

Drug-Related Violence in Mexico

A literature study from 1985-2011



A relative of murdered teen sisters cries in the cemetery in Ciudad Juarez.¹

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Abstract

The explanations for the escalation of drug-related violence that are found in the literature are diverse as well as numerous. Among these explanations two direct causations dominate: first, Mexican government policy and strategy, primarily since Calderon took office in 2006 and to lesser extent during the Fox administration and second, the competition between and within the Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) since 2000. However, when these explanations are compared to the empirical data, the escalation of violence primarily coincides with the policy of Calderon and there are no elevated levels of violence since 2000, which reduces the validity of inter and intra-cartel violence within the timeframe of the literature.

The empirical data suggests that since 2004 drug-related violence started rising slightly, with a clear break and an escalation of homicides since 2007. This also adds more weight to two more explanations: first the diversification of DTO modus operandi, a process that has essentially started with the arrival of the Zetas and second, with a decline in demand for Mexican drugs in America since 2006.

Furthermore, the findings from the literature study seem best explained by the principle of producer-product, as the direct causality between policy, competition and drug-related violence could hardly exist without the existing environment. Pre-conditions like weak institutional capacity, corruption, availability of weapons, poverty, geography, culture and others are seen as exacerbates and contributors to the escalating levels of drug-related violence.

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List of abbreviations

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ATF | Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives |
| ATS | Amphetamine-type stimulants |
| DEA | Drug Enforcement Agency |
| DFS | Direccion Federal de Seguridad (Federal Security Directorate) |
| DTO | Drug Trafficking Organization |
| DNDH | Comision Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (Mexico's Human Rights Commission) |
| FBI | Federal Bureau of Investigation |
| Golden Triangle | Chihuahua, Durango and Sinaloa |
| HRW | Human Rights Watch |
| INEGI | Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía |
| NAFTA | North American Free Trade Agreement |
| PAN | Partido Accion Nacional (National Action Party) |
| POE | Point of Entry |
| PGR | Procurador General de la Republica (Mexican Attorney General's Office) |
| PRI | Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party) |
| SNSP | Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (National Public Security System) |
| STRATFOR | Strategic Forecasting |
| TBI | Trans-Border Institute (located in San Diego) |
| TCO | Transnational Crime Organizations |
| Tierra Caliente | Mountainous and remote region in southwest Michoacán consisting of 7 municipalities with Apatzingan as the center of its operations. |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |

1 Introduction

'Drug trafficking has become the main source of revenue for organized crime, as well as to terrorists and insurgents: in other words, drug-related illegality has become a threat to nations in so many theatres around the world. Recent developments in West Africa, the Sahel, and parts of Central America show the very real dangers of narco trafficking to security, even the sovereignty of states.'¹

UNODC World Drug Report 2010

Drug trafficking and the associated crime and violence have become a serious threat to security in many parts of the world. One of the theatres where this drug-related violence has substantially increased in the last couple of years is Mexico. In mid-January 2012, under pressure from media and watchdog groups, the Mexican government released new data on the casualties of the drug war in Mexico. The data confirmed that drug-related violence has increasingly deteriorated not long after the beginning of the President Felipe Calderón administration in 2006. Calderón has waged a convincing effort to rid the country of drug trafficking and the accompanying criminal organizations. According to the Mexican government, there were almost 50,000 documented drug-related homicides from Calderón's inauguration on December 1, 2006 to September 30, 2011.²

Mexico has been a producer country and transit route for illegal drugs for generations but the accompanying levels of homicides of recent years appears to be unprecedented. This trend has also been captured by the media and has resulted in continuous reporting's on the drug-related violence. The media reports, however, give the impression that large parts of Mexico have become uninhabitable. Instead drug-related violence is concentrated in a few key states and victim profiling depicts that the vast

¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *World Drug Report 2010*, (New York 2010) p. 9.

² D. Shirk, V. Rios and C. Molzahn, 'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011', Trans-Border Institute San Diego (2012) p. 1.

majority of the homicides are still drug trafficking organization (DTO) members or foot soldiers.³ Scholars and policy makers have given more nuanced insights into drug-related violence in Mexico but tend to focus on specific aspects, such as the DTOs, government policy or the democratization process that Mexico has undergone the last decennia. Recently, however, it appears that a more eclectic approach has started as authors, like David Shirk, try to give a more comprehensive answer for the escalation of drug-related violence. This thesis tries to add to this trend of inclusiveness and reviews the explanations for the high levels of drug-related violence that are given within the literature covering the period from 1985 to 2011. Furthermore, to get a more comprehensive answer a part of the research will focus on general trends on drug-related violence between 1985-2011. This empirical part of the research will be compared to the dominant explanations found in the literature.

1.1 Purpose of study and research question

The purpose of this study is to identify the main explanations for drug-related violence in Mexico. My ambition is to bring together earlier research by mapping all causes found in the discourse and compare these explanations to the empirical data on drug related violence. Based on the purpose of my study, my research question is:

What are the main explanations for drug-related violence in Mexico from 1985 till 2011 and how do these explanations correspond with the empirical data on drug-related homicides?

The research is conducted through thorough analysis of the literature on the drug-related violence in Mexico since 1985. The starting point of 1985 is chosen because some mark this as the year when the relative tranquility that existed among the first generation of major Mexican drug traffickers began to erode. The murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena in

³ D. Shirk, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011'*, p. 1-2.

1985 and the arrest of Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo in 1989 brought a subsequent breakdown of central mechanisms of protection and coordination.⁴ Felix Gallardo's protégé, Hector Luis Palma Salazar, was among the first to come into conflict with other traffickers, including his former boss, which is one of the initial accounts of increased violence among the Mexican DTOs.⁵ Also the beginning of the 1980s is seen as the starting point of the dominance of the Mexican DTOs and the decline of the powerful Colombian DTOs.⁶

After identifying the dominant explanations within the period of investigation, the second part explores the empirical data on drug-related violence in Mexico. All findings will then be compared before forming an answer to the research question.

⁴ D. Shirk, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis from 2001-2009'*, Trans-Border Institute San Diego (2010) p. 9.

⁵ Shirk, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis from 2001-2009'*, p. 9.

⁶ K., Finklea, W. Krouse, and M. Randal, *'Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence'*, *CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service* (2011). p. 7.

2 Theory and Context

This section will present the earlier research on drug-related violence. Furthermore, it will focus on the definition of drug-related violence and the distinction between direct and indirect drug-related violence. In order to better understand drug-related violence in Mexico, this section will also provide some background information about Mexico's position in the international drug economy and identify the parties involved in drug-related violence in Mexico. All findings will be summarized at the end of the chapter.

2.1 Drug-related violence

Violence is amongst the primary threats of communities around the world, and the drug trade has been identified as a key cause of violence, particularly in urban areas.⁷ The drug market violence has traditionally been framed as resulting from the effects of drugs on the users, however, increasingly the violence is being understood as a way used by groups and individuals to maintain or gain a (market) share of the drug trade.⁸ The literature on the connection between violent crime and drugs in Mexico can be categorized in multiple ways that can later be subdivided. For this literature review a distinction made by David Friedman, an American economist, will be used. Friedman stated that the link between violent crime and drugs can occur broadly in three ways: violent crime by consumers of drugs, violent crime associated with the production and distribution of drugs, or violent crime directly associated with the attempt to enforce drug prohibition.⁹ For this study only the latter two categories will be considered, together with the perceived causes of changes in violence within these two categories. First, however, some background information is necessary like

⁷ D. Werb and E. Wood, 'Effect of drug law enforcement on drug market violence: A systematic review', *International Journal of Drug Policy* 22 (2011) pp. 87–94. p. 87.

⁸ D. Werb, 'Effect of drug law enforcement on drug market violence: A systematic review' p. 87.

⁹ D. Friedman, *Drugs and Violence*, www.davidfriedman.com/academic/drugs_and_violence/Drugs_and_violence.html (08-08-2011).

the position of Mexico within the international drug flows and who are the parties involved in drug-related violence in Mexico. Second, a definition of drug-related violence is necessary and what terminology will be used throughout this paper?

Mexico

Within the international drug economy three different categories, or a mixture of these, can be applied to a country: a producer, transit or consumer country. The position and geography is an important aspect of the division in these categories. In the case of Mexico, the proximity to the United States, the largest consumer market in the world, make it a natural transit point for land based-smuggling. Also the types of drug matter, for example the coca plant does not grow everywhere, cannabis on the other hand can be grown virtually anywhere. These few characteristics are but a few of more that lead to the division of countries into the above-mentioned categories. When we look at Mexico it has different roles for distinctive drugs.

Since the 1990s, Mexico can be considered as a major producer and supplier of heroin, marijuana and methamphetamine to the United States drug market.¹⁰ Mexico is also the leading transit country for cocaine produced in South America.¹¹ In total it is estimated that about 70% of all drugs consumed in the U.S. comes through Mexico.¹² Mexican DTOs, hence, appear to control most of the North American drug flows and are involved in the cultivation, manufacturing and trafficking of a mixture of drugs. This makes Mexico primarily a transit and producer country and, as we will explore later in this paper, key transit and production areas appear more prone to violence. Also the various substances and geography in relation to drug-related violence will be explored further in this chapter.

¹⁰ Beittel, 'Mexico's Drug-Related Violence.', p. 2-3.

¹¹ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, p. 106.

¹² Sabet and Rios, 'Why violence has increased in Mexico and what can we do about it', p. 7.

Actors

The main parties that are involved in the drug-related violence have to be identified to get a clearer understanding of the literature. The first and most obvious groups involved are the Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs). However, more groups are implicated in violence, as perpetrators and victims. Therefore, three more groups can be distinguished: first government officials and journalists, second the police and military and the last group are civilians.

Drug Trafficking Organizations

The United States defines Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) as: 'complex organizations with highly defined command-and-control structures that produce, transport, and/or distribute large quantities of one or more illicit drugs.'¹³ Within Mexico there are numerous active DTOs with ever changing strength and alliances but the name Drug Trafficking Organizations can be misleading. The core business might be drug trafficking but the criminal violence that accompanies these organizations extends well beyond drugs to include trafficking in arms, vehicles, people and kidnapping.¹⁴ In this differentiation of business lies one of the limitations of the research on drug-related violence. Within the data on DTOs, for example the Mexican crime statistics, there is no distinction between drugs and other DTO operations and when there are DTOs involved, it is by definition drug-related violence.¹⁵ These and other limitations of the data, however, will be explored later but the DTOs appear to be the foremost perpetrators of drug-related violence in Mexico and within the time frame of my analysis (1985-2011), numerous DTOs have been active.

¹³ National Drug Intelligence Center, 'Organized Crime and Drugs', <http://www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs38/38661/dtos.htm#Top> (3-4-2012).

¹⁴ J. Bailey and R. Godson, *Organized Crime and Democratic Governability: Mexico and the U.S.–Mexican Borderlands* (Pittsburg 2000) p. 2.

¹⁵ D. Shirk and V. Rios, '*Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2010.*', Trans-Border Institute San Diego (2011) p. 4-5.

Since the 1990s four DTOs dominated: the Tijuana/Arrellano-Felix organization (AFO), the Sinaloa cartel, the Juarez/Vicente Carrillo Fuentes organization (CFO) and the Gulf cartel.¹⁶ However, in the years after Calderon took office in 2006, three more Mexican DTOs dominated the landscape and control the trafficking routes into the United States.¹⁷ These three are Los Zetas, La Familia Michoacana and the Beltran Leyva organization.¹⁸ Together, these seven operate within vast supply chains consisting of individuals operating independently, in specialized groups or together in larger, more hierarchical networks.¹⁹ I will not further subdivide the DTOs into lower levels, such as mid-level drug trafficking networks like the Quentero organization or Amazcua organization, because they are closely tied with the dominant DTOs.

Among the DTOs there is a fluid network of alliances and partnerships. They may fracture or show signs of merging in response to increased attention from the Mexican government, the economics of the drug trade and due to the emergence of rival alliances.²⁰ In recent years, the major developments in this regard have been the emergence of “the federation”, formed by the Sinaloa, Juarez and Valencia cartels, and an alliance between the Tijuana and Gulf cartels. This partial consolidation has been matched by the emergence of Los Zetas and the rise of La Familia Michoacána in the west of Mexico.²¹ Some even say it is increasingly coming down to a fight between the Sinaloa cartel and Los Zetas, and their respective allies, which are currently seen as the most powerful DTOs.²²

¹⁶ J. Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug-Related Violence.’, *CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service* (2009) p. 6.

¹⁷ Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug-Related Violence.’, p. 6.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence.’, p. 6.

²⁰ S. Weintraub and D. Wood, ‘Cooperative Mexican-U.S. Antinarcotics Efforts’, *Strategic Studies Institute Publication* (2010) p. 13-14.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² The New York Times, ‘Mexican Drug Trafficking’, (2012) http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/mexico/drug_trafficking/index.html (6-4-2012).

Within the literature it is strongly advocated that the coming emergence of Los Zetas changed and influenced the DTO culture and modes operandi, which will be explored in depth later. Consequently, within the review of the literature below, the focus among the DTOs will be on the Zetas, Sinaloa because it is one of the oldest and has been dominant for almost 20 years.

Figure 1. The Major Drug Trafficking Organizations.²³

| Organization | Base | Profile |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Beltran-Leyva | Morelos, Guerrero | Led by Arturo Beltran-Leyva and his brothers, the cartel began life as an affiliate of the Sinaloa cartel but split from it in 2008. It is now allied with the Zetas. The cartel has been severely weakened recently by the killing or capture of three of the four Beltran-Leyva brothers; only Hector remains in control. |
| La Familia Michoacana (LFM) | Michoacán | The newest actor in the Mexican DTO universe, LFM is notorious for its use of symbolic violence (decapitations, messages cut into the flesh of its victims' bodies) and for its semi-religious or moralistic rhetoric. |
| Gulf | Nuevo León, Tamaulipas | Although severely weakened by the arrest or killing of senior members of the cartel in recent years, the Gulf DTO continues to play a central role in drug trafficking in northeast Mexico. Allied with the Juárez cartel, it is engaged in conflicts with both the Tijuana cartel and the Zetas. |
| Juárez | Chihuahua | The Juárez cartel derived its power and influence from its geographic location at one of the most important crossing points for drugs passing from Mexico to the United States. Although the cartel has been weakened in recent years, its alliance with the Gulf DTO has helped strengthen both cartels. |
| Sinaloa | The Golden Triangle— Sinaloa, Durango, Chihuahua | One of the most important cartels, the Sinaloa DTO is at the center of “the federation,” an alliance with a number of smaller cartels. Through this structure, the Sinaloa cartel has a presence in 17 Mexican states and has distribution networks throughout the United States. |
| Tijuana | Baja California Norte | Just like the Juarez DTO, the Tijuana cartel, also known as the Arrellano Félix cartel, has gained power by controlling the lucrative corridor from Tijuana to Mexicali, both moving drugs and charging other cartels for their shipments through its territory. |
| Zetas | Eastern Mexico | The former military wing of the Gulf cartel, the Zetas now operate as a fully fledged DTO independently in a number of states and regions of Mexico and have engaged in turf wars with the Gulf cartel and the LFM. |

²³ Table adopted from Weintraub and Wood, ‘Cooperative Mexican-U.S. Antinarcotics Efforts’, p. 11.

Government Officials and Journalists

More recently, government officials and journalists have bore the brunt of the attack on civil society. Mayors and other politicians, who make policy decisions from the local to the national level, have frequently been killed. At the 2010 elections, which put 12 governorships up for election nationwide, DTOs assassinated 13 candidates.²⁴ This year also saw 14 mayors and 10 journalists assassinated, an unprecedented number in Mexico's history.²⁵ It is clear that government officials and journalists have been victims of drug-related violence but government officials also contribute indirectly to the violence, as there is significant corruption, which undermines the state capacity to deal with the DTOs.

Law Enforcement and Military

Providing public security and upholding the law are core tasks of law enforcement around the world. Mexico is no different but public security is virtually absent in many places.²⁶ In Mexico drug trafficking is a federal crime and therefore under the jurisdiction of the federal police. For the remainder of this paper police thus refers to the federal police.

The police and military are two groups that are directly linked to drug-related violence. Direct in the way that police and military personal are killed, however, they also cause violence themselves. The distinction between a direct and indirect correlation with drug-related violence will be further explored when we look at the definition of drug-related violence.

²⁴ D. Shirk, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011'*, p. 13-14.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

Beittel, *'Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence.'*, p. 22.

²⁶ G. Grayson, *Mexico. Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* (New Jersey 2010) p. 3-4.

The task of the police to control the levels of violence appears beyond their capacity. An indication of their failing is low public confidence in the Mexican police.²⁷ Their inability to avert the violence is supported by the literature, which frequently mentions endemic corruption and insufficient capacity as reasons for sustained violence.²⁸ Additionally law enforcement encompasses the courts and prisons and these institutions are also not exempt from corruption and violence, as there are examples of DTO members ruling in prison or bought judges.²⁹ The inability to curb these institutional weaknesses is one of the reasons why the Calderon government has expanded the role of the military in fighting the DTOs. Since Calderon took office in 2006 the Mexican military has become a major player in fighting the DTOs and in 2011 nearly 50.000 military personnel were involved.³⁰ In sum, the military and law enforcement each have their own distinct relation to Mexican drug-related violence and deal with direct violence within this conflict.

Civilians

The Mexican government argues that almost all the violence takes place between the DTOs in turf wars but the Mexican population has come increasingly in direct and indirect contact with drug-related violence.³¹ On January 2010 a group of 14 people, of which 11 minors, were massacred at a high school birthday party in Ciudad Juarez. No link with drug trafficking could be proven, however, it exemplifies the increasing violence against bystanders.³² Civilians are victims that have become increasingly vulnerable in the deteriorating public security.

²⁷ G. Grayson, *Mexico. Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*, p. 5

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Grayson, *Mexico. Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*, p. 272.

³⁰ Weintraub and Wood, 'Cooperative Mexican-U.S. Antinarcotics Efforts', p. 3.

³¹ D. Shirk, '*Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2010*', p. 1.

³² Reuters, Gunman kill 14 at high school party in Mexico, (2010)
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/02/01/us-mexico-drugs-idUSTRE60U1DS20100201> (15-9-2012).

Drug-Related Violence

The terminology used to describe the drug-related violence can already be a base of disagreement, as common references used by scholars, media sources and governments for drug related violence are: 'narco-violence', 'drug violence', 'cartel-related violence' etc. References to 'drug violence' are deemed to be imprecise and not focused on the relationship with organized crime. Another example is 'narco-violence' since it refers to only one subset of illicit drugs, narcotics. David Shirk notes in the paper *Drug Violence in Mexico* that: 'while these arguments have merit, they ultimately come down to semantic differences.'³³ All these names use the same data and since drug-related violence does not refer to a specific legal category, all this data equals homicides. It is clear, however, that violence consists of a much broader spectrum and it is important to acknowledge that the key indicator for Mexican violence used throughout the literature is almost exclusively based on DTO related homicides with multiple underlying causes.

Because of a lack of access to legal institutions, violence is intrinsic to the trade in illegal drugs.³⁴ However, there is no agreement on how to define drug-related violence and different classifications have been used for data collection. Without a clear definition of drug-related violence the data will vary and leave room for interpretation. The earlier mentioned two categories of violence we use from Friedman: violent crime associated with the production and distribution of drugs and violent crime directly associated with the attempt to enforce drug prohibition, both give a clear range of the drug-related violence but only what the violence is associated with. Goldstein might provide us with a useful alternative from his research on the drugs/violence nexus. Goldstein has made a tripartite framework of which the 'systemic violence' most closely resembles the two categories of Friedman: 'In the systemic model, violence is intrinsic to involvement with any illicit

³³ D. Shirk, 'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis from 2001-2009', Trans-Border Institute San Diego (2010) p. 1.

³⁴ A. Livingstone, 'A Reputation for Violence, Fractionalization's Impact on Criminal Reputation and the Mexican State', *Master Thesis Colgate University* (2011) p. 14.

substance. Systemic violence refers to the traditionally aggressive patterns of interaction within the system of drug distribution and use.’³⁵ This definition of systemic violence is often applied to research on drug-related violence but it still does not encompass the violence caused by the enforcement of drug prohibition and is mainly from the viewpoint of the DTOs. Since the literature provides no other alternatives on the definition of drug-related violence, the broad definition from Friedman appears best to answer the research question of this paper, as it takes the government side of the violence into account as well.

Another distinction that is not clearly made within the literature is the difference between a direct and indirect relation to drug-related violence. There exists no clear definition for this, however, for the purpose of this study a (crude) definition will be needed. A direct correlation with violence is when there is a clear causality between action and reaction. For example, government pressure with increased military action against the DTOs is considered a clear causality, which can lead to victims on the government or DTO side.. Another example of a direct relation to violence is inter-cartel violence with clear assassinations on one or both sides. Indirect violence is harder to distinct and measure but still an important part of drug-related violence. For this study an indirect correlation with drug-related violence can be observed when the relationship is not necessary a clear causality but can be identified as having contributed to an environment of drug-related violence. For example, corruption, locations prone to more violence or the availability of high caliber weapons.

³⁵ P.J. Goldstein, ‘ The Drugs/Violence Nexus: A Tripartite Conceptual Framework’ *Journal of Drug Issues* v. 39 (1985) pp. 143-174, p. 148.

2.2 Literature review

Mexican society seems to support a connection between violence and the drug trade. In recent years the skyrocketing levels of violence have caused zones of impunity, and public security seems to be dwindling. According to the latest statistics on homicides released by the Mexican government 12.903 people had been killed in violence related to DTOs from January to September 2011. Added to the previous total since Calderon's presidency, this means that 47.515 people have died in violence blamed on organized crime since 2006.³⁶ Scholars, journalists and policy makers have given various reasons for this dramatic rise in violence. To identify the causes we have to include the trends of violence before Calderon took office. Additionally, is violence intrinsically linked to the drug-market? Before reviewing the literature the latter question of violence deserves our attention.

Conventional wisdom on drug related violence sees a causal connection between drugs and violent crime. This connection holds merit but research shows that *high* levels of violence are not common to drug markets.³⁷ For the majority of the drug economy, there are low levels of violence to ensure continued business. The extreme level of violence present in Mexico is thus not typical for illegal markets.

