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El Salvador's Drug Experience in Mexico

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Abstract

This paper examines the potential for a comparable agreement in Mexico. In order to comprehend the viability of implementing El Salvador's experience, to determine whether negotiations or a violent approach has been effective in containing cartel violence. To check if there are any similarities between El Salvador's drug trafficking organizations and gangs. Mexico's drug cartels by gaining an understanding of both nations' landscapes. There is no hope of eliminating violence in these countries through violent means. Further divisions and the emergence of other, more aggressive organizations would follow. In the event of a civil war between cartels and states, highly-trained security forces would be required to operate in a variety of terrains, such as deserts, jungles, and metropolitan areas.

Keyword's: Cartels, Drug Trafficking, Mexico, Nations, and Gangs

Introