

Corruption, Drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico

STEPHEN D. MORRIS
Professor
Middle Tennessee State University

CORRUPTION PLAYS A CENTRAL ROLE in the drug trafficking and the related “war” that have violently scarred Mexico in recent years. Corruption facilitates the operation of Mexico’s vast and powerful criminal-business enterprises while simultaneously debilitating the state’s efforts to confront them. In fact, corruption makes it difficult at times to differentiate violators from enforcers. As poet, social activist, and grieving father of one victim of the war on drugs Javier Sicilia laments, “I don’t know where the state ends and organized crime begins.”¹ But corruption and the structural weaknesses characterizing Mexico’s institutions of justice are hardly new. Corruption has long shaped Mexican politics and the drug trade, yet never have these factors conspired to generate the degree of violence, brutality, and instability seen in recent years. This historical paradox—wherein drug-related corruption once contributed to or at least coexisted with low levels of violence and relative stability but now fuels the opposite—raises questions about the shifting patterns of corruption, the threads that tie it to drug trafficking and violence, and the dynamics unleashed by Mexican President Felipe Calderón’s “war of choice” on organized crime. This brief essay first draws on recent events to describe the role of corruption in facilitating drug trafficking and handicapping the state, and then explores the underlying changes that have altered the historical and once-stable pattern.

29

STEPHEN D. MORRIS is Professor and Chair of the Department of Political Science at Middle Tennessee State University. His research focuses on political corruption and reform in Mexico. His most recent book is *Corruption and Politics in Latin America* (Lynne Rienner, 2010).

Copyright © 2012 by the *Brown Journal of World Affairs*

STEPHEN D. MORRIS

CORRUPTION AND DRUG TRAFFICKING

Most scholars, public officials, and members of the general public agree that organizations providing contraband goods and services (i.e., organized crime including drug trafficking organizations) *cannot* operate without corruption: that the two—corruption and organized crime—are inherently linked, pointing to a type of corrupt bargain.² Studies of early twentieth-century prohibition in the United States and the operation of gambling and prostitution rings in major cities throughout the country today, for instance, both highlight the role illegal payoffs to police and local officials play not only in allowing these businesses to operate, but also in maintaining their activities and influence within certain geographic and political bounds.³ With respect to Mexico, most experts agree on this point. As Laurie Freeman, a former associate of the Washington Office on Latin America, notes, “Doing business [in Mexico] entails bribing and intimidating public officials and law enforcement and judicial agents [...] organized crime cannot survive without corruption.”⁴ During a 2008 meeting of the *Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Pública* (National Council of Public Security), President Felipe Calderón (2006–2012) echoed this sentiment: “The insecurity and violence that the country is living through is the result of [...] corruption that has become a cancer.”⁵

30

The evidence of a corrupt bargain wherein corrupt state officials support and sustain drug trafficking in Mexico is overwhelming. Headlines periodically feature the arrest or detention of top officials within agencies spearheading the fight against drugs and organized crime (a federal responsibility); port and prison officials; military and police commanders; governors and gubernatorial candidates; state police, investigators, and district attorneys; mayors and city officials; and hundreds of municipal police, all for essentially aiding and abetting organized crime. For example, in November 2008, during the high profile *Operación Limpieza* (Operation Clean House), six members of SIEDO (*Subprocuraduría de Investigación Especializada en Delincuencia Organizada*), the attorney general’s office in charge of investigating and prosecuting organized crime, the head of the Mexican office of Interpol, directors of the federal police, and close associates of the secretary of public security were arrested for their ties to the Beltrán Leyva cartel.⁶ Noé Ramírez, the former director of SIEDO, reportedly received \$450,000 per month for his services to the cartel’s leaders.⁷

This was not the first time that key officials in charge of fighting drug trafficking and organized crime had been discovered to be in the pay of drug traffickers. In 1997, General José Gutiérrez Rebollo, then head of the *Instituto*

Nacional para el Combate a las Drogas (National Anti-Drug Institute) was arrested for his ties to *el Señor de los Cielos*, Amado Carillo Arrellano, the leader of the Juárez cartel. In May 2009, the federal government raided the western state of Michoacán, arresting a total of 38 public officials, including the former director of public security, the former state attorney general, and various mayors for their support of La Familia cartel.⁸ All were eventually freed, however, for lack of evidence. In May 2010 in the state of Quintana Roo—just weeks after former governor Mario Villanueva was extradited to the United States on charges of receiving \$19 million from the Juárez cartel—the gubernatorial candidate and former mayor of Cancún Gregorio Sánchez was detained for alleged ties to the Beltrán Leyva and Zetas criminal organizations. In late January 2012, reports surfaced that the government was investigating three recent governors of the border state of Tamaulipas for possible ties to the Gulf cartel.⁹

Criminal organizations were reportedly spending more than \$500 million a year in bribes.

