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Capstone: Will Violence from the Mexican Drug Cartels Continue to Spill Over Into American Cities?

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“Will violence from the Mexican drug cartels continue to spill over into American cities?”

**Part I:**

Introduction

Theory of Drug Cartels

History of the Drug Cartels within Mexico

Mexican Cartels

Recent Innovations within the Mexican/American Drug Trade

**Part II:**

History of the Drug Trade within America

Theory of Spillover Violence

Spillover Violence within America

Research Question

Thesis

**Part III:**

Spillover Violence: Case Study

The Colombian Example

Mexican Law Enforcement: Practices

American Law Enforcement: Practices

Conclusions

## **Part I:**

### **Introduction**

The drug trade in both America and Mexico has a long history. Mexico is both a major drug supplying and transit country<sup>i</sup> while the U.S. is a net receiver and the biggest drug market in the world.<sup>ii</sup> Mexico is a major producer and supplier of heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana, and a major transit country for cocaine.<sup>iii</sup> Drugs can be easily moved across the 2,000 mile long border through the thousands of vehicles which cross the border every day, for legitimate and illegitimate reasons.<sup>iv</sup> Drugs then move throughout the country in a well-established network. An estimated 90% of the cocaine in the US passes through Mexico.<sup>v</sup> 85% of methamphetamine also comes from Mexico, and 70% of heroin in the US does as well.<sup>vi</sup>

The illegal drug trade costs America an estimated 70 billion dollars per year, while netting Mexican traffickers an estimated 25 billion.<sup>vii</sup> Addiction to drugs ravages communities and destroys futures. The ‘War on Drugs’ was first declared in 1969, yet drugs continue to pour over the border.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Theoretical Background**

A significant portion of the Mexican economy is involved in the drug trade. A 1998 estimate put the number of people earning their living growing drug crops at 200,000-300,000.<sup>ix</sup> This does not include the number of people in related occupations that also make money from the drug trade, or the number of corrupt officials who also benefit from the drug traffickers.<sup>x</sup> An estimate from 2001 guessed that profits from the drug trade amounted

to at least 6% of the Mexican GNP.<sup>xi</sup> 20% of Mexico's exports to the US are related to the drug trade.<sup>xii</sup>

The 'Resource Curse' helps explain some aspects of the Mexican situation. Corruption goes hand in hand with the drug trade in Mexico. Due to Mexico's determined efforts to halt the drug trade, officials within law enforcement cannot be entirely bypassed – they must be bought.<sup>xiii</sup> Ashley-Louise Bybee argues that even an illicit or non-natural resource can give a country the "Resource Curse."<sup>xiv</sup> Although Mexico does not display all symptoms of the Resource Curse, the mass corruption of officials is certainly related to the drug trade.

The term "Resource Curse" was first coined in 1993. It explains why states with abundant natural resources can actually be harmed by their resources, rather than benefitted.<sup>xv</sup> These states with natural resources tend to perform badly in economic terms.<sup>xvi</sup> One only needs to look at the disparity between the economies resource-rich Africa and resource-poor East Asia to see the origin of the theory.<sup>xvii</sup>

When the resource in question is drugs, criminal groups are perfectly suited to take advantage of the availability. Governments cannot deal openly with drugs, unless they are willing to risk international resistance.<sup>xviii</sup> The abundance of the resource – in this case, illicit drugs – means that drug suppliers have virtually limitless amounts of non-state controlled money to bribe officials. As in West Africa, the poverty and low salaries of the populace make bribing them relatively cheap.<sup>xix</sup> It is more accurate to say that the 'location curse,' rather than the resource curse, applies to Mexico: Mexico has the misfortune to be

located between drug producers and drug consumers.<sup>xx</sup> This makes it extremely vulnerable to the drug trade.

Mexico can also be classified as a weak state.<sup>xxi</sup> Weak states can be defined as states that do not fulfill three critical functions: security, providing basic services, and protection of essential civil rights or freedoms.<sup>xxii</sup> Weak states are deficient in one or two of these areas, as opposed to failed states, who are unable to serve their citizens in any of these areas.<sup>xxiii</sup> Mexico has “a history of authoritarian domination. . . [and is also] a deeply stratified nation with high unemployment, low real wages, systematic corruption, and extensive racial discrimination.”<sup>xxiv</sup> The high status of the drug cartels and the widespread nature of the violence show that the Mexican government does not have a monopoly on the use of force, one characteristic of a weak state. Dozens of journalists, police officers, prosecutors, and politicians have been killed by cartel violence.<sup>xxv</sup> Furthermore, the private security industry has boomed in past years, showing that the powerful cannot or choose not to rely simply on police protection.<sup>xxvi</sup> The state does provide many basic services to its citizens, but there is still high unemployment. Finally, although the Mexican government is elected democratically, it is undermined in many ways by the cartels’ authority over certain geographical areas. The border regions are virtually autonomous zones, controlled by the cartels rather than the state.<sup>xxvii</sup> It therefore makes sense that weak states are more vulnerable to nonstate actors like narcotics traffickers and dealers creating underground economies.<sup>xxviii</sup> Their lack of control over their own country leaves a vacuum for non-state actors. Furthermore, the conflicts within weak states are more likely to spill over into neighboring nations.<sup>xxix</sup> The ‘weak state’ theory helps explain the conflicts currently experienced by Mexico.

Theories of organized crime, black markets, and ‘shadow economies’ may fit the Mexican model most accurately. The Mexican drug organizations fit many characteristics of organized criminal groups, including being organized into small ‘cells’.<sup>xxx</sup> Organized crime inherently begets violence because there are no other outlets to settle disputes that cannot be agreed upon.<sup>xxxi</sup> It has been said that “the state is simply the most successful form of organized crime,” as both nations and organized criminal groups use force to protect markets and routes, to maintain internal order, and to expand their market share.<sup>xxxii</sup>

‘Black globalization’ also contributes to the Mexican problems. Black globalization “creates a neo-feudal power structure in which power flows to non-state actors controlling large slums.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> These geographical areas, which are not controlled by law enforcement, then become the stations of the illicit economy. To support this economy, groups create a massive structure of criminal infrastructure.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

### **Cartel Overview**

The drug cartels in Mexico are a system of extremely well-financed groups, constantly engaged in warfare against each other and the government.<sup>xxxv</sup> They employ private paramilitary groups, bribe officials and police across Mexico, and kill discriminately and indiscriminately.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Each cartel distributes at least several different drugs throughout the United States.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Until the 1980s and 90s, the small-scale drug trade was largely controlled by Mexico’s Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).<sup>xxxviii</sup> Mexico was then organized in a single-party system, where the elites used organized crime to keep their positions, while maintaining plausible deniability.<sup>xxxix</sup> The PRI regulated the drug trade by protecting the

kingpens, and deciding which group had access to the *plazas*. *Plazas* is a “hierarchical system of payoffs and kickbacks to government officials for the license to commit crime.”<sup>xli</sup> Under these rules, the drug trafficker bought a ‘license’ from a local power figure to smuggle drugs.<sup>xlii</sup> This local figure would then pass bribes up the ladder to their patrons.<sup>xlii</sup> Basically, certain specific traffickers became ‘plaza holders,’ who held the exclusive right to traffic drugs through a specific geographical area. In return for this monopoly, the cartels delivered bribes and agreed to keep inter-cartel violence to a minimum.<sup>xliii</sup> However, when the PRI lost power, the system collapsed and cartels began battling for control over the drug-smuggling plazas.<sup>xliv</sup>

The status of Mexican drug cartels has risen substantially over the past decade in recognition of the fall of Colombia’s Cali and Medellin cartels.<sup>xlv</sup> In the 1980s, Mexican traffickers were mostly involved in smuggling the drugs across the US-Mexican border. Colombian cartels were responsible for both providing the drugs and transporting them within the United States.<sup>xlvi</sup> After the fall of the Colombian cartels, Mexican traffickers began taking over the business of distribution. Their profits then increased, as they cut out the money that would have gone to the middlemen.<sup>xlvii</sup> Furthermore, the success of US interdiction efforts in the Caribbean also benefitted the Mexican cartels, as they became the main way-station for entry into the United States.<sup>xlviii</sup>

This all occurred through a strategic alliance between the Colombian cartels and a Mexican man, Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, who was already a well-known drug smuggler who controlled much of the trade along the border.<sup>xlix</sup> Felix Gallardo, however, was more interested in negotiation and organization of the drug trade than violence.<sup>1</sup> Even while he

was in prison, he ordered his lieutenants to divide up the drug territories and corridors amongst themselves, avoid violence, and concentrate on making a profit.<sup>li</sup>

Unfortunately, the drug cartels did not play by Felix Gallardo's rules for long. They began the inter-cartel violence, trying to wipe out their opposition so they could control their smuggling corridors.<sup>lii</sup> Their use of violence also became more public and bloody.<sup>liii</sup> Furthermore, when the leader of a group was imprisoned or killed, there was usually a battle to find a successor. Ironically, the determination of the U.S. and Mexican governments to capture the leaders of cartels actually increased the intra-cartel violence, as there were more and more battles to see who would be the successor.<sup>liv</sup> Furthermore, other cartels may sense weakness when a cartel's leader is captured, and try and take over.<sup>lv</sup>

Some have also argued that Mexico's culture of *machismo* plays a role in the violence between the different cartels.<sup>lvi</sup> They argue that the inter-cartel rivalries went beyond simple economic calculations into personal feuds and vendettas.<sup>lvii</sup> Narco-ballads, or popular music about the cartels and drug trade, fuel the rivalry by romanticizing the violence and creating legendary 'heroes.'<sup>lviii</sup>

Cartels operate with much more impunity within Mexico's borders, compared to the United States.<sup>lix</sup> They engage in violence both within the group, and against other organized criminal groups.<sup>lx</sup> Furthermore, their incredible wealth invites corruption and bribery of both American and Mexican officials.<sup>lxi</sup> The risk of being captured is greatest on the border; hence, the bribery of officials, evasion, and other means of concealment mostly take place on the border.<sup>lxii</sup> The centralized nature of Mexican law enforcement invites more corruption. If one was transporting drugs long-distance throughout the United States,

one would have to bribe every individual local police department. In Mexico, in contrast, one could bribe a single military or police force.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Traditionally, Mexican groups have avoided using excessive violence within the United States, to avoid drawing attention to themselves.<sup>lxiv</sup> They avoided territoriality and intra-group violence, and have been known to collaborate with Colombian and other groups.<sup>lxv</sup>

A typical trafficking group, or cartel, boasts 200 plus members in the Mexico base, plus hundreds more scattered throughout the US.<sup>lxvi</sup> These groups take in tens of billions of dollars per year.<sup>lxvii</sup> Their identities are typically known by United States law enforcement personnel.<sup>lxviii</sup> However, they are excellent at using technology to mask their locations. The cartel members in the U.S. typically rely on pre-paid cell phones because no identification is required to get them.<sup>lxix</sup> They get new phones every thirty days, or whenever a group member is arrested or captured. Many higher-level traffickers have multiple cell phones, using one to speak to members of the cartel, and another to talk to customers and low-level dealers.<sup>lxx</sup>

### **Most Prominent Mexican Cartels**

The four largest cartels in Mexico are the Gulf Cartel, the Juárez cartel, the Tijuana cartel and the Sinaloa Federation Cartel.<sup>lxxi</sup> A new cartel, 'La Familia,' has also begun competing with the others for power.

#### **Gulf Cartel**

The Gulf Cartel is based in Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, Miguel Aleman, and Reynosa, and is involved in a coalition with the Tijuana cartel.<sup>lxxii</sup> However, it is also found all across Mexico. Their presence and violent activities exceed any other cartel in Mexico.<sup>lxxiii</sup> The Gulf Cartel first became prominent in the 1990s, when their then-leader Juan Garcia Abrego made a deal with the Colombians to traffic drugs into the U.S.<sup>lxxiv</sup> They are the principal enemy of the Sinaloa Cartel.<sup>lxxv</sup> After the capture and subsequent extradition of the Gulf's leader, the Sinaloa Cartel attempted to challenge the Gulf cartel for territory.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

The Gulf cartel's "enforcers" are known as the Zetas. They are largely composed of "anti-drug military personnel who defected to the traffickers."<sup>lxxvii</sup> The Zetas are the most feared sicarios (hit men), or paramilitary groups in Mexico because they are perfectly willing to kill law enforcement personnel.<sup>lxxviii</sup> Their current leader is Heriberto Lazcano-Lazcano, who is also the security chief for the Gulf cartel.<sup>lxxix</sup> The Zetas not only protect the Gulf Cartel, but "also engage in kidnapping, trafficking arms, money-laundering, drug-dealing, and collecting payments for the cartel."<sup>lxxx</sup> There are also many people affiliated with the Zetas who act as look-outs and informers.<sup>lxxxi</sup>

The Zetas are also known for their high-tech weaponry, including machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs).<sup>lxxxii</sup> Their weapons are far superior to those of local police forces.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> The group also is heavily involved in the typical Mexican corruption. In June 2005, local police being paid by the Zetas took up arms against the Mexican army troops sent to Nuevo Laredo to combat the drug trade.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> While the Zetas have formerly been loyal to the Gulf cartel, some experts argue that they are now moving to split off from the cartel to form their own group.<sup>lxxxv</sup>

The Gulf cartel typically moves drugs from Nuevo Laredo to Laredo, Texas, then up route 35 to the rest of the United States.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> They operate three extremely profitable drug corridors: Nuevo Laredo/Laredo, Reynosa/McAllen, and Matamoros/Brownsville.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Recently, there have also been rumors that they have begun stockpiling weapons within the US.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> The 2009 However, the Gulf cartel has been the target of law enforcement groups throughout 2008, and now is less powerful than it used to be.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

### **Juárez Cartel**

Amado Carrillo Fuentes consolidated the Juárez cartel.<sup>xc</sup> Juárez has erupted as a scene of violence since the beginning of 2008, when the Sinaloa cartel began a power play on Juárez's turf.<sup>xcii</sup> Juárez hosts an excellent plaza, or drug smuggling corridor, through El Paso.<sup>xcii</sup>

The Barrio-Azteca cartel began in El Paso, and is affiliated with the Juárez cartel.<sup>xciii</sup> They were first formed in an El Paso prison in the 1980s.<sup>xciv</sup>

### **Sinaloa Cartel, or the 'Federation'**

Culiacán is the capital of the Sinaloa state and the center of Mexico's drug trade.<sup>xcv</sup> They are involved in meth. They are based in Baja, Sinaloa, Durango, Sonora, and Chihuahua.<sup>xcvi</sup> The Federation is a coalition of the Sinaloa cartel and other local groups.<sup>xcvii</sup> They were briefly allied with the Juárez cartel, but the alliance has since been broken off.<sup>xcviii</sup>

Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman is the leader of the Sinaloa cartel. Although briefly imprisoned, he escaped in 2001 and has eluded re-capture despite the price on his head.<sup>xcix</sup> The cartel consolidated their power by relying on their family ties. Family relations

controlled the entire drug chain, which created very strong loyalty among group members and made it difficult for law enforcement to penetrate the group.<sup>c</sup> They also integrated themselves into the local community through buying and investing in local businesses.<sup>ci</sup>

The Sinaloa cartel initiated the practice of smuggling drugs in fire-extinguishers. They also transported drugs through tunnels dug under the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>cii</sup> Once, they controlled 66% of the cocaine coming to the U.S. However, they lost power throughout 2008 through intra-cartel warfare, and now are less of a presence.<sup>ciii</sup>

### **Tijuana Cartel**

The Tijuana Cartel was originally led by Felix Gallardo's nephews, the Arellano-Felix brothers.<sup>civ</sup> However, in 2008, the last of the brothers was captured.<sup>cv</sup> They used to be the most important group, but have declined in power as leaders have been arrested or killed.<sup>cvi</sup> This cartel has been targeted particularly by Mexican forces.<sup>cvii</sup> Intra-group competition has led to extensive violence in the Tijuana area.<sup>cviii</sup>

### **La Familia**

'La Familia' is different from the other cartels in several significant ways. First, they originally were created as a vigilante group against kidnappers and drug traffickers.<sup>cix</sup> However, they began adopting the methods of their opponents until they evolved into a cartel involved in smuggling cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamine.<sup>cx</sup> They are also known for their cult-like atmosphere and reverence towards their leader, Nazario Moreno Gonzalez.<sup>cx</sup>

### Recent Innovations in the Drug Trade

In the past, traffickers had operated primarily on the West coast. However, they have now extended their operations into the Midwest and East coast.<sup>cxii</sup> Unlike many organized criminal groups, Mexican drug cartels work almost exclusively in the drug trade, with a great deal of professionalism.<sup>cxiii</sup>

Despite the Mexican president's actions to curb cartel violence, which will be discussed later in this paper, cartel violence has risen in Mexico since 2002.<sup>cxiv</sup> In 2008, drug-related murders doubled from the year before, at 6,200.<sup>cxv</sup> In 2005, drug-related violence soured in Mexico.<sup>cxvi</sup> Ciudad Juárez, across the border from El Paso, is one of the most violent cities.<sup>cxvii</sup>

Traffickers have also increasingly been involved in inter-group violence. In April 2008, in Nuevo Laredo, the Gulf Cartel's Zetas actually hung a banner across a major street advertising for recruits.<sup>cxviii</sup> The cartels' executions of over 24 journalists mean that many Mexican journalists will no longer cover the cartels.<sup>cxix</sup> Three police chiefs sought asylum in the US in May 2008 because of cartel threats against them and their families.<sup>cxx</sup>

Violence can be extremely gruesome, and is designed to make examples of the victims. Beheadings and torture are common.<sup>cxxi</sup> Much of the violence is confined to northern Mexico, in cities like Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, and Nuevo Laredo.<sup>cxxii</sup> However, violence now extends within America, as smugglers have increasingly been firing on American law enforcement border patrols.<sup>cxxiii</sup>

## Part II:

### History of the Drug Trade Within America

Initially, the drug trade into America was controlled by Colombian cartels.<sup>cxxiv</sup> However, the success of US efforts to close the entry into Florida via the Caribbean meant that Mexico became the best location for transport into the US.<sup>cxxv</sup>

Globalization and the increase in trade from NAFTA lent greater opportunities for concealment to the cartels, so it could be hidden within legitimate trade.<sup>cxxvi</sup> Many more cars and trucks started going across the border, creating more opportunities to hide drugs and weapons within the vehicles.

George Iknadosian, the owner of X-Caliber Guns, is going on trial on charges that he knowingly sold guns to the Sinaloa cartel.<sup>cxxvii</sup> Moving the guns into Mexico was relatively easy. Cars going into Mexico are rarely searched, drug laws are much more lax within America, and there are thousands of licensed gun dealers near the border.<sup>cxxviii</sup> Americans with clean criminal records find it relatively easy to purchase several weapons at a time, then transport them across the border.<sup>cxxix</sup>

The cartels are responsible for the trafficking of cocaine and heroin, as well as the manufacture of marijuana and methamphetamine.<sup>cxxx</sup> Mexican cartels have distribution capabilities in at least 230 American cities.<sup>cxxxi</sup> This distribution relies on the network of Hispanic people in the U.S.<sup>cxxxii</sup> The drug traffickers can be hidden within the legitimate population. Furthermore, the network of families means that the cartels can threaten relatives of drug couriers if they develop cold feet.<sup>cxxxiii</sup> Finally, traffickers often choose to hide within areas of illegal immigrants, who are guaranteed not to inform the police about the drug trafficking because of their own illegal status.<sup>cxxxiv</sup>

West Texas is one of the most important areas of drug trafficking from Mexico to the US.<sup>cxxxv</sup> The Justice Department's National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) believes that six cartels operate in this area.<sup>cxxxvi</sup> Some of the drugs remain in the area, while others are moved on to as far north as Michigan, as well as to the south and eastern coast.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> Goods cross the river and then are hidden in 'safe houses,' before being transported onwards.<sup>cxxxviii</sup> The Dallas-Fort Worth Airport is one of the U.S.' busiest airports. Traffickers will sometimes use non-commercial aircraft to smuggle drugs, as passengers and goods above these planes receive less scrutiny than those people and items on commercial aircraft.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

### Cocaine

The 2009 National Drug Threat Assessment found that cocaine was the biggest drug threat to the United States, because the adverse impact of powder and crack cocaine was the greatest of any illegal drugs.<sup>cxl</sup> Both national and local law enforcement agencies blamed cocaine as the biggest contributor to violent and property crime, which seems to be supported by statistical data.<sup>cxli</sup>

Recently, cocaine trafficking has shifted from West Texas to California, as border control within Texas has been tightened.<sup>cxlii</sup> Overall, there has been less cocaine available within U.S. markets compared to 2004 and 2005, which DEA officials attribute to increased American efforts to seize cocaine, as well as the inter-cartel warfare.<sup>cxliii</sup>

A recent indictment handed down in Chicago shows how cocaine distribution takes place within the United States. 15 defendants were accused of distributing cocaine throughout the Chicago area, under the orders of La Familia.<sup>cxliv</sup> La Familia gave the local

distributors the cocaine and then were paid once the cocaine was sold, which indicates high levels of trust and coordination between the two groups.<sup>cxlv</sup> The Mexico-based group was involved all the way down to the local level within the U.S.

### **Methamphetamine**

Methamphetamine is a “synthetic stimulant, which can be smoked, inhaled, or injected.”<sup>cxlvi</sup> It is also known as crystal, crank, meth, and speed. It can be difficult to eliminate methamphetamine, because it isn’t a crop and vulnerable to crop eradication, and it also cannot be traced.<sup>cxlvii</sup> The ingredients can be obtained with some degree of ease, it requires few workers, and can be done in a small location.<sup>cxlviii</sup> Furthermore, it is sold inexpensively on the street and has a long ‘high.’<sup>cxlix</sup> To sum up, it has a very small footprint, and is fairly cost-effective for addicts.

Purity levels of meth can range from 10% – 100%.<sup>cl</sup> It can become addictive quickly because it impairs the brain’s ability to manufacture dopamine, which is involved in the feeling of happiness.<sup>cli</sup> Addicts have described the sensation of meth as “feeling like [he or she] was Superman.”<sup>clii</sup> Withdrawal, known as ‘crashing,’ causes intense feelings of sadness and depression. Prolonged use of the drug can cause severe brain damage, anxiety, insomnia, paranoia, hallucinations, and a sensation of ‘crank bites,’ or the feeling that bugs are crawling under one’s skin.<sup>cliii</sup> Meth use is also linked to increased rate of HIV and hepatitis, as well as other drug and alcohol use.<sup>cliv</sup>

Mexican cartels control an estimated 80% of the meth on American streets.<sup>clv</sup> Mexico’s consumption of cold medicines, which can be used to make meth, has increased

dramatically in the past several years. Although restrictions on this have been tightened, it is suspected that cold medicine is still being imported through corrupt Mexican ports.<sup>clvi</sup>

Furthermore, Mexican groups began making methamphetamine in laboratories in Mexico and California, then trafficking these drugs to cities like Boise, Idaho.<sup>clvii</sup> Upon taking over the drug networks founded by the Colombians, Mexican traffickers began selling meth at a reduced price, or even for free, to increase demand.<sup>clviii</sup> Once they had gained a market, they began ‘cutting’ the drugs, or mixing them with another ingredient that adds bulk but cuts the purity. However, this backfired, because people began making their own meth in ‘mom and pop’ labs.<sup>clix</sup> This was then curtailed when Iowa restricted the sale of pseudoephedrine, so Mexican traffickers were able to regain control of the market with super-labs.<sup>clx</sup>