In his book about the political economy of the international drug trade, David Mares describes that the low level of violence that normally characterizes the drug trade can be explained because there is not one drug market, but multiple markets, even for the same substance.³⁸ So the competition that could produce violence in this illegal realm is constrained by the diversity of these markets. Another point Mares makes is that most traffickers seem to prefer to expand within known territory and invest excess profits in other

³⁶ BBC, Q&A Mexico's Drug Related Violence, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-10681249> (5-5-2012).

³⁷ V. Felbab-Brown, 'The Violent Drug Market in Mexico and Lessons from Colombia', *Foreign Policy at Brookings* (2009) p. 5.

³⁸ D. Mares, *Drug Wars and Coffeehouses: the political economy of the international drug trade* (Michigan 2006) p. 86.

businesses, including legitimate ones.³⁹ The legitimate businesses give the trafficker access to legal channels to settle conflicts and the expansion into known territory constrain traffickers to a certain region or locale. Mares also calls into question the notion that a few large criminal organizations control the market for illicit drugs, making the former big cartels in Columbia and the present Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) more of an exception than rule.⁴⁰ The majority of traffickers are only engaged in one level of the commodity system, from manufacturing to retail.⁴¹ Hence, the high levels of drug-related violence in Mexico are an abnormality within the global drug markets and it is this abnormality, which has drawn international attention.

This literature review on drug-related violence, from 1985-2011, is based on the single-case study of Mexico. The review will illustrate that the causes for drug-related violence are incredibly complex, hard to measure. In the rest of this chapter, the explanations that dominate the discourse on drug-related violence will be reviewed, mapped and prioritized.

³⁹ Mares, *Drug Wars and Coffeeshouses*, p. 86.

Davenport-Hines, R., *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York 2006) p. 444.

⁴⁰ Mares, *Drug Wars and Coffeeshouses*, p. 83.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

2.2.1 Regime Change, Institutional capacity, Policy

Regime change

If we look at direct and indirect links on the enforcement side of drug prohibition, there are a number of reasons given for a change in violence. Three closely linked and complex processes can be identified: regime change, institutional capacity and policy.

One of the reasons that is given for the high level of drug-related violence in Mexico is regime change. In a comparative case study, including Mexico, Richard Snyder & Angelica Duran-Martinez claim a causal relationship between regime change and drug-related violence.⁴² For seventy years the monopoly of power in Mexico was held by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The PRI provided a centralized enforcement that had the capacity required to deliver a credible threat of enforcement. In the mid-1980s the PRI started losing political power in local elections to the Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and Snyder & Duran-Martinez argue that this marked the start of a change from an authoritarian system to a democratic regime, which reduced the ability to maintain state sponsored protection rackets.⁴³ State sponsored protection rackets meaning: protection deals between public officials and drug-traffickers, which were a part of public security cooperation. During the late 1980s the protection rackets in Mexico weakened and broke down because of three main reasons: increased political competition, transformed geography of enforcement and an influx of Columbian cocaine traffickers coupled with changes inside Mexican criminal organizations. These three reasons made the task of coordination between protectors and the state increasingly difficult.⁴⁴

⁴² Editors note: the definition of regime change used by Snyder & Duran Martinez is not undisputed. They see regime change as increasing members of different parties on different levels of government. In the case of Mexico, where the PRI lost its dominance after a 70 year rule, the democratization process and regime change are one and the same.

⁴³ R. Snyder and A. Duran-Martinez, 'Does illegality breed violence? Drug trafficking and state sponsored protection rackets.', *Crime Law and Social Change* 52 (2009) pp. 253–273. P. 261-262

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

Others also propose a link between a rise in violence and democratization. Shannon O'Neil states, in an article in *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, that with democratization, a disruption of established payoff systems between drug traffickers and government officials exacerbated drug-related violence.⁴⁵ To support this theory, O'Neil argues that drug-related violence rose first in opposition-led states and that democratic competition hampered the state's capacity to react forcefully, making the increase in violence an unintended side effect of democratization. Andres Villarreal focuses more on the impact of political factors on violent crime and sees a correlation between greater electoral competition, at the sub-national level, and homicide in a country undergoing an uneven transition to democracy.⁴⁶ Existing patronage networks, mainly in the rural areas, were threatened by social and political changes causing a temporary loss of social control and an increase in crime.

With their arguments Snyder & Duran-Martinez, O'Neil and Villarreal claim that the increase in violence mainly stems from the shift to a (more) democratic regime. However, Eric Schyberg, in his master thesis from the university of Uppsala concludes that this assumption is precipitated. Schyberg's thesis, *The effects of regime change on drug-related violence*, concludes that regime change in Mexico between 1985-2011 has most likely not affected drug-related violence and bases this conclusion on the ground of primarily three observations. First, there were clear signs that public security in Mexico was already weakly coordinated in the mid-1980s. Second, the regime change did not decrease public security cooperation. Third, when regime change reached the national level, after it started earlier with replacement of local and regional PRI politicians, the drug-related violence had already grown to an unmanageable problem for both PRI and PAN governors. Making it likely that the violence was caused by other variables.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ S. O'Neil, 'MEXICO-U.S. RELATIONS: WHAT'S NEXT?', *Americas Quarterly*, 2010, Vol. 4 Issue 2, (2010) pp. 68-72. p. 68.

⁴⁶ A. Villarreal, 'Political Competition and Violence in Mexico: Hierarchical Social Control in Local Patronage Structures.', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (2002) pp. 477-498. P. 477.

⁴⁷ E. Schyberg, *The Effects of Regime Change on Drug-Related Violence. A Case Study of Mexico between 1985-2011*, Master Thesis Uppsala University (2011) p. 62.

Another author looks at the evolution of policing in Mexico, claiming this is the main cause of the chaos and violence in the country. In her article, *'Policing, Regime Change and Democracy: Reflections from the Case of Mexico'*, Diane Davis looks at the connection between democratization and drug-related violence from a different perspective.⁴⁸ Davis claims that Mexico, in a trade off between democracy and public security, established neither. By prioritizing the requisites of policing and public security over those of creating democratic institutions, caused a downward spiral of armed conflict and deteriorating rule of law.⁴⁹ The downward spiral started with the 1917 revolution in Mexico and the subsequent decades. The focus on policing actually stalled democratization and even gave Mexico a highly centralized political system built on the use of the police to protect the fragile state. The system spurred corruption, political policing and violence that the police used to flaunt its impunity. By the 1980s and 1990s, police and military involvement in drugs, guns and money laundering put them beyond the control of the state. The author concludes that the centralized state and authoritarian heritage has finally shaken off now, but the Mexican state still has a rotten internal core. The rotten core comprising of: one of the most corrupt police forces in the world and continued evidence of policy-military linkages, both of which are reported to have put Mexico high on the list of international drug and operation chains.⁵⁰

In sum, although they give it different names such as uneven transition to democracy or regime change, the authors use the same political change to further their argument for increased drug-related violence or homicides. These arguments look back over a greater period of time to find the roots of the current violence, however, the arguments are not undisputed and leave the more recent spike of violence unexplained.

⁴⁸ D. Davis, 'Policing, Regime Change and Democracy: Reflections from the case of Mexico.', *Crisis States Working Papers Series No. 2*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2007).

⁴⁹ Davis, 'Policing, Regime Change and Democracy: Reflections from the case of Mexico.', p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem* p. 17.

Institutional capacity

The last decade the media frequently voiced that Mexico is becoming a *failed state*. Stratfor global intelligence argued, in 2008, that Mexico was nearing the status of a failed state. It stated that the central government lost control over of the northern tier of Mexico to DTO's that have significantly greater power in that region than government forces.⁵¹

One of the basic institutional requirements of a functioning state is the protection of civilians and some have claimed that Mexico is becoming a failed state since it cannot provide this countrywide. Other arguments that are mentioned as evidence of reduced institutional capacity are the soaring murder rate or the venality of local, state and federal police.⁵² When we look at the 'failed state index' published yearly by Foreign Policy Magazine, Mexico is far from collapsing but does rank among the top 30 in the world with a failing police apparatus and states: 'Corruption and lack of transparency remain rampant within the government, especially in local governments, the judiciary, and the police force. Serious reforms are needed to repair Mexico's fragile institutions.'⁵³

One of the authors, who sees the strength of the Mexican state diminishing with continuing violence as a consequence, is George Grayson. He argues that the rise of vigilantism is a clear sign of a failure to protect. Mexico has, identified and acknowledged by the government, existing 'zones of impunity' where crime runs rampant.⁵⁴ One of the clearest examples of this are parts of Ciudad Juarez where a massive emigration of people has occurred because of the violence. A result and proof of the failure to protect is a growing chasm between the political elite and Mexican citizens, who have a sense of helplessness,

⁵¹ Mauldin, J., 'Mexico and the Failed State Revisited.' (2010) <http://www.johnmauldin.com/outsidethebox/mexico-and-the-failed-state-revisited-4671> (4-3-2012).

⁵² Grayson, *Mexico. Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*, p. 4.

⁵³ Fund for Peace, Country Profile of Mexico, <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=states-mexico> (8-2-2012).

⁵⁴ Grayson, *Mexico. Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*, p. 270.

and which has caused dwindling public confidence in state institutions.⁵⁵ The law enforcement capabilities and judicial apparatus are unfit to deal with the violence and the militarization of the conflict by Calderon has brought questionable results. Grayson, here, links the drug-related violence to weak institutions and believes that Mexico should be on guard against the emergence of 'dual sovereignty' or a state within a state.⁵⁶ President Calderon himself has acknowledged this danger; in August 2010 he described the violence perpetrated by the DTOs as 'a challenge to the state, an attempt to replace the state.'⁵⁷

Grayson's argument is an example of how the correlation between institutional capacity and drug-related violence is perceived, as weak law enforcement capabilities. The argument of weak law enforcement has been put forward by many others and is often mentioned in one breath with corruption. These arguments mainly point to the struggling Mexican rule of law, which has shown that neither correctional, nor the judicial system have been able to cope with the drug-violence and therefore prolong the violence.⁵⁸

The author Phil Williams, in his article: '*Illicit markets, weak states and violence: Iraq and Mexico*', supports the argument of Grayson and concludes that the context (weak state) in which organized crime operates is one of the main determinants of the level of violence.⁵⁹ Williams additionally, points out that it is tempting to see corruption and violence as alternative tactics of criminal organizations – the infamous choice between plata o plomo – but corruption and violence are actually mutually reinforcing.⁶⁰ Williams exemplifies this with the frequency with which police chiefs have been assassinated, which arguably

⁵⁵ Ibidem p. 272.

⁵⁶ Ibidem p. 274.

⁵⁷ J. Beittel, 'Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence.', *CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service* (2011) p. 2.

⁵⁸ V. Felbab-Brown, A Smarter Drug Interdiction Policy for Mexico, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/0312_mexico_drugs_felbabbrown.aspx (10-9-2011).

⁵⁹ P. Williams, 'Illicit markets, weak states and violence: Iraq and Mexico', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Vol. 52, No. 3, (2009) pp. 323-336. P. 323-324.

⁶⁰ Williams, 'Illicit markets, weak states and violence: Iraq and Mexico', P. 330.

reinforces corruption.⁶¹

Peter Andreas in, *Border Games Policing the U.S. Mexican divide*, sees an increased effectiveness of law enforcement but argues that this leads to more corruption.⁶² He states: 'As more government resources were devoted to drug control, smugglers responded by devoting more resources to paying off those doing the controlling. Thus, drug-related corruption reflected not only the weakness of the Mexican state but also its power: law enforcement had to be bribed because it could not be entirely bypassed or bullied. In order to stay in business drug smugglers had to pay a higher price for an essential state service: the non-enforcement of the law.'⁶³

Andreas sees the deepening corruption, caused by Mexico's own increased law enforcement operations that started during the Salinas and Zedillo governments of the late 80s and 90s, together with selective enforcement and the huge profitability of the drug trade, as the main reasons of increasing drug-related violence.⁶⁴ In an article published in *Current History Magazine* Andreas also points out that the deepening corruption is not limited to the police force but that institutionalized corruption within Mexican law enforcement generated growing pressure to turn to the military. The militarization of the fight against DTOs has corrupted a large part of the military, which has reduced the institutional capacity to respond to the violence. According to Andreas the high-profile drug-related scandals are proof of this ongoing corrupting of the Mexican military.⁶⁵ The author Marcos Moloeznik supports the argument that militarization led to an increase in human rights violations, corruption and defection among the military, which lead to a substantial

⁶¹ Ibidem p. 330-331.

⁶² P. Andreas, *Border games: Policing the U.S.-Mexican Divide* (New York 2009) p. 61.

⁶³ Andreas, *Border games: Policing the U.S.-Mexican Divide*, p. 61.

⁶⁴ Ibidem p. 61-67.

⁶⁵ P. Andreas, 'The Political Economy of Narco-corruption in Mexico', *Current History*, no. 97, (1998) pp. 160-165. p. 164.

loss of public security.⁶⁶

Within the public discourse on Mexican drug violence, human rights organizations confirm the relationship between increased violence and the weakening of the state. Human Rights Watch (HRW) observes a correlation between the increase of human right abuses and the Mexican military corruption. The failing judicial apparatus leads to 'near total impunity'⁶⁷ and this impunity gravely affects the institutional capacity to deal with the DTOs. A November 2011 HRW report, entitled *Neither Rights Nor Security*, describing the deteriorating human rights situation since Calderon took office, concluded the following: 'Not only do human rights violations in themselves undermine the rule of law, but they also can be counterproductive in reducing violence, dismantling criminal networks, and building the public confidence in institutions that are critical for effective counter narcotics efforts. Since the outset of Calderón's "war on drugs," violent crime has skyrocketed; abusive policing has undermined the investigation and prosecution of criminal suspects; and widespread abuse and corruption has antagonized civilians who otherwise could provide security forces with crucial information.'⁶⁸

The report argues that the decision of Calderon, to confront the DTOs head on with the military, is one of the main reasons for the increased violent crime, which in turn has resulted in exacerbating corruption, deteriorating public security and antagonized civilians whose trust and help is necessary in fighting the DTOs. The HWR report also shows the close linkage between institutional capacity and government policy but we will come to the policy argument later.

⁶⁶ M. Moloeznik, 'The Militarization of Public Security and the Role of the Military in Mexico,' *Police and Public Security in Mexico*, ed. Robert A. Donnelly and David A. Shirk (San Diego, University Reader, 2009) pp. 65-92. p. 65-66.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch, Mexico: Widespread Rights abuses in 'War on Drugs' (2011) <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/11/09/mexico-widespread-rights-abuses-war-drugs> (2-2-2012).

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Neither Rights nor Security* (2011) <http://www.hrw.org/node/102793/section/4> (2-2-2012).

The United States government officials and their reports also contribute substantially to the discourse on Mexican drug violence and state capacity. The United States, with a few exceptions, has in recent years been of opinion that: 'Mexico is in no danger of becoming a failed state'.⁶⁹ Still, there are signs, throughout the government reports, that the violence is getting worse and that there is doubt whether the Mexican state can deal with the violence sufficiently. The travel advisory from the U.S. state department expanded its warning from 10 to 14 Mexican states as recently as February 2012 and according to the advisory: '120 U.S. travelers to Mexico were reported murdered in 2011'.⁷⁰ Also the bilateral cooperation, between the United States and Mexico, has increased greatly and the Mérida Initiative is a prime example of this increased cooperation. American congress has provided funding for the Mérida Initiative, a multi-year initiative for \$1.4 billion in U.S. counterdrug and anticrime assistance to Central America and Mexico. To date the assistance is largely in the form of equipment, training and has the primary focus to strengthen the judicial, law enforcement and military capabilities of Mexico and to a lesser extend Central America. The goals of the Mérida Initiative are: 'Breaking the power and impunity of criminal organizations; assisting the Mexican and Central American governments in strengthening border, air, and maritime controls; improving the capacity of justice systems in the region; and curtailing gang activity in Mexico and Central America and diminishing the demand for drugs in the region'.⁷¹

Although these areas of focus do not show a direct cause-effect relationship between state capacity and drug-related violence, the Mérida Initiative and the U.S. government discourse, show that many U.S. government officials have concerns about the Mexican government's capacity to control the violence in Mexico and control insurgent-like or

⁶⁹ J. Beittel, 'Mexico's Drug-Related Violence.', *CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service* (2009) p. 8.

⁷⁰ Huffington Post, Mexican Drug Violence: U.S. State Department Expands Travel Warning To 14 Mexican States (2012) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/10/mexican-drug-violence-us-travel-warning-february_n_1268352.html (8-3-2012).

⁷¹ Finklea, K., Krouse, W. and Randol M., 'Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence', *CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service* (2011) p. 37.

terrorist tactics employed by the DTOs.⁷² So the main argument, in the discourse from U.S. government officials, is not that the institutional lack of capacity directly causes more violence but that reduced state capacity exacerbates violence through failing law enforcement and corruption. In other words, the context provides a hotbed for organized crime and the context first needs to improve before the level of violence can go down again.

Within the literature on Mexican drug violence, there is thus a consensus that part of the institutional capacity is lacking. It is important to realize, however, that the institutional capacity is primarily equated with the rule of law and its weakness is seen as one of the main reasons of the prolongation of violence. The literature does not, however, explain to what extent the failing rule of law actually increases the violence. A long history of corruption in the young democracy can mainly be seen as a mutual parasitic relationship. As Howard Campbell puts it in his book, *Drug War Zone*: ‘[...] states and illicit or illegal activities are not separate, distinct fields of social action, but are tightly intertwined in a dialectic relationship.’⁷³ Campbell’s view underlines the close relationship between the state and the drug traffickers; the state represented by the government, its policies and also the various institutions and agencies that exist within a state. The majority of the literature does not indicate that Mexico is becoming a failed state but mainly observes the weak institutional strength of Mexico in relation to the protection of its civilians. The arguments of a weak and corrupt law enforcement and military are thus seen as a major contributor to violence, an indirect cause of drug-related violence, but is the deeply rooted corruption and incapacity of law enforcement to reduce the violence one of the main reasons of the more recent escalation of violence?

⁷² Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence’, p. 6.

⁷³ H. Campbell, *Drug War Zone: Frontline Dispatches from the Streets of El Paso and Juárez* (Austin 2009) p. 9.

2.2.2 Policy

“War is the continuation of policy by other means”⁷⁴

Carl von Clausewitz

This old adagium from von Clausewitz can also be applied to the current ‘drug war’ in Mexico, where the government’s fight against the DTOs is a continuation of anti-drug policy. Within the literature on drug-related violence, the path of direct military-led confrontation with the DTOs, which has been the center of Calderon’s domestic policy, is frequently mentioned as the cause of the spike of violence in recent years. The policy decisions made by the Mexican government(s) seem to influence the drug-related violence but in what way? And to what extent?

First, we have to identify the different levels of policy and to clarify distinctions made in the literature a militaristic policy division will be made. The first policy level comes from the highest national political layer, the government, dominated by the president. The policy the president decides upon to defeat the DTOs can be seen as strategy. A second layer touches more upon the operational plans that flow from this strategy to deal with the DTOs. To understand the influence and power of the president, a basic understanding of the presidential system in Mexico is necessary.

Mexico’s party system was historically weak and dominated by one hegemonic entity, the PRI. During the 71 years the PRI ruled Mexico the president held significant powers and Guillermo O’Donnell argues that Mexico was a “delegative democracy” during the period of PRI dominance. This refers to a form a democracy in which a strong Executive, in Mexico represented by the president, dominates the political system.⁷⁵ The collapse of the

⁷⁴ Politik has been translated as politics or policy. Both are accepted ways of translation. Clausewitz, Carl von (1984) [1832]. Howard, Michael; Paret, Peter. eds. *On War [Vom Krieg]* (Indexed ed.). New Jersey: Princeton University Press. p. 87

⁷⁵ J. Bailey and R. Godson, *Organized Crime and Democratic Governability: Mexico and the U.S.–Mexican Borderlands* (Pittsburg 2000) p. 9.

PRI initiated a system with increased congressional and party strength, which in turn weakened the presidency.⁷⁶ Still, the president holds significant power and dictates national policy and foreign policy in the Mexican presidential republic.⁷⁷ And it is this considerable influence of more recent presidents, which has shaped Mexican anti-drug policy.

The PRI was a centralized and hierarchical party that pursued an overall policy of accommodation of the DTOs. Under this system, eradication of drug crops and arrests did take place but due to the widespread effects of corruption the system was “characterized by a working relationship between Mexican authorities and drug lords” throughout the 1990s.⁷⁸ This PRI policy is closely linked to the earlier mentioned connection between democratization (regime change) and increased violence. The more pluralistic political landscape brought forward the rise of PAN and it was PAN who initiated a policy shift regarding the DTOs.

Throughout the discourse the confrontational policy is seen as one of the immediate factors for the escalation in drug violence. David Shirk, from the Trans Border Institute in San Diego, has published numerous research papers on drug-related violence in Mexico and gives three reasons why there has been a recent escalation of violence: first the fractionalization of organized crime groups; second changing structures of political-bureaucratic corruption; and third recent government efforts to crack down on organized crime.⁷⁹ According to Shirk’s argumentation all three reasons stem from policy changes, starting with the shift that reduced the level of impunity the DTOs enjoyed because of the protection by corrupt officials at very high levels in the Mexican government.⁸⁰ Shirk sums up the three arguments and says: ‘that inter-cartel dynamics and the government’s chosen

⁷⁶ K. Michaud, ‘Mexico’s Militarized Anti-Drug Policy. Understanding Its Origins Through Examination of Institutional Legacies, Democratization, and Public Opinion’, *Stanford Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 2 (1). (2011) pp. 3-18. P. 3-5.

⁷⁷ Geo Mexico, Mexico Policical System: the basics (2012) <http://geo-mexico.com/?m=201203> (5-4-2012).

⁷⁸ Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence’, p.4-5.

⁷⁹ Shirk, ‘Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis from 2001-2009’, p. 9.

