cartels severely handicapped Mexico's political, social, and economic progress. They have caused violence and widespread corruption in all levels of government. Atrocities committed by drug cartels continue relatively unabated today.[22] Nevertheless, millions of people on both sides of the border view drug cartels with admiration and enjoy listening to their exploits

[22] As mentioned previously in this thesis

through narcocorridos ("Narcocultura," 2014). This reflects a disturbing trend that glorifies drug cartel culture and encourages lawless behavior.

Negative societal implications abound, and the ripple effects are visible across multiple generations and age groups. In a country where violence and corruption are considered a normal part of daily life, narcocorridos have become an important part of culture and tradition. Experts believe that narcocorridos are sponsored by drug cartels in order to spread propaganda to the masses. More than a dozen corridistas and figures connected with the narcocorrido genre have been murdered since 2000, fueling speculation that corridista ties with drug cartels are more profound than imagined (Hastings, 2013b).

It is important to understand the corrido in order to understand the appeal of the narcocorrido because the corrido evolved into the narcocorrido. The corrido is a descriptive narrative written in poetic verse and played to a simple tune. For widespread appeal, it uses a formula of catchy rhymes, poetic persuasion, alluring stories, and "common-folk" vernacular. The use of "common-folk" vernacular refers to eyewitness accounts from actual events that have occurred in history. Corridos use poetic standards, where lyrics consist of six to ten syllables per line, and each verse has four to six lines. Rhyme schemes use ABCB or ABCBDB patterns (Fernández & Finch, 2013, pp. 251-252).

Corrido lyrics espouse values such as bravery, loyalty to friends, machismo, independence, and justice for the common man. The opening line to a corrido often declares that the song is indeed a corrido. The middle part details the story being told, and the closing lyrics indicate an end to the story, often using religious references for emphasis. Among other theories on the origin of the word, "corrido," is the one that comes from the Spanish verb "correr." The

meaning of, “correr,” is “to run,” signifying a running account of events sung in poetic form (Fernández & Finch, 2013, pp. 250-253).

The origins of corrido goes back to the Spanish form known as romance, which was brought by the first Spanish settlers of America. Romance evolved in central Mexico into the unique and popular form known as corrido in the mid-1800s. Predominant topics in corridos of this period were American western stories of cowboys- Stories of heroic gunmen, outlaws, wilderness trails, and horses. As Mexico plunged into strife in the early 1900s, corridos on war and conflict became common. These corridos praised heroic Soldiers and legendary battles while lamenting tragic losses. Some classic corridos such as “Corrido Villista” and “Carabina 30-30” are about the Mexican Revolution, which occurred from 1910 to 1920 (Fernández & Finch, p. 250).

United States enactment of Prohibition in 1920 switched much of the focus to the border. Prohibition ushered in a new era of corridos, as the smuggling business became more lucrative and drug cartels formed (Wald, 2002, p. 3). When prohibition was repealed in 1933, the transport of narcotics gained traction. At this point, corrido themes of smuggling and illegal activity were common, but not necessarily the most popular. In fact, there was a variety of popular narcocorrido subjects: One, the noble bandit who fights for justice. Two, hometown nostalgia. And three, farming and agricultural practices. The subjects of drugs, smuggling, and immigration were among the most popular corridos (de la Peza, 2004, p. 122-123).

It was not until the 1970s, with the arrival of a band, Los Tigres del Norte, that corridos on illegal drug activity became immensely popular. With their hit song, “Contrabando y Traición,” Los Tigres del Norte infused a modern twist into the corrido. They are credited with widening the appeal and use of the term, “narcocorrido” (Wald, 2002, p. 13). Dozens of

corridistas have since followed in the footsteps of Los Tigres del Norte, seeking to profit from the wave of narcocorrido popularity. Interestingly enough, corrido scholars consider the true corrido to have faded away in the 1930s, possibly because the narcocorrido espoused significantly more negative values than the classic corrido (Berry, 2012, p. 1).

During the counterculture of the 1960s, narcocorridos "were characterized by the cautionary tale they told of the drug trafficking world" (Tabarez, 2012, p. 232). Things changed in the 1990s, when corridistas used narcocorrido lyrics with wilder stories and depraved deeds. While the narcocorrido has grown in popularity, the old-fashioned corrido is far from extinct. In economically rich areas such as Monterrey in Mexico, classic corrido groups from the 1970s remain more popular than newer, narcocorrido groups. Fans of classic corridos are usually older folks, who "are still wrapped up in their cowboy past" (Ward, 2002, p. 184). When a city like Monterrey gets most of its wealth from industry rather than drug trade, it is more likely to have fans of older corridos (Ward, 2002, p. 183). But the majority of Mexican cities are heavily influenced by the drug trade. Youth in these areas demand a faster, drug-infused lifestyle than that espoused by old-fashioned corridos. The narcocorrido has responded to this demand, and it has flourished.

