
Drugs, Drug-related Violence, and Corruption in Mexico

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Drugs, drug-related violence, and drug-related corruption have come to dominate Mexican politics in the late 2000s. Rival drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) have unleashed a wave of crime and violence that all too frequently grab the national and international headlines, while the military-led crackdown by President Felipe Calderon (2006-2012) has thus far come to define his administration. Most consider corruption central to both the trade and the war. In fact, it is commonly and categorically asserted that organized crime, particularly drug trafficking, cannot exist without it. During the public meeting of the *Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Pública* in August 2008, for example, President Calderon expressed this widely-held view: “El crimen no puede entenderse sin el cobijo de la impunidad y la corrupción de las policías” (*Milenio* August 27, 2008). A few days later and amidst revelations of the infiltration of drug trafficking high within the Attorney General’s (PGR) office, Calderon pinpointed a critical implication of this relationship: “I’m convinced that to stop the crime, we first have to get it out of our own house” (Lacey 2008).

Assertions such as these that wed drugs, violence, and corruption raise a number of questions. First, what precisely is the nature of the relationship tying drug trafficking, drug trafficking-related violence, and corruption? Does drug-trafficking inherently require corruption? And if so, does corruption facilitate drug trafficking operations, thus making it an independent variable, or does drug trafficking actually create the corruption, thus making corruption a dependent variable? Even if some sort of causal relationship links the two, what might be their link to drug-related violence? Is drug trafficking inevitably violent? Does violence increase the level of corruption or might corruption mitigate the potential for violence? Second, how has the complex relationship among these variables changed in recent years in Mexico? Most importantly, what changes help account for the recent spike in violence? Is the Calderon-led military crackdown a response to a qualitative change in the operations of the DTOs or have the operations of the DTOs changed in response to the crackdown? And has corruption facilitated or followed these dynamics?¹

¹ This paper is part of a much broader research project that explores the relationship linking crime and corruption or what I refer to as societal and state illegalities.

The three sections of this exploratory paper begin examining some of these questions. The first section discusses the theoretical connections linking drug trafficking, and related corruption and violence. It explores various arguments, and highlights the different types of corruption associated with the drug trade. The second section then examines recent trends. Centered primarily on a review of recent analyses, particular attention is paid here to the changing nature and role of corruption in the overall equation. The final section then takes a tentative empirical glance at some of these questions. It compares the Mexican states with the highest levels of drug-related activity and drug-related violence to other states and asks whether these states suffer higher levels of corruption (both perceived and real), rule of law problems, or exhibit less confidence in the judicial system. This section also attempts to look at changes in public perceptions in recent years as the drug wars have unfolded.

Theoretical Linkages

Though the concurrence of drugs, drug-related violence and corruption today seem to suggest some sort of strong connection, it is important to ask about the nature of the relationship and the mechanisms that pull the three together. This section reviews the theoretical ties linking drug-trafficking, corruption, and drug-related violence. Obviously, the theoretical calculus is a bit more complex when considering three as opposed to just two variables. Still, discussion focuses separately on the various dyadic combinations

1. Drug-trafficking and corruption. There seems to be widespread consensus in the literature and among observers that organizations providing contraband goods and services (aka organized crime, including drug trafficking organizations) cannot operate without the existence of some form of corruption: that the two are intricately and inherently linked (see, for instance, Andreas 1998; O'Day and López 2001; O'Day 2001; Hanson 2008; Naylor 2003; Pimental 2003; Shelley 2005). Studies of prohibition in the US and the operation of gambling and prostitution in major cities, for instance, highlight the historic role illegal payoffs to police and local officials have long played in not only allowing these businesses to operate, but in maintaining them within certain bounds (Naylor 2003). In Mexico, of course, scores of analyses echo this point (see Lupsha 1995). As Laurie Freeman (2006, 12) notes, "Doing business entails bribing and intimidating public officials and law enforcement and judicial agents...organized crime cannot survive without corruption, and it looks for opportunities to create and deepen corruption."

Even accepting this strongly asserted proposition, it is useful to acknowledge first that many other factors besides corruption facilitate the rise and operation of organized crime. Impunity, a variable often enjoying co-top billing alongside corruption for facilitating drug trafficking, for example, can stem from many factors besides corruption, including gross inefficiencies within the institutions charged with investigating, prosecuting and punishing crimes, the lack of resources relative to the magnitude of the problem, poor training and weak professional standards, and competing political priorities, to name just a few. In the case of Mexico, the extremely high levels of impunity found within the criminal justice system to process and punish criminals, estimated to be as high as 97%, cannot be attributed entirely to corruption (see Zepeda 2004).² In other words, the lack of law enforcement in Mexico to fighting drug trafficking is not exclusively the result of corruption, thus raising the question of whether drug-trafficking indeed requires corruption even in the face of widespread impunity and institutional weaknesses. Second, it should also be acknowledged that this symbiotic linkage does not seem to apply to individual criminal acts. Rarely does anyone categorically associate everyday forms of crime (non-organized crime) with corruption.

But despite the almost axiomatic connection tying drug-trafficking and corruption, the direction of causality remains unclear and may in fact vary. One view, perhaps the more commonly-held position, is that organized crime corrupts state officials through the seductive power of bribes (that organized crime → corruption). The 1967 Task Force Report on Organized Crime was quite explicit on this as well as the prior point: “all available data indicate that organized crime flourishes only where it has corrupted public officials” (cited in Kelly 2003, 128-129). Though it can take many different forms, this pattern of corruption finds organized crime influencing policy implementation in ways that facilitate the operation of their businesses, reducing costs and increasing profits (Scott 1972) (see Table 1). Examples from Mexico are (too) abundant. *Operación Limpieza* in October 2008, for example, uncovered payments, some as high as US \$450,000 a month, to over 30 officials of SIEDO (*Subprocuraduría de Investigación Especializada en Delincuencia Organizada*) in return for providing confidential information on law enforcement operations to the Sinaloa cartel, including those of the DEA (*Latin American Mexico & NAFTA Report*, November 2008; Padgett 2008). In May 2009, federal police arrested

² Ackerman (2009) cites an independent study showing that only 17% of suspects arrested for drug offenses were actually brought to court in 2008.

about a dozen mayors and nearly two dozen other local officials in the state of Michoacan (Llana 2010). Indeed, payoffs to police, investigators, local officials, prison officials and others by drug-traffickers are all too common.

[Table 1 here]

But as Peter Andreas (1998, 161) points out, corruption is a two-way street and “involves not only the penetration of the state, but also penetration by the state.” Indeed, a second type of linkage reverses this causal error and depicts corruption as an independent variable that produces and hence promotes drug trafficking operations (corruption → organized crime). Rather than envisioning organized crime exerting its influence and control through payoffs, this pattern finds state officials using (and abusing) their authority to largely control and influence the activities of organized crime, enjoying a portion of the business’ profits in the process. Shown under the extortion side of Table 1, activities here find state officials “demanding” payment for the selective enforcement of the law. Though at times difficult to distinguish bribery from extortion, as we see later, this sort of theoretical linkage seems to have great historical significance to Mexico.³

A third way of linking the two envisions them as largely indistinguishable. This includes instances where police directly engage in criminal activity, but not in a way that most would call corruption (see *SourceMex* June 26, 2006 and September 3, 2008). Citing statistics from the SSP, *Excelsior* reported, for example, that 56 of the 897 kidnappers arrested from 2001 through the first half of 2008 were active or former members of a police department or the military (*SourceMex* September 24, 2008). Indeed, initial investigations into the high-profile Fernando Marti kidnapping and killing in August 2008 pointed to the involvement of federal agents and judicial police from the Federal District (*Milenio* August 18, 2008; *Latin American Mexico & NAFTA Report*, September 2008 RM-08-09).⁴ This blurring of the lines can also be seen in revolving-door corruption where state officials leave office to work for the companies they had

³ Does it really matter? If crime is the independent variable creating corruption, then any sort of crackdown against these societal organizations will actually increase their need to resort to corruption (or violence) to offset or undermine the heightened enforcement. If corruption is the source of the problem, however, then attacking the societal organizations may be of limited utility. Either way, of course -- regardless of whether organized crime is corrupting the state or whether a corrupt state is engaging in organized crime -- corruption must be addressed since it undermines enforcement of the law against both societal and state forms of illegalities.

⁴ In October 2008, 100 ski-masked federal police stormed the mansion of Colombian drug merchant, robbing all the guests. “The federales, it turns out, had turned the takedown into a violent shakedown” (Grayson 2010, 128-129).

been policing. Indeed, many former police and military officers in Mexico have gone on to pursue careers with DTOs, including the infamous Zetas drawn largely from the ranks of the Mexican military special forces (Grayson 2008, 2010).