Though evidence suggests that corruption and collusion reach into the highest and lowest layers of the Mexican government, the municipality constitutes the social base of organized crime. This is the place, as Kenny and Serrano note, “where Mexican policemen became criminals.”¹⁰ The newspaper *Reforma* reports that, of the 357 Mexican law enforcement officials detained in 2009 for assisting narco-traffickers, 90 percent belonged to local police forces.¹¹ Indeed, a study by the National Conference of Secretaries of Public Security estimated that 93.6 percent of municipal police depend on corruption to supplement their low salaries.¹² This historic pattern is incredibly sticky and seemingly immune from periodic and ritualistic purges, as well as purification and professionalization efforts.¹³ Thousands of officials and police officers have been dismissed over the years because of corruption, and entire departments and agencies have been disbanded. Yet, as Charles Bowden notes, “In over a half century of fighting drugs, Mexico has never created a police unit that did not join the traffickers.”¹⁴

By the 1990s, criminal organizations were reportedly spending more than \$500 million a year in bribes—double the budget of the Attorney General’s office (the *Procuraduría General de la República*, or PGR).¹⁵ According to Héctor de Mauleón, author of *Atentamente, El Chapo* (Sincerely, El Chapo), “every trafficker has a great many appointed officials and elected politicians on his payroll.”¹⁶ Clearly, these extralegal payments are designed to neutralize the state’s enforcement of laws against the illicit activities of the cartels. Thus, payoffs target those directly responsible for state enforcement efforts, including preventive and

STEPHEN D. MORRIS

investigative police at both the federal and state levels, the municipal police at the local level, military commanders, *ministerios publicos* (officials within the attorney general's office responsible for leading investigations and presenting cases to judges), judges, prison officials, and treasury and banking officials in charge of tracking the money laundering. They also target those who issue orders and are indirectly responsible for enforcement officers in the field, such as governors, mayors, and agency directors.

Ensuring that public officials responsible for enforcing drug trafficking laws do not comply with those tasks encompasses a wide range of activities. For

Federal police actually picked up cocaine shipments from the planes and delivered them.

example, the task of the head of Mexico's Interpol office at the Mexico City airport working for the Sinaloa cartel was to "entertain his people"—the rest of the officials of Interpol—so as to allow certain persons

and merchandise to pass through airport security without detection.¹⁷ Other pivotal and more active functions include channeling intelligence information about upcoming government enforcement operations to cartel leaders, offering advanced warning of raids and searches, and providing cover and protection for the movement of cartel leaders and merchandise. The August 2002 arrest of drug trafficker Delia Patricia Buendía Gutiérrez (a.k.a. Ma Baker) revealed that federal police actually picked up cocaine shipments from the planes and delivered them.¹⁸ In this sense, corruption facilitates the everyday operation of the illegal narcotics business. This pattern of corruption also includes the placement of select personnel in key government posts. According to one protected witness, the Sinaloa cartel provided funds to the ex-inspector of the federal police, Edgar Bayardo, to acquire promotions for key allies working within the police agency.¹⁹

32

Beyond merely neutralizing law enforcement, corruption is also used by criminal organizations to employ state officials as allies in their fight against the state itself and against rival organizations. By engaging in this type of corruption, state officials move past simple noncompliance into a form of targeted compliance. This is a dramatic shift in the pattern of corruption with public officials proactively abusing state authority in pursuit of the objectives of the criminal organizations. The former police commander in the pay of the Beltrán Leyva cartel noted earlier, for instance, participated in operations against rival groups like the Zetas.²⁰ In fact, the June 2008 arrest of Colombian trafficker Eder Villafaña was the product of information provided to the government by the Sinaloa cartel.²¹ As is discussed later, this has had a tremendous impact on the overall level of violence in Mexico.²²

Corruption, Drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico

A prominent underlying pattern of corruption involves a type of revolving door—somewhat reminiscent of the relationship linking lobbyists to the U.S. Congress, but with far more violent consequences—whereby state security officials leave government service to work for the cartels and cartel members infiltrate and work within the government. Indeed, many cartel leaders and, it seems, most of the *sicarios* (enforcers or hitmen) were once government employees. Mexico's first racketeer, Colonel Esteban Cantú, was a career soldier; one of the first cartel leaders, Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, was a former member of the state judicial police; Osiel Cárdenas Guillén of the Gulf cartel was a former federal judicial police officer; Rafael Aguilar Guajardo, who founded the Juárez cartel, was a former commander of the federal police; Amado Carrillo, who made the Juárez cartel famous, was a former police officer; and Arturo Guzmán Decena of the Zetas organization, initially linked to the Gulf cartel, was a former lieutenant in the army's airmobile division of special forces (GAFE).²³ In fact, many of the members of the violent Zetas organization acquired their skills in GAFE and the Mexican military. Lacey estimates that from 2002 to 2009, 100,000 soldiers quit to join cartels.²⁴ Bailey and Taylor suggest that as many as one-third of traffickers have served in the military.²⁵

While it is difficult to determine corruption's precise role in shaping impunity because Mexico's system of justice suffers from numerous inefficiencies, widespread impunity nonetheless further undermines the efforts of law enforcement. Guillermo Zepeda's extensive study found that only 10 percent of reported crimes end with any formal charges being brought by the public ministry before a judge (and fewer than half of crimes are reported due to lack of trust in the institutions), and even fewer still result in a sentence, resulting in a roughly 97 percent rate of impunity.²⁶ A more recent report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) shows how the rise in violence has failed to produce a corresponding increase in criminal prosecutions. Of the

35,000 killings the government says were tied to organized crime from December 2007 to January 2011, federal prosecutors opened somewhere between 997 and 1,687 investigations (two different responses were given to HRW by Mexican officials), formally charged 343 suspects, and convicted just 22. HRW noted a similar trend at the state level. From 2009 to 2010 in the state of Chihuahua, there were over 5,000 deaths related to organized crime, but only 212 people were found guilty.²⁷ Such impunity prompts Bowden to rhetorically ponder: "Imagine living in a place where you can kill anyone you wish and nothing happens except that they fall dead."²⁸ Like other crimes, cor-

STEPHEN D. MORRIS

ruption goes largely undetected and unpunished. Allegations or even arrests rarely result in prosecution. But even when the enforcement successfully prosecutes traffickers by surmounting the challenges presented by police corruption and impunity, corruption can still provide special privileges and even a means of escape. Corruption in Mexican prisons is widespread. Perhaps the best-known

Because of corruption, when fighting criminals, the state must also fight parts of itself.

case is the “assisted escape” of the leader of the Sinaloa cartel and one of Forbes’s wealthiest individuals, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, from El Puente Grande maximum-security prison in the state of Jalisco in 2001. The

escape revealed an extensive network of payoffs to prison officials that not only allowed for the cartel leader’s departure, but for the continued operation of his drug empire from behind bars. This is not the only case of bribery facilitating the release of prisoners, of course. In 2010, over 300 inmates escaped from Mexico’s troubled federal prisons, often abetted by officials who allowed prisoners to literally walk out the front door. In one case, prison officials granted inmates an unofficial furlough in order to murder a group of 17 people.²⁹

34

To reiterate, the prevailing patterns of corruption associated with drug trafficking and organized crime not only facilitate the illicit businesses of these organizations, but also effectively handicap official state efforts to control or contain them. Part and parcel of the weaknesses of Mexico’s institutions of justice, corruption strips the state of its capacity to enforce the rule of law, gather and effectively use intelligence, carry out investigative and forensic work, make arrests, and prosecute members of criminal organizations or corrupt state officials: in short, to employ the justice system to provide security and accountability. Furthermore, corruption undermines the public’s trust in the government and thus prevents the state from receiving the level of cooperation needed from society for effective law enforcement. Thus, because of corruption, when fighting criminals, the state must also fight parts of itself.³⁰ Understanding the prevailing corrupt bargain is a critical point in understanding both the tools at Calderón’s disposal when he launched the 2006 war and the dynamics that war unleashed.

CHANGE VERSUS CONTINUITY

Neither drug trafficking nor corruption in Mexico is new. Both share a long and shadowy history. Yet the violence, brutality, and public insecurity of recent years are qualitatively different. As Howard Campbell points out, “During the PRI’s [*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*] 71-year reign, Mexico suffered from

Corruption, Drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico

endemic corruption and drug trafficking flourished, but at least there was a type of stability, since a small group of powerful traffickers and PRI government officials maintained relatively predictable relationships.³¹ Hence the historical paradox: whereas corruption once coexisted and seemingly facilitated the peaceful operation of drug trafficking in Mexico, today it coexists with and arguably facilitates a far more violent species of drug trafficking. This paradox can be explained by three broad changes, which together altered the patterns and impact of corruption as it relates to drug trafficking and organized crime: Mexico's political transformation, changes within the drug trafficking sector itself, and the confrontational policies of President Calderón.

The first monumental change centers on Mexico's political transformation over the course of the past two or three decades—specifically, the dismantling of the PRI-led authoritarian regime. The PRI, as noted, once coordinated a network of informal institutions that essentially governed or managed the relationships linking drug traffickers to the state.³² As George Grayson points out, “Relying on bribes or *mordidas*, the *desperados* [bandits] pursued their illicit activities with the connivance of authorities [...] 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.”³³ Indeed, Kenny and Serrano describe the long disbanded Federal Security Directorate (DFS) as “the country's [first] major criminal mafia.”³⁴ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, however, opposition parties began to capture control of state and local governments, challenging PRI's hegemony. This undermined the ability of a centralized state to guarantee its side of the corrupt bargain. As local power increasingly fell outside the PRI-controlled networks, federal agents, local police, and corrupt officials all began acting more and more autonomously.³⁵

A second area of change occurring during this same period relates to the nature of the Mexican drug business itself. In the 1980s, in response to the U.S. government's efforts to upset the Colombian supply chain through South Florida, the Colombian cartels turned to Mexican suppliers as allies. This sparked a dramatic growth in Mexican operations and profits during a period of peak demand in the United States.³⁶ Years later, NAFTA further eased the transshipment of drugs into the U.S. market from Mexico, solidly establishing the Mexican cartels as major players.³⁷ By the turn of the century, over 70 percent of cocaine and a large portion of the marijuana entering the U.S. market were coming through Mexico.³⁸ Together, these changes channeled vast fortunes to the growing Mexican drug-trafficking organizations, augmenting their autonomy,

their numbers, and the level of competition among them.³⁹ As competition grew, the drug-trafficking organizations began to “vie for influence at both the national and sub-national level.”⁴⁰ Together, the altered political context and the enhanced competition over the lucrative drug market made the organizations more violent.⁴¹ The elimination in 2004 of the ban on assault weapons in the United States, in turn, helped fuel and escalate that violence.

Even prior to the launching of Calderón’s war in 2006, these two trends—the erosion of the centralized, authoritarian state and the growing number and power of criminal organizations—had effectively altered the prevailing pattern of drug-related corruption. Rather than the more stabilizing forms of extortion that characterized the PRI period—what Kenny and Serrano refer to as “elite-exploitative” relations in which local political actors essentially held the upper hand—bribery and the colonization of segments of the state by criminal organizations grew to become the dominant pattern.⁴² Now, rather than centralized political authorities essentially “managing” the drug businesses and keeping the criminal organizations and the violence within certain bounds, as had occurred under the PRI, the organizations increasingly called the shots, dictating the terms of the relationship and, in turn, increasingly limiting the scope and power of the State. As O’Neil notes, “[Under Fox,] drug-trafficking organizations took advantage of the political opening to gain autonomy, ending their subordination to the government.”⁴³

36

Viewed from a slightly different angle, the political fluidity of this period undermined old bargains and the informal rules of operation. This left cartels without the secure state-sponsored protection they had once enjoyed and forced them to acquire their own means of protection and to create their own paramilitary structures.⁴⁴ The breakdown of old bargains also prompted the criminal organizations to seek out new allies within the state and to forge new pacts. But while political decentralization broadened the number of potential state allies that could be bought off, it also provided fewer and less reliable returns or guarantees to the drug trafficking organization in exchange for their bribes.⁴⁵ This introduced greater uncertainty and risks, feeding the tendency to use violence.

As a result of these underlying changes, the level of violence ratcheted upward during the 1990s and early 2000s. But it was Calderón’s militant crackdown—which began on 11 December 2006 when the newly (s)elected president sent 7,000 troops, marines, and federal police to occupy his home state of Michoacán—that would exacerbate these trends. During the ensuing five years as part of his war on drug trafficking organizations, security spending soared, the militarization of law enforcement agencies that had begun under

Corruption, Drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico

President Zedillo in the late 1990s reached new highs, and the number of arrests, killings, and extraditions of cartel members skyrocketed. The size of the PGR grew from around 21,000 in 2008 to over 26,000 agents by 2010. Between 2001 and 2009, personnel at the public security secretariat more than doubled from 16,810 to 39,840 personnel and grew another 18 percent in 2010. The budget rubric “Order, Security, and Justice” climbed from \$3.9 billion in 2003 to \$6.8 billion in 2010. The size of the Mexican military also more than doubled from 102,975 members in 1980 to 258,875 in 2010. In Calderón’s first budget in 2007, military spending climbed 25 percent and another 13 percent the following year.⁴⁶ According to *México Evalúa* (Mexico Evaluation), overall public security spending increased seven times faster under Calderón than it had under the Fox administration.⁴⁷ At the same time, the number of extraditions of cartel leaders to the United States climbed from 15 in 2000 to 63 in 2006, 95 in 2008, and 100 by November of 2009.⁴⁸

In addition to strengthening its fight against drug trafficking organizations, in this two-front war, the Calderón government also battled itself. The government initiated a series of reforms designed to enhance the level of cooperation among the over 1,600 law enforcement agencies throughout the country, and to purge and professionalize federal, state, and local police, customs officials, and others. At the same time, it detained and/or replaced numerous officials involved in the war. In 2009, as noted earlier, 357 Mexican law enforcement officers were detained, 90 percent of whom belonged to local police forces.⁴⁹ That same year, the customs service replaced all of its 700 inspectors with new agents trained to detect smuggling.⁵⁰ In August 2010, the Federal Police dismissed 3,200 agents for failure to conform to internal norms such as passing exams that test honesty and reliability. According to the secretary of public security, by September 2010 a total of 1.2 million police officers from city, state, and federal forces had been removed from their posts during the preceding four years.⁵¹ Within just months after taking office in April 2011, the new attorney general, Marisela Morales, fired 140 federal police officers and investigators and opened more than 280 internal investigations. In August 2011, 21 top federal prosecutors in 21 states and federal districts quit rather than face the internal cleansing.⁵² Morales announced in mid-November that 1,500 federal security agents would be dismissed by December. She also claimed that 300 officers had already been released, while 600 were in the process of being removed, and an additional 600 had resigned to avoid processing. The report added that 20,000 employees of the PGR would be vetted through drug tests, lie detectors, and psychological exams.⁵³

But despite the increased spending and emboldened enforcement efforts against organized crime and initiatives to fight the debilitating effects of corruption, the level of violence, and arguably corruption, skyrocketed. Amid already intensified competition among criminal organizations, the arrest or killings of cartel leaders by the state merely expanded the power vacuums, unleashing an unprecedented wave of violence among and within the organizations and, to a lesser degree, against state officials.⁵⁴ From December 2006 through December 2011, more than 45,000 people have been killed in cartel-related violence.⁵⁵ Amid this volatile setting, the nation's criminal organizations unleashed a multi-front war against Calderón's increasingly aggressive and militarized state, on the one hand, and a growing number of splinter and rival organizations (and their armies of state allies) on the other. This multi-front war intensified the need for organized crime to infiltrate the state via corruption to maintain the operation of the primary business (moving drugs into the United States), and for offensive (aggressively expand their territory) and defensive (fending off the government and rivals) purposes. Corrupt allies become even more crucial in providing information about the activities of both a more aggressive state and rival organizations, and as a means to channel information to garner state assistance in fighting their rivals.

38

Part of this multi-front war involves the state. Though difficult to decipher, violence against the state has come to focus in part on pressuring or intimidating the government in an effort to shift its enforcement attention elsewhere and to target corrupt state officials working for rival organizations. According to Bailey and Taylor, "Mexican gangs' choice of confrontation is aimed primarily at eliminating specific obstacles to their growth or threats to their survival, whether these come from government, rival criminal gangs, or both."⁵⁶ Beyond the killing of police and military personnel, violence against the state has come to target mayors, candidates for public office, and others. The year 2010 in particular witnessed the assassination of the gubernatorial candidate in Tamaulipas, Rodolfo Torre Cantú of the PRI, and 15 mayors across the country.⁵⁷

From the perspective of the state, it too faces a multi-front war, both against itself (because of corruption) and against powerful criminal organizations (which are empowered by corruption). Increased enforcement efforts against the cartels not only ignite internal power struggles that create and intensify inter- and intracartel violence, but also strengthen the need for organized crime to corrupt state officials in order to survive. While growing corruption further handicaps the state's enforcement efforts, the growing level of impunity brought about by soaring violence and corruption pushes open the gates ever wider for the per-

vasive use of violence to settle everyday societal problems. As a result, the state grows increasingly ineffective and unable to fulfill its primary task of providing security, often creating by its actions the exact opposite. At the same time, the state itself becomes a target. As Freeman 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.”⁵⁸ Louise Shelley highlights the inherent 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.⁵⁹ According to Vanda Falbab-Brown, Mexico, unlike Colombia, is battling six large cartels simultaneously and is unable to destroy any of them because it is spread too thin and because it cannot manage the splinter groups arising from the inter- and intracartel clashes.⁶⁰


In sum, we find that an increased enforcement effort (Calderón’s war) undertaken without the appropriate institutional tools to do so has inadvertently increased the overall level of violence and brutality and, arguably, the scope of corruption and degree of impunity in Mexico. But the unintended consequences may extend even further. The current situation has pushed criminal organizations to expand their reach both in terms of their money-making operations and in terms of corruption and violence. Organizations have moved into areas such as kidnapping, human trafficking, the protection/extortion racket (*derecho de piso*), theft and transshipment to the United States of pirated products including stolen petroleum from PEMEX, Mexico’s state-owned petroleum company, and, perhaps most problematic, legitimate business efforts.⁶¹ They have expanded operations into Central America and other regions while at the same time reaching further and deeper into Mexican politics. As with most large, well-organized, and well-financed organizations, Mexican-organized criminal groups will continue to seek to assert political and economic influence. They will do so using employment opportunities for Mexico’s vast unemployed and underemployed population, campaign contributions to candidates, and corrupt payoffs to state officials if possible, and—as shown by the killings of local and state candidates, and perhaps even key officials in the Calderón government—violence and intimidation if necessary.⁶²