An analysis of Mexico's socio-economic history reveals why so many people were easily drawn to the music of narcocorridos. Years of war and conflict left the majority of Mexicans stuck in vicious cycles of poverty. For these masses, "banditry and smuggling emerged as a response to class stratification and lack of economic opportunity" (Berry, 2012, p. 2). In a 1934 ballad that may be considered the first narcocorrido, "El Contrabandista" tells the story of a smuggler who gained riches from smuggling goods:

Comencé a vender champán, tequila y vino habanero,
Pero es que yo no sabía lo que sufre un prisionero.
Muy pronto compré automóvil, propiedad con residencia
(Wald, 14)

During United States prohibition, opportunists smuggled alcohol to the United States for profit. The singer in "El Contrabandista" claims his success in this endeavor bought him a car and house. Similar financial success is echoed in a popular 1940s narcocorrido, "Carga Blanca," in which two Mexicans successfully smuggle drugs to Texas for easy profit (Wald, 2002, p. 14). Plenty of narcocorridos associate the bandit or smuggler as the "noble robber" figure that steals from the rich and gives to the poor. This popular "Robin Hood" concept adds an air of invulnerability to the bandit while he engages in magnanimous acts that the poor so desperately need (Berry, 2012, pp. 8-9).

Los Tigres del Norte's, "Contrabando y Traición," was appealing because it incorporated the concept of immigration, Hollywood glamour, love, and betrayal. Characters Emilio and Camelia smuggle marijuana from Mexico to the United States in their car tires. After the couple sell the goods in Hollywood, Emilio announces to Camelia that he is going to San Francisco to be with another woman. Camelia shoots him dead and disappears (Wald, 2002, p. 13).

The appeal of a successful border crossing in narcocorridos such as "Contrabando y Traición" and "Carga Blanca" cannot be understated. Millions of unemployed Mexicans dream of crossing the border because of the perceived availability of economic opportunity on the other side (Fernández & Finch, 2013, p. 257). Combined with the appeal of the enormously lucrative drug trade alluded to in "El Contrabandista," narcocorridos conjured up an illusion of success irresistible for the common Mexican. The fact that many narcocorridos are fraught with tragedy,

violence, and murder does little to diminish the seduction of rags-to-riches stories. There is still an audience for the older corridos, but their appeal has decreased with each new generation.[23]

As drug trafficking increased in the 1970s, so too did the appeal of narcocorridos. The 1970s was a "peak period for Mexican drug trafficking, and the public was eager for tales of daring border smugglers" (Wald, 2002, p. 19). Ironically, many narcocorridos that exaggerate or fictionalize stories are also credited with confronting the stark realities of the streets. The appeal of such realities such as drug use, crime, violence, and womanizing is that it gives a sense of exclusivity. It is the feeling of belonging to a club of people who have been through the same hardship. This feeling is empathized by the masses of the poor and less empathized by the rich (Morrison, 2008, pp. 381-382).

The appeal of narcocorridos draws similarities to that of hardcore rap in the United States. Just "as rap was forcing the Anglo pop world to confront the raw sounds and stark realities of the urban streets, the corrido was stripping off its own pop trappings to become the rap of modern Mexico and the barrios on el otro lado" (Wald, 2002, p. 71). While both styles developed in different regions and disparate ancestries, "both hardcore rap and narcocorridos address harsh social realities as the illicit drug trade, gun violence and the sexual dominance of women, often in fantastic, morally ambiguous terms" (Morrison, 2008, p. 384). These topics are served in poetic renderings that exploit an angry youth culture in Mexico and the United States.

As a musical genre, rap has carved out a considerable niche in American music and culture. It is no secret that prominent corridistas are eyeing the same level of success. Recent demographic shifts show that narcocorridos are popular far beyond historically Hispanic neighborhoods east of Los Angeles (Morrison, 2008, p. 380). An entire generation of Mexican-

[23] As Elijah Wald notes, people in towns of northeast Mexico such as Tamaulipas and Nuevo León still prefer classic corridor groups of the 1970s (Wald, 2001, p. 183).