The example of Muscatine, Iowa shows how Mexican methamphetamine can penetrate far from the border.<sup>clxi</sup> Although Muscatine is a small community, it is located along the Mississippi River and is within a 5 hour drive of many major cities within the US, including Chicago, Kansas City, and Detroit.<sup>clxii</sup> It is located near several major freeways, and its low population and rural location mean that the law enforcement presence is minimal.<sup>clxiii</sup> Therefore, Muscatine became a major drug distribution center.<sup>clxiv</sup>

## **Marijuana**

Marijuana in the U.S. is both grown domestically by cartel groups and smuggled over the border.<sup>clxv</sup> Although the flow of cocaine seemed to slow at this time, the smuggling of marijuana in 2007 remained the same, or may even have increased.<sup>clxvi</sup> U.S. officials

speculate that this occurred because of widespread eradication of both indoor and outdoor cultivation of marijuana within the U.S.<sup>clxvii</sup>

### **Theory of Spillover Violence**

The ‘spillover effect’ has been seen in many different arenas, from economics to political science. But there is very little academic research available on the topic of spillover violence. That which is available concentrates on several different reasons for the violence, none of which is applicable to the U.S.-Mexican example. Violence may occur because of a flood of refugees into the neighboring country, which is not the case with the U.S. and Mexico. Although there have been a few requests for asylum, and illegal immigration is a constant issue, it is not because of the drug wars.<sup>clxviii</sup> Another theory focuses on ethnicity: a ethnic group may want to take revenge for poor treatment in a neighboring country, or be inspired by a successful uprising, which also does not apply in the U.S. case.<sup>clxix</sup> This theory focuses on the idea of ‘bad neighborhoods’: a state surrounded by ethnic conflicts will be more likely to have an ethnic conflict of its own.<sup>clxx</sup> In short, the area of spillover violence has not yet been fully explored.

### **Recent History of Spillover Violence**

Of course, Americans who travel to Mexico have been affected by the surge of violence there in the past seven years. Americans have been killed in Mexico, both as accidental victims or innocent bystanders, or because they were involved in the drug trade. They have also been kidnapped.<sup>clxxi</sup> However, now violence has begun to take place within

the borders of the U.S. John Leech, the acting director of the Office of Counternarcotics Enforcement at the Department of Homeland Security, has said “as violence south of the border continues to grow, we have begun to see disturbing increases in kidnappings, gang activity, illicit smuggling, and other drug related crimes. . . on the northern side of the border.”<sup>clxxii</sup>

Spillover within the US first began in Texan border cities like Laredo and El Paso.<sup>clxxiii</sup> In 2005, John P. Walters, then director of the Office of National Control Policy, said “The killing of rival traffickers is already spilling across the border. Witnesses are being killed. We do not think the border is a shield.”<sup>clxxiv</sup>

Furthermore, members of cartels no longer run when confronted with American law enforcement. A 2006 report from the House Homeland Security committee found that smugglers now fired on US Border Patrol agents with automatic weapons, instead of running.<sup>clxxv</sup>

From 2006-2009, seven men have been gunned down in Laredo by the Zetas.<sup>clxxvi</sup> In 2008, U.S. officials obtained a ‘hit list’ of targets living in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and El Paso, Texas.<sup>clxxvii</sup>

Violence gradually spread north to Phoenix, 185 miles north of the border.<sup>clxxviii</sup> Phoenix has now replaced Miami as the primary gateway to illegal drugs entering the U.S.<sup>clxxix</sup> There were 366 kidnappings in 2008, compared to just 96 in 1998.<sup>clxxx</sup> In one incident, a group of Mexican nationals dressed in Phoenix police uniforms stormed a drug dealer’s house and killed him.<sup>clxxxi</sup> In 2008, a Las Vegas child was kidnapped because a relative allegedly owed money to a cartel.<sup>clxxxii</sup> These incidents show that spillover violence is on the rise.

Furthermore, cartels have begun increased recruitment of Americans. Rosalio Reta, of Laredo, Texas, was only 13 when he was recruited by the Zetas.<sup>clxxxiii</sup> He was responsible for killing on behalf of the Gulf Cartel, which was battling the Sinaloa cartel for control of the Interstate 35 drug corridor.<sup>clxxxiv</sup>

Ciudad Juárez is one of the most dangerous cities in Mexico.<sup>clxxxv</sup> Drug traffickers, in February 2009, demanded and got Chief Roberto Orduña Cruz's resignation, after murdering six members of the law enforcement system.<sup>clxxxvi</sup> Rival cartels are currently battling to control Juárez.<sup>clxxxvii</sup> Juárez business owners began having to pay upwards of \$2000 per month in protection money, or face Molotov cocktails.<sup>clxxxviii</sup>

However, El Paso, Juárez's sister city just across the border, is still a safe area. Other than Honolulu, El Paso is the safest city of its size in America.<sup>clxxxix</sup> In 2008, El Paso saw roughly 15 murders, while Ciudad Juárez had more than 1300.<sup>cxc</sup> Residents of El Paso have begun ceasing their trips into Juárez, which used to be a regular part of daily life. Many residents hold dual passports, and have close ties to both cities.<sup>cxc</sup> Every day, 20,000 people cross one of the five bridges connecting the two areas.<sup>cxcii</sup>

Those involved in the banking industry in El Paso may notice an interesting incongruity: El Paso is a poor area, but boast many large cash transactions – a sign of drug money being present.<sup>cxciii</sup> Some cartels have been abducting people across the American border, although the actual violence generally takes place on the Mexican side.<sup>cxciv</sup> However, the most important point may be the sheer concentration of American law enforcement in El Paso. El Paso is full of representatives from many American governmental agencies: DEA, FBI, ICE, and Customs and Border Enforcement, to name just a few.<sup>cxcv</sup> There is simply no room for Mexican cartels to operate.