⁸⁰ Ibidem.

strategy to combat organized crime groups by targeting top leadership structures has contributed to the fractionalization of organized crime groups, more severe and disorganized violence, and a diversification of organized criminal activities.⁸¹ Shirk thus argues that the government strategy and the operational plans to realize this strategy are the main causes of the increase in drug-related violence. Shirks also explores how the Mexican policy was formulated and sees it partly as a reflection of the policies and priorities of the United States. The United States' influence on Mexican policy and also the influence of the US policy itself will be explored further in this literature review but first we have to look to more literature on the Mexican strategic and operational level as main causes of drug-related violence.

Kevin Sabet and Viridiana Rios, in their article on drug-related violence, interpret the increase in violence similar to Shirk and point to Mexico's more recent efforts to curb the influence of DTOs.⁸² Calderon's justification for a strategy of increased governability and confrontational policy: 'no other policy could be efficiently implemented without first recovering official control over the areas where drug trafficking has openly taking place.'⁸³ On the operational level Calderon targeted his main efforts at three main areas: decreasing the amount of drugs that crossed the border, capturing high-profile cartel leaders and destroying illegal crop cultivation. Sabet and Rios argue that the policy of this crackdown, increased violence in three ways: first, an increase in inter-cartel violence due to a decrease in territories controlled by DTOs. Second, the capturing of drug lords has changed the internal structure of the cartels, resulting in more intra-cartel violence and third, the seizures of illegal drugs, the confiscation of weapons, money, goods and eradication of illegal crops lead to less profits in the drug trafficking with an associated increase in violence.⁸⁴ Sabet and

⁸¹ D. Shirk, 'Drug Violence and State Responses in Mexico', *Department of Political Science, University of San Diego* (unpublished, 2011) p. 2.

⁸² K. Sabet and V. Rios, 'Why violence has increased in Mexico and what can we do about it.' (Unpublished, 2009) p. 4-6.

⁸³ Sabet and Rios, 'Why violence has increased in Mexico and what can we do about it', p. 5.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem* p. 6.

Rios finally argue that the new policy and redefinition of the relationship between the government and drug cartels started in 2000 with the election of Vicente Fox who was unable or unwilling to reestablish the old 'pact' that was made between the DTOs and government.⁸⁵ An argument supported by Peter Reuter who sees that the election of Vicente Fox disturbed the arrangement between the DTOs and government but that Fox did so without generating massive violence, while the aggressive campaign of Calderon created an entirely new situation. This new situation resulted in rapid turnover in DTO leadership and probably disturbing existing market division arrangements.⁸⁶

Ami Carpenter also points out that there is a direct link between increased violence and the enforcement strategy of the Mexican government. On the operational level the incarceration and killing of key drug lords has left power vacuums that lead to more intra- and inter-cartel violence. Carpenter considers the enforcement strategy as the most important trigger of the increase in drug-related violence.⁸⁷ Richard Davenport-Hines sums up the enforcement argument in his extensive book on the history of narcotics: 'Each time law enforcement is escalated drug-trafficking has to escalate to survive'.⁸⁸

Williams describes the high levels of violence as 'transitional violence' that is caused by a policy change by the new Mexican government party PAN and that: 'codes of conduct between the state and organized crime are being developed they have still not been institutionalized'.⁸⁹ This transitional nature of the high levels of drug-related violence should normalize when a new status quo will be reached with the government, which implies that government enforcement strategy is a key factor in relation to drug-related violence.

⁸⁵ Ibidem p. 4.

⁸⁶ P. Reuter and B. Kilmer, 'RAND Reducing Drug Trafficking Revenues and Violence in Mexico. Would legalizing Marijuana in California Help?', *RAND corporation* (2010) p. 53.

⁸⁷ A.C. Carpenter, 'Beyond Drug Wars: Transforming Factional Conflict in Mexico', *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* (2010) pp. 401-421. P. 401-403.

⁸⁸ R. Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics* (New York 2006) p. 422.

⁸⁹ Williams, 'Illicit markets, weak states and violence: Iraq and Mexico', p. 327.

In a systematic review paper on the general effects of law enforcement on drug market violence, a conclusion is reached that confirms a strong correlation between levels of drug law enforcement and levels of drug market violence.⁹⁰ The review points out that: ‘ the drug prohibition likely contributes to drug market violence and increased homicide rates and that increasingly sophisticated methods of disrupting illicit drug distribution may in turn increase levels of violence.’⁹¹ It also elaborates on the situation in Mexico and concludes that violence is an inevitable consequence of drug prohibition when groups compete for massive profits. Additionally, a process of ‘target hardening’ occurs, wherein vulnerable entities become increasingly militarized and this process is documented in Mexico where the escalating militarization of drug cartels have resulted in increased levels of violence and homicides.⁹² This report therefore strongly supports the argument that the Mexican enforcement strategy has led to increasing levels of drug-related violence.

As laid out above, the policy argument is widely supported throughout the literature and is coined as the militarization of Mexican anti drug-policy. The policy argument or Mexican strategy versus the DTOs can be seen as the most dominant explanation for the increase in violence, particularly since 2007, as Calderon took office in December 2006.

Another part of the policy related explanations are the operational plans on how to confront the DTOs and deal with the drug problem. Within the arguments for drug-related violence provided by Rios and Sabet, Shirk and Carpenter, kingpin removal is argued to cause instability inside the cartels and between them. The Council on Foreign Relations also states that the eradication [of high profile drug-traffickers] efforts have led to violent succession battles, which not only lead to a dramatic rise in drug-related homicides within a DTO but also to an increase of killings between DTO members.⁹³ June Beittel supports the failing kingpin tactics and expresses that: “These counter narcotic successes, however, led to a

⁹⁰ Werb and Wood, ‘Effect of drug law enforcement on drug market violence: A systematic review’, p. 5.

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Shirk, D., ‘The Drug War in Mexico Confronting a Shared Threat’, *Council on Foreign relations* (2011) p. 3.

wave of violence as arrests of DTO leaders resulted in bloody turf battles over territory, resources and manpower.”⁹⁴ Juan Lindau sees this process starting in 1989 with the decapitation of the, at that time largest, Arellano Felix cartel.⁹⁵ The argument of Lindau is traced back to the 1985 kidnapping, torture and murder of DEA agent Camarena by the Felix cartel in 1985, which started a process of government purging of the Federal Police and the DFS and a shift towards more active anti-drug tactics focused on kingpin removal.⁹⁶

A part of government tactics is the focus on certain cities and other regions that have had the discomfort of more drug-related violence. Most scholars, however, argue that this has not brought the desired effect since the violence might decrease in the targeted area but seems to rise in others.⁹⁷ This phenomenon is termed ballooning and some even say this is happening on a much larger scale and that the violence is crossing Mexico’s borders because of these security operations.⁹⁸

Hence, the discourse is clear on the consequences of the crackdown and the decapitation (kingpin removal) tactic. It caused fractionalization, increasing competition and displacement of the violence.

An additional frequently mentioned focal point of the operational plans, one that has come under increased scrutiny, is the Mexican (and US) government focus on supply reduction. Although the supply reduction policy said to cause more violence, since it would decrease profits, it is mainly perceived as an incomplete and inefficient way of dealing with the drug problem.⁹⁹ Some authors, like Peter Andreas in, *Border Games: Policing the U.S.* –

⁹⁴ Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug-Related Violence’, p. 3.

⁹⁵ J. Lindau, ‘The Drug Wars’ Impact on Executive Power, Judicial Reform, and Federalism in Mexico’, *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 126 Number 2 (2011) pp. 177-200. p. 183.

⁹⁶ Schyberg, ‘The Effects of Regime Change on Drug-Related Violence. A Case Study of Mexico between 1985-2011’, p. 22.

⁹⁷ L. Astorga and D. Shirk, ‘Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context’, Olson, Eric L. / Shirk, David A. / Selee, Andrew (Eds.): Shared (2010) p. 30.

⁹⁸ The Economist, ‘The Tormented Isthmus’, (2011) <http://www.economist.com/node/18558254> (6-4-2012).

⁹⁹ Sabet and Rios, ‘Why violence has increased in Mexico and what can we do about it’, p. 3-5.

Mexican Divide, argue that traffickers assume that a certain percentage of their products will be seized and calculate this into their profit projections. And that traffickers use small, easily detectable, shipments as decoy to distract from bigger shipments.¹⁰⁰ Thus, making most seizures calculated losses that would hardly affect the DTO operations on a large scale. However, checking the broad implications of current policy is beyond the scope of this paper but it remains clear that seizures have been a main focus of the Mexican and global-anti drug campaign and some see this operational enforcement tactic as a contributor to drug-related violence.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) also poses a correlation between less profit and increased violence in the World Drug Report. Where the report links a recent slump in cocaine profits to violence at the plaza of Ciudad Juarez : ‘recent losses in cocaine revenues seems only to have intensified the violence’¹⁰¹ UNOCD also suggests that the reduction in profit has possibly lead the DTOs to more progressively engaging in other forms of organized crime activities such as extortion, kidnapping and migrant smuggling, which are associated with high levels of violence.¹⁰² Interestingly, however, UNOCD also plays down the argument of government efforts causing more violence by making a comparison with Guatemala, where enforcement is much weaker and the murder rate is at least four times higher.¹⁰³ In addition, most of the deaths are cartel members themselves fighting over trafficking routes, not law enforcement personnel.¹⁰⁴

We can conclude that the discourse on the links between policy, on both the strategic and operational level, and drug-related violence are vast. The Mexican government

Reuter and Kilmer, ‘RAND Reducing Drug Trafficking Revenues and Violence in Mexico. Would legalizing Marijuana in California Help?’, p. 53.-54.

¹⁰⁰ Andreas, P., *Border games: Policing the U.S.-Mexican Divide* (New York 2009) p. 79.

¹⁰¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2011* (New York 2012) p. 245.

¹⁰² UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, p. 238.

¹⁰³ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, p. 238.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem* p. 245.

policies, with the president as the most visible and powerful entity of the government, are seen as the main reasons for the increase in drug-related violence, with a few exceptions like UNODC who put more emphasis on DTO competition. There are many changes in the structure and modes operandi that are acknowledged to be the consequence of the militarization of the anti-drug policy and the operational plans that stem from it. The DTO modus operandi and structure(s) will be discussed later in this literature review.

Apart from the policy argument, regime change and the institutional capacity are also important for the relationship between government and the DTOs. As shown above, all are closely linked and therefore grouped together within this literature review. In sum, in the existing literature policy is seen as the largest contributor to drug-related violence of the three and more importantly also understood as a direct cause of violence. The regime change argument is a little more disputed as shown in Shyberg's thesis but generally viewed as an essential element of the changing relationship with the DTOs with an associated loss of control. Regime change is therefore mainly seen as a more indirect cause of (more) drug-related violence. The institutional capacity is mainly equaled with weak law enforcement capabilities and corruption, which both exacerbate the violence. All three lines of argumentation are from a government or state perspective but before we look at more explanations from a DTO perspective, the United States deserves our attention as U.S. influence is frequently mentioned throughout the discourse as one of the main contributors to the current drug-related violence in Mexico.

2.2.3 U.S. influence and Policy

U.S. influence

An important factor that is frequently emphasized throughout the discourse is how the United States has influenced Mexican government policy and how America's own policy has strengthened the Mexican DTOs. Both seem central to understand the context of the current Mexican anti-drug policy. This part will focus on US influence, US policy and the relationship with Mexican drug-related violence. First we will explore how Mexican policy was or is being shaped by American influence before exploring the effects of United States policy on drug-related violence.

Katherine Michaud, in an article on understanding the origins on the militarization of the Mexican anti-drug policy by Calderon brings regime change, weak institutional strength and the policy arguments just discussed together and adds the arguments of United States influence and public opinion. Michaud states: 'This paper demonstrates how Mexico's historical party system and law enforcement institutions allowed drug trafficking to strengthen while leaving the Mexican presidency and state weaker. It argues that these institutional legacies, combined with the forces of democratization, public opinion, and United States influence, resulted in Calderón's decision.'¹⁰⁵ Calderon's decision refers to the decision to use the military and the confrontational policy versus the DTOs. About the U.S. influence Michaud is clear, that given the US' historical involvement in Mexican drug policy and the preference for a militarized anti-drug strategy, the U.S. influence stands out as a contributor to Calderon his policy decision, despite predictions that aggressive anti-drug policies would ignite more violence as the seen in the Columbian drug war.¹⁰⁶ Consequently the United States is mentioned as a main factor that contributed to Mexican policy decisions that helped ignite violence.

¹⁰⁵ Michaud, 'Mexico's Militarized Anti-Drug Policy. Understanding Its Origins Through Examination of Institutional Legacies, Democratization, and Public Opinion', p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem.

In the 1980s and the 1990s. U.S.-Mexican counternarcotic efforts were often marked by mistrust.¹⁰⁷ This relationship has changed significantly and many point to the fact that US policy and Mexican policy towards DTOs have been converging. The U.S. government continues to define the Mexican DTOs as “the greatest organized crime threat” to the United States today.¹⁰⁸ And as part of his anti-drug strategy, president Calderon has demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to collaborate with the United States on joint counterdrug measures.¹⁰⁹ Before Calderon, President Fox already gave President Bush guarantees that he would combat drug trafficking extensively. The willingness of President Fox to extradite several drug lords to the United States is seen as evidence of increased collaboration.¹¹⁰ Tony Payan points to the fact that the “security agendas” coincided and strengthened, while throughout the decades before the U.S. Mexican relationship had been more problematic.¹¹¹

According to Peter Andreas, the strong U.S. influence and willingness of Mexico to adopt the extended criminalization of the drug trade, started already during the presidency of Salinas.¹¹² Andreas points out that there was an important trade off between economic expansion and liberalization and the increased anti-drug offensive, which Salinas used to pacify U.S. critics to pave the way for the passage of NAFTA. Andreas deems this a “political success of a failing policy” where NAFTA was a political success and impressive quantitative anti-drug results actually hid the fact that the drug trade strongly strengthened and professionalized because of the economic liberalization and anti-drug efforts.¹¹³ The process of economic integration also opened new channels of commerce for the “illicit

¹⁰⁷ Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug-Related Violence’, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ J. Beittel and R. Seelke, ‘Latin America and the Caribbean: Illicit Drug Trafficking and U.S. Counterdrug Programs’, *CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service* (2010) p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence’, p. 18.

¹¹⁰ T. Payan, ‘The Drug War and the U.S.-Mexico Border: The State of Affairs’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 105 (2006) pp. 863-880. p. 868.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹¹² Andreas, *Border games: Policing the U.S.-Mexican Divide*, p. 61.

¹¹³ *Ibidem* p. 56.

economy”¹¹⁴ Overall, the campaign brought with it significant collateral damage such as more militarized law enforcement, more corruption and arguably more drug-related violence.¹¹⁵

When looking at the connection between U.S. influence and Mexican policy, the larger dependency on the U.S. for the militarized anti-drug campaign is also regularly referred to. Stratfor Intelligence says Mexico has to consider the domestic political cost of allowing greater American influence while relying on the United States for resources, training, and intelligence sharing.¹¹⁶ The securing of the Merida Initiative and the reliance on the U.S. justice apparatus through extradition are all components that have made Mexico more dependent on the United States and in turn have contributed towards a continuation of current drug policy. George Grayson supports the idea of strong U.S. influence on the Mexican anti-drug efforts and sees the militarization as a direct cause of American pressure saying Washington already strongly urged Mexico to use the armed forces during the office of Ernesto Zedillo, who was president between 1994-2000.¹¹⁷ Grayson also blames the certification process for pressuring Mexico into more action, while angering Mexico that saw it as breach of their sovereignty, it still made an impact and Mexico sought to highlight its commitment to fighting drugs.¹¹⁸ The certification process, which in theory provided an objective basis for determining compliance with the U.S. Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1986, (that reported on the progress of the drug producing and/or drug transit countries to eliminate the drug threat) in practice meant that the U.S. president had substantial flexibility in determining whether a country had taken ‘adequate steps’ to confront this threat.¹¹⁹ These

¹¹⁴ Astorga and Shirk, ‘Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context’, p. 7.

¹¹⁵ Ibidem. p. 7-10.

¹¹⁶ Stratfor Intelligence, *Mexico In Crisis: Lost Borders and the Struggle for Regional Status* (Austin 2009) p. 170.

¹¹⁷ Grayson, *Mexico. Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*, p. 226.

¹¹⁸ Ibidem p. 222.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem p. 221.

U.S. policy decisions, with added power through codification, helped to force U.S. anti-drug policy on drug producing and drug transit countries.

Juan Lindau says the drug war already effectively began in Mexico in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the Mexican state, in response to U.S. pressure, enacted a variety of measures designed to reduce the flow of drugs crossing the border.¹²⁰ The war intensified during the 1980s, as the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George Bush senior devoted significantly larger resource to supply reduction in drug-producing countries. Since then the United States has become increasingly worried about a spill-over of the violence into the United States but U.S. government officials maintain that there has been no significant spill-over yet.¹²¹ Still, its threat has captured the U.S. government's attention and was perceived to be more serious after 9/11, when the border area was transformed from a 'law enforcement era' to one of national security. This 'securization', as Payan calls it, saw the budgets for border security and surveillance increase even more than they had in the 1980s and 1990s, which influenced Mexican policy and the bilateral relationship, especially on issues regarding the fight against drugs.¹²²

The United States, who has been the leading world power since the World War II, clearly has a strong influence on domestic policies around the world and the Mexican geographical proximity makes U.S. pressure and influence inevitable. The U.S. wish to militarize global anti-drug policy started at the end of the 1960s and was intensified in the 1980s.¹²³ Mexican governments and presidents have not been immune to these U.S. efforts, consequently influencing and shaping Mexican anti-drug policy.

¹²⁰ Lindau, 'The Drug War's Impact on Executive Power, Judicial Reform, and Federalism in Mexico', p.182.

¹²¹ Beittel, 'Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence', p. 1.

¹²² T. Payan, *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars: Drugs, Immigration, And Homeland Security* (Westport 2006) p. 14.

¹²³ Grayson, *Mexico. Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*, p. 225 -231.

Davenport-Hines, R., *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Global History of Narcotics*, p. 429- 449.

Mares, *Drug Wars and Coffeehouses: the political economy of the international drug trade*, p. 121.

U.S. Policy

The previous section focused more on the general strategy of the U.S. on DTOs and the deliberate pressure on Mexico to militarize the fight against drug trafficking. This part will, similar to the layers in Mexican policy, look more at the operational plans and how they affected the DTOs and drug-related violence in Mexico.

The historic significance of U.S. policy influence is frequently mentioned throughout the discourse and mainly starts with President Nixon declaring war on illegal drugs with Operation Intercept in 1969. The border area between the U.S. and Mexico has been subject to more direct influence of U.S. policy and Payan stresses that the: “long term significance of Operation Intercept resides in a single fact: It inaugurated an era of illegal-drug policy that has resulted in the creation and consolidation of a few large cartels and the increasing effectiveness of their operations. Moreover, Operation Intercept brought with it a new kind of war based on a logic of escalation between law enforcement and criminal organizations.”¹²⁴

Ironically, Mexico’s prominence in the drug trade seems an unintended by-product of United States policy and operations. Since the end of the 1960s the focus has mainly been on supply reduction through eradication and interdiction, and these interdiction efforts have led to the current dominant position of the Mexican DTOs.¹²⁵ Mexican cartels became ever more important and powerful organizations, in part because of successful U.S. government efforts to end the flow of Colombian drugs through the Caribbean and south Florida.¹²⁶ This maritime drug blockade has caused drug routes to shift to Mexico, and Colombian cartels enlisted their Mexican counterparts as intermediaries. This process started in the 1980s and in the long run Mexican cartels moved beyond this role, controlling a growing share of production and distribution.¹²⁷ The stopping of the drug flow through the Caribbean to

¹²⁴ Payan, ‘The Drug War and the U.S.-Mexico Border: The State of Affairs’, p. 863.

¹²⁵ G. Gonzales and M. Tienda, *The drug connectin in U.S. Mexican relations* (San Diego 1996) p. 16.

¹²⁶ Andreas, ‘*The Political Economy of Narco-corruption in Mexico*’, p. 160.

¹²⁷ Lindau, ‘The Drug War’s Impact on Executive Power, Judicial Reform, and Federalism in Mexico’, p. 182.

Florida was like a big stone in a river, the drugs simply flowed around it through other routes. This significantly increased the importance of Points of Entry (POEs) on the Mexican border and these 'plazas' were soon heavily defended and vied over by the Mexican DTOs.¹²⁸

The focus and debate in the United States has mainly been on the 'unholy trinity' of marijuana, cocaine and heroin. A freebase form of cocaine called "crack" received extra attention in the 1980s because of its higher mortality among its users and associated violence.¹²⁹ This brought more importance to the eradication efforts on cocaine, which resulted in considerable power and extra revenue for the Mexican DTOs since Mexico became the main transshipment point for cocaine.¹³⁰ Also the U.S. operations have focused to eradicate the production at the source.¹³¹ By attacking production facilities and crops in the Mexico, Colombia and other Latin American countries, the U.S. caused geographic displacement of production, fractionalization and increased competition between DTOs throughout Central America and in Mexico.¹³² Tony Payan supports this line of reasoning and argues that Homeland Security, with their efforts along the border, may actually be strengthening the cartels rather than weakening them, because the effectiveness of U.S. law enforcement efforts turned the DTOs into more flexible, more efficient, more technological and well-consolidated smuggling units.¹³³

In sum, the U.S. efficiency in interdiction of the maritime routes through the Caribbean is seen as one of the primary causes of a power shift to the Mexican DTOs. Also the strong emphasis on the supply side, with reduction and eradication efforts, seems to

¹²⁸ Sabet and Rios, *'Why violence has increased in Mexico and what can we do about it'*, p. 8.

¹²⁹ Gonzales and Tienda, *The drug connectin in U.S. Mexican relations*, p. 32-33.

¹³⁰ W. Marcy, *The Politics of Cocaine: How U.S. Foreign Policy Has Created a Thriving Drug Industry in Central and South America* (Chicago 2010) p. 239-258.

¹³¹ R. Jordan, *International Organizations: A Comparative Approach to the Management of Cooperation* (Westport 2001) p. 185.