Americans have adopted the narcocorrido as music that reaffirms their roots as immigrants (Simonett, 2001, p. 320). The narcocorrido is the most popular Latin music in the United States, featuring prominently in many Hollywood films and television shows (Hastings, 2013b).

The 2014 film, “Narcocultura,” documents the rise of narcocorridos in the United States and the consequent impact on culture. In the film, director Shaul Schwarz highlights successful corridistas such as El Komander as evidence of the popularity of narcocorridos. El Komander charges $45,000 per performance and is booked all year. The music company that produces and promotes his music, Twiins Enterprises, capitalizes on violence in Mexico to write narcocorridos. In clubs across the United States, adoring fans gleefully sing along to lyrics of killing and glamorizing drug cartel activity. Schwarz contrasts this bliss to the grim violence that continues to plague Mexican towns such as Juárez. Despite the daily tragedies wrought by cartels, youth in this town desire to be cartel members and narcocorridos remain popular (“Narcocultura,” 2014).

Narcocorridos have played an important role in the shaping of persona and image. For example, a corrido about a Soldier in the Mexican Revolution may shape that Soldier’s image as a legendary symbol of bravery. Consider the legend of Jesus Malverde, a man who had a dubious existence. He was supposedly a bandit who lived in the nineteenth-century in Sinaloa, Mexico. Malverde was a “Robin Hood” figure that allegedly stole from the rich and divided the spoils to the poor. Authorities ultimately caught and executed him, resulting in his martyrdom.

Malverde became a symbol of the injustice of the legal system and the extreme inequalities in society. Narcocorridos helped shape his image as a poor man’s criminal- a “bandit-saint”- who everyone can identify with. The legend of Malverde grew with each new corrido, and he became known as a saint who could grant safe passage. A 2008 narcocorrido titled, “Jesus Malverde,” pleads to a divine force for survival against the dangers of conducting

illicit activity (Michel & Park, 2013, pp. 3-10). Narcocorridos devoted to him "are narrated in the first person and express gratitude for the miracles that have allowed the narrator to escape personal tragedy" (Michel & Park, 2013, p. 9). Malverde's legend is one among other Mexican folk heroes who add to the lore of the narcotrafficker. Narcocorridos about these heroes generally tend to praise machismo, defend the use of violence, and denounce the dominant classes (Edberg, 2004, p. 267).

With the rising popularity of narcocorridos, generations of Mexicans have been influenced to engage in lawless behavior, blaming the rich for their difficult situations and relegating women to sexual objects. Attempts were made to censor corridistas due to their potential negative influence on society, but the censors had limited impact. In some cases, censor attempts backfired, allowing the narcocorrido to have more exposure to the public. This is because censorship generated publicity and the allure of owning something forbidden. In 1987, the governor of Sinaloa made a decision to control radio programming to censor violent music. Corridistas such as Los Tigres del Norte capitalized on the controversy by releasing popular "prohibited songs" (Wald, 2002, p. 87). Censorship or perceived censorship has proven to be a boon for Los Tigres del Norte, who sometimes use the clever marketing strategy of fabricating censorship to increase sales (Simonett, 2001, p. 320).

The majority of narcocorridos produced before the 1990s consist of stories that glorify the drug trade, but they also served as cautionary tales for would-be drug traffickers. Drug traffickers in those narcocorridos inevitably land in jail or are betrayed and killed. In this sense, there existed an implicit ethical code and a righteous, "anti-imperialist" sentiment.

A new generation of narcocorridos do not have the same moral undertones or endings. They glorify illicit drug use, portray drug cartel as rich and fearless, and brazenly dare authorities

to try capturing cartel members. Los Tucanes de Tijuana is a band “credited with initiating this recent shift from tales of law-evading nationalists and wily profiteers to stories of all out debauchery, reminiscent of the African-American ‘pimp narratives’ that today’s thug rappers emulate” (Morrison, 2008, p. 386). In their 1996 hit, “Mis Tres Animales,” they use coded words to celebrate the trafficking lifestyle:

> Vivo de tres animales, que quiero como a mi vida.
> Con ellos gano dinero, y ni les compro comida.
> Son animales muy finos,
> mi, perico, mi gallo y mi chiva…
> En California y Nevada, en Texas y en Arizona.
> Y corrido alla en chicago, tengo unas cuantas personas
> que venden mis animales,
> mas que hamburguesas en el mcdonald’s
> Aprendi a vivir la vida, hasta que tuve dinero.
> Y no niego que fui pobre, tampoco que fui burrero.
> Ahora soy un gran señor,
> mis mascotas codician los gueros
> (Los Tucanes de Tijuana, 1996)

In the song, the “animals” are drugs, and the people who sell them are drug traffickers. The singer brags that his drugs sell more than McDonald’s sells hamburgers. He used to be poor, but now he is a great man because the white folks crave his drugs. The only hint of a moral warning comes near the end of the song:

> Dicen que mis animales, van a acabar con la gente.
> Pero no es obligación, que se les pongan enfrente.
> Mis animales son bravos,
> sino saben torear pues no le entren
> (Los Tucanes de Tijuana, 1996)

Figure 7: Los Tucanes de Tijuana pose in a publicity photo from 2007
(Ugarte, 2007)

The singer merely cautions people against using the destructive drug if they are not capable of handling it. The narrator is not held responsible for his actions, sending a message to society that drug traffickers can live an extravagant lifestyle with relatively little fear of reprisal. It is particularly alarming that the youth buy into this idea. In an interview with troubled youth, boys as young as eleven years old were asked about the image of narcotraffickers. Many indicated that they want to be narcotraffickers because they wanted to dress like them, achieve power, and become wealthy. The boys desired to be famous narcotraffickers so that corridos could be written of them (Edberg, 2004, p. 264).

Narcocorridos influence society to use drugs and glorify drug lords. Corridistas such as Los Tucanes de Tijuana "departed from previous tradition by celebrating not only drug smuggling but the drugs themselves" (Wald, 2002, p. 106). In a song titled, "La Piñata," Los Tucanes de Tijuana refer to cocaine as "vitamins" that can be served along with beer, wine, and women (Wald, 2002, p. 107). Their ballad, "El Pelo de Angel," downplays the potential negative effects of marijuana, describing it as something used merely to relax nerves and eliminate tension.

Other corridistas have chimed in, popularizing drug use as hip and relatively harmless. Los Tigres del Norte's 1994 corrido, "Los Dos Plebes," mentions cocaine as something to keep one awake to prevent fatigue (Wald, 2002, p. 108). Downplaying the dangers posed by drugs has affected society in areas such as Baja California and San Diego, where local consumption of drugs had increased three times the national average in 2002 (Ramos et al., 2009, p. 1000).

Narcocorridos are also sending the wrong message about drug lords and cartel members. Ballads such as "El Guero Palma" and "Jefe de Jefes" are peppered with words of praise, respect, and warning. Both narcocorridos refer to legendary boss of the Sinaloa cartel, El Chapo, who

was jailed for a brief period in 1993 before escaping. “El Guero Palma” declares that the drug lord is a respectable gentleman and warns the police to not cross the line because the “king” is far from dead (Fernández and Finch, 2013, p. 260). “Jefe de Jefes” boasts of El Chapo’s power to stay hidden from the media and authorities. There are descriptions of tragedy that would befall all those who oppose El Chapo and his organization. These thinly veiled threats are trumpeted on radio stations and even forced onto police radios, where they are received as catchy propaganda. Narcocorridos have developed a cult of personality around cartel bosses, causing them to become larger-than-life, mythical figures (Campbell & Hansen, 2014, p. 8).

There is widespread speculation that corridistas have deep ties to drug cartels. Given their prevalence and large fan base, narcocorridos have become highly valued weapons of propaganda. Narcocorridos sell the image of the narcotrafficker, glorifying murder and easy money. In many cases the “narcotrafficker image sells, so much so that narcotraffickers themselves often commission narcocorridos to be written about them, as a kind of advertisement” (Edberg, 2004, p. 266). Chalino Sánchez, one of the founders of the narcocorrido genre, was allegedly financed by drug cartels to sing narcocorridos on their behalf (Campbell & Hansen, 2014, p. 8). Among other measures, drug cartels can use narcocorridos to send warnings, glorify drug bosses, and generate fear and respect.

Part of the reason why corridistas work with cartels is due to financial struggles. Hundreds of corridistas struggle to make a living selling music about the old, noble days. Ballads about drugs and violence are lucrative, and corridistas can receive large payments from cartel sponsors. According to one corridista, drug lords pay from twenty to thirty thousand dollars for one corrido, and then pay an additional ten thousand dollars to record the music (Ward, 2002, p. 209).