39

CONCLUSION

Mexico suffers a glaring “rule of law deficit.” State institutions lack the capacity to enforce the law vis-à-vis society and vis-à-vis themselves. In the past, seemingly strong informal institutions either hid these shortcomings or minimized their

STEPHEN D. MORRIS

effects. But recent experience shows that launching a war against powerful drug traffickers and criminal organizations without the capacity to adequately do so leaves the state with few tools but force itself, resulting in a spiral of violence and an unprecedented level of insecurity. Such a setting makes for a less than propitious moment to try to address deep-seated corruption or professionalize faulty institutions. The lack of respect for the government and the law, in turn, leaves the government largely isolated and lacking the degree of cooperation from society needed to execute the war and enforce the rule of law. Poverty and inequality complicate these tasks even more by providing criminal organizations with a ready and willing army of labor and victims and by further isolating the government. Meanwhile, the United States' huge supply of arms and demand for drugs seem to pull the country excruciatingly in opposing directions. Ultimately, it is not entirely clear how far—or high—the drug-trafficking-related corruption reaches, how to escape this quagmire, or how a change in presidential administrations in December 2012 might have an impact.⁶³ It seems certain given the results of the Calderón war that the country will most likely seek a strategy that focuses more on reducing the level of violence rather than on crippling drug trafficking, addresses the underlying social and economic causes, and relies less on violent confrontation. 

40

NOTES

1. "Murder of Mexican Activist Sparks Corruption Claims," *New Zealand Herald*, December 1, 2011, <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/murder20of20mexican20activist/search/results.cfm?kw1=Murder%20of%20Mexican%20Activist&kw2=&st=gsa>.

2. Peter Andreas, "The Political Economy of Narco-Corruption in Mexico," *Current History* (April, 1998): 160–65; June S. Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress, 7-7500 (June 7, 2011); Stephanie Hanson, "Mexico's Drug War," Council on Foreign Relations (November 20, 2008); Thomas R. Naylor, "Predators, Parasites, of Free-Market Pioneers: Reflections on the Nature and Analysis of Profit-Driven Crime," in *Critical Reflections on Transnational Organized Crime, Money Laundering, and Corruption*, ed. Margaret E. Beare (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 35–54; Thomas R. Naylor, "Violence and Illegal Economic Activity: A Deconstruction," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 52 (2009): 231–42; Patrick O'Day and Angelina López, "Organizing the Underground NAFTA," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 17, no. 3 (2001): 232–42; Stanley A. Pimental, "Mexico's Legacy of Corruption," in *Menace to Society: Political Criminal Collaboration around the World*, ed. Roy Godson (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2003), 175–98; Louise Shelley, "The Unholy Trinity: Transnational Crime, Corruption, and Terrorism," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11, no. 2 (2005): 101–11.

3. Naylor, "Predators, Parasites, of Free-Market Pioneers," 35–54.

4. Laurie Freeman, "State of Siege: Drug-Related Violence and Corruption in Mexico," WOLA Special Report (June 2006), 12. Despite the almost axiomatic connection tying drug-trafficking and corruption, the direction of causality is not entirely clear. It may, of course, move in both directions. One prominent view suggests that organized crime corrupts state officials through the seductive power of bribes (that organized crime à corruption). But, as Peter Andreas ("The Political Economy of Narco-Corruption," 161) points out,

Corruption, Drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico

corruption is a two-way street and “involves not only the penetration of the state, but also penetration by the state.” A second view thus reverses the direction of causality and depicts corruption as the independent variable that produces and hence promotes drug trafficking operations (corruption → organized crime).

5. Sergio Javier Jiménez and Silvia Otero, “Todos somos responsables de la inseguridad: Calderón,” *El Universal*, August 21, 2008, www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/531961.html.

6. *Justice in Mexico*, Monthly News Report, November 2009, 8–9.

7. Gustavo Castillo García, “Noé Ramírez recibía del *cártel* de Sinaloa 450 mil dólares al mes, reveló Medina Mora,” *La Jornada*, December 22, 2008, www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/11/22/index.php?seccion=politica&articulo=011n1pol. See also: David Aponte, *Los Infiltrados: El narco dentro de los gobiernos* (Mexico City, DF: Grijalbo, 2011).

8. University of San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, “Justice in Mexico: October 2010 Monthly News Report,” http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/2010-10-october_news_report.pdf, 16.