### **Research Question**

Will violence from the Mexican drug cartels continue to spill over into American cities?

### **Thesis**

Although the outcome is by no means certain, violence will continue to spillover to American cities if the current law enforcement practices are not drastically changed.

## **Part III:**

### **Spillover Violence: Case Study**

The example of Colombia is the best comparison to the current situation in Mexico. As in the current situation, lawmakers and the press drew attention to the fear of spillover violence before it had become very significant.<sup>cxcvi</sup> Furthermore, the specific examples of cross-border violence were very much the same: increased kidnappings within the second country, the smuggling of weapons, and hostage-taking.<sup>cxcvii</sup> Each of these has been seen in the Mexican example. Leaders have also worried about the spread of the drug traffickers. As Colombia becomes too difficult to operate within, they point out that their countries would make ideal places for the traffickers to move to.<sup>cxcviii</sup>

Although the drug trafficking organizations of Colombia have different motivations than those in Mexico, they increasingly rely on criminal activity for their funding.<sup>cxcix</sup> Like

Mexico, border areas have been focused on smuggling for years, and are under little control from the central government.<sup>cc</sup>

Colombia shares a border with five nations: Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. In the case of Venezuela, spillover led to refugees fleeing to Venezuela and increased drug trafficking across the border.<sup>cci</sup> The Chavez administration has complicated this issue, as there has been little contact with American officials regarding the issues.<sup>ccii</sup> Ecuador, as a country that neither produced nor consumed drugs, at first had little fear of spillover violence.<sup>cciii</sup> However, as the conflict in Colombia escalated, both paramilitary groups and refugees began crossing the border into Ecuador.<sup>cciv</sup>

Panama in this case may be compared to the U.S. Panama at first tried to avoid the problem of the violence, worrying that it would harm them in the eyes of the global community, especially the U.S.<sup>ccv</sup> However, they too began to face problems of violence. Sensing weakness, the paramilitary groups moved into the border areas and engaged in inter-group violence there. Innocent citizens of Panama were caught in the crossfire.<sup>ccvi</sup> Kidnapping and assault became common. Colombian groups deposited money in Panama's banks, shipped weapons through Panama, and used Panama as a meeting place to make contacts.<sup>ccvii</sup>

### **The Colombian Example**

Plan Colombia, the inspiration for Plan Merida, has cost over five billion dollars over seven years.<sup>ccviii</sup> However, the GAO has found that cocaine production has actually increased, albeit only by a small amount, since the plan began.<sup>ccix</sup> The plan did succeed in disrupting the Medellin and Cali cartels, but the drug trade then just became

decentralized.<sup>ccx</sup> Furthermore, it has been blamed for increased violence within Ecuador and Venezuela.<sup>ccxi</sup> Plan Colombia, while well-intended, was not developed with full awareness of the probable consequences to surrounding countries.<sup>ccxii</sup>

### **Mexican Law Enforcement: Recent Practices**

Calderón's administration has focused on cracking down on drug traffickers, due in part to American encouragement.<sup>ccxiii</sup> In an effort to stem the corruption and intimidation that plagued Mexican law enforcement forces, Calderón has brought in the army to help curtail the cartels' activities.<sup>ccxiv</sup> Since the beginning of his term, he has deployed over 45,000 soldiers and thousands of federal police.<sup>ccxv</sup> However, the increased role of the military means that they are becoming susceptible to bribery from the cartels.<sup>ccxvi</sup> Corruption is a major factor throughout Mexico, and employees of the Attorney General, police chiefs, and federal police agents have all been arrested on accusations of corruption.<sup>ccxvii</sup> The payoff seems simply too good to resist – a single bribe could be more than a police officer would earn in a year.<sup>ccxviii</sup>

The Mexican government has traditionally blamed weak U.S. gun control laws for the increase in cartel violence.<sup>ccxix</sup> The Mexican government believes that as many as 2,000 guns are smuggled across the border into Mexico daily.<sup>ccxx</sup> This number may have increased since 2004, when the ban on assault weapons in the U.S. was lifted.<sup>ccxxi</sup> Many U.S. scholars and lawmakers agree that the easy availability of guns is a large contributor to the violence.<sup>ccxxii</sup>

Three Mexican cities are the major sources of the violence: Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, and Culiacán.<sup>ccxxiii</sup> President Calderón responded by inundating Ciudad Juárez with 10,800 troops until the murder rate finally began to fall.<sup>ccxxiv</sup> As in some American cities, the vast amount of government forces succeeded in stemming the violence.

But President Calderón will not have a free hand to operate forever. The Mexican public is frustrated with the slow pace of winning against the cartels and the increased amount of violence.<sup>ccxxv</sup> According to a poll in March 2009, 49% of Mexicans disapprove of how the Calderón administration is handling the drug war.<sup>ccxxvi</sup> The public may decide that they would rather deal with the drug traffickers than the violence that comes with increased enforcement.

### **American Law Enforcement: Recent Practices**

The US has attempted to crack down on methamphetamine through limiting the supplies needed to create the drug.<sup>ccxxvii</sup> These have succeeded in slowing the growth of ‘superlabs’ which can make more than 10 pounds of meth in a single cycle.<sup>ccxxviii</sup> Consequently, production has switched from laboratories within the U.S. to laboratories in Mexico.