Not all narcocorridos sing praises of drug cartels. Even with risk of reprisal, many corridistas choose to sing narcocorridos critical of drug cartel activity and sometimes lampoon cartel behavior. Between 2006 and 2008, more than a dozen corridistas were assassinated because they allegedly sang songs that offended cartels. Sergio Vega, a well-known ballad singer, was gunned down several hours after scoffing at reports that speculated that he would be assassinated. And all members of the band La Quinta Banda were killed on stage in 2012. La Quinta Banda were famous for their popular songs dedicated to La Linea, who were the Juárez cartels' deadly enforcers (Hastings, 2013b). Drug cartels commissioned corridistas to sing lyrics offensive to rival cartels. Valentin Elizalde was a popular corridista who was murdered in his car after one of his concerts in 2006 "after singing a song that offended Los Zetas in their home turf" (Tabarez, 2012, p. 236). Evidence to support this claim may be in the lyrics to Elizalde's narcocorrido, "A Mis Enemigos":

> Sigan chillando culebras, las quitaré del camino Y a los que en verdad me aprecian, aquí tienen a un amigo Ya les canté este corrido a todos mis enemigos
> (Elizalde, 2006)

Elizalde says there are snakes that hiss in the path, but assures the listener that he will easily dispose of them. Many believe the snakes refer to Los Zetas. Regardless of whether or not there is merit to this claim, it is easy to see that narcocorridos are a powerful influence in inciting cartel violence. Assassinating a corridista "silences his messages of support or criticism of a specific drug trafficking organization" (Campbell & Hansen, 2014, p. 8).

Corridos have played a significant role in Mexican history, and it appears narcocorridos mean to make their mark as well. Narcocorrido music has spilled over the United States border, where it has reverberated well with the disenchanted Hispanic youth (Morrison, 2008, p. 380).

The popularity of the genre gives new meaning to the idea of musical influence, as it has influenced society to desensitize collateral damage from drug trafficking.

Like hardcore rap, narcocorrido has made an indelible mark in history, society, and culture. Thus far, that mark has been made mostly with the rise in drug use, violence, and criminal activity. Meanwhile, drug use and cartel presence in both Mexico and the United States remain stubbornly high. Narcocorridos of recent years, which generally glamorize the drug trade, have most likely exacerbated the situation. They have also given the corrido the stigma of drug cartel notoriety. This does not do justice to a traditional brand of music that has graced Mexican history for generations. The trend of narcocorridos can and should be changed, for the sake of future generations to reflect the noble efforts of Mexican history.

Solutions to Counter Cartel Influence in Film, Television, and Music

Narco-culture has become more than a passing trend for Mexico; it is a way of life. While violence and corruption wreak havoc in Mexican government and society, cartels continue to be seen in a positive light for millions of youth. This does not necessarily mean that youth are ignorant of the negative impacts caused by cartels. But it hints at a sense of disillusionment in their future, and perhaps an altered sense of reality where the actions of cartels are somehow justified by the hopelessness that surrounds them.

Film, television, and music have contributed to glamorizing cartel image, which has proven to be as lucrative as it is popular. In order to counter this influence, media conglomerates, and entertainers can work together to portray cartels in a negative light. The Mexican public are already apathetic to everyday bloodshed because of fatigue, and sex increases appeal in the entertainment world. The solution may be to focus media on tragedies rather than sex and

violence. Films that document families and neighborhoods devastated by cartel influence would weigh heavily on the conscience of the public. Since documentaries are rarely popular, films and dramas that satirize the appeal of cartels and government corruption can be used to help people realize the extent of the damage wrought by drug cartels.

Narcocorridos should portray drug cartels in a negative light, with lyrics that skewer their appeal and lifestyle. A resurgence of the traditional corrido that espouses values such as loyalty and honor would likely highlight positive ideals for the youth. Government should enlist the aid of entertainers to promote non-violent and drug-free policies. Sex appeal should be attributed to men and women who pursue legitimate enterprises and education. Telenovelas that focus sympathy on drug traffickers should be replaced with those that focus on their inevitable demise or capture.

Health Issues and Drug Use along Mexico-U.S. Border

Although the U.S. continues to be the main consumer of drugs supplied by Mexican cartels, the number of consumers in Mexico has increased significantly in the last three decades. Illegal drug use rose 3.3 to 5.3 percent among the urban population from 1988 to 1998 (Bucardo et al., 2005, p. 285). It rose 87 percent between 2002 and 2011 (Villagran, 2013).[24] This increase in drug use in Mexico has resulted in corresponding health and related social issues.