9. University of San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, “Justice in Mexico: June 2010 Monthly News Report,” <http://catcher.sandiego.edu/items/peacestudies/june2010.pdf>, 10–1.

10. Paul Kenny and Monica Serrano, ed., *Mexico’s Security Failure: Collapse into Criminal Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 33.

11. Antonio Baranda and Rolando Herrera, “Halla narco socio dentro de Policía,” *Reforma*, September 25, 2009.

12. *Justice in Mexico*, Monthly News Report, November 2009, 10.

13. Daniel A. Sabet, “Confrontation, Collusion, and Tolerance: The Relationship between Law Enforcement and Organized Crime in Tijuana,” *Mexican Law Review* 2, no. 2 (2010): 3–29.

14. Charles Bowden, *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy’s New Killing Fields* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 109.

15. Paul Kenny and Monica Serrano, ed. *Mexico’s Security Failure: Collapse into Criminal Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 41.

16. Alma Guillermoprieto, “The Murderers of Mexico,” *New York Review of Books*, October 28, 2010.

17. Aponte, *Los Infiltrados*, 20.

18. Raúl Monge, “La estructura policiaca al servicio de ‘ma baker’,” *Proceso* 1348 (September 1, 2002).

19. Aponte, *Los Infiltrados*, 141.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, 144.

22. J. Jesús Esquivel, “‘El Vicentillo’, asunto de seguridad nacional en Estados Unidos,” *Proceso* 1830 (December 14, 2011), 14–15; Alberto M. Osorio and Felipe Cobian R., “Y el paraíso tapatío se derumbó,” *Proceso* 1820 (September 18, 2011); Andrew Kennis and Jason McGahan, “Rápido y furiosos: Armas para ‘El Chapo,’” *Proceso* 1820 (September 18, 2011). A frequently voiced hypothesis in Mexico suggests that just like other corrupt officials, President Calderón is siding with a particular organization (the Sinaloa cartel) and targeting enforcement measures accordingly. Recent reports point to the possibility that the United States has also been helping the Sinaloa cartel through its Fast and Furious program and money laundering schemes.

23. Kenny and Serrano, *Security Failure*, 29.

24. Marc Lacey, “In an Escalating War, Mexico Fights the Cartels, and Itself,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2011.

25. John Bailey and Matthew M. Taylor, “Evade, Corrupt, or Confront? Organized Crime and the State in Brazil and Mexico,” *Journal of Politics in Latin America* (2009): 19; Aponte, *Los Infiltrados*. It should be pointed out that corruption moves in a variety of directions. Just as drug traffickers pay off police, one of the state’s major investigative tools—and the source of much inside information on corruption—involves police payoffs (sometimes in the form of immunity and new identities) to members of drug trafficking organizations in exchange for information, particularly following their arrest. The testimony of “Felipe” for example, a former official who had infiltrated the U.S. embassy in Mexico, was key to the arrests of key SIEDO officials in *Operación Limpieza* (see: Aponte, *Los Infiltrados*).

26. Guillermo Zepeda Lecuona, *Crimen sin castigo: Procuración de justicia penal y Ministerio Público en México* (Mexico City, D.F.: Centro de Investigación para el Desarrollo and Fondo de Cultura Económica).

STEPHEN D. MORRIS

27. Human Rights Watch, *Mexico: Neither Rights Nor Security: Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico's 'War on Drugs,'* www.hrw.org/reports/2011/11/09/neither-rights-nor-security-0, 171.

28. Bowden, *Murder City*, 13.

29. Vidriana Rios and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis through 2010*, (San Diego: University of San Diego, 2010), 16–17.

30. Kenny and Serrano, *Security Failure*, 29.

31. Howard Campbell, *Drug War Zone: Frontline Dispatches from the Streets of El Paso and Juárez* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 271.

32. Louise Shelley, "Confrontation, Collusion, and Tolerance: The Relationship between Law Enforcement and Organized Crime in Tijuana," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11, no. 2 (2005): 215.

33. George Grayson, *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2010), 29.

34. Kenny and Serrano, *Security Failure*, 33.

35. Grayson, *Mexico*, 31.

36. Carpenter, *Foreign Policy Briefing*, 87.

37. Grayson, *Mexico*, 56.

38. Intelligence Center, *National Drug Threat Assessment 2005*, February 2005.

39. Grayson, *Mexico*, 31.

40. Rios and Shirk, *Drug Violence*, 11.

41. Grayson, *Mexico*, 31.

42. Kenny and Serrano, *Mexico's Security Failure*, 33.

43. Shannon O'Neil, "The Real War in Mexico," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 4 (2009): 63–77.

44. Richard Snyder and Angelica Duran-Martínez, "Does Illegality Breed Violence? Drug Trafficking and State-Sponsored Protection Rackets," *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 52 (2009): 264.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Juan Lindau, "The Drug War's Impact on Executive Power, Judicial Reform, and Federalism in Mexico," *Political Science Quarterly* 126 (2011): 177–200.