¹³² Marcy, *The Politics of Cocaine: How U.S. Foreign Policy Has Created a Thriving Drug Industry in Central and South America*, p. 239-258.

¹³³ Payan, 'The Drug War and the U.S.-Mexico Border: The State of Affairs', p. 870.

have consolidated the position of the DTOs and added to their professionalization. The securization of the border made the POEs more important, which lead to increased competition over the plazas. Over time, the militarization policy of the U.S. has forced Mexico upon a similar policy route, which has indirectly contributed to more drug-related violence.

2.2.4 Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs)

“In recent weeks, we have had a series of inhuman and despicable acts in different parts of the country that mark an irrational fight fundamentally between two existing criminal groups and their criminal allies. [...] Clear indications that a recent surge in violent acts stems from a direct conflict between the Zetas and the Sinaloa cartels over territory and power”¹³⁴

On May 15 2012, Mexican Interior minister Alejandro Poire made this statement after Mexican authorities found 49 decapitated bodies on a roadside in Northern Mexico. It is just one of the many examples of the gruesome acts of violence that are being perpetrated by the DTOs and which are blamed on the direct conflict between the DTOs. The literature is abundant on the connection between drug-related violence and the DTOs. The DTO perspective looks more deeply into the DTO modes operandi and focuses mainly on the intra and inter-cartel violence as the main causes of increased drug-related violence. There are also other causes of drug-related violence mentioned in relation to the DTOs that are less prominently mentioned but that do deserve attention. First, however, we will look at the intra and inter-cartel violence.

Intra and inter-cartel violence

David Shirk (who we have already encountered with the ‘policy explanation’) is a strong advocate of the argument that the increase in drug-related violence is primarily caused by inter and intra DTO fighting and competition. Together with Luis Astorga, Shirk sees the start of a new era around 2000, an era where DTO competition is characterized by levels of “extreme and high profile violence”.¹³⁵ In addition Shirk observes that: “one thing stands out about the evolution of drug-related violence in recent years is the extent to which it has

¹³⁴ CNN, ‘Mexican Official Calls Cartel Violence ‘irrational’, (2012)
http://edition.cnn.com/2012/05/14/world/americas/mexico-bodies-found/index.html?hpt=hp_t3 (10-5-2012).

¹³⁵ Astorga and Shirk, ‘Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context’, p. 16.

been driven by the splintering of and competition among DTOs.¹³⁶ Interestingly, Shirk calls it an evolution, implying that the situation causing drug-related violence has evolved into a new form.

Many support the theory that cartel rivalries are one of the main causes of drug-related violence and the majority of the discourse focuses on inter-cartel violence. These are mainly seen as turf wars over territory, where the geographical position of the cartels is being defended and expanded. The government played a big role by targeting one cartel more than another and thus leaving a cartel weaker in a certain area, which ignited more violence as competition over territory, and smuggling routes would rise.¹³⁷

In the Congressional Research Service reports written by June Beittel the fracturing¹³⁸ of DTOs and, consequently, the increasing numbers of organizations that vie for control are mentioned as main characteristics of the increased violence.¹³⁹ Beittel supports the argument of fractionalization with an example of the Zetas, who became fully independent in the period from late 2008 to early 2010, which sparked a vicious battle for control in the northeastern states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and other territory once controlled by their former master, the Gulf cartel.¹⁴⁰ Beittel additionally elaborates on the intra-cartel violence, which is widespread in the organizations, as DTOs have succession struggles to replace fallen or arrested leaders.¹⁴¹ Kevin Sabet and Viridiana Rios put a timeframe on the increased competition and state that: ‘since 2000, cartel rivalries have been a major contributor to the steady increase in violence [...]’¹⁴², which includes the break down of long-standing pacts by

¹³⁶ Shirk, ‘Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis from 2001-2009’, p. 10.

¹³⁷ Felbab-Brown, ‘The Violent Drug Market in Mexico and Lessons from Colombia’, p. 5.

¹³⁸ An interesting and important difference pointed out by Astorga and Shirk who deliberately use the term “fractionalization” in opposition to the term “fragmentation,” since fractionalization puts an emphasis on the emergence of new factions and networks in place of old ones.

¹³⁹ Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence’, p.12.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem p. 14.

¹⁴¹ Ibidem.

¹⁴² Sabet and Rios, ‘Why violence has increased in Mexico and what can we do about it’, p. 4.

trying to take control of other territories in order to increase their profits. An argument also put forward by Laurie Freeman who argues that the relative peace among the DTOs ended around 2000.¹⁴³

An interesting paper by Miriam Eberle tested Stathis Kalyvas' theory, which predicts variation in the level of violence by the degree of territorial control that political actors have over an area, on the current situation in the Mexican state of Michoacán.¹⁴⁴ Eberle concludes that: 'Kalyvas proposition that violence plays a key role in obtaining control and collaboration is also valid for the Mexican case.'¹⁴⁵ Thus, Eberle observes that the degree of territorial control is a main variable for violence in Michoacán, since violence is needed to assert control by one of the DTOs or the government forces. Others focus more on the battle between the influential DTOs and say it is increasingly coming down to a fight between the Sinaloa cartel and Los Zetas, which are currently seen as the two most powerful DTOs.¹⁴⁶

The emphasis on competition between DTOs gives government forces a less important role as a cause of violence, especially over areas that contain important POE. We can also derive that geography is a key factor of drug-related violence. The importance of geography will be discussed more extensively later. In sum, throughout the discourse intra and inter-cartel violence is seen as a direct cause of drug-related violence. Furthermore, fractionalization and an increasing number of DTOs since 2000 appear to have added to the increased competition.

¹⁴³ L. Freeman, 'State of Siege: Drug-Related Violence and Corruption in Mexico. Unintended Consequences of the War on Drugs' *Washington Office on Latin America* (2006) p. 2-3.

¹⁴⁴ S.N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. (New York, 2006) p. 88-89.

¹⁴⁵ M. Eberle, 'The Logic of Drug-Related Violence, A Case Study of Mexico from 2006 to 2011', *Master Thesis Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen* (2011) p. 112-114.

¹⁴⁶ The New York Times, 'Mexican Drug Trafficking', (2012) http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/mexico/drug_trafficking/index.html (6-4-2012).

Militarization (professionalization)

Apart from inter and intra-cartel violence, there are other DTO based arguments to explain the increased levels of violence. One we have already encountered, as many attribute this to government policy, is the professionalization and/or militarization of the DTOs. Moreover, the militarization of public security, which has added to corruption and defection, where the main change seems to have taken place when the Gulf cartel started using para-military groups for security.¹⁴⁷ The emergence of militias fighting on behalf of some of the DTOs, such as the Zetas of the Gulf cartel and the Negros of the Sinaloa cartel, have increased DTO power and militarized operations and structure.¹⁴⁸ The Zetas, who broke their alliance with the Gulf cartel and are now independent, were elite military officers who defected to the DTOs. This process of defection professionalized the DTOs as they brought skills, weapons and technological advancement for the DTO hitmen.¹⁴⁹ The Zetas are the clearest example of this and are therefore perceived as one of largest threats to public security. Mexican scholar Raul Benitez insists that: “Los Zetas have clearly become the biggest, most serious threat to the nation’s security”¹⁵⁰ and the DEA advises that these brigands: “may be the most technologically advanced, sophisticated and violent of these paramilitary enforcement groups.”¹⁵¹

Williams points to a connection between the drug-related violence and the ready availability of ‘specialist’ in violence.¹⁵² Here the former military men intensified drug trafficking violence and according to Williams this began in the late 1990s, when Osiel Cardenas Guillen, leader of the Gulf Cartel, hired as enforcers former Mexican Army Special

¹⁴⁷ Astorga and Shirk, ‘Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context’, p. 16.

¹⁴⁸ Felbab-Brown, ‘The Violent Drug Market in Mexico and Lessons from Colombia’, p. 12.

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁰ Grayson, *Mexico. Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*, p. 179.

¹⁵¹ Ibidem.

¹⁵² Williams, ‘Illicit markets, weak states and violence: Iraq and Mexico’, p. 328.

Forces, many of whom were trained in the United States.¹⁵³ Williams argues that with: “ their employment began a process of professionalization in drug violence in Mexico, which has subsequently been accentuated by the additional involvement of former members of the Kabiles, Guatemalan Special Forces.”¹⁵⁴ Shirk and Astorga agree on this and, especially in the case of the Zetas, that the defection of military forces has led to more extreme violence and that the increased military power spurred other DTOs to develop their own elite enforcer groups.¹⁵⁵

Moloeznik also points to the disturbingly high defection rate among the Mexican military, which rose to a third of all military personnel during the course of the Fox administration. From December 2000 to December 2006, the ministry of National Defence lost 123.218 of its personnel.¹⁵⁶ Others point to a yearly desertion¹⁵⁷ rate of 10% between 2007 and 2010.¹⁵⁸ The high defection rates have clearly contributed to the militarization of the DTOs and both the desertion and defection rates add to the inability of the law enforcement and military to confront the DTOs effectively. This process started around 2000, when the Gulf cartel started using the Zetas as their enforcers or paramilitary wing.

In sum, the militarization and professionalization of the DTOs occurred under government pressure but accelerated significantly with the use of the Zetas by the Gulf cartel. The new level of expertise is said to have added to the high level of drug-related violence, especially vis-à-vis other DTOs.

¹⁵³ Williams, ‘Illicit markets, weak states and violence: Iraq and Mexico’, p. 328.

¹⁵⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁵ Astorga and Shirk, ‘Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context’, p. 29.

¹⁵⁶ Moloeznik, ‘The Militarization of Public Security and the Role of the Military in Mexico’, p. 87-88.

¹⁵⁷ Note the difference between desertion and defection. Desertion is simply abandoning while defection is crossing over to another party.

¹⁵⁸ Astorga and Shirk, ‘Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context’, p. 30.

DTO Structure, Culture and Diversification

Among the DTOs there are big differences when it comes to modes operandi and their use of violence. There are some commonalities and indirect factors that have contributed to drug-related violence in relation to the DTOs. Here we will look at the structure, culture, diversification and differences between some DTOs. We have already mentioned the Zetas with their paramilitary capacity and more militaristic background but did this change the operations of the DTOs?

An important part of the modus operandi of a DTO is its structure. According to Shirk and Astorga the DTOs in Mexico consist of many actors working within a vast supply chain that consists of: “individuals operating independently, specialized and tightly knit groups, as well as larger, more hierarchical networks”¹⁵⁹ Andrew Livingstone argues that: “large criminal enterprises in Mexico generate violence through a structure of horizontally integrated subcontracted enforcement groups.”¹⁶⁰ This entails that the enforcer groups are not directly working in a central hierarchy of command but are rather linked in parallel to the contracting DTO.¹⁶¹ Antonio Mazzitelli supports this finding but he emphasizes that this model mainly applies to the “cultures” of one of the two largest and most influential DTOs: The Zetas. Mazzitelli argues that Sinaloa exemplifies the standard DTO structure with a pyramidal shaped structure, while the Zetas also have a strong hierarchy but their model expands by progressively adding independent and self-sustained cells that are established for occupying new territories, which he calls the ‘clustered hierarchy model’.¹⁶² The core difference, according to Mazzitelli lies in their focus, where Sinaloa has a business-focused operation, which aims to control drug trafficking routes, the Zetas have a strong territorial

¹⁵⁹ Astorga and Shirk, ‘Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context’, p. 16.

¹⁶⁰ Livingstone, ‘A Reputation for Violence, Fractionalization’s Impact on Criminal Reputation and the Mexican State’, p. 20.

¹⁶¹ Ibidem.

¹⁶² A. Mazzitelli, ‘Mexican Cartels Influence in Central America’, *Western Hemisphere Security Analysis Center Paper* (2011) p. 17-18.

culture that focuses on any criminal operator in their area to pay the Zetas a share of the profits.¹⁶³ This difference has large implications for the level of violence used by the DTOs. Mazzitelli sums up the difference: “The closed and secretive structure of the Sinaloa Cartel and other DTOs, coupled with their specialization in drug (trafficking and production) and their business orientation can be considered one of its strengths because it offers the capacity for co-opting local partners and generating mutual beneficial alliances. Recourse to violence is, in this perspective, only used as a last resort and as a punishment for violation of the rules of the game. The opposite can be said of the Zetas’ model. The autonomy of each cell, the very nature of its core business (territorial control) and the consequent need for sustaining control and expansion through unselective recruitment lead necessarily to the atomization of the original structure and the progressive separation, and confrontation, among cells. The Zetas’ model of expansion also clashes with local criminal groups that will not accept their dominance.”¹⁶⁴ The difference in relation to drug-related violence is clear; the Zetas have a structure and business model that seems more prone to violence. A final point that is made apparent by Mazzitelli is that he does not see the Zetas as a DTO but defines them as a Criminal Organization (CO) taking drugs out of the equation. This highlights one of the issues in measuring and researching drug-related violence, as criminal activities differentiate and change and it is hard to distinguish whether the violence took place in relation to drug-related activities. The process of diversification is, due to the territorial model rather than the business model based on a substance, consequently linked to the arrival of the Zetas and ¹⁶⁵

The view of Mazzitelli that violence is essentially used as a last resort by DTOs is not supported by most. In general the violence is seen as an integral part of general DTO operations. Livingstone, for example, argues that the reputation of a DTO is key to its

¹⁶³ Mazzitelli, ‘Mexican Cartels Influence in Central America’, p. 16-19.

¹⁶⁴ Ibidem p. 21-22.

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem.

success. To build up a criminal group's reputation violence is used, which has the added effect of simultaneously diminishing the reputation of its rivals.¹⁶⁶ Others support this like Mares who argues that DTOs, like the older Tijuana (Arellano Felix) cartel, pursue infamy through violence and see violence as a way of exerting a degree of control over their environment.¹⁶⁷ Grayson sees a change of behavior among the DTO members, as 'modern' DTO members are ruthless and set a: "new standard of savagery".¹⁶⁸ Grayson also sees an evolution in DTO operations as he points out that: "Narco-trafficking evolved from a discreet, managed enterprise into a vicious free-for-all between and among heartless criminals."¹⁶⁹ Grayson also confirms the idea that the rise of the Zetas has changed the modus operandi of other DTOs such as La Familia: "Even though La Familia became adversaries of Los Zetas, they adopted many of their sinister techniques, such as hit-and-run ambushes of adversaries; torturing and beheading; human trafficking, kidnappings, extortion, murder-for-hire, loan-sharking, and dominating contraband sales by street vendors."¹⁷⁰ Grayson does not shy away from a more popular use of wording but his message is clear: violence has become the norm of most current DTO operations and the Zetas have changed the game. Also the diversification Grayson mentions is frequently put forward as an emerging factor of increased violence.¹⁷¹ Mexican DTOs have become poly-criminal organizations and they have branched into other profitable crimes. The surge in violence has been accompanied by an increase in kidnapping for ransom and other crimes. According to estimates, kidnappings in Mexico have increased by 188% since 2007, extortion by 101% and

¹⁶⁶ Livingstone, 'A Reputation for Violence, Fractionalization's Impact on Criminal Reputation and the Mexican State', p. 17-18.

¹⁶⁷ Mares, *Drug Wars and Coffeehouses: the political economy of the international drug trade*, p. 23.

¹⁶⁸ Grayson, *Mexico. Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*, p. 74,84.

¹⁶⁹ Ibidem p. 85.

¹⁷⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁷¹ Beittel, 'Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence', p. 16.

robbery by 47%.¹⁷² This diversification is seen as a more recent development that started around 2006.¹⁷³

In discourse on drug-related violence there is, furthermore, a more general part of criminal culture that some mention: machismo. Machismo is a concept that describes men's behavior in Mexican culture and is a social construction that is mainly described as a negative form of hyper masculinity.¹⁷⁴ Machismo is mentioned occasionally in the literature as an indirect cause of violence and used to exemplify a culture of aggression among Mexican criminals. Williams for example states that: "There was also an element of machismo in the Mexican culture which encouraged competition in the criminal world to become increasingly violent."¹⁷⁵ Williams also perceives that DTOs become personal: "The high level of violence among trafficking organizations also stems partly from personal animosity, which results in and is perpetuated by the killing of family members in rival organizations."¹⁷⁶ Stratfor points to machismo in relation to gun use among criminals who tend to carry large high-caliber guns, which seem a big part of Mexico's robust gun culture.¹⁷⁷ Machismo is not so much seen as a direct contributor to drug-related violence but regarded as a factor that helps to escalate violence between and among the DTOs.

Another part in which the Zetas differ in their operations is that the members tend to move up in the groups through merit rather than through familial connections, which stems from their militaristic organization.¹⁷⁸ In general members of a family control the DTOs and

¹⁷²Beittel, 'Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence', p. 16.

¹⁷³ Astorga and Shirk, 'Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context', p. 38.

¹⁷⁴ T. Anderson and M. Arciniega, 'Toward a fuller conception of Machismo: Development of a traditional Machismo and Caballerismo Scale' *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Vol 55(1), (2008) pp. 19-33. p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ Williams, 'Illicit markets, weak states and violence: Iraq and Mexico', p. 327.

¹⁷⁶ Ibidem p. 333.

¹⁷⁷ Stratfor Intelligence, *Mexico In Crisis: Lost Borders and the Struggle for Regional Status*, p. 59-60.

¹⁷⁸ Stratfor Intelligence, 'Mexican Drug War Update: Indistinct Battle Lines', (2012)
<http://www.stratfor.com/sample/analysis/mexican-drug-war-update-indistinct-battle-lines> (20-4-2012).

moving up is mainly based on familial connections rather than merit.¹⁷⁹ Although there is no relation to violence mentioned in the literature, this difference does accentuate the different level of professionalization that arguably leads to more effective use of violence within the violent culture already associated with the Zetas.

The Mexican government also points out differences in use of violence between the DTOs. According to Vanda Felbab-Brown government policy, during the presidency of Calderon, started to focus more on the more violent DTOs. She uses the example of law enforcement agencies focusing more intensely on La Familia in Michoacán and Los Zetas in northern Mexico.¹⁸⁰

In sum, it can be said that there are differences in the degree of violence used by the DTOs. The differences in structure, business orientation or different level of militarization between DTOs have received more attention the last couple of years. The literature, so far, shows that the coming of the Zetas and their different modus operandi has accelerated a pattern of violence behavior between the DTOs and versus those who oppose them, a process that started around 2000 and has quickened since 2006 with increasing diversification of criminal activities. As long as the smuggling corridors exist, providing access to a lot of profit, DTOs will inevitably fight to assume control over them. Interestingly the conclusion reached by Eberle, that the degree of territorial control is a main variable for violence in Mexico, seems to be applicable mainly to the modus operandi of the Zetas. Kalyvas' theory of territorial control, consequently, makes the geographical position of the DTOs more important in relation to drug-related violence. The next part will look more closely at geography to confirm this hypothesis.

¹⁷⁹ Stratfor Intelligence, *Mexico In Crisis: Lost Borders and the Struggle for Regional Status*, p. 77.

¹⁸⁰ Felbab-Brown, 'Calderon's Caldron: Lessons from Mexico's Battle Against Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking in Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez and Michoacán', p. 40.

2.2.5 Other contributing factors

Apart from the government and DTO perspective there are some other contributing factors mentioned that influence drug-related violence. These are mainly indirect connections to drug-related violence but still frequently mentioned throughout the discourse. They will be reviewed here in random order.

Geography

The positioning of the DTOs and Mexico itself are seen as key to the level of drug-related violence. The United States, which is considered the largest drug market in the world, is connected to only Mexico in the south. This simple fact of proximity to a market with a high demand for psychoactive substances makes Mexico a natural transit point for land-based smuggling. The position of Mexico has especially gained importance since the U.S. focused intensely on interdiction efforts of maritime routes, making land-based smuggling more important. This shift in strategic location to the border(s) of Mexico from overseas connections has made the general population more prone to be the victim of “collateral damage”.¹⁸¹ An added difficulty is the terrain along the U.S.- Mexican border, which covers great distances and inhospitable terrain, making government control of the country extremely challenging.¹⁸² And it is not only Mexico which has felt the consequences of these U.S. operations but also the countries south of Mexico, in particular the ‘northern triangle’ of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, which have become key transit countries of maritime and land-based drug smuggling of mainly cocaine.¹⁸³

The U.S.-Mexican border, as we already discussed, has received much more attention since 9/11. The securization of the border and joint U.S. Mexican efforts have put more strain and importance on the existing POEs. The position of the POEs at the U.S. border and

¹⁸¹ Schyberg, *The Effects of Regime Change on Drug-Related Violence. A Case Study of Mexico between 1985-2011*, p. 58.

¹⁸² Stratfor Intelligence, *Mexico In Crisis: Lost Borders and the Struggle for Regional Status*, p.137.

¹⁸³ The Economist, ‘The Tormented Isthmus’, (2011) <http://www.economist.com/node/18558254> (6-4-2012).

the location of the plazas have seen a lot of violence in Mexico. The Mexican government has argued that the violence is intensely concentrated within eight northern states. This concentration, however, does not reduce the severity of the violence and its debilitating impact on the affected communities. Moreover, violence has spread to other areas of Mexico in part because of the before mentioned phenomenon of ballooning, and states with previously relatively low-levels of violence, such as San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas, have registered significant increase in 2011.¹⁸⁴ While previously violent places like Tijuana have experienced a significant decrease in 2011.¹⁸⁵ Within the rapidly adaptive drug economy the locations of activity are able to change fast. Production hotspots, distribution channels and accompanying violence are subject to quick changes but some areas, like the POEs, stick out.

When we look at the geographical concentration of killings given by Shirk and Rios, 56% of all homicides from organized crime in 2010 occurred in just four of Mexico's states: Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas and Guerrero. Of these 4 states Chihuahua and Tamaulipas are situated on the northern border and contain the important POEs of Ciudad Juarez and Nuevo Laredo.¹⁸⁶ However, POEs are not only situated for entry into the United States. The drugs, chiefly cocaine as the others are mainly produced in Mexico, have to come to Mexico first, which puts more importance on Guerrero state. Also for transshipment within Mexico, states with big harbors like Sinaloa state are essential. According to the Anti-Narcotic Division of El Salvador, maritime trafficking accounted for 80 percent of the cocaine flow into Mexico via Central American countries in 2009.¹⁸⁷ The importance of maritime routes into Mexico makes the southern coastal states more prone to vying between the DTOs versus the inland states of southern Mexico.