Drug users are considered at high risk of health issues such as HIV/AIDS because of a number of factors. In addition to risks associated with sharing injection equipment, burns and sores caused by drug use have been known to transmit blood-borne infections. Some of the most

[24] Actual figures may be higher considering that the data is self-reported (Villagran, 2013).

common drugs causing health issues are Mexican black tar heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine (Maxwell et al., 2005, pp. 86-87).

The Mexico-U.S. border region is of particular concern. The geographic and social landscape along this area is characterized by poverty, drug, use, prostitution, and mobility. Nearly 28 percent of the population in the border states of Baja California consists of adolescents, who have shown an increased tendency to experiment in drugs and other deviant behavior. Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez had the first and second highest rate of drug use by 1998, and a large number of addicts reported using drugs before 15 years of age (Bucardo et al., 2005, p. 285). About 81 percent of Mexican youth start drinking by the age of 14 and begin using other illicit drugs between the ages of 12 and 29. More than 20,000 drug-related fatalities were reported since 2007, and the majority of these deaths occurred in Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana (Sthrathdee, Magis-Rodriguez, Mays, Jimenez, & Patterson, 2012, p. 429).

Between 1995 and 2001, the number of cumulative AIDS cases almost doubled in Mexico.[25] Although HIV prevalence among Injection Drug Users (IDU) and other high risk groups remain low, there is evidence that their social networks and environments influence the risk of HIV infection (Bucardo et al., 2005, pp. 285-286). The existence of shooting galleries, where groups of IDUs gather to share rented needles, and female sex workers (FSW) along border states dramatically increase IDU-associated HIV epidemics (Sthrathdee et al., 2012, p. 429). FSWs are especially susceptible to HIV because they can acquire the disease through both the sexual and injection routes. Tijuana has approximately 6,000 female sex workers and 10,000 IDUs. Juárez has more than 4000 female sex workers and 6,500 IDUs (Beletsky et al., 2012, p. 404).

[25] From 25,746 to 51,914. The majority of these cases were attributed to heterosexual or homosexual activity (Bucardo et al., 2005, p. 286).

Confronted by alarming increases in drug use, the Mexican government has responded by implementing a national drug addiction epidemiologic surveillance system that now covers 53 cities in all 31 Mexican states. This system compiles data from drug treatment centers, emergency rooms, and other sources in order to identify changes in patterns of consumption, risk groups, new drugs, and other factors. The Mexican National Institute of Psychiatry has assisted by conducting periodic, national surveys on addictions. The government has implemented training programs for pharmacists and health officials to spread knowledge on sterile needle use and other preventative measures. Numerous education programs such as the Programa Compañeros have provided harm reduction services within prisons and Police Academies (Bucardo et al., 2005, pp. 284-288).

Law enforcement actions against drug trafficking and drug use has increased considerably since President Vincente Fox was elected in 2000. Their success in reducing drug use is dubitable considering the rising numbers of health issues. At least one of their tactics has inadvertently led to an increase in health issues. The fear of police detainment has discouraged IDUs from carrying needles, leading them to resort to sharing needles in shooting galleries. This has led to an increased risk of multiple blood-borne infections amongst IDUs (Bucardo et al., 2005, p. 288).

Cartel Influence in Latin America and the United States

Mexico's problems are not limited to its borders. They have direct and indirect consequences on its neighbors. The global drug trade has an estimated value of more than $400 billion, and Mexican cartels take $30-40 billion of that pie. Enormous profits give cartels significant influence on both sides of the border. On the U.S. side, violence and corruption has

increased among officials along the border. Evidence of cartel presence in scores of U.S. cities emphasizes the high demand for drugs such as cocaine and marijuana (Carpenter, 2012, pp. 3-17).

More than 23 million Americans use drugs on a monthly basis, and about half of all high school students have used illegal drugs at least once. A national study conducted by the Research Triangle Institute estimates that drug use in the U.S. causes tens of billions in lost productivity for American businesses (Bernards, 1990, pp. 13-18). A 2007 estimate on the economic impact of illicit drug use totaled more than $193 billion, and the U.S. government has allotted more than $23 billion annually for the past three years in its efforts to reduce drug use and its consequences ("Economics," 2014).

On the Latin American side, Mexican cartels have been expanding their operations into countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Guatemalan troops have been battling well-equipped cartel armies since 2011, as cartels aggressively ramp up production and sales of drugs in that region (Dowd, 2014). Mexico has historically acted as a bridge between the top drug-consuming market in the world and the top drug-producing countries in the world. As their power increases, they are not content to languish in their role as middlemen; they desire to reap the benefits of being a one-stop shop for production and sales (Corchado, 2013, pp. 41-43).