42

47. University of San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, "Justice in Mexico: August 2011 Monthly News Report," <http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/2011-08-august-news-report.pdf>, 7–8.

48. University of San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, "Justice in Mexico: November 2009 Monthly News Report," <http://catcher.sandiego.edu/items/peacestudies/JMPNovember2009.pdf>, 4–5.

49. Baranda and Herrera, "Halla narco socio dentro de Policía," *Reforma*, September 25, 2009.

50. University of San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, "Justice in Mexico: August 2009 Monthly News Report," <http://catcher.sandiego.edu/items/peacestudies/JMPaugust2009.pdf>, 2.

51. University of San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, "Justice in Mexico: September 2010 Monthly News Report," http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/2010-09-september_news_report1.pdf, 10.

52. Chuck Neubauer, "Mexican prosecutors step down amid purge," *Washington Times*, August 2, 2011.

53. University of San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, "Justice in Mexico: August 2011 Monthly News Report," 4–15.

54. Eduardo Guerreo Gutiérrez, "Como reducir la violencia," *Nexos en línea*, November 3, 2010. The most dramatic spike in violence took place between 2008 and 2010. Drug-related executions climbed from 2,500 in 2007 to 5,207 in 2008, to 6,587 in 2009, and to more than 11,800 in 2010. Two waves of violence marked the period. The first took place between May and November in 2008 following the detention of Alfredo Beltrán Leyva (El Mochomo) and the breaking off of relations between the Beltrán Leyva brothers and the Sinaloa cartel. The second wave took place between December 2009 and May 2010 following the death of Arturo Beltrán Leyva (El Barbas) during a military operation.

55. University of San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, "Justice in Mexico: February 2012 Monthly News Report," <http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/2012-02-february-news-report.pdf>, 7.

56. John Bailey and Matthew M. Taylor, "Evade, Corrupt, or Confront? Organized Crime and the State in Brazil and Mexico," *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 1, no. 2 (2009): 22.

57. Vidriana Rios, "Why are Mexican Mayors Getting Killed by Traffickers? A Model of Competitive Corruption" (Unpublished, 2011).

58. Freeman, "State of Siege," 6.

Corruption, Drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico

59. Shelley, "Corruption and Organized Crime in Mexico in the Post-PRI Transition," 214. The government claims that most of the killings (roughly 90 percent) are by drug-traffickers, and that only seven percent are by Mexican security forces. See: June S. Beittel, *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations: Source and Scope of the Rising Violence*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 7-7500 (June 7, 2011), 20. Yet given the lack of investigative prowess on the part of the government, it is unclear exactly how they arrive at this figure. As noted, exceedingly few of these killings have made it through the judicial system. Rúben Aguilar and Jorge G. Castañeda *El Narco: La Guerra Fallida. Mexico: Punto de Lectura*, (Mexico City, D.F.: Santillana Ediciones Generales, 2009) contend that perhaps what the government portrays as violence among drug traffickers may really be the work of state officials. The growing concern, however, is that state violence is being targeted at innocent journalists, human rights activists, students, and other members of society. See: John M. Ackerman, "How Mexico Gets it Wrong," *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 2010.

60. Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Lessons from Colombia for Mexico? Caveat Emptor," Brookings Institution, in University of San Diego: Trans-Border Institute, "Justice in Mexico: February 2012 Monthly News Report," 4.

61. In October 2011, 121 INM agents were fired for alleged complicity in abduction of Central American migrants. Such abductions, including the mass execution of migrants in the state Tamaulipas, were attributed to the Zeta organization (*Justice in Mexico*, Monthly News Report, October 2011). For information on stolen Petroleum from PEMEX, see: Ana Lilia Pérez, "Los careless, infiltrados en Pemex," *Proceso* 1832 (December 11, 2011).

62. Speculation persists that the plane crash that took the life of the Interior Secretary and Calderón's most trusted advisor, Juan Camilo Mouríño, along with a top official within the ministry of public security, José Luis Santiago Vasconcelos, in 2008, and the helicopter crash that killed the Interior Secretary José Francisco Blake Mora in November 2011 were not accidents.

63. For one approach to solving the quagmire, see: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Instituto Iberoamericano de Derecho Constitucional, *Elementos para la Construcción de una Política de Estado para la Seguridad y Justicia en Democracia* (August 2011), www.ddu.unam.mx/imgs/Inicio/SeguridadYJusticia/propuesta_s_AGO11.pdf.