2. Drug-trafficking and violence. It is often assumed that since DTOs do not have access to legal means to resolve conflict, enforce internal norms, or prevent law enforcement from intervening in their operations that violence is a natural and inevitable by-product of their business model. Phil Williams (2009), in fact, compares the situation to the anarchy of the Westphalian nation-state system where states must utilize power to assert their interests vis-à-vis other states. The recent uptick in drug-related violence in Mexico also seems to confirm a connection between drug-trafficking and violence. Yet, numerous studies suggest otherwise: that there is no inherent relationship linking the two (Friman 2009, Naylor 2009, Williams 2009). First, violence is costly and bad for business (Naylor 2009). Criminal organizations consequently try to avoid violence and prefer to operate under the radar by cooperating with one another and “corrupt[ing] enough state officials to maintain sufficient freedom of action for their activities” (Williams 2009, 325). As Andreas and Wallman (2009, 227) succinctly point out, the drug smuggler “prefers to bypass or buy off the police rather than bully them.” Rather than natural and inevitable, violence thus tends to occur only under certain conditions. Violence among criminal groups, for instance, is more likely during disputes over control of lucrative distribution networks and market share, while violence against the state is more likely when criminal justice is engaged in trying to curtail the business or pursuing broader political goals (Friman 2009, 286).⁵

A second indication of the lack of a clear, strong connection linking drug-trafficking and violence is the considerable variations found across and within sectors of the illicit economy (Andreas and Wallman 2009; Naylor 2009). Businesses operating in such illicit, contraband markets as illegal wildlife, stolen art, counterfeit products, contraband cigarettes, and even marijuana, for example, rarely exhibit much violence despite not having access to legal means to resolve conflict (Naylor 2009). Indeed, Naylor (2009) finds that only in the drug and sex trades is

⁵ Franklin Zimring (2008) contends that drug violence is contingent in part on the degree of violence within the culture. Enrique Serna makes a similar argument with regards to corruption and illegality. Portraying the government as a reflection of society, he contends that “Ningún sermón cívico ha podido erradicar del alma nacional la propensión a ver el erario como un botín...Ningún funcionario pierde amigos cuando se enriquece de la noche a la mañana; por el contrario, su éxito social aumenta en la misma proporción que su cuenta bancaria.” In the end, he posits, the culture applauds delinquent activity (Serna 2009, 20).

violence possible though it is still unlikely in all four areas of the chain (production, marketing, product distribution, and profit distribution).

3. Corruption and (drug-related) violence. As noted, DTO's prefer to bypass or corrupt state officials rather than confront them violently. This suggests an inverse relationship linking corruption to drug-related violence. Indeed, over four decades ago Huntington (1968, 59-64) characterized corruption as a substitute for political violence. In Snyder and Duran-Martinez's (2009) parsimonious model, violence is low where corruption forges informal institutions of state-sponsored protection. The absence of violence, of course, operates in both directions. Bribes mean the state will refrain from using violence against organized crime, and that organized crime will behave in like manner vis-à-vis the state, preferring payoffs to violent confrontation. Under these conditions, public officials refrain from enforcing the law or enforce it selectively against rival organizations in exchange for share of the profits (payoffs), while criminal organizations in return provide the state information about rivals and comply with certain behavioral expectations. For this to occur, however, the state must be capable of carrying out enforcement. As discussed in the subsequent section, many describe the old PRI regime in this way.

Even so, in a broader context and under different scenarios, the two seem to be somewhat more closely aligned. As captured in the classic phrase in Spanish "*plomo o plata*" the threat of violence is indeed frequently associated with corruption. Though such threats are intended to strengthen the seductive appeal of the bribe and in the end prevent real violence from occurring (an inverse relationship), such intimidation nonetheless constitutes a form of violence. Referring back to the question of casual direction linking drug-trafficking and corruption, "*plomo o plata*" clearly represents the bribery form of corruption as opposed to the extortion form.⁶

A second scenario where the relationship between corruption and violence may be more closely linked looks beyond a simple dyadic relationship tying one criminal organization to the state. Where one criminal organization uses payoffs to get state officials not only to refrain from enforcing the law against that group, but also to enforce it selectively against a rival organization

⁶ Of course, at some point, intimidation can prevail without even paying the bribes. "*Plomo o plata*" is in some ways generous on the part of the drug traffickers since mere intimidation without the bribes might be cheaper. This point may have been reached in parts of Mexico. Reports surfaced in 2008 that in 12 municipalities in the state of Mexico organized crime operated a protection racket that extended to local and federal deputies. Officials claimed they cannot make declarations because they have them "identified and threatened" to harm their families (*Milenio* October 6, 2008).

using violence, the corruption/violence nexus turns positive. In such cases, overall violence will increase as the state authority uses violence to target the rival organization and the rival organization, in turn, employs violence against the state and/or the corrupting organization.

In sum, despite the coexistence of the drugs, corruption and violence in contemporary Mexico, the relationships between these are not inevitable, and instead seem contingent on a variety of factors. This not only raises the question of how specific factors have changed to shape the current alignment and collusion of the three in Mexico, but also suggests that targeting the three may first require some sort of de-linkage.

Crime and Corruption Dynamics in Mexico

The production and shipment of drugs from Mexico is nothing new, nor is the corruption associated with it. Luis Astorga (1996, 2007) and George Grayson (2010) offer detailed historical accounts of the evolution of the business and the politics behind it going back over a century. Yet, most agree that the situation has changed qualitatively in recent years marked by a dramatic increase in the size and scope of the operations, the amount of resources involved, the magnitude of the corruption, and above all, the level of violence and related criminal activities.

Three broad areas of change seem to lay behind these recent developments. The first encompasses the rise of political competition, the collapse of the centralized authoritarian regime, and democratization. Indeed, many analysts describe a close, collusive relationship linking drug traffickers to the state under the PRI-led, one-party authoritarian regime (Andreas 1998; Flores 2009; Lupsha 1995; Shelley 2001; Shirk 2010). During this period, Mexican DTOs operated under a single hierarchy as public officials extorted from and in turn protected the drug traffickers. According to Peter Lupsha (1995), “Mexico’s justice agency was in reality an arm of drug trafficking, and organized crime’s government intermediary...Key traffickers and trafficking routes in a centralized authoritarian system like Mexico always needed the ‘*con permiso*’ of those within the Federal District.” Exercising a degree of control, the state thus enforced certain norms of operations among the groups: an arrangement that went beyond sharing profits with the drug-trafficking organizations to assisting the police and the political system by providing PR victories and cases for the judicial system. As Grayson (2010, 29) contends, “Relying on bribes or *mordidas*, the desperadoes pursued their illicit activities with the connivance of authorities, frequently through ad hoc pacts that might last days, weeks, or

months.” Under the prevailing “rules of the game,” the authorities “allocated ‘*plazas*’” based on a formula. “Drug dealers behaved discretely, showed deference to public figures, spurned kidnapping, appeared with governors at their children’s weddings, and, although often allergic to politics, helped the hegemonic PRI discredit its opponents by linking them to narco-trafficking.” When conflict among organizations emerged, state governors would resolve it. Although the dominance of one political party did not contribute to the development of the rule of law, as Louise Shelley (2001, 215) notes, it did contribute to a law of rules, or informal institutions and mechanisms that governed the relationship between drug traffickers and the state. Above all, this state-sponsored racket resulted in lower levels of violence (Snyder and Duran-Martínez 2009, 262). Indeed, Celaya Pacheco (2009, 1024), for example, notes how narcoviolence was kept at bay during the “extensively corrupt Salinas de Gortari administration.”

But political competition and democratization undermined this pattern largely by hampering PRI’s capacity to control the enforcement and non-enforcement of the law (Snyder and Duran-Martínez 2009, 262). As opposition parties began to capture control of state and local governments, this increased the number of potential protectors and prevented a central state from being able to guarantee enforcement or non-enforcement. At the same time, this lack of a unified, overarching hierarchy of corrupt state officials contributed to the fractionalization of the DTOs (Shirk 2010, 11). As O’Neil (2009) concludes, “by disrupting established payoff systems between drug traffickers and government officials, democratization unwittingly exacerbated drug-related violence.”

A second area of change reflecting many of these broader political trends involves changes in the scope and the administration of enforcement. Amidst growing pressures from the United States dating as far back as the Nixon administration, Mexico has progressively dedicated more of its scarce resources and energies to fighting drugs. Between 1987 and 1989, it tripled its federal anti-drug budget, and tripled it again in the 1990s (Andreas 1998). During the following decade, public security budgets increased 565 per cent, while the number of federal police climbed 51 per cent (between 1999 and 2007), and the number of agents within the AFI shot up almost 100 per cent. The budget for the federal public security ministry doubled from 2000 to 2008 and the PGR budget increased 94 per cent over the decade (*Latin American Mexico & NAFTA Report*, September 2008 RM-08-09). Such changes have come with major administrative reforms. This began, as Snyder and Duran-Martínez (2009) point out, with reforms within the

PGR prior to the collapse of the PRI that transformed the geography of enforcement, altering the ratio of protectors to organizations and shortening the time horizons of public officials. Such reforms included restructuring, mandated relocation of personnel and mass firings of corrupt officials. It included purges, increased turnover and swifter assignment rotations. And it encompassed decentralization including the creation of three new *subprocuradurias* with each controlling non-contiguous states, and increased responsibilities and autonomy of state governments and PGR field offices. This change allowed hometown cops to act with greater independence from the PJF.