Production and sale of drugs in the Andes and other Latin American countries have been rising and is expected to increase. Crackdown and arrests of prominent drug lords in South America often leave power voids that Mexican cartels are more than happy to fill. The U.S. has "spent hundreds of millions of dollars to help Colombia dismantle its major cartels but may have actually helped the Mexican gain traction in South America in the process" (Llorca & Bajak, 2009).

In their quest to reap greater profits, Mexican cartels are increasingly buying their products directly from cocaine-producing locations in the Andes. They are willing to go long distances to acquire raw material for the production of methamphetamine. Mexican cartel members have been apprehended for illicit production of drugs in countries such as Peru, Guatemala, Honduras, Argentina, and Brazil. They have even been caught in countries as far away as Malaysia. Three Mexicans were arrested in Malaysia in 2008, after being found with 63 pounds of methamphetamine. It is evident that Mexican cartels are seeking new markets to sell their drugs and new locations to produce their supply (Llorca & Bajak, 2009).

Violence, crime, and corruption has increased in Latin American as a result of Mexican cartel influence. This is particularly true in Guatemala, where a weak criminal justice system combined with rampant corruption makes it difficult for the government to combat drug activity. Authorities have discovered training camps for Los Zetas and large weapons caches on numerous occasions. Violent conflicts between Mexican and Guatemalan gangs over control of drugs and territory have resulted in numerous deaths (Llorca & Bajak, 2009). In Colombia, cartel violence has cost over 15,000 lives over the last 20 years (Huey, 2014).

Many of the same issues of corruption and violence plaguing Mexico are also problematic in Latin American countries, and perhaps the most notable sign of damage lies in their natural environments. Deforestation has been rampant while use of rural countryside for production of narcotics has increased considerably. Mexican cartels have directly contributed to the rapid deforestation of major forests in the Caribbean lowlands and Mesoamerican Biological corridor. Since 2000, “deforestation rates in Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua have been among the highest in Latin America and the world” (McSweeney, Nielsen, Taylor, Wrathall, Pearson, Wang, & Plumb, 2014, p. 489). Cartels leverage the relative safety of the forest to

construct clandestine landing strips and production hubs. Key drug trafficking nodes in eastern Nicaragua and Honduras has seen deforestation at alarming rates, and this has consequently increased the amount of conflict in the area (McSweeney et al., 2014, pp. 489-490).

Figure 8: A clandestine landing strip in eastern Honduras used exclusively for drug planes (McSweeney et al., 2014, p. 489)

Weak government presence in forested and rural areas of Latin America are exploited by cartels, who inject enormous amounts of manpower and resources with relative ease. Ranchers, farmers, and timber-traffickers in the local area are bribed to become part of the narco-trafficking process. When governments attempt to intervene, they are faced with powerful guerilla forces, usually consisting of local populace who make their living from cartel money. Violent clashes have resulted in little more than the death of citizens (McSweeney et al., 2014, p. 490).

Efforts to eradicate drug crops damage the ecosystem and push opium growers to operate in more ecologically sensitive areas to continue their business. All of this comes at the expense of local indigenous landowners, who are bullied and coerced into accepting intolerable conditions. These folks are the primary advocates of forest preservation, but they are largely powerless against the might of cartels (McSweeney et al., 2014, p. 490).

Large swaths of forests in Latin America are purchased by cartels for the purpose of drug production. Although laws supposedly protect the preservation of indigenous territory, rampant government corruption has allowed cartels to purchase these territories with impunity. Traffickers "then profit from land speculation when they sell to criminal organizations- domestic and foreign- who are increasingly diversifying into rural enterprise" (McSweeney et al., 2014, p. 490). This process serves to legitimize dirty money while simultaneously devastating acres of natural habitats.

Potential Solutions and Ideas for Action

It would be beneficial for the Mexican government to take a multi-faceted approach to combat the influence of Mexican cartels. The arrest or death of cartel members has little impact on overall operations and influence of drug cartels. El Chapo's arrest in early 2014 will most likely result in the ascension of another drug lord, who will easily take his place as head of the Sinaloa cartel. Power voids are easily filled in the Mexican drug underworld. There is simply too much demand and too little resistance. It would benefit the Mexican government to change critical aspects of government, society, and culture in addition to successful law enforcement in order to make a dent in cartel armor. Many of these solutions have already been discussed in this thesis. The following are unconventional solutions that may be considered to make a positive impact.