¹⁸⁴ Felbab-Brown, 'Calderon's Caldron: Lessons from Mexico's Battle Against Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking in Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez and Michoacán', p. 38.

¹⁸⁵ UT San Diego, 'Violence Down Along the Border, ' (2012) [http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2012/mar/02/report-drug-violence-lessening-tijuana-other-borde/ \(7-4-2012\)](http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2012/mar/02/report-drug-violence-lessening-tijuana-other-borde/(7-4-2012)).

¹⁸⁶ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, '*Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011.*', p. 1-2.

¹⁸⁷ Mazzitelli, 'Mexican Cartels Influence in Central America', p. 8.

For the level of drug-related violence it also appears to be important where the DTOs have their base of operations and exert their influence. Figure 2 was adopted from June Beittel's report to congress in 2011 and shows the areas of DTO influence.¹⁸⁸ As the illustration shows the DTOs are active in a wide range of locations and that all areas have two or more active DTOs. A book from Claire Metelits, *Inside Insurgencies*, points out that: 'A group becomes coercive when it faces competition from rival groups or states. In this circumstance, the previously singular insurgent group is forced to shift the logic of its priorities to the short term in order to guarantee its survival.'¹⁸⁹ Metelits focus lies on the relationship between insurgents and civilians and the competition that seems to be present all over Mexico, especially around the area of the capital, is likely to bring more violence because of an increased use of force in the insurgent-civilian relationship.¹⁹⁰

Also, the differences between the DTOs, their modus operandi and use of violence make it important in what region or place a DTO is active. Grayson notes that there has been a shift in geographic importance as DTOs had their own geographic enclave that functioned as a sanctuary. These sanctuaries were free from revenge killings or other reprisals. In 2009 only Merida and Queretaro had attributes of sanctuary cities, which is seen as indication of more competition and less respect between the DTOs.¹⁹¹

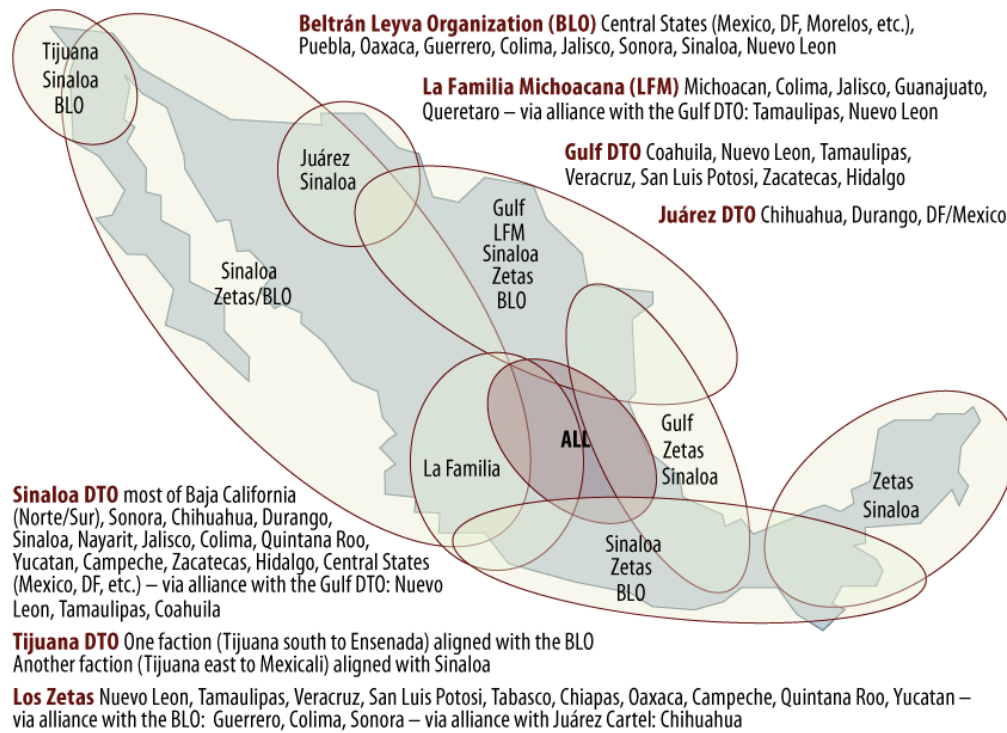
¹⁸⁸ Beittel, 'Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence', p. 11.

¹⁸⁹ C. Metelits, *Inside Insurgencies*, (New York, 2009) p. 27.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁹¹ Grayson, *Mexico. Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*, p. 29-30.

Figure 2. DTO Areas of Influence.



Another important feature is the high concentration of violence along key drug routes and within relatively few cities and towns.¹⁹² The competition to control smuggling routes is seen as one of the major causes of violence.¹⁹³ The importance of geography, in sum, with a concentration of violence in areas, such as the POEs into the U.S and Mexico, the control of the trafficking routes and the proximity to other DTOs make geography a key variable in drug related-violence.

A final note on the literature about geography and drug-related violence is that the DTOs are considered to be transnational criminal organizations that transcend borders. In this literature review we chiefly researched the case study of Mexico but the geography and the violence perpetrated by the DTOs and violence associated in the fight against DTOs reaches much further. Mexican DTOs seem to be asserting their presence in consumer

¹⁹² Beittel, 'Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence', p. 20.

¹⁹³ Finklea, K., Krouse, W. and Randol M., 'Southwest Border Violence: Issues in Identifying and Measuring Spillover Violence', p. 2.

countries and they keep expanding.¹⁹⁴ An example of this comes from UNODC and Stratfor, who both state that Mexican DTOs are active in Australia.¹⁹⁵ These developments are worrisome and show the scope of the DTOs. The interconnectedness of the current global society arguably leads to more competition, as DTOs are able to expand beyond borders and invade each other's territory.

Local drug market and Gangs.

According to a statement made by public security secretary Genaro Garcia Luna in 2010 there has been a concerning trend of increased drug consumption in Mexico during the last decade, especially in terms of cocaine and methamphetamine use.¹⁹⁶ Others point to an earlier rise in demand, as demand in illegal drugs in Mexico doubled between 1988 and 2002.¹⁹⁷ What seems important in relation to drug-related violence is that the general development of increased domestic demand makes Mexico itself an increasingly important drug market, which would arguably lead to more competition.¹⁹⁸ A couple of reasons are mentioned for the development of a larger domestic market; first, demand reduction in the U.S., second, that DTOs started paying in drugs and third, more successful interdiction at the border.¹⁹⁹ The growing importance of the Mexican market has also led to the development

¹⁹⁴ Insight Organized Crime in the Americas, 'Columbias President Clashes with Old Guard', (2011) <http://www.insightcrime.org/component/k2/item/782-colombias-president-clashes-with-old-guard> (10-10-2011).

¹⁹⁵ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, p. 43.

Stratfor Intelligence, 'Mexican Drug War Update: Indistinct Battle Lines', (2012) <http://www.stratfor.com/sample/analysis/mexican-drug-war-update-indistinct-battle-lines> (20-4-2012).

¹⁹⁶ L. Brito, 'Drug Numbers Challenge the Pundits' (2012) <http://fnsnews.nmsu.edu/2010/01/22/drug-numbers-challenge-the-pundits/> (5-5-2012).

¹⁹⁷ A. Reyes Garces, 'Winning The War On Drugs In Mexico? Toward an Integrated Approach to the Illegal Drug Trade', Thesis Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey California (2009) p. 28.

¹⁹⁸ Shirk, 'Drug Violence and State Responses in Mexico', p. 8.

¹⁹⁹ Beittel, 'Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence', p.20.

of more gangs and gang warfare that vie over local drug markets. A proliferation of lower level organized crime networks, with new groups and gangs that operate at the street level are contributing to the phenomenon of “narcomenudeo”, or small-time drug dealing.²⁰⁰ Williams reflects that increased violence can be attributed to struggles over these local markets.²⁰¹ Beittel also points to the rise in drug abuse in border cities such as Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana, where gang warfare has broken out to control the local drug trade.²⁰²

The involvement of gangs²⁰³, or *maras*, has a long history in the region but really emerged in Central America in the early 1990s.²⁰⁴ Some of these gangs have their roots in Mexico or the United States, like *Barrio 18*, and their involvement in drug-related violence has increased over the years, as a lot of the gangs work directly for the DTOs.²⁰⁵ Steven Dudley points out that the reasons for the steady increase in gangs in Central America are abundant and mentions: “poverty, marginalization, lack of access to basic services and educational opportunities; dysfunctional families; rapid and unplanned urbanization in the region; repatriation of experienced gang members from the United States; and the culture of violence that preceded their emergence, including one in which guns were prevalent and ex-combatants from the long-standing civil wars were active in criminal networks.”²⁰⁶ Many of these reasons are social-economic but also cultural reasons and repatriation from the United

²⁰⁰ Astorga and Shirk, ‘Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context’, p. 19.

²⁰¹ Williams, ‘Illicit markets, weak states and violence: Iraq and Mexico’, p. 333.

²⁰² Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence’, p.20.

²⁰³ For the purposes of this study, the use of the word “gang” refers to any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its identity (adopted from Malcolm Klein, “Voices from the Field Conference”, February 2005). However, a wide range of organized groups and networks are referred to as gangs and a distinction between these groups is not made in the literature on drug-related violence.

²⁰⁴ S. Dudley, ‘Drug Trafficking Organizations in Central America: Transportistas, Mexican Cartels and Maras’ (2010) pp. 63-95. p. 82.

²⁰⁵ S. Longmire, ‘US Gangs That Work With Mexican TCOs — Spillover Or Standard Violence?’ (2012) http://www.hstoday.us/index.php?id=3416&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=22199 (7-6-2012).

²⁰⁶ Dudley, ‘Drug Trafficking Organizations in Central America: Transportistas, Mexican Cartels and Maras’, p.19.

States are mentioned. However, the underlying causes for gang and DTO membership is a phenomenon beyond the scope of this thesis but what is important is that these social-economic and cultural reasons appear to add to the appeal and strength of criminal groups.

Central is that these gangs, in relation to drug-related violence and besides their 'regular' operations, are utilized for murder and intimidation by the DTOs. In a congressional report on gang activity in Central America, Clare Seelke acknowledges the connection between the Mexican DTOs and gangs but that this connection is more developed in El Salvador and other Central American countries.²⁰⁷ The gangs themselves, similar to the DTOs, seem to have evolved: "they have evolved into sophisticated and lethal international operations that have spread throughout the United States, Mexico and Central America."²⁰⁸

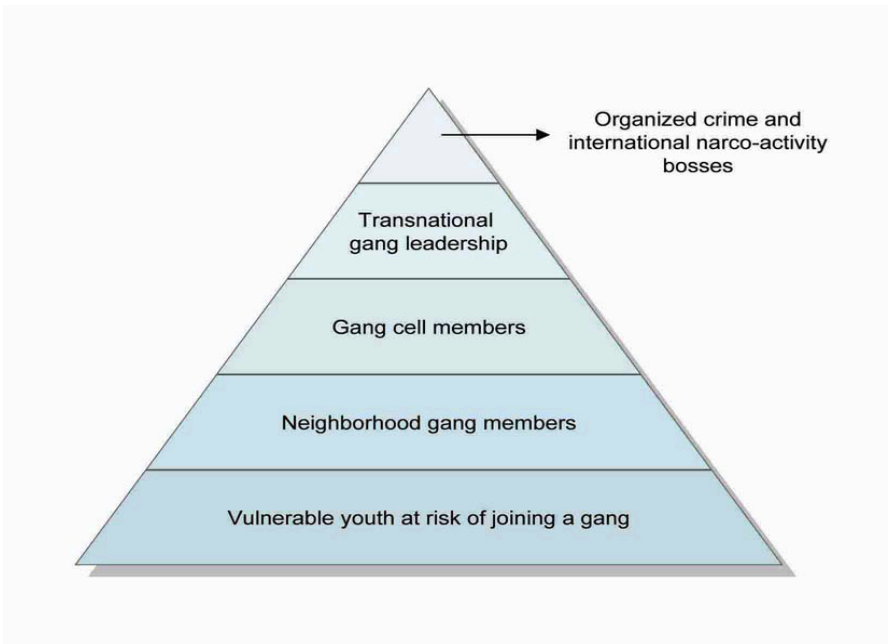
To better understand the connection to the DTOs figure 3 below shows a hierarchy of organizations and networks in Central America and Mexico that most commonly fall under the definition of gangs. The pyramid provides a general understanding of the various groupings of gangs and their relation to organized crime networks. Each strata is portrayed in a simple form and does not do justice to the level of complexity within each strata, however, it does show that organized crime is connected and stands above the gangs. The typology of the different strata is also generalized as not all gangs have the same objective, engage in the same type of activities, or exhibit the same level of violence.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Beittel and Seelke, 'Latin America and the Caribbean: Illicit Drug Trafficking and U.S. Counterdrug Programs', p. 6.

²⁰⁸ Dudley, 'Drug Trafficking Organizations in Central America: Transportistas, Mexican Cartels and Maras', p. 8.

²⁰⁹ USAID, 'Central America And Mexico Gang Assessment', *Bureau for Latin American and Caribbean Affairs Office of Regional Sustainable Development (2006) p. 13.*

Figure 3. Hierarchy within gang networks.²¹⁰



In sum, the increasing role of Mexico as a consumer country has fueled additional drug-related violence in the form of gang warfare. This is something that only recently has received attention throughout the literature on drug related-violence. The exact increase of the domestic market and contribution of gangs to violence has not been researched but the general development of more gang involvement and gang warfare clearly contributes to drug-related violence and more precisely in the form of gangs that vie among themselves and gangs that are being utilized by the DTOs.

Demand

The relation between demand and drug-related violence is primarily an indirect one. Unsurprisingly there would be no drug trafficking without demand but it is reduced demand that is sometimes mentioned to cause additional drug-related violence.

The Obama administration has acknowledged that the U.S. is one of the reasons the current fight against the DTOs in Mexico. Hilary Clinton also criticized the failure of U.S.

²¹⁰ USAID, 'Central America And Mexico Gang Assessment', p. 13.

antidrug policy and acknowledged that an “insatiable demand for illegal drugs” in the United States “fuels the drug trade”.²¹¹ This insatiable demand, however, is volatile. The literature generally agrees on a reduced demand by the U.S. in recent years, albeit there are differences regarding type of drug and scale of volatility. Sabet and Rios claim a decline in cocaine use over the last two decades and a lower prevalence of cannabis use among high school students since 2002.²¹² UNODC mainly sees a trend of reduced cocaine use since 2006 and not a lot of change on overall cannabis use in the U.S.²¹³ For amphetamine type stimulants UNODC even observes increased use in Mexico and U.S.²¹⁴ Tracking drug use is difficult as data is scarce and incomplete but trends are arguably noticeable with the available data and the trend shows declining overall drug use in the U.S., especially cocaine.²¹⁵ An important distinction is that there is a reduced demand in the U.S. for drugs trafficked and/or produced *in Mexico*.²¹⁶ Since the lower demand for Mexican drugs is not only offset by lower demand but also due to more domestic and Canadian production in the marijuana market.²¹⁷ So how does the reduced demand for Mexican drugs relate to violence?

The link between diminished demand and violence is mainly profit. Sabet and Rios, for example, see lower profits caused by a more competitive and tighter market, which leads to more violence.²¹⁸ They also note a transnational link between violence and reduced demand. Since it has forced the Mexican DTOs to look for alternative markets, such as the

²¹¹ M. Lander, ‘Clinton on Mexico’ (2009) <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/26/world/americas/26mexico.html> 2009. (3-4-2012).

²¹² Sabet and Rios, ‘*Why violence has increased in Mexico and what can we do about it*’, p. 6.

²¹³ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, p. 87,177.

²¹⁴ *Ibidem* p. 129.

²¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

²¹⁶ [italics added to emphasize importance of Mexico here.]

²¹⁷ Sabet and Rios, ‘*Why violence has increased in Mexico and what can we do about it*’, p. 6.

²¹⁸ *Ibidem* p. 7.

before mentioned domestic market but also Europe. This has arguably added competition and violence between the Mexican DTOs and DTOs based in Brazil and other Latin American countries that control most of the drug flow to Europe.²¹⁹ Shirk indicates that volatility in U.S. drug consumption is an additional factor related to violence, however, Shirk's main point, is that competition and splintering cause the more recent spikes of violence.²²⁰ Reduced demand and profit is thus mainly seen to cause additional violence through fiercer competition. This conclusion is also reached by the RAND Corporation, which has done extensive studies regarding legalization of marijuana in California.²²¹ The RAND research paper mainly sees additional violence in the short run and sees three sources of violence caused by the reduction in profit:

1. conflict between the current leaders and the dismissed labor
2. within DTOs. Even after the firing of excess labor, the earnings of the leadership most likely will decline. One way the individual manager might compensate for this is to eliminate his or her superior, generating systemic internal violence from senior managers who become more suspicious in the face of the overall decline in earnings.
3. between DTOs. The leadership of an individual DTO may try to maintain their earning by eliminating close competitors.²²²

The RAND Corporation argumentation of demand and profit, in relation with drug-related violence, shows that the DTO operations are often viewed as businesses. This business-oriented way of looking at the DTOs is often expressed by the use of terms like *drug economy* or *drug market*. The market perspective will be reviewed later in this chapter.

²¹⁹ Ibidem.

²²⁰ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, 'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011.', p. 17.

²²¹ Reuter and Kilmer, 'RAND Reducing Drug Trafficking Revenues and Violence in Mexico. Would legalizing Marijuana in California Help?', p. 41.

²²² Ibidem.

The link between reduced demand, lower profits and drug related violence is, in sum, predominantly seen as business like competition between and within the DTOs. This development is mainly labeled since 2006 and also seems to have spurred the before mentioned diversification. In addition the creation of a local market, with payouts in cocaine also added to a tougher market. The literature relates all these elements, which cause increased competition, as indirect contributors to drug-related violence.

Substance and Profitability

Each drug has its own production, distribution methods, consumption patterns and effects. A problem with substances, in relation to violence, lies with the fact that the drugs are illegal and therefore require law enforcement action. The adagio *nullum crimen sine lege* or no crime without law tells us that without law there is no criminalization of drugs.²²³ From a government perspective some drugs are regarded more dangerous than others and are therefore more intensively persecuted by law enforcement, such as the unholy trinity of cocaine, heroine and cannabis that dominated policy and law enforcement actions till the beginning of the 20th century.²²⁴ Since the turn of this century we can add amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) to the 'unholy' three.²²⁵ Hence, there is a clear connection between type of drug vis-à-vis law enforcement.

According to Williams the context wherein the substance or commodity is situated is much more important, while: ' the nature of the commodity is not the major determinant of the level of violence'.²²⁶ Williams also does not see much difference in the level of illegality of the substance as licit commodities, like oil, can cause equally high levels of violence.²²⁷

²²³ Apart from social constructions of criminalization within communities that can ultimately lead to codification and persecution by law. (Natural Law)

²²⁴ Mares, *Drug Wars and Coffeeshouses: the political economy of the international drug trade*, p. 5.

²²⁵ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, p. 126-128.

²²⁶ Williams, 'Illicit markets, weak states and violence: Iraq and Mexico', p. 324.

²²⁷ *Ibidem* p. 334-335.

Nonetheless, Williams does stipulate that the nature of the commodity is important to the level of violence, just not a major determinant. Given that the Mexican DTOs conduct poly drug operations, it is very difficult to identify how much of the DTO violence is caused by, for example, the marijuana trade versus other substances.²²⁸ What we can derive from the literature, however, is that the link between substance and drug-related violence is primarily seen to be profitability.

According to Tony Payan, drug trafficking is the most profitable organized criminal activity in the world and America the most important market for illegal drugs.²²⁹ The profitability and revenue of the four main types of drug, cocaine, marijuana, heroin and methamphetamines differs. In terms of revenue a 2012 Woodrow Wilson Institute report, on new strategies to confront de Mexican DTOs, states that cocaine brings the most revenue for Mexican DTOs.²³⁰ The report estimates that of illegal drug export revenues are: cocaine (est \$2,8 billion), followed by marijuana (\$1,9 billion), heroin (\$0,9 billion) and methamphetamines (\$0,6 billion).²³¹ Profit equals revenue minus cost and in terms of profit the literature generally agrees that cocaine and methamphetamine bring the most profit.²³² However some, like Sabet and Rios, argue that there are symptoms of reduction in general profits and that since 2005 marijuana profits exceeded those from cocaine.²³³ Of the four types of drug, cocaine is generally considered the most problematic drug in terms of trafficking-related violence but no clear empirical evidence for this is given, except for the violence in the crack cocaine market.²³⁴ Also, the limitations of measuring the size of the

²²⁸ Reuter and Kilmer, 'RAND Reducing Drug Trafficking Revenues and Violence in Mexico. Would legalizing Marijuana in California Help?', p. 52.

²²⁹ Payan, *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars: Drugs, Immigration, And Homeland Security*, p. 24-26.

²³⁰ Mexico Institute, 'Considering New Strategies for Confronting Organized Crime in Mexico', *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars* (2012) p. 2.

²³¹ Ibidem.

²³² Eberle, 'The Logic of Drug-Related Violence, A Case Study of Mexico from 2006 to 2011', p. 17.

²³³ Sabet and Rios, 'Why violence has increased in Mexico and what can we do about it', p. 9-10.

²³⁴ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, p. 85.

illegal drug trade is generally accepted and made evident through the UNODC wide ranging estimates. For example, worldwide cannabis cultivation estimates ranged between 200.000 and 641.800 hectares.²³⁵ This limitation also applies to estimating the revenue and profits of the Mexican DTOs. For the relevance of this study the relation with violence is mainly determent by the most profitable drugs, as is argued that the most profitable drugs contribute more to DTO power, buys them sophisticated weaponry, corrupts and increases the incentive for competition.²³⁶

Profitability also relates to the production, distribution system and whether Mexico is primarily a producer, transit or consumer country. In a congressional report on Latin America and the Caribbean is stated: 'In Latin America, drug trafficking-related violence is particularly concentrated in drug production and drug transit zones. [...]' ²³⁷ Since the 1990s, Mexico can be considered as a major producer and supplier of heroin, marijuana and methamphetamine to the United States drug market.²³⁸ Mexico is also the leading transit country for cocaine produced in South America.²³⁹ In total it is estimated that about 70% of all drugs consumed in the U.S. comes through Mexico.²⁴⁰ A more precise involvement of the Mexican DTOs in trafficking the four main types of drugs is laid out underneath.