Most analysts argue that enhanced enforcement along with these administrative changes, while having done little to stem the flow of drugs, have increased corruption and violence. According to Andreas (1998), as enforcement increases, so too does the need to corrupt those doing the enforcing. Characterizing corruption as a tax, he argues that any increase in enforcement merely increases the capacity of the state to tax. Yet, as Padgett (2008) contends, referring to *Operación Limpieza*, Padgett (2008), the breadth of the corruption “seems to make a mockery of Calderon’s efforts to stamp it out.” Indeed, despite the periodic dissolution of entire federal police forces like the INCD (eliminated in 1997) and FEAD (eliminated in 2003), the purging of local police, or the thousands of sanctions against public officials, the level of corruption seems largely unchanged (Morris 2009). In like manner, increased enforcement heightens the degree of violence. Celaya Pacheco (2009), for instance, attributes the rise in violence to increased enforcement particularly along the US-Mexico border, while Grayson (2010) and Snyder and Duran-Martinez (2009) tie the increase in violence to the administrative changes. This has certainly been the pattern with the recent Calderon crackdown and his non-negotiating position (Celaya Pacheco 2009).⁷ According to Ted Carpenter (2005, 3), for instance, the federal takeover of law enforcement in Nuevo Laredo in June 2005 “had no meaningful impact on the violence” and that instead the number of killings went up.

The tendency for increased enforcement to generate violence and corruption occurs in a number of ways. First, the proliferation of enforcers and erosion of centralized control lead

⁷ Aguilar and Castañeda (2009) question Calderon’s strategy and reasoning for launching the war. They present data that fail to confirm the supposed increase in the use of drugs in Mexico or even a dramatic increase in violence. What has changed, they contend, is the perception of violence. One reason for launching the war, they note, is for the state to regain control: that the state has lost its monopoly control over the legitimate use of force, to collect taxes, etc (Aguilar and Castañeda 2003, 51; see also Escalante Gonzalbo (2009).

cartels to acquire their own means of protection and to create paramilitary structures, so in the absence of state-sponsored protection rackets, the violence increases (Snyder and Duran-Martínez 2009, 264). Second, the increased enforcement undermines business operations and triggers violence within and among DTOs (Shelley 2001). The arrests or killings of key figures in the drug organizations creates power vacuums that frequently ignite conflict within organizations as the lieutenants vie for internal control, and among DTOs vying for control of *plazas*. As these internal struggles grow, DTOs in turn enlist the support of corrupt officials to help tilt the balance in their favor. But as Freeman (2006, 6) notes, “anything public servants do that is interpreted as benefiting one group – such as trying to take down its rival – makes them the target of the other.” Indeed, the capture of some cartel leaders was tantamount to “kicking around hornets’ nests without having the means to spray the rattled insects” (Grayson 2010, 51).⁸ Finally, increased enforcement leads more directly to violence as the state employs it to fight DTOs and the DTOs, in turn, fight back. Though most of the killings are among DTOs (with cops and enforcement officials often working for the DTOs), Rúbén Aguilar and Jorge Castañeda (2009) contend that perhaps what are portrayed as violence among drug traffickers may really be the work of state officials.⁹

But while increasing the level of violence and corruption, the crackdowns and administrative maneuvers have done little to reduce the actual level of drug trafficking. As Andreas (1998, 161) noted over a decade ago, the reality is that the business “has thrived in the face of intensified Mexican drug control efforts.”¹⁰ Indeed, Bricker (2009) points out that the quantitative results of the crackdown have been poor. According to the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, drug seizures decreased since Calderon’s war began; eradications fell from 2007 to 2008; marijuana eradication and seizures also fell in 2008; while drug production in Mexico in 2008 was higher than in 2006. All this despite concurrent with the 16,500 drug-

⁸ Shelley (2001, 214) highlights the paradox here: that combating one or two organizations only strengthens the capacity of their rivals, but launching a simultaneous attack on all is beyond the state’s capacity.

⁹ Though I have seen little evidence to support this allegation, given the weakness of the judicial system to process and prosecute criminals, it seems plausible.

¹⁰ More troubling, the deployment of military forces to contain drug trafficking have wrought an increase human rights abuses. “Troops dispatched to try to wrest control of states where the drug trade has escalated are also accused of violations against the very civilians they are sent to protect” (*SourceMex* March 4, 2009).

related killing during the first 3 years of the Calderon *sexenio*, surpassing the entire rate for the six years under Fox (estimated at between 9,000 and 13,000).

A third broad area of change behind the current explosion of violence relates to changes in the nature of the drug business itself. First, at about the time of the two of the other changes just discussed, US Government's "Operation Hat Ticks" upset the Colombian supply chain through south Florida. This forced the Colombian cartels to turn to Mexican suppliers, resulting in the growth of their operations and profits. A few years later, NAFTA further facilitated the business by making the transshipment of drugs to the US easier (Grayson 2010, 56; O'Neil 2009). Together, these changes opened the way for vast fortunes for the Mexican organizations, while increasing the level of competition among them. As Grayson (2010, 31) notes, it multiplied the number of organizations, raised the stakes, and, in the process, made them more violent. The influx of Colombian traffickers also made the task of coordination more difficult and increased the level of brutality. As the number of organizations and competition grew, they began to "vie for influence at both the national and sub-national level" (Shirk 2010, 11). For Louise Shelley (2005), this brought about a qualitative change. The older crime groups which were dependent on existing institutional and financial structures to move their products (these groups minimized the risk of prosecution and did not fear the power of state institutions because they had "corrupted or developed collusive relations with state institutions") have been replaced by new crime groups that do not possess long-term financial strategies and tend to link up with terrorist groups. These new organizations do not profit from state contracts and thrive on a shadow economy, "the violence and disorder of the state" (Shelley 2005, 103).