The Merida Initiative (the ‘Plan Merida’ or ‘Plan Mexico’) began in 2008.<sup>ccxxix</sup> This is a three year long, supply-side counter-drug assistance program to assist Mexico and Latin America. The initiative was modeled on Plan Colombia, which has cost \$7 billion as of 2009 and according to some experts, has not made a noticeable difference in the drug trade.<sup>ccxxx</sup> The plan focuses on security, interdiction, and enforcement.<sup>ccxxxi</sup> It aims to use

US money and training methods to help strengthen Mexican law enforcement – a kind of ‘help them to help themselves’ plan.<sup>ccxxxii</sup> However, the Mexican government has complained that the money has been slow to arrive, and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimates that only 2% of the money promised has been spent.<sup>ccxxxiii</sup>

A popular response within the US involves ‘sealing the border,’ or stopping the ‘illegal immigration problem.’<sup>ccxxxiv</sup> However, smugglers typically just shift their operations away from the areas of enforcement.<sup>ccxxxv</sup> It is logistically impractical to imagine sealing the entire border with a fence, and summoning the hundreds of US law enforcement personnel that would be needed to guard it.<sup>ccxxxvi</sup>

One of the principal frustrations of American law enforcement is the Mexican’s lack of ability to enforce strict conditions within prisons. The leader of the Gulf Cartel, Osiel Cardenas Guillen, was arrested and imprisoned in 2003 in the La Palma prison. However, he continued to direct his cartel’s activities from prison. Finally, in 2007 he was extradited to the United States.<sup>ccxxxvii</sup>

The U.S. has established a series of High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTAs). The HIDTAs were initially established as five areas, which has since been expanded to 31.<sup>ccxxxviii</sup> Their mission is to reduce drug trafficking in the most critical areas of the country, so it cannot expand further.<sup>ccxxxix</sup>

There have also been a number of different operations focused on specific cartels, drugs, or geographical areas. The most recent, operation Coronado, has led to over 900 arrests in the past four years, as well as the seizure of millions of dollars and thousands of pounds of drugs.<sup>ccxli</sup> This operation, which has been carried out in over 19 states, focuses on stopping the drug distribution from La Familia, a group associated with the Gulf Cartel.<sup>ccxli</sup>

However, the arrests were of low-level distributors and middle-men, not the cartel's leaders. It was based on the success of Operation Xcellerator, which focused on the Sinaloa cartel, and Project Coronado, which went after the Gulf Cartel.<sup>ccxlii</sup>

Project Reckoning was a 15 month long multiagency initiative, targeting the Gulf Cartel.<sup>ccxlili</sup> Operation Dos Equis and Operation Vertigo resulted in the arrest of more than 30 cartel members, the seizure of more than \$1 million dollars in cash, and hundreds of pounds of drugs.<sup>ccxliv</sup> A second phase of the operation resulted in 40 more arrests.

## Conclusions

There is no reason to believe that spillover violence will not continue to escalate along the border. As in the example of Colombia, drug trafficking organizations and cartels will move to different locations for safety and to increase their profits. However, the U.S. has many advantages over other countries, including a lack of corruption and a transparent government and law enforcement system. Still, it is basically impossible for the U.S. to control every inch of the border. While raids and operations may eliminate the networks that distribute drugs, those networks can easily be rebuilt. Policies that work to eliminate cartel leaders only end up causing more violence in the ensuing fight for who is to be at the top. If the U.S. truly wishes to stop spillover violence, it needs to consider policy alternatives that will actually help.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Cook.  
<sup>ii</sup> Cook.  
<sup>iii</sup> Beittel 1  
<sup>iv</sup> Finckenaue 2  
<sup>v</sup> Cook.  
<sup>vi</sup> Finckenaue 3, Brands 5  
<sup>vii</sup> Brands 5  
<sup>viii</sup> Payan 1  
<sup>ix</sup> Andreas 160  
<sup>x</sup> Andreas 160  
<sup>xi</sup> Gonzalez-Ruiz 27  
<sup>xii</sup> Sullivan 3  
<sup>xiii</sup> Andreas 160  
<sup>xiv</sup> Bybee 2  
<sup>xv</sup> Bybee 3  
<sup>xvi</sup> Sachs 827  
<sup>xvii</sup> Ross 299  
<sup>xviii</sup> Cornell 753  
<sup>xix</sup> Bybee 7.  
<sup>xx</sup> Williams 326  
<sup>xxi</sup> Elkus 1  
<sup>xxii</sup> Eizenstat 3  
<sup>xxiii</sup> Eizenstat 3  
<sup>xxiv</sup> Elkus 1  
<sup>xxv</sup> Sullivan 2  
<sup>xxvi</sup> Sullivan 2  
<sup>xxvii</sup> Sullivan 2  
<sup>xxviii</sup> Eizenstat 4  
<sup>xxix</sup> Eizenstat 4  
<sup>xxx</sup> Beittel 1  
<sup>xxxi</sup> Gonzalez-Ruiz 24  
<sup>xxxii</sup> Williams 325  
<sup>xxxiii</sup> Sullivan 3  
<sup>xxxiv</sup> Sullivan 3  
<sup>xxxv</sup> Brands 5  
<sup>xxxvi</sup> Brands 5  
<sup>xxxvii</sup> Beittel 3  
<sup>xxxviii</sup> Brands 6  
<sup>xxxix</sup> Williams 326  
<sup>xl</sup> Finckenaue 8  
<sup>xli</sup> Lupsha 3  
<sup>xlii</sup> Lupsha 3  
<sup>xliii</sup> Brands 6  
<sup>xliv</sup> Brands 6  
<sup>xlvi</sup> Cook  
<sup>xlvi</sup> Finckenaue 3  
<sup>xlvi</sup> stratfor  
<sup>xlvi</sup> Brands 5