The largest market, in terms of size, is cannabis and in particular marijuana. Mexico seems to be the primary foreign source, as U.S. domestic production is the largest source. The older DTOs originated in the marijuana trade of the 1970s, when Mexico first

²³⁵ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, p. 177-179.

²³⁶ M. Kleiman, 'Targeting Drug-Trafficking Violence Mexico: An Orthogonal Approach', *UCLA School of Public Affairs, Yale Center for the Study of Globalization* (2011) pp. 125-136. P. 129-130.

²³⁷ Beittel and Seelke, 'Latin America and the Caribbean: Illicit Drug Trafficking and U.S. Counterdrug Programs', p. 6.

²³⁸ Beittel, 'Mexico's Drug-Related Violence.', p. 2-3.

²³⁹ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, p. 106.

²⁴⁰ Sabet and Rios, 'Why violence has increased in Mexico and what can we do about it', p. 7.

established its dominance in supplying the U.S. market.²⁴¹ Despite the high demand and production, sales only generate a small profit for the DTOs compared to other illicit drugs.²⁴² Marijuana is also difficult to transport in high profit quantities because of its size, and easy detectability.

The second Mexican DTO drug product is cocaine. The cocaine market has declined since the 1980s but the United States remain the largest national market with 37% of the global users.²⁴³ According to the UNODC's 2011 World Drug Report, about 90% of cocaine transits through Mexico before entering the United States and the Mexican DTOs control the bulk of these cocaine flows.²⁴⁴ Mexican DTOs do not seem to be involved on the production side of cocaine, which is geographically situated in Peru, Columbia and Bolivia.²⁴⁵ Still the cocaine market is hugely profitable for the DTOs because of the virtual monopoly on entry points into the United States.

Opiates make the third Mexican DTO product, in particular heroin. Small amounts of poppy come from Afghanistan but the Americas are largely self-sufficient for the heroin market, as it is produced in Latin America and particularly Mexico.²⁴⁶ The FBI assesses that Mexican DTOs are maximizing revenues by taking control from production to distribution and they now seem to control the opiate market in the western hemisphere.²⁴⁷

The fourth and last major drug group are ATS that actually come before opiates in terms of users. The methamphetamine market is a relatively recent development in Mexico

²⁴¹ Astorga and Shirk, 'Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context', p. 7-9.

²⁴² Eberle, 'The Logic of Drug-Related Violence, A Case Study of Mexico from 2006 to 2011', p. 17.

²⁴³ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, p. 35-36.

²⁴⁴ Ibidem.

²⁴⁵ Ibidem.

²⁴⁶ Eberle, 'The Logic of Drug-Related Violence, A Case Study of Mexico from 2006 to 2011', p. 17.

²⁴⁷ FBI, Drug Trafficking Violence in Mexico: Implications for the United States, , U.S. Department of Justice (2010), <http://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/drug-trafficking-violence-in-mexico-implications-for-the-united-states/> (5-5-2012).

that seems to have started in 2005 with stricter control over precursor chemicals enacted in the United States, which caused a shift in production to Mexico and the Mexican DTOs now dominate much of this American market.²⁴⁸ Important for the DTOs is that the ATS market is highly profitable and the amphetamine market has arguably made up for the decline in revenue from cocaine.²⁴⁹ Other important aspects about ATS manufacturing are that it can be done cheap, that various precursor chemicals are mainly legal and that production is not bound to a particular geographic region, which makes the ATS market extremely difficult to track.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, the DTOs are quick to market new products (like ketamine or piperazines) as UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa stated in 2010: "These new drugs cause a double problem. First, they are being developed at a much faster rate than regulatory norms and law enforcement can keep up. Second, their marketing is cunningly clever, as they are custom-manufactured so as to meet the specific preference in each situation."²⁵¹

In sum, the Mexican DTOs appear to control most of the North American drug flows and are involved in the cultivation, manufacturing and trafficking of a mixture of drugs. A causality or correlation between drug-related violence and types of drug is mainly explained in terms of profitability. Of the four main types of drugs cocaine and ATS seem to be the most profitable. However, no clear empirical evidence is available or given by the literature to substantiate the claim of more violence with certain types of drug. The only clear connection in the literature is between types of drugs vis-à-vis government policy and, consequently, law enforcement.

²⁴⁸ Andreas, *'The Political Economy of Narco-corruption in Mexico'*, p. 160.

²⁴⁹ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*, p. 127-130.

²⁵⁰ Eberle, 'The Logic of Drug-Related Violence, A Case Study of Mexico from 2006 to 2011', p. 17.

²⁵¹ UNODC, 'Shift Towards New Drugs and New Markets' (2010)
<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2010/June/unodc-world-drug-report-2010-shows-shift-towards-new-drugs-and-new-markets.html> (13-5-2012).

Availability of Weapons

The Obama administration has acknowledged that the current violent situation in Mexico is also their fault.²⁵² The widespread availability of firearms, particularly high-powered weapons, in the United States has been a part of the discussion of U.S. contributions to the violence in Mexico. In 2009 Hilary Clinton stated that: “our inability to prevent weapons from being smuggled across the border to arm these criminals causes the deaths of police, soldiers and civilians.”²⁵³ Compared to America, Mexican gun laws are very strict, while the availability in the United States, coupled with limited checkpoints at the U.S.-Mexican border, makes the smuggling a low-risk endeavor.²⁵⁴ Under President Obama the United States and Mexico have sought to disrupt the southbound smuggling of firearms (and cash).²⁵⁵ William Hoover of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) even stated that: “Mexican President Felipe Calderon and Mexican attorney general Eduardo Mora have identified cartel-related violence as a top security priority and proclaimed the illegal trafficking of U.S.-source firearms to be the ‘number one’ crime problem affecting the security of Mexico”²⁵⁶ According to the ATF, more than 90 percent of the confiscated weapons in Mexico came from the United States.²⁵⁷ These numbers are not undisputed, however, but it is generally acknowledged that the majority of the weapons used by the DTOs come from America.

The flow of guns or ‘iron river’ mirrors the flow of drugs into the United States. The steady demand of weapons in Mexico has a long history dating back to the gun culture that

²⁵² Weintraub and Wood, ‘Cooperative Mexican-U.S. Antinarcotics Efforts’, p. 52.

²⁵³ Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug-Related Violence.’, p. 13.

²⁵⁴ Weintraub and Wood, ‘Cooperative Mexican-U.S. Antinarcotics Efforts’, p. 54.

²⁵⁵ Astorga and Shirk, ‘Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context’, p. 25-26.

²⁵⁶ Weintraub and Wood, ‘Cooperative Mexican-U.S. Antinarcotics Efforts’, p. 53.

²⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

started with the Mexican revolution and the times of Pancho Villa.²⁵⁸ In recent years, there has been a serious escalation of demand, some figures pointing to a 500 percent increase, (without giving exact temporal reference however) primarily caused by the militarization of the DTOs.²⁵⁹ Without these weapons, such as the popular Belgian made Five-Seven pistols that have the nickname Matapolicias (Cop Killers) for their armor piercing rounds, the number of deaths would arguably be lower.²⁶⁰ The availability and rising use of high-powered guns is thus regarded as one of the contributors of drug-related violence. If only, because they are used by the DTOs and other criminals involved in drug trafficking.

Economic Opportunity and Poverty: Profile of Mexican drug trafficker.

There is no direct causality between the economy and drug-related violence but throughout the literature a dire economy is frequently mentioned to exacerbate the violence. The economy is meant in the sense of reduced economic opportunities, social exclusion and poverty. The dominant analytical perspective that expresses these conditions is rational choice. The individuals involved make the rational choice for criminal and ultimately violent behavior. In their 2008 contribution to the “Economists’ Contribution to the Study of Crime and Justice.” Shawn Bushway and Peter Reuter claim that the choice to commit crime is based on the utility or profit of illegal work compared with legal work.²⁶¹ Rios supports this theory and states: “the prototype drug dealer has high economic aspirations that the legality cannot satisfy.”²⁶² Also, the institutional context, in which an (violent) action occurs, is taken into account and the context in Mexico seems favorable to drug-related violence.

²⁵⁸ Stratfor Intelligence, *Mexico In Crisis: Lost Borders and the Struggle for Regional Status*, p. 59.

²⁵⁹ Weintraub and Wood, ‘Cooperative Mexican-U.S. Antinarcotics Efforts’, p. 54-59.

²⁶⁰ Ibidem p. 52.

²⁶¹ S. Bushway, and P Reuter, ‘Economists’ Contribution to the Study of Crime and the Criminal Justice System.’, *Crime and Justice*, Vol. 37, No. 1. (2008) pp. 389-451. p. 392-393.

²⁶² V. Rios, ‘Who becomes a drug dealer and why? Profiling the Mexican drug trafficker’ *Unpublished* (2009) p. 2.

The rational choice for criminal behavior is partly explained by looking at the profile of drug traffickers. The average drug traffickers are young men with little formal education and come from underprivileged economic backgrounds.²⁶³ The economic and social context provides fewer opportunities and that makes a (rational) choice for criminal activities more attractive. Beittel supports this line of reasoning and states that economic hardship brings more recruits for the DTOs.²⁶⁴ Livingston takes this argument further and argues that: “In many cases poverty and unemployment do not just provide a greater supply of potential illegal labour for organized criminal activities, but they also create a favorable environment for criminals to exploit the social fabric of countries as a foundation for organized crime.”²⁶⁵ Poverty and economic deprivation thus add to the appeal of the DTOs and possibly make them more effective but that does not necessarily make them more violent.

When we look at the criminal profile again, Alfred Blumstein’s paper on “Youth Violence, Guns, and the Illicit Drug Industry” concludes that age is actually a major predictor for violence in an area. His research indicates that people ages 15 through 24 commit the majority of crime in a given area.²⁶⁶ Youth tends to be less skilled, are considered risk takers and were found to have higher rates of gun possession.²⁶⁷ In 2011 Mexico had a median male population age of 26, which is young, especially compared to Western democracies such as the Netherlands, which has an average male population aged 40,3.²⁶⁸ According to Rios the Mexican drug trafficker has an average age of 18 years, which would support that the DTO

²⁶³ Rios, ‘Who becomes a drug dealer and why? Profiling the Mexican drug trafficker’, p. 2.

²⁶⁴ Beittel, ‘Mexico’s Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence’, p. 20.

²⁶⁵ Livingstone, ‘A Reputation for Violence, Fractionalization’s Impact on Criminal Reputation and the Mexican State’, p. 18.

²⁶⁶ A. Blumstein. “Youth Violence, Guns, and the Illicit-Drug Industry.” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* Vol. 86, No. 1. (1995) pp. 10-36. p. 14.

²⁶⁷ Ibidem.

²⁶⁸ CIA World Factbook, ‘Mexico’ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2177.html#mx> (17-4-2012).

members are more prone to violent behavior.²⁶⁹ Hence, it seems that economic hardship, poverty and social exclusion make the choice to join a DTO more appealing. In relation to violence it appears that mainly the age of the average drug trafficker in Mexico is what makes the DTOs more prone to violent behavior.

Literature Study Summary

The literature on the drug-related violence in Mexico has grown in recent years as well as the media attention. The escalating character of violence has given the literature an impulse and scholars from various disciplines have contributed to the research. It appears that a more eclectic approach is taking hold as authors, like David Shirk or June Beittel, try to give a more comprehensive answer to the reasons for escalation. However, the majority of the literature still has a more narrow focus. To better understand the origins of the literature, the main analytical perspectives that dominate the Mexican drug-violence literature will be briefly explained. The second part will explain the dominance of American literature and the trend of eclecticism. In the third and last part, the findings of the literature study will be summarized in a figure that makes a distinction between direct and indirect causes of drug-related violence.

Analytical perspectives

Four concepts dominate the discussion of the drug phenomenon: deviance, beliefs, markets, and security threats.²⁷⁰ These four concepts are also valid for the literature on drug-related violence and are reviewed below.

The behavior of deviance does not conform to the dominant social norms and values, and by approaching drug use this way the focus lies on abnormality as key to understanding the drug phenomenon. In case of the literature on drug-related violence in Mexico the focus of this group lies in abnormality of the Mexican state compared to western democracies. The

²⁶⁹ Rios, 'Who becomes a drug dealer and why? Profiling the Mexican drug trafficker', p. 2.

²⁷⁰ Mares, *Drug Wars and Coffeehouses: the political economy of the international drug trade*, p. 19.

Mexican institutional capacity, law enforcement, democracy all suffer from major flaws, like corruption, that need be amended before it can deal with the drug-related violence and DTOs. From a DTO perspective the violent behavior also seems to be deviant versus normal drug trafficking operations. This deviance perspective can be applied to the literature on the Zetas and their 'new' modus operandi as well as to individuals that violate the norm and join a DTO.

The second concept of beliefs (constructivism), are ideas that guide behavior and actions. Consequently, the beliefs individuals or groups have towards drugs and drug policy relates to which relevant actors conceptualize the drug phenomenon and this can ultimately lead to social norms. The majority deems drug use as improper, dangerous and something that needs to be eradicated but constructivism believes these norms are constantly being challenged and altered. The decriminalization and legalization debate is a good example of the beliefs concept. Within the literature on drug-related violence constructivism mainly challenges conventional wisdom.

The market concept is a business-like view of the drugs phenomenon. In markets forces of supply and demand rule, thereby focusing on the transactional nature of drugs. Within the discourse on drug-related violence the markets perspective applies mainly to literature from a DTO perspective with a focus on competition, demand, profitability and professionalization. From a government perspective the market concept largely applies to strategic decisions, such as supply reduction, and tactical decisions, such as the kingpin removal that should weaken the drug trafficking 'company'.

The last perspective of security threats or realism centers on governments and nations. Domestic politics are largely neglected within this perspective and the relation between states is based on anarchy. Realism links the drug phenomenon to a loss of sovereignty or other security challenges.²⁷¹ Within the literature on drug-related violence realism is especially linked to the powerful influence of the United States, 9/11 and how the Mexican state should solve its drug problem since it is affecting other countries. The security

²⁷¹ Mares, *Drug Wars and Coffeehouses: the political economy of the international drug trade*, p. 19.

threats perspective has strongly influenced the general American anti-drug policy, which in turn strongly influenced Mexican policy, as America is more powerful than Mexico.

In sum, the four perspectives each try to answer questions correlated to drug-related violence and there are generally more perspectives than one present in the explanations given by authors in literature. For this paper, the perspectives help clarify the focus of some of the literature used in this literature review.

American literature and Eclecticism

The bulk of literature on Mexican drug-related violence is from the United States. Of which a large amount are U.S. government publications, as well as reports from non-governmental and international organizations based in America. They offer a profound coverage and represent an important base for data and trends.

Within the variety of literature and research on the drug trade and drug-related violence there seems to be a more recent trend of eclecticism. This trend is clearly visible from one of the mayor sources of data on drugs and the drugs trade in world: The United Nations yearly World Drugs Report. The 2011 report states in its foreword: “Drug control is also increasingly taking a more balanced approach, focused on development, security, justice and health to reduce supply and demand, and disrupting illicit flows. There is an understanding that in regions where illicit crops are grown, it is vital to eradicate poverty, not just drugs. There is a realization that underdevelopment makes countries vulnerable to drug trafficking, and other forms of organized crime: therefore development is part of drug control, and vice versa.”²⁷²

The more eclectic approach is taking stems from the research, literature and practice of employed policies over the last decades. By tackling perceived causes, policies of many countries have taken a broader approach in battling the illicit drug trade. However, this more approach has evolved slowly. One of the main reasons for the slow development of the

²⁷² UNODC, *World drug report 2011*, p. 4.

more recent balanced approach is the influence of conventional wisdom on policy. A research paper on drugs related literature in the United States, clearly shows a sometimes conflicting relationship between actual policy and research.²⁷³ While the paper acknowledges that the United States is both the largest producer of drug research in the world and the world's only 'national drug-control superpower', it suggests, however, that the simultaneous leadership in social science and world agenda setting is not the result of a symbiotic relationship between American research and policy-making.²⁷⁴ The paper reflects, to a large extent, the largely fruitless efforts of American social scientists to counter-arrest the influence of conventional wisdom on policy. Conventional wisdom, or publicly accepted ideas, is widely recognized as 'knowledge' or 'truth'. The exact process of policy formation, however, is beyond the range of this paper but does recognize that American literature dominates the discourse on drug-related violence.

2.2.6 Summary and Status Quaestionis

The direct and indirect explanations for drug-related violence are all weighed differently over the course of this 26-year period. In general the literature sees an escalation of violence since 2006 and to a lesser extent since 2000. There are two dominant explanations for this escalation: first, Mexican government policy and strategy and second, the competition between and within the DTOs. Both these reasons are seen as direct contributors to drug-related violence and have various correlations with other reasons such as democratization, professionalization and geography.

There are also numerous indirect explanations mentioned that contribute to drug-related violence Mexico. These appear best explained by the theory of Russel Ackoff and the distinction between producer-product. Producer-product is terminology introduced by the

²⁷³ L. Laniel, 'The Relationship between Research and Drug Policy in the United States', *Management of Social Transformations*, Discussion Paper No. 44 (1999) p. 1-2.

²⁷⁴ Laniel, 'The Relationship between Research and Drug Policy in the United States', p. 1.

American philosopher Edgar Singer Jr. A producer-product relationship exists when X is necessary, but not sufficient to cause Y.²⁷⁵ Singer uses the example of an acorn and an oak tree, where: “An acorn is necessary to cause an oak tree, but if it is not placed in a suitable environment, the acorn will not grow into an oak.”²⁷⁶ The distinction is that the producer alone cannot be the cause of the product, since other conditions are necessary. In the case of the acorn, the necessary conditions are the soil, sunlight and other environmental conditions. Hence, the environment is central to understanding and explaining the product.

In comparison to cause-effect Ackoff notes that: “the use of the producer-product relationship requires the environment to explain everything whereas use of cause-effect requires the environment to explain nothing. Science based on the producer-product relationship is *environment-full*, not *environment-free*.”²⁷⁷ As a result, any principle proposed about producer-product relationship must specify the conditions under which the principle applies.

When we apply the principle of producer-product to the literature on drug-related violence in Mexico, the direct causality between policy, competition and violence could not exist without the existing environment. Preconditions like weak institutional capacity, corruption, availability of weapons, poverty, geography, culture, etc. are seen as necessary before the escalating levels of violence would be possible. The sum of the literature points in this direction and the producer-product concept would therefore be helpful to include in future studies on the reasons for drug-related violence in Mexico. The principle of producer-product can be questioned, however, since a tree can grow in unfavorable conditions, only slower. Hence, would the violence exist without the preconditions and only the direct explanations?

The findings of all explanations, direct and indirect (environment), that relate to drug-related violence are summarized in figure 4 below.

²⁷⁵ R. Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future* (New York 1981) p. 20.

²⁷⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷⁷ Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future*, p. 21.

Literature review causes of drug-related violence in Mexico 1985-2011

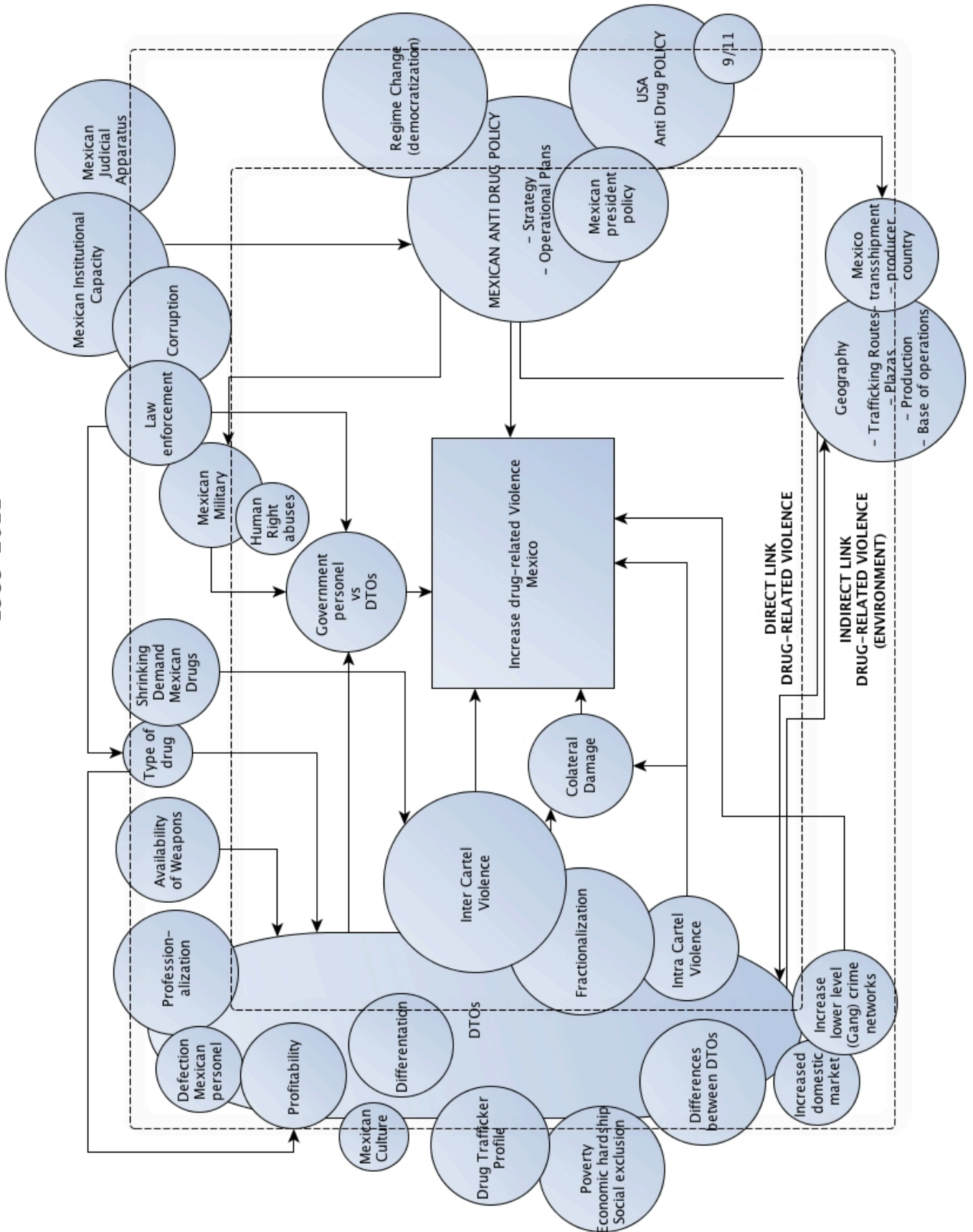


Figure 4. Summary of literature.