Impact on corruption. Combined these changes have wrought a shift in the dominant patterns of corruption relating to drug-trafficking. First, the weakening of the centralized power of the state coupled with the growing power and presence of DTOs altered the balance of relative power, resulting in a move away from extortion forms of corruption to bribery. Now rather than centralized political authorities "managing" the drug businesses and keeping the DTOs within certain boundaries, as once occurred, the DTO's now largely call the shots, dictating the terms of the relationship. As O'Neil (2009) notes: [Under Fox] "drug-trafficking organizations took advantage of the political opening to gain autonomy, ending their subordination to the government. They focused instead on buying off or intimidating local authorities in order to ensure the safe transit of their goods."

Second, the decentralization of authority coupled with stepped-up enforcement has opened up many more points of corrupt entry and in essence decentralized corruption. In a sense, by blurring the lines of authority it has become necessary to grease more palms in the process. According to Snyder and Duran-Martínez (2009, 264), there has been an “increase in the number of actors who needed to be bribed and it became far more difficult to determine whom to bribe in order to guarantee the transit of drug cargoes across the country.” With the proliferation of rival groups and their use of corruption to enlist the support of state officials, this has pitted state actors against one another, fueling more violence across lines.

Third the growing strength and prowess of DTOs has led it to flex its political muscle at different and deeper levels. As Lupsha (2005) notes, “rather than protection percolating up through the PJF, PGR, or military to the party and the private secretaries and bag men around ‘Los Pinos,’ it now appears transnational organized crime and narco power are attempting to operate directly in public and private sector board rooms, with Cabinet level staff and secretaries to plan and coordinate activities for mutual benefits, development, and free trade.” The growing concern here is that the influence of DTOs extends beyond the criminal justice system to elected officials at the local and national levels. Concerns that drug-related funds are being channeled into political campaigns have grown manifold in recent years.

Subnational Comparison

As noted at the outset, the number of drug-related killings in Mexico climbed throughout the decade of the 2000s, skyrocketing in 2008 when the number of killings jumped from 2,280 the prior year to 5,153. This number inched upward with 6,587 drug-related killings in 2009. Among the more notable trends involves the geographic concentration of the violence in just a few key states considered critical to drug production and distribution. In 2007, the top states included Sinaloa, Guerrero and Michoacan. In 2008, Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Baja California topped the list. Chihuahua again led the way in 2009 suffering almost a third of all drug-related killings in the country, followed by Sinaloa, Guerrero and Durango (Shirk 2010).

Exploring further the linkages of drug-trafficking, violence and corruption, Table 2 compares the states suffering high levels of drug-related killings to other states. The table looks at a) crime victimization, b) the perception of insecurity, c) the level of impunity measured by a

combination of the non-reporting of crime and the non-investigation of crimes,¹¹ d) an index compiled by the National Human Rights Commission that measures the level of fulfillment of the rule of law in political, economic and social arenas; and e) a series of measures gauging corruption. These include an index of participation in lower level forms of bribery, perceptions of the level of corruption and change at the national and state levels, and the perception of corruption specifically within the government, the justice system, the armed forces, and the police. The most recent available data is from 2007 and 2008, which obviously does not fully capture the significant developments that have occurred in 2008 and 2009. Still, as a simple, working hypothesis based on the forgoing discussion, we would expect the states suffering the highest levels of drug-related violence will exhibit higher levels of crime victimization, greater feelings of insecurity, weak rule of law, and more corruption.¹²

[Table 2 here]

As expected, respondents in the narco-states feel a higher level of insecurity than those in other states. And in three of the six narco states, respondents are more likely to be victims of crime. Both measures of the rule of law, however, fail to show any substantial differences among the states. Guerrero stands out here as suffering the highest level of impunity and weak rule of law, but other narco-states tend to register higher levels of rule of law than the other states. In terms of corruption, again the differences tend to be minimal and insignificant. Contrary to expectation, participation in corruption is slightly less in the narco-states than in other states as is the level of perceived corruption in the justice system and the armed forces. Notable here is the perception of the seriousness of the problems of corruption at the local area. With the exception of Durango, respondents in the narco-states expressed a much greater concern about corruption than their counterparts in other parts of the country.