One potential solution that may help curb the influence of Mexican cartels is the legalization of marijuana in the U.S. and other countries. Statistics indicate that a large number of U.S. drug users have switched from harder, socially destructive drugs to softer drugs such as marijuana. A U.S. poll indicated that over 55 percent of Americans support legalization of

marijuana, which has shown promise as a medicinal drug. Drug reformers nationwide "continue to argue that legislation will free up resources needed to fight harder drugs, deny traffickers billions of dollars in profits, and generate tax revenues for prevention and treatment through state-controlled marijuana sales" (Huey, 2014). Prohibition of marijuana drives up its price, increasing profits for cartels as well as the amount of federal money spent to combat its use (Bernards, 1990, p. 28). And while many other Latin American countries remain adamantly opposed to legalizing drugs, Uruguay has become a pioneer in becoming the first country to legalize marijuana (Huey, 2014).

Another potential solution lies in the form of economic aid for producers of drugs and sustained economic development for areas of production. Farmers in many Latin American regions that produce drugs for Mexican cartels are too poor and uneducated to make a living doing anything else. Coca farmers in countries such as Colombia desperately need government aid to switch to a different crop or occupation, but the state is too poor to provide adequate support. Farmers need seeds, fertilizer, and other material to grow different crops. Many of the regions where they operate require roads in order to transport goods, and there is insufficient means of communication. Critics of anti-drug trafficking efforts have suggested that money should be allocated to help these farmers, who are considered the source of drugs that end up in the hands of consumers. Mexico and the U.S. have spent a tremendous amount of money battling cartels and the flow of cocaine. Perhaps that money is better spent attacking drugs at their source. It would likely take years of sustained economic aid before any positive outcome is discernible, but this solution has the added benefit of aiding people living in abject poverty (Bernards, 1990, pp. 176-180).

Many in the leftist opposition party, the PRD, believe that the government must go after money laundering in order to best combat drug cartels. As stated in this research, hundreds of millions of dollars in drug money are invested in legitimate enterprises. By dismantling cartel financial networks and shutting down these enterprises, the government could theoretically cripple cartel operations. The problem with this tactic lies in the overwhelming amount of drug money in Mexico's system. Shutting down enterprises and extracting laundered money could potentially cripple Mexico's economy. With the right approach however, it may be possible to confiscate the cartel funds for the Mexican treasury without shutting down the network and without shutting down major industries (Grillo, 2014).

Conclusion

The irony of the United States war against drug trafficking is that the U.S. is fighting to defeat an aberration that it is largely responsible for strengthening. After more than a trillion dollars of U.S. money spent to dismantle drug cartels in Latin America since the 1970s, the U.S. government looks no closer to solving the dilemma of drug trafficking than their Mexican counterparts (Huey, 2014). A similar criticism could be said of the Mexican government, which has spent its share of resources to defeat cartels. The difference between the two countries is that Mexico sees more directly the negative consequences of cartel influence and is ill equipped to handle the power of cartels. These difficult circumstances only increase the burden of positive change for Mexico, which faces increasing pressure to take action in order to avoid being a failed state.

It would aid multiple governments and societies if Mexican drug cartel influence is decreased. However, history shows that no singular action can curb drug cartel influence. It has

been around too long, and it has established itself as a considerable force in the United States, Mexico, and Latin America. A quick fix for this situation is improbable. Progress will take time, and it would be beneficial to take methodical steps. For the next few years, the Mexican government will probably continue to face criticism that it is not doing enough to counter drug cartel related issues. Despite El Chapo's arrest, drug cartels are likely to continue corrupting state officials. Many Mexican teenagers will likely continue to aspire to be drug cartel members. Millions of drug addicts in the U.S. will likely continue to buy and abuse illicit drugs. Health and ecological concerns will likely continue to persist.

Authorities would benefit from thinking outside the box by taking a multi-faceted offensive to weaken cartels. This is why it is essential for authorities to understand how and why Mexican cartel influence has become so powerful. Understanding this is the first step to reversing and countering their influence. This thesis has proposed solutions for countering cartel influence in government, journalism, entertainment, society, and culture based on their history and present day impacts. These solutions, once implemented together, bring a holistic approach to the drug cartel dilemma capable of making definitive progress. Mistakes of the past should not be repeated. With the amount of daily damage caused by cartel influence worldwide, it would be optimal to seize every moment in the reduction of Mexican cartel influence.

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