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- xlix Payan 865
  - <sup>l</sup> Payan 865
  - li Payan 865
  - lii Payan 866
  - liii Payan 866
  - liv Payan 866
  - lv Payan 867
  - lvi Williams 327
  - lvii Williams 327
  - lviii Williams 327
  - lix Finckenauer 6
  - lx Finckenauer 6
  - lxi Finckenauer 7
  - lxii Finckenauer 7
  - lxiii Finckenauer 7
  - lxiv Finckenauer 8
  - lxv Finckenauer 8
  - lxvi Finckenauer 4
  - lxvii Finckenauer 4
  - lxviii Finckenauer 4
  - lxix North Texas 12
  - lxx North Texas 12
  - lxxi Brophy 248
  - lxxii Brands 6, Carpenter 2
  - lxxiii Brophy 248
  - lxxiv Brophy 249
  - lxxv Carpenter 2
  - lxxvi Brophy 250
  - lxxvii Carpenter 2
  - lxxviii Brophy 251
  - lxxix North Texas 9
  - lxxx Brophy 251
  - lxxx<sup>i</sup> Brophy 251.
  - lxxx<sup>ii</sup> Brophy 252
  - lxxx<sup>iii</sup> Brophy 252
  - lxxx<sup>iv</sup> Brophy 253
  - lxxx<sup>v</sup> Beittel 4
  - lxxx<sup>vi</sup> Brophy 255
  - lxxx<sup>vii</sup> North Texas 9
  - lxxx<sup>viii</sup> Carpenter 4.
  - lxxx<sup>ix</sup> Beittel 4
  - xc Vinson 40
  - xc<sup>i</sup> Campo-Flores 1
  - xc<sup>ii</sup> Beittel 4
  - xc<sup>iii</sup> Campo-Flores 2
  - xc<sup>iv</sup> Campo-Flores 3
  - xc<sup>v</sup> Some Taxi Drivers
  - xc<sup>vi</sup> Brands 6
  - xc<sup>vii</sup> Carpenter 2
  - xc<sup>viii</sup> Vinson 48
  - xc<sup>ix</sup> Vinson 45
  - c Vinson 42
  - ci Vinson 42
  - cii Vinson 47
  - ciii Beittel 4

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| civ     | Vinson 40          |
| cv      | Beittel 4          |
| cvi     | Carpenter 2        |
| cvi     | Carpenter 2        |
| cvi     | Beittel 4          |
| cix     | Burton December    |
| cx      | Burton December    |
| cx      | Burton December    |
| cxii    | Finckenauer 5      |
| cxiii   | Finckenauer 5      |
| cxiv    | Carpenter 2        |
| cxv     | Lacey              |
| cxvi    | Freeman 1          |
| cxvii   | Archibold US Moves |
| cxviii  | Carpenter 2        |
| cxix    | Carpenter 2        |
| cxix    | Carpenter 2        |
| cxix    | Carpenter 2        |
| cxix    | Carpenter 3        |
| cxix    | Carpenter 3        |
| cxix    | Carpenter 4.       |
| cxix    | Gonzalez-Ruiz 24   |
| cxix    | Gonzalez-Ruiz 24   |
| cxix    | Fisher 13          |
| cxix    | US Moves           |
| cxix    | U.S. Moves         |
| cxix    | US Moves           |
| cxix    | Brands 5           |
| cxix    | Beittel 1          |
| cxix    | Fisher 16          |
| cxix    | Fisher 17          |
| cxix    | Fisher 18          |
| cxix    | Campo-Flores 2     |
| cxix    | Newsweek           |
| cxix    | North Texas 3      |
| cxix    | Campo-Flores 3     |
| cxix    | North Texas 2      |
| cxl     | National 11        |
| cxli    | National 11        |
| cxlii   | National 11        |
| cxliii  | National 18        |
| cxliv   | Mexico             |
| cxlv    | Mexico             |
| cxlv    | Cunniff 1.         |
| cxlvii  | Fisher 13          |
| cxlviii | Fisher 13          |
| cxlix   | Cunniff 1          |
| cl      | Cunniff 2.         |
| cli     | Cunniff 2.         |
| clii    | Cunniff 2.         |
| cliii   | Cunniff 3          |
| cliv    | Cunniff 3          |
| clv     | Cunniff 4          |
| clvi    | Cunniff 4          |
| clvii   | Fisher 12          |
| clviii  | Fisher 12          |

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clix Fisher 12  
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 clxii Fisher 12  
 clxiii Fisher 13  
 clxiv Fisher 16  
 clxv National 27  
 clxvi National 31  
 clxvii National 31  
 clxviii De Groot 15  
 clxix De Groot 15  
 clxx Sambanis  
 clxxi Carpenter 3  
 clxxii Leech  
 clxxiii Stratfor  
 clxxiv Carpenter 4  
 clxxv Carpenter 4  
 clxxvi Carpenter 3  
 clxxvii Carpenter 3  
 clxxviii Burton  
 clxxix Quinones 4  
 clxxx Quinones 4  
 clxxxi Quinones 4  
 clxxxii Carpenter 3  
 clxxxiii McKinley2  
 clxxxiv McKinley2  
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 clxxxvii With Force  
 clxxxviii Campo-Flores 2  
 clxxxix Campo-Flores  
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 cci Millett 5  
 ccii Millett 10  
 cciii Millett 14  
 cciv Millett 14  
 ccv Millett 18  
 ccvi Millett 19  
 ccvii Millett 20  
 ccviii Carpenter 7  
 ccix Carpenter 8  
 ccx Carpenter 8  
 ccxi Andrade-Garzon v  
 ccxii Andrade-Garzon v  
 ccxiii Carpenter 1

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ccxiv Carpenter 1  
ccxv Beittel 1  
ccxvi Carpenter 7.  
ccxvii Carpenter 8  
ccxviii Carpenter 8.  
ccxix Carpenter 5  
ccxx Beittel 7  
ccxxi Beittel 12  
ccxxii Carpenter 5  
ccxxiii Beittel 12  
ccxxiv Beittel 12  
ccxxv Beittel 13  
ccxxvi Beittel 13  
ccxxvii Fisher 13  
ccxxviii Fisher 13  
ccxxix Brands v  
ccxxx Carpenter 1  
ccxxxi Brands v  
ccxxxii Brands v  
ccxxxiii Lacey December  
ccxxxiv Carpenter 6.  
ccxxxv Carpenter 6  
ccxxxvi Carpenter 7  
ccxxxvii Brophy 249  
ccxxxviii HIDTAs  
ccxxxix HIDTAs  
ccxl McKinley  
ccxli McKinley  
ccxlii Burton  
ccxlili North Texas 9  
ccxliv North Texas 9

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