3 Data and Method

In this chapter the empirical data on drug-related violence will be analyzed and compared to the major explanations found in the literature study. First, data and measurement issues, bias and the methodological shortcomings in relation to drug-related violence will be elaborated on. The second part reviews the data on drug-related violence for Mexico. Thirdly, the explanations will be weighed against the empirical evidence, which will possibly give a more accurate picture of the main reasons for the volatility in drug-related violence in Mexico.

3.1 Measurement issues

In chapter two we already touched upon some difficulties with data on drug-related violence and established that the key indicator for Mexican violence used throughout the literature is almost exclusively based on DTO related homicides. Of particular concern is the fact that Mexican DTOs have become more fractionalized and differentiation of criminal activities seems to be the trend, including extortion, kidnapping and other crimes that have a direct impact on the general population. DTO violence, thus, consists of a much broader spectrum than homicides and this information is not used in the literature on drug-related violence. To distinguish and add these different categories of violence could provide a much broader dataset for future studies on the DTOs and drug-related violence. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to gather and develop alternative ways of measuring drug-related violence. For this reason the main explanations found in the literature will be compared to the empirical data on drug-related homicides.

Using only homicide data can also lead to false causality or false positives. Let me clarify this point with an analogy about the American way of measuring success in their struggles against the Vietcong during the Vietnam War. During the Vietnam War Americans used a body count system to measure the success they were having against the Vietcong. The higher the discrepancy between their own fallen soldiers and the number of death Vietcong soldiers the better America was doing. History has shown this correlation to be

false and that broader approaches would have been more appropriate at that time.²⁷⁸ If we apply this to the research on drug-related violence, we see that no alternative measurement is used, while the homicides are not necessarily caused by DTOs. This is especially the case when we use data prior to 2000, as there are no statistics available that distinguish between the types of homicides. Consequently, the use of homicides could be a false indicator of drug-related violence.

Another problem with the data lies in the illicit nature of the drug economy, which wants and tries to stay hidden. The underreporting of crime and violence is a common phenomenon and this makes margins of error considerable and these errors tend to multiply as the scale of estimation is raised, from local to national, regional to global levels. These errors stem from bias as well. Miriam Eberle, in her study on drug-related homicides and the Kalyvas' theory, makes a distinction between five common types of biases.²⁷⁹ Eberle concludes that some of these biases also apply to Mexico, such as the selection bias, which focuses on the link between violence and illicit markets. Examples of selection bias in Mexico are that most research focuses on "hard" drugs (cocaine or heroine), which conventional wisdom connects with high levels of violence or that attention is primarily drawn to the most violent places and actors, such as the border region but ignore the fact that most of the Mexican states remain largely unaffected.²⁸⁰ However, Eberle considers the "overaggregation bias" a major challenge for her research, as there is a tendency to depict Mexico's drug related violence more severe than it actually is. This is particularly a problem for comparative studies because existing indicators on violence are often inconsistent and unreliable over time and across nations or regions.²⁸¹

For scholars it is therefore important to accept that official statistics seldom capture

²⁷⁸ E.R. Muller and D. Starink, *'Krijgsmacht, Studies over de organisatie en het optreden'* (Alphen aan den Rijn, 2004) p. 622-623.

²⁷⁹ Eberle, 'The Logic of Drug-Related Violence, A Case Study of Mexico from 2006 to 2011', p. 50.

²⁸⁰ Ibidem.

²⁸¹ Ibidem.

the real extent of offenses. Rather, they are an indicator of the capacity to gather data, record events and depend on the willingness to report abuses. Establishing a verifiable connection between drug trafficking activities and violence requires proper police investigation and due process of law. In Mexico, such investigations are repeatedly slowed by the resource limitations of police agencies, especially at the local and state level.²⁸² Consequently, counting drug-related homicides has been a very subjective exercise, prone to guesswork, even when done by government authorities. Therefore, the data considered in this thesis will be primarily used quantitatively to derive trends and the different methodologies of the data will be critically reviewed.

3.2 Sources and Methodology

To judge the quality of the data and methods to collect data, the sources of data on drug-related homicides has to be considered first. To get a more accurate picture, a disaggregation of the data is necessary. This first problem is made by the variable of time, since there exists no clear data on drug-related homicides before 2000.²⁸³ The period from 2000-2011 has more reliable information, mainly due to data gathering specifically focused on drug-related homicides, especially from 2006 to 2011. Hence, the distinction in different periods stems from the available sources, their methods and quality. The next part will lay out the sources that are considered and which will be used for this study.

The Trans-Border Institute (TBI) is one of the first institutes that has extensively reviewed the data on drug-related violence in Mexico. In a TBI report, on data and analysis for 2010, Shirk reports that: "Government data sheds new light on the extent of drug violence in Mexico. Recently released official figures on homicides associated with organized crime report levels of violence that are significantly higher than those tracked by media accounts, which were previously the only source of information publicly available."²⁸⁴ The

²⁸² Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011.'*, p. 4.

²⁸³ Schyberg, *'The Effects of Regime Change on Drug-Related Violence. A Case Study of Mexico between 1985-2011'*, p. 12.

²⁸⁴ Shirk and Rios, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2010.'*, p. 1.

new government data Shirk refers to is a comprehensive online database that gives a clearer picture of patterns of Mexican drug-related homicides, which was released on January 2011. Until this date the government released only sporadic and disorganized data on drug related violence and data was tracked by media sources, like newspapers Reforma, El Universal and Milenio, which produced widely varying estimates.²⁸⁵

The official data can be divided in three types. The first source is based on police records, and offer statistics on homicides from December 2006 till the present (minus a year due to delay of publishing) compiled by the Mexican Attorney General's Office (PGR) for the National Public Security System (SNSP).²⁸⁶ The second source was produced by the Instituto Nacional de Geografía, Estadística e Informática (INEGI), which based its homicide rates on death certificates in each municipality. The INEGI database starts from 1990 till the present (delay of publishing 1,5-2 year). Both sources, however, do not make a distinction between 'regular' homicides and those related to DTOs. Also the SNSP homicides do not include the killing of a person by a police officer since this is not considered a homicide in law and therefore usually excluded from such databases.

With the third source conflation of homicides is reduced by taking only drug-related homicides into account and by distinguishing between types of homicide.²⁸⁷ This government data was gathered through a collaborative task force coordinated by the National Security Counsel (NSC) and involved numerous intelligence and law enforcement agencies.²⁸⁸ The type of homicides monitored by this task force was reclassified in 2011 as "homicides allegedly caused by criminal rivalry." from "homicides allegedly linked to organized crime."²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011.'*, p. 3-4.

²⁸⁶ Ibidem.

²⁸⁷ C. Patrick, 'Mexico Govt Backtracks on Murder Data' (2012) www.insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/2056-mexico-govt-backtracks-on-murder-data (6-7-2012).

²⁸⁸ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011.'*, p. 5.

²⁸⁹ Ibidem.

A homicide will fit into this category when it meets two of the six specific criteria, which are considered relevant characteristics of the modus operandi of Mexican DTOs, listed below:

1. The victim was killed by high calibre firearms.
2. The victim presents signs of torture or severe lesions.
3. The victim was killed where the body was found, or the body was located in a vehicle.
4. The body was wrapped with sheets, taped, or gagged.
5. The homicide occurred within penitentiary and involved criminal organizations.
6. Special circumstances (e.g., victim was abducted prior to assassination (levantón), ambushed or chased, an alleged member of a criminal organization, or found with a narco-message (on or near the body)).²⁹⁰

This NSC database presents a more accurate picture versus the general homicides numbers. Unfortunately, at the beginning of 2012 Calderon decided that these statistics will not be made publicly available anymore and therefore only the previously released data from December 2006 -2010 can be used for comparison. It is also noteworthy that the government appeared to put more emphasis on the connection to DTO inter and intra cartel violence since the new definition focuses on criminal rivalry instead of linking it to organized crime. Perhaps government involvement is seen as less likely in the former category?

Apart from government data, the TBI also notes other sources, such as Mexican newspaper Reforma, which is a commonly used source of data on drug-related violence. Reforma is preferred over other sources and newspaper tallies because it utilizes a specific methodology for identifying drug related homicides. Reforma uses a combination of factors related to an incident, such as use of high-caliber and automatic weapons, execution-style and mass casualty shootings or dismemberment of corpses.²⁹¹ The database from Reforma runs from 2006 till the present. Another measurement, covering the period from 2001-2005 also uses accounts of violence from Reforma and official statistics and is presented by

²⁹⁰ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, 'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011', p.5.

²⁹¹ Ibidem p.21.

Marcos Moloeznik.²⁹² The data presented by Moloeznik is quantified and primarily based on media reports and therefore only useful to indicate trends.

The 2011 report from the TBI also makes a note on a new methodology used by Viridiana Rios to measure historical trends of drug-related homicides. Rios used a multiple imputation algorithm that draws on documentation of how violence correlates with the demand, supply of illegal drugs, as well as with other types of homicides and crimes.²⁹³ These results are available from 2001-2006 and the data of this retrospective method will be incorporated in the data analysis.

The final two sources of data that will be used for this paper are: first, the homicide rates from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which tracks international homicides defined as: 'unlawful death purposefully inflicted on a person by another person'.²⁹⁴ UNODC used the Mexican National Statistical Office (INEGI) but combined this data with the Pan American Health Organization to present their Mexican homicide data. The UNODC data runs between 1995 and 2010. The second source is the Sistema Nacional de Informacion en Salud (SINAIS) database that is presented with research from Aguirre Botello. Botello tracks the Mexican homicide rate since 1931 and for the period 1979-1989 he uses the SINAIS database, which has a database on causes of mortality, including homicide.²⁹⁵

Of the eight mentioned sources only Reforma, NSC, Moloeznik and Rios have specifically estimated drug-related homicides. For the other data we assume that a certain percentage of the homicides is drug-related. The TBI report for violence through 2011 states on drug-related violence that: 'while such violence was the cause of 31.9% of all intentional homicides in 2007, by 2010 and 2011 organized crime killings accounted for 63.4% and

²⁹² Moloeznik, 'The Militarization of Public Security and the Role of the Military in Mexico', p. 4.

²⁹³ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, '*Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011*', p. 22.

²⁹⁴ UNODC, 'UNODC Homicide Statistics' (2012) <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/homicide.html> (6-6-2012).

²⁹⁵ A. Botello, 'Mexico Maxico Homicidios' (2012) <http://www.mexicomaxico.org/Voto/Homicidios100M.htm> (6-7-2012).

53.8% of all intentional homicides, respectively.’²⁹⁶ In the TBI report that analysed the period from 2001-2009 Shirk already argued that: ‘drug-related killings represent perhaps 10-20% of all homicides nationwide for most of the 2000s. However, the dramatic increase in such killings in 2008 and 2009 suggests that they now represent a much larger proportion of intentional homicides, [...]’²⁹⁷ Hence, for the period before 2000 we assume that drug-related killings are in the 10-20% range of the yearly intentional homicide accounts.

In short, the available data on Mexican drug-related violence has different strengths and weaknesses. The variety between the different tallies illustrates the limits of each source. Reforma, for example, shows the media’s limitations of tracking all cases under investigation and would require more government transparency for more accurate estimates. With the use of the eight (Reforma (through TBI), INEGI, SNSP, UNODC, NSC, SINAIS, Moloeznik, Rios) sources this paper will try to derive trends of drug-related homicides and compare their findings to the main explanations provided by the literature. Due to the period of these explanations and sparse empirical data, no distinction will be made between different types of drug-related violence, such as executions, aggression directed against state authorities or violent confrontations. With the use of the illuminating trend analysis from the TBI this chapter will also try to identify a trend in victimization and basic trends in the geographical spreading of the homicides since 2006.

²⁹⁶ Shirk and Rios, *‘Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2010.’*, p. 1.

²⁹⁷ Shirk, *‘Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis from 2001-2009’*, p. 5.

3.3 Drug-related violence in Mexico

Number of drug-related homicides

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal in June 2012 President Felipe Calderón said that for the first 5 months of 2012 there appears to be a trend of decline in drug-related homicides.²⁹⁸ However, data for 2012 and for a large part 2011 have not been released yet but this apparent trend is an interesting development that could prove helpful for future studies on the explanations on drug-related violence.

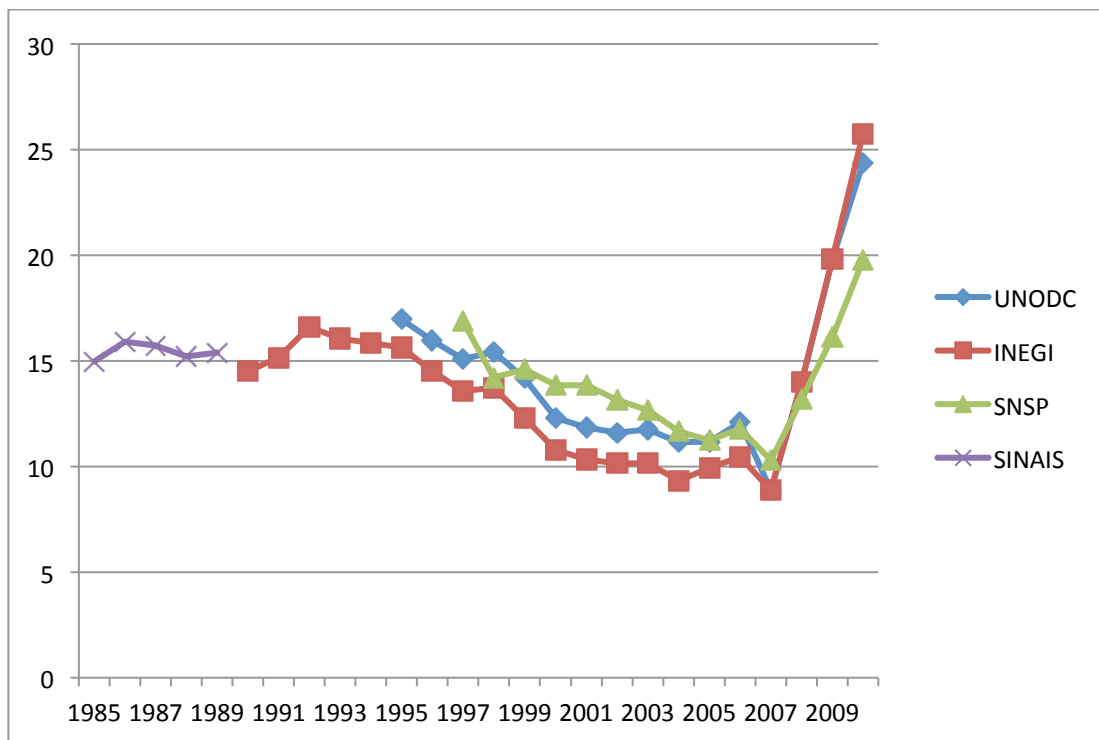
Since the 1990s, Mexico has experienced high rates of violent crime and increased violence among DTOs. In recent years, this violence has become even more severe and 2011 was the worst year on record²⁹⁹, which was measured till September and extrapolated with accounts from Reforma.³⁰⁰ However, yearly data exists till 2010 and when we observe the data from the eight sources previously discussed, we can derive a clear trend. Figure 5 below shows the number of 'regular' homicides from the discussed sources. As can be seen, the Mexican homicide rates remained fairly stable, from 1985 around 1996. The homicide rate then drops and gradually decreases till a low in 2006. Through the data of Moloeznik and Rios, in figure 6, we observe that there is an equal trend in drug-related killings from 2000 till 2006. Thus it seems that while overall homicides numbers drop, the amount of drug related killings remains fairly stable till 2007. As of 2007 the homicide rate skyrockets to phenomenal heights, with estimates ranging from 19.500-25.500.

²⁹⁸ The Wall Street Journal, 'Mexico Drug Violence Shows Decline' (2012)
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303822204577464821699025772.html> (8-8-2012).

²⁹⁹ In perspective: The Mexican homicide rates are depicted as very high, especially by the media, but if we compare it the Mexican rate (18 per 100,000 inhabitant in 2010) to other countries in the Western Hemisphere it is about average. In addition, Mexico's homicide rate pales in comparison to Honduras (82), El Salvador (66), Venezuela (49), Belize (41), Guatemala (41), Colombia (33), the Bahamas (28), Puerto Rics (26). The depiction by the, mainly Mexican, media is a clear example of the 'overaggregation' bias (which, in this case means the same as exaggeration).

³⁰⁰ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, 'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011', p. 1.

Figure 5. Number of Homicides x 1.000. 1985-2010.³⁰¹



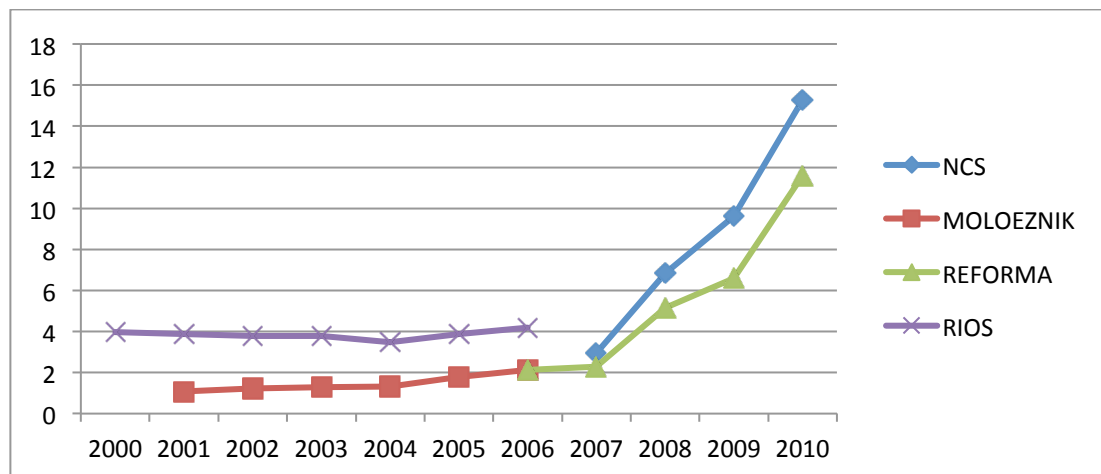
³⁰¹ INEGI, (2012) http://www.inegi.org.mx/lib/olap/general_ver4/MDXQueryDatos.asp?#Regreso&c=11144
www.presidencia.gob.mx/base-de-datos-de-fallecimientos/ (8-6-2012).

SNSP, (2012)

http://www.icesi.org.mx/documentos/estadisticas/estadisticasOfi/denuncias_homicidio_doloso_1997_2010.pdf
 f (8-6-2012).

UNODC, UNODC, 'UNODC Homicide Statistics' (2012) <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/homicide.html> (6-6-2012).

Figure 6. Number of Drug-Related Killings x 1.000. 2000-2010.³⁰²



When we look more closely at the data gathered with methods that search for correlation with DTOs. The data from 2000-2006 points to a rate of drug-related killings that was relatively stable and ranges between 1.000 and 4.000 killings each year. There is a great discrepancy between the retrospective data provided by Rios and the data from MoloezNIK. However, the estimates are on par as both display a degree of stability. Both see a minor break of the relative stability from 2004 – 2005, with a rise from respectively 1.304 to 1.776 and 3.478 to 3.878 killings. However, the most significant changes are over the last three years, where estimates more than double in 2008 and grow 50-75% in 2010 to a staggering range of 11.583-15.273.³⁰³

For the period from 2006-2010 the NSC and Reforma measurements also show a discrepancy. The TBI attributes the higher NSC numbers to the many agencies that are involved which can cause duplication. Also some cases are all still under investigation, which means some originally labeled as involving in organized crime violence may be reclassified. However, to date, no Mexican government’s dataset has been reclassified for these reasons.³⁰⁴ Overall, the various estimates described reveal closely correlated trends. Based

³⁰² Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, *Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011*, p. 5.

³⁰³ Ibidem.

³⁰⁴ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, *Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011*, p. 5.

on the data we assume that from 1985 drug-related violence was fairly stable till around 1996 before showing a downward trend, which lasted till at least 2000 and then stabilized till 2006. Since 2007 the homicide rates skyrocketed with a peak in 2010, the last year included in the used dataset. An important note about these trends is that the data becomes more numerous and more specific for drug-related homicides the closer we get to the present. Therefore the assumption of a relative stability from 1985 till around 1996 is less reliable versus the more recent trend identification.

Geographical spreading

Apart from the substantial surge in drug-related homicides, there are also some significant geographical dynamics to be observed. Unfortunately, however, the geographical spread of drug-related violence has only been tracked since 2006. Therefore, it depicts a very short timeframe compared to the explanations tracked in the literature review. The Trans Border Institute is the primary source as they have started to aggregate this data and identified patterns since 2006. In addition, in the literature study we have already reviewed some of the empirical data on geographical patterns. In sum, the findings were that violence is highly concentrated along key drug routes, POEs in the U.S. and Mexico and where competition was most abundant. The findings were generalized, however, and had little temporal reference. The following part will present the geographic data with more time related information and location specification.