¹¹ Note that when asked about the reasons for not reporting crime in 2008, 39% said it was a waste of time. If this group is included with the additional 16% that expressed lack of confidence in the authorities, the 3% noting the hostility of the authorities, and the 1% expressing a fear of being extorted, this points to 59% not reporting a crime because of institutional factors (ICESI 2009).

¹² Few empirical studies have explored these questions. A cross-national study by Van Dijk links organized crime to the rule of law. "The critical factor determining the extent of organized crimes is the quality of institutions responsible for the rule of law, including competent police services and independent courts complying with standards of professional integrity" (Van Dijk 2007, 46). A similar study by Soares (2004) links the perception of corruption to the non-reporting of crime.

Data depicting changes in many of these areas tend to reinforce some of these findings. The perception of insecurity, for instance, has clearly deteriorated more in the narco-states over the four year period than in other states even though the level of crime victimization fell slightly in four of the six cases. In terms of impunity, only Baja California and Chihuahua registered an increase in the level of impunity above the average for other states. Notably, the percentage of respondents who felt that corruption had increased during the prior year at the national and local levels tended to be greater in the narco-states. In three of the six states, the proportion sensing an increase in corruption at the national level surpassed the average for the other states, while the proportion sensing an increase at the state level was higher in all cases save Chihuahua.

Though only exploratory, the data suggest two general conclusions. First, respondents in the states suffering higher levels of drug-related violence and the presence of the military in response do not seem to significantly suffer higher levels of crime, weaker rule of law, or more corruption than their fellow nationals in other states. There does seem to be a slightly greater sense of insecurity in these states -- that has climbed in recent years -- and a tendency to consider corruption at the local level a more serious problem and a problem that has grown worse. Second, the data point to a relatively wide variation among the narco-states themselves. With the possible exception of the perception of corruption among the institutions, within-group differences seemed to be greater than across-group differences. The state of Guerrero, for instance, scored particularly poor in terms of the rule of law, but exhibited fewer crime victims. Durango suffered lower levels of corruption and tended to consider it less of a problem than the other narco states.

Conclusion

Mexico and its struggling democracy currently face a triple threat posed by drug trafficking, drug-related corruption, and drug-related violence. The complex links between these three forces seriously complicate enforcement, while also raising questions as to whether the cure may in fact be more toxic than the disease. In many ways, as Calderon notes, it is virtually impossible to assert the law or even legal force against criminals if law enforcement officials work for and on behalf of the criminals (corruption – state capture). This makes strengthening legal institutions and the rule of law a requisite first step (see Ackerman 2010). Yet enforcement against both DTOs and their corrupt allies inside the state seem only to increase the level of

violence and the corruption. Such linkages, moreover, lead many to believe that Mexico is suffering more from the consequences of the violence and the corruption, than the drug trade itself. Rather than fighting drug trafficking per se, it might be more appealing to delink it from violence and insulate the drug-related corruption.

Despite common perceptions, the current review shows that drug-trafficking, drug-related corruption and drug-related violence are not always linked, neither theoretically, or in Mexico's own experience. Yet political and economic changes over the past two decades have inadvertently altered the relationship among these forces. The state has suffered an erosion of centralized control and a weakening of the informal institutions that helped keep drug-trafficking and violence in check, while DTOs have grown stronger, richer, and more violent. Above all, this has altered the nature of the corruption and forced the state into a two-front war against the DTOs and against itself.

Part of a larger research project exploring the relationship between societal and state illegalities, the current paper also compares that states suffering the bulk of the drug-related violence to other states. Again despite the common assumption linking the three variables, the data reveal that these states are not necessarily more corrupt than other states, nor are they more likely to suffer rule of law problems. Though merely suggestive, the data tend to find that the perception of corruption pre-dates the increasing drug-related violence, but may be growing worse as a result.

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Table 1. Types of Drug-related Corruption