Between 2006 and 2011, there has been a widely varying distribution of violence in Mexico. In 2006, violence was mainly concentrated in three Pacific coastal states: Sinaloa, Guerrero and Michoacán. In 2007, however, Michoacán saw a sharp decline while Sinaloa became the most deeply affected by homicides. At the same time, the number and rate of drug-related homicides significantly increased in other states, particularly in the northern border region.³⁰⁵ By 2008 three states experienced strong increases in homicide rates, of which Chihuahua alone accounted for a third of all killings, especially on the Mexican side of

³⁰⁵ Shirk and Rios, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2010.'*, p. 6.

the El Paso – Ciudad Juarez plaza. Sinaloa was already among the states with high levels of violence and this trend continued in 2008. Baja California’s completes the list with drug-related killings that nearly quadrupled and these three states together accounted for over half of all of Mexico’s drug-related killings in 2008.³⁰⁶

In 2009 the violence increased significantly at the national level and the overall concentration of violence remained in Northern Mexico, especially along the U.S.-Mexican border. A notable change was the increase in drug-related violence in Durango and Sinaloa, who make the “Golden Triangle” region with neighbouring Chihuahua.³⁰⁷

From 2010 through September 2011, the high degree of concentration in certain cities and rural areas associated with drug trafficking cultivation remained, however, there were some reductions in homicides that were offset elsewhere in the country. Overall there has been a trend of dispersion of violence since 2007. The number of municipalities with 50-99 drug-related (yearly) homicides grew from 3 in 2007 to 26 in 2011. Also the range of 10-49 drug-related homicides grew from 40 to 163 during the same period.³⁰⁸

Figure 7. Dispersion of Organized Crime Homicides at the Municipal Level³⁰⁹

| Municipalities with: | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 100 or more organized crime homicides | 2 | 4 | 7 | 18 | 17 |
| 50 to 99 organized crime homicides | 3 | 4 | 7 | 19 | 26 |
| 10 and 49 organized crime homicides | 40 | 62 | 103 | 146 | 163 |
| Zero drug-related homicides | 799 | 612 | 515 | 401 | 427 |

The following maps depict the geographical distribution of the total yearly number of drug related homicides. The maps are adopted from the TBI reports and are based on the number of homicides found by the SNSP and are represented on a state level.

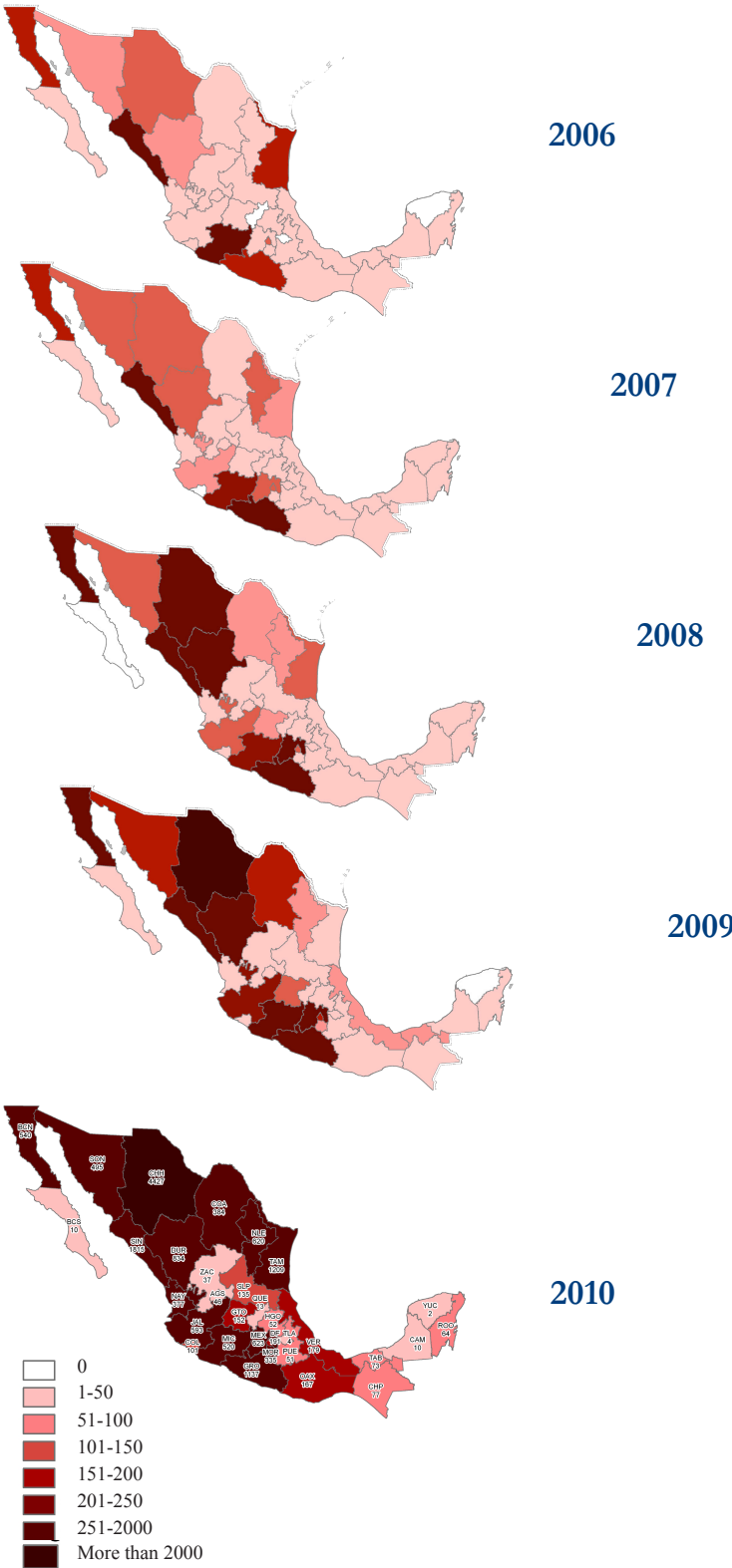
³⁰⁶ Shirk and Rios, *‘Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2010.’*, p. 6.

³⁰⁷ Ibidem p. 7.

³⁰⁸ Ibidem p. 6.

³⁰⁹ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, *‘Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011’*, p. 18.

Figure 8. Drug-Related Homicides 2006-2010.³¹⁰



³¹⁰ Combined from Shirk and Rios, 'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2010.', p. 6. And Shirk,

Figure 8 displays, besides a steep increase, also the already mentioned dispersion of violence. Nevertheless, according to this data violence seems geographically focused which does not correspond to the conventional wisdom of a general epidemic of violence, as depicted by the media.

Violence is most concentrated in the border towns of Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Juarez, Agua Prieta, Nogales, Mexicali and Tijuana.³¹¹ Other areas of concentration are Mexico's Pacific or Atlantic ports and coastlines, which serve as POEs for predominantly cocaine. Further affected are Mexico's drug-producing regions of "Tierra Caliente" and the "Golden Triangle", where marihuana, poppy and meth labs are located.³¹² Thus, Violence seems most concentrated where DTOs are competing for dominance, which is often in areas of strategic importance. Later in this chapter, these findings will later be weighed against the explanations found in the literature.

Victimization

The Mexican government's publicly released data are not disaggregated, however, Reforma's tally and other sources provide an indication of trends in categories of victims, including law enforcement authorities and the military, journalists politicians and young people.³¹³

When we look at 2009 the odds of being a victim of a drug-related homicide in Mexico in 2009 were fairly low (around 1 in 16,300).³¹⁴ The probability was significantly higher in certain states as can be derived from the geographical data, notably in the Golden Triangle with an average of approximately 1 in 2,500.³¹⁵ According to Reforma's data, an

Rios and Molzahn, *Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011*, p. 18.

³¹¹ Eberle, 'The Logic of Drug-Related Violence, A Case Study of Mexico from 2006 to 2011', p. 57.

³¹² Ibidem.

³¹³ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, *Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011*, p. 18.

³¹⁴ Shirk, 'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis from 2001-2009', p. 8.

³¹⁵ Ibidem.

estimated 35 soldiers and nearly 500 police died in relation to drug violence in 2009. This represents roughly 7% of all recorded drug-related casualties that year.

(Innocent) bystanders reflected a relatively smaller proportion of less than 3%, which puts, crudely, 90% of drug-related killings in Mexico involving ranking members and foot soldiers of the DTOs.³¹⁶

Further, according to government statements the average drug-related homicide is male and 32 years old, though there appears to be a growing number of female and younger casualties. The cited trend on the use of gangs, which consist of mainly unaffiliated and untrained young men, are increasingly found among the dead.³¹⁷ In September 2011, El Universal reported that drug related deaths became the leading cause of death for young people aged 15 to 29 in recent years: 2007 (366), 2008 (1,638), 2009 (2,511) and 2010 (3,741).³¹⁸ In addition to the young population, the proportion of women that were killed also seems on the rise. Reforma reported a greater number of 424 among the deceased in 2009 compared to 194 the previous year and this amount rose even further to 904 in 2011.³¹⁹

The counting of police and military victims shows a downward trend the last two years with a reduction from 547 policemen and 44 soldiers in 2011 compared to 715 policemen and 61 soldiers in 2010. Still they remain a significant part of the drug-related victims. Meanwhile, politicians and journalists have been increasingly targeted, this trend is shown in figure 8 and 9 below, with a record year in 2010 with 15 majors and 10 journalists.³²⁰

³¹⁶ Shirk and Rios, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2010'*, p. 13-14.

³¹⁷ Shirk, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis from 2001-2009'*, p. 8.

³¹⁸ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011'*, p. 18-20.

³¹⁹ Shirk, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis from 2001-2009'*, p. 8. and

³²⁰ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, *'Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011'*, p. 18-20.

Figure 9. Assassinated Journalists 1994-2011.

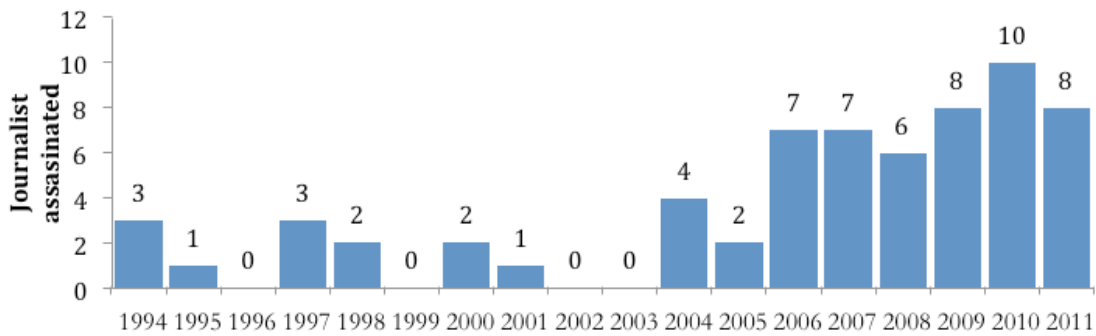
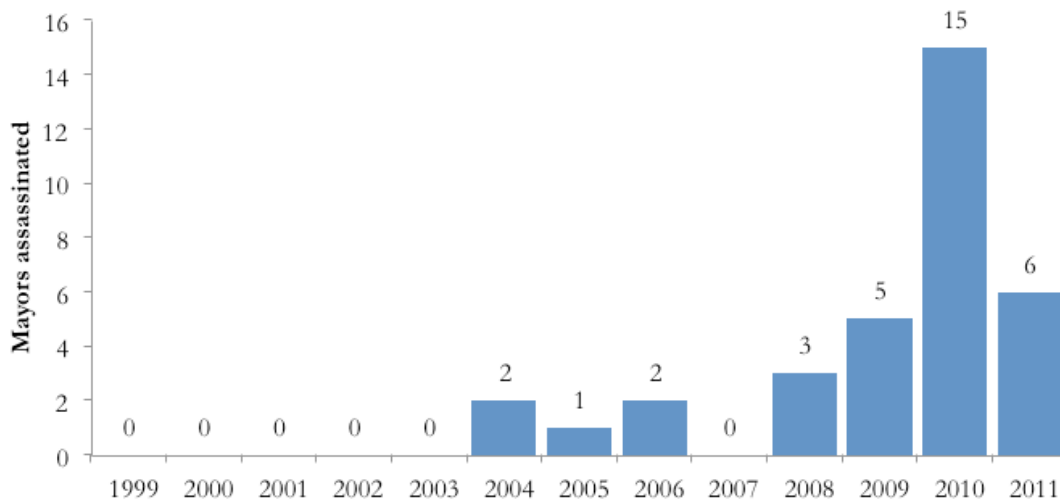


Figure 10. Assassinated Mayors 1999-2011.



Overall, almost 10% of all victims in 2011 were tortured before being executed (1,173) and 4,5% of the bodies were found decapitated (556 cases). The proportion and number of torture cases and decapitations grew in 2011 relative to 2010, although reliable statistics are not available for the other forms of brutality, such as mutilation. The available data suggests that violence is not only more prevalent but also becoming more gruesome and cruel in recent years.³²¹

In sum, the victimization profile suggests that the vast majority of the victims are DTO members and affiliates. There is also evidence for discerning trends of increasing brutality, more young victims and women and high-profile victims like politicians and journalist.

³²¹ Shirk, Rios and Molzahn, *Drug Violence in Mexico, Data and Analysis through 2011*, p. 18-20.

Finally the police, law enforcement that lost their lives due to drug-related violence remains at a fairly stable percentage. Unfortunately, the victimization data is only reliably available from 2008 as accounts are distorted and not aggregated enough before this date. Overall, we have to keep the limitations of the used datasets in mind and cannot exclude distorted results.

3.4 Empirical evidence vs Literature research

In this part the main explanations for drug-related violence are compared to the empirical evidence. This is done, by comparing the temporal reference of the main explanations with the data on drug-related homicides. The number of homicides is used, as well as, the geographical spread and the victim profile.

3.4.1 Timeline

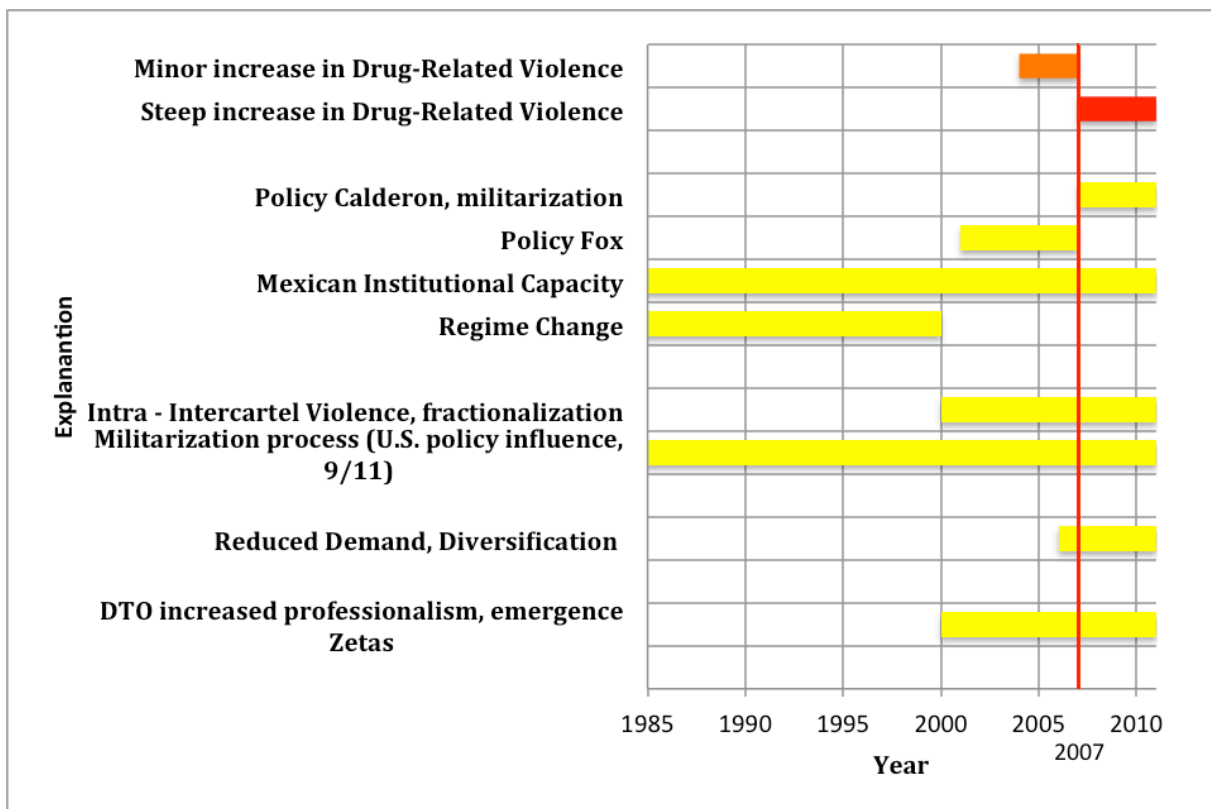
As summarized in the literature review, the direct and indirect linkages to drug-related violence between 1985-2011 all are weighed differently over the course of this 26-year period. In general the literature sees an escalation of violence since December 2006 when Calderon took office and to a lesser extend since 2000, with two dominant reasons: first, Mexican government policy (strategy) and second, inter and intra-DTO violence. Most of the other explanations have vague temporal linkages as specific start and endings are hard to identify, still on the bases of the literature review, this paper has tried to summarize the dominant explanations in the timetable shown below.

When the findings in the literature are compared to the empirical data on homicides, the escalation of violence clearly coincides with the policy of Calderon and not with the timeframe the literature puts on increased intra and inter-cartel violence since 2000. The policy of confrontation and disruption of DTO operations, with use of the military, can be identified as the largest contributor to the spike of violence that has occurred the last couple of years. The empirical data also seems to add more weight to another explanation. In 2004 drug-related violence started rising slightly and has been rising steeply since 2007. This

corresponds with the trend of diversification of DTO modus operandi, a process that has essentially started with the emergence of the Zetas and was spurred by an offset in American drug demand since 2006. However the influence of the Zetas on this development is more circumstantial and the professionalization of DTOs has been a long-term process and can therefore not be the direct cause of the 2007 skyrocketing homicide numbers. Also the other major explanations, such as the institutional capacity, regime change and militarization are all long-term processes that saw no immediate change around 2007.

Hence, the empirical data on drug-related homicides mainly seems to correlate with government policy as a direct cause of violence and adds more weight to the effect of reduced demand and diversification of criminal operations as causes of increased levels of drug-related violence.

Figure 11. Timeline of major explanations drug-related violence 1985-2011.



The data on geography, which is only available since 2006, reveals violence is both widespread and relatively concentrated. The violence has dispersed to new areas and involved more municipalities. The violence, while still concentrated along drug trafficking routes, has spread to almost every state and flared in the northern border states. (figure 8, page 89) When the geographic pattern of homicides is weighed against the literature the result is inconclusive. Calderon has actively focused on confronting the DTOs, especially in the North, but violence also seems most concentrated where DTOs are competing for dominance.

When we compare the empirical data to the areas of influence of the DTOs (figure 5, page 55) we can observe that most homicides occur in the North and West of Mexico, while the largest concentration of DTOs is around the capital. The political center of Mexico, thus seems less affected by homicides while it has the largest number of active DTOs. A possible explanation is that there are simply too many DTOs in the area to maintain or achieve dominance. Interesting is also that this supports Kalyvas' theory, since territorial control by the government is strongest in the capital and weaker along the border areas.

The victim profile demonstrates an increasing number of murdered mayors, which implies a standoff between policy makers at a local level and the DTOs, thus, adding more weight to a change of policy as the main reason for escalation. On the other hand, the vast majority of the homicides are committed among and between the DTO members, which strongly supports competition as a main cause of drug-related violence.

In sum, the empirical data corresponds primarily with the confrontational policy of the Calderon administration and puts more weight on the effect of reduced demand and diversification of criminal operations as causes of increased drug-related violence. However, the majority of the victims are DTO member and the argument of intra and inter-DTO violence still has merit but seems to have been caused by the disruption of DTO business and the tactics that flowed from the government policies, consequently prioritizing government policy over DTO competition as a direct cause of drug-related violence.

Conclusion

The direct and indirect explanations for drug-related violence are all weighed differently over the course of the timeframe from 1985-2011. In general the literature sees an escalation of violence since the end of 2006 and to a lesser extent since 2000. There are two dominant explanations for these increases: first, Mexican government policy (strategy) and second, the competition between and within the DTOs. Both these explanations are perceived as direct contributors to drug-related violence and have various correlations with other explanations such as democratization, professionalization and geography.

There are also ample indirect reasons that seem to contribute to drug-related violence in Mexico and the principle of producer-product seems to apply best for these explanations. The direct causality between policy, inter and intra-DTO competition and violence can not exist without the existing environment. Preconditions like weak institutional capacity, corruption, availability of weapons, poverty, geography, culture, and others are seen as necessary before the escalating levels of violence would have been possible. The sum of the literature points in this direction and Ackoffs' producer-product concept would therefore be helpful to include in future studies on drug-related violence in Mexico.

The documenting of historical patterns of drug-related violence has been a more recent development. Therefore, the current empirical data is of low quality, incomplete and can only be used to derive trends. Furthermore, the limitations with datasets on crimes related to drug trafficking makes the margin for error big. The estimates suggest that drug-markets were fairly stable but became increasingly violent since 2004 with a real break of the trend line in 2007, when the number of homicides exploded. When this data is compared to the dominant explanations found in the literature a clearer picture emerges, as the data clearly corresponds with the confrontational policy of the Calderon administration. Also two other explanations gain more weight: U.S. reduced demand for Mexican drugs and the diversification of criminal operations. However, the increased competition between DTOs still maintains some validity but within a different timeframe as it is likely caused by

the disrupting influence of government policy. Other explanations from the literature are more circumstantial, such as the militarization, professionalization or regime change, as these are long-term processes with vague temporal reference. Consequently, it is the explanation of Calderon's government policy, with the employment of questionable tactics against the DTOs, which is the most dominant explanation for the skyrocketing drug-related homicides in Mexico since 2007.

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ⁱ Cover photo, boy crying at cemetery, adopted from ABC news: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-01-03/mexican-boy-cries-at-cemetary/3756154> (10-9-2012).