<p>1. Bribery form</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payoffs to police to prevent the enforcement of the law – this includes payoffs to ensure acquiescence (passive), payoffs to acquire information about law enforcement operations (active) • Payoffs to police for selective enforcement against rivals • Payoffs to enter law enforcement (Shelley 2001, 216) • Payoffs to prosecutors to prevent prosecution or judges to secure a favorable outcome • Payoffs to prison officials to enjoy certain benefits while in prison, including the operation of the business • Payoffs beyond the criminal justice system into executive and legislative areas. Includes bribes to officials influencing policy or contributions to campaigns to influence elections. • Payoffs at the societal level to press to ensure favorable coverage or banking officials for money laundering 	<p>2. Extortion form</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police demanding payment in return for the non-enforcement of the law, or for insider information about law enforcement activities. • Officials demand payments in return for strikes against rivals or competitors • Officials demand payments to enter the ranks • Prosecutors or judges demand payments in return for not prosecuting or a favorable ruling • Prison officials demand payments • Public officials demand payments in return for favorable policy decisions or to influence law enforcement • Members of the press or business demand payments in return for services
<p>3. Blurring of the Boundaries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The resell of confiscated contraband by officials • Revolving door – former agents begin to work for DTOs – Andreas (1998) cites an internal report from Gobernacion in 1995 that states about 900 armed criminal bands in the country of which more than 50% were made up of current or former law enforcement agents.
<p>4. Peripheral Corruption</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payoffs (or demand for payoffs) within law enforcement agencies, includes competition to be assigned key posts. Mario Ruiz Massieu, the top anti-drug prosecutor under Salinas in 1994, was reportedly paid as much as \$1 million by prosecutors and police commanders to be assigned profitable posts along the border and major drug areas (Andreas 1998, 163).

Table 2. State-level Comparisons

State	Crime/Insecurity		Rule of Law		Corruption					
	Crime Victim ¹³ 2008	In-security ¹⁴ 2008	Impunity ¹⁵ 2008	IECDES-CA ¹⁶	Bribes ¹⁷ 2007	Problem ¹⁸ 2007	Gov't ¹⁹ (1to10)	Justice ⁷ (1to10)	Armed Forces ⁷ (1to10)	Police ⁷ (1to10)
Baja Cal.	15	76	76	70	8.8	45.4	8.43	7.85	6.51	8.94
Chihuahua	14	83	78	62.2	8.7	46.5	8.58	8.03	6.98	8.75
Durango	7	75	72	43.8	6.5	38.4	8.64	8.38	6.55	9.02
Guerrero	7	71	90	6.4	8.0	65.7	8.12	7.67	6.03	8.46
Michoacan	13	71	84	24.8	5.7	61.8	8.77	7.73	6.10	8.70
Sinaloa	8	67	80	47.9	8.1	65.6	8.71	7.94	6.70	8.86
Avg. Narco States	10.7	73.8	80	42.52	7.63	53.9	8.56	7.89	6.48	8.77
Avg. Other states	10.3	55.5	83	46.43	8.05	42.8	8.54	8.06	6.51	8.70

Changes

State	Crime and Insecurity		Rule of Law	Corruption		
	Crime Victim ¹ 2004-08	Insecurity ² 2004-08	Impunity ³ 2004-08	Bribes ⁵ 2001-07	More ²⁰ (national)	More (state)
Baja Cal.	-5	+14	+12	+3.1	49.8	50.3
Chihuahua	+3	+26	+9	+3.2	39.6	29.9
Durango	-2	+35	-9	-2.4	39.1	36.5
Guerrero	-1	+27	-1	-5.4	49.9	37.9
Michoacan	+4	+22	-2	-4.6	40.8	36.9
Sinaloa	-6	-6	0	+0.3	50.7	41.7
Avg. Narco States	-1.1	+19.6	+1.5	-0.6	45.0	38.9
Avg. Other states	+0.6	+11.1	+6.4	+0.3	42.6	34.4

¹³ Crime victim. Percentage of adults victimized by crime in 2008 (ENSI-6) (no data for Tamaulipas and Tlaxala)

¹⁴ Insecurity. Percentage who consider their state unsafe (ENSI-6) (no data for Tamaulipas and Tlaxala).

¹⁵ Impunity. Percentage who did not report a crime plus cases where though reported, no investigation was initiated (note that in 2008, 78% failed to report, while another 7% did not lead to an investigation (ENSI-6) (no data for Tamaulipas and Tlaxala).

¹⁶ IECDESCA. State Index of Fulfillment of Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (Indice Estatal de Cumplimiento de los Derechos Economicos, Sociales, Culturales y Ambientales) (CNDH 2007).

¹⁷ Bribes. INCBG (Index of Corruption and Good Government). Measure of actual participation in corruption based on reported payment of bribe to obtain a series of public services (ENCBG 2001, 2007. Encuesta Nacional de Corrupcion y Buen Gobierno 2001, 2007, Transparencia Mexicana).

¹⁸ Problem. Percentage of respondents who when asked “How serious is the problem of corruption in your locality” responded “Very serious.” (ENCB 2007).

¹⁹ Respondents are asked to rank the level of corruption within (the government, the justice system, the armed forces, and the police) on a scale of 1 (not corrupt) to 10 (corrupt). (ENCB 2007).

²⁰ Changes in corruption. Percentage of respondents who when asked “In comparison to a year ago, is there more, less or the same amount of corruption in the (country/state)” selected the response “more” (ENCB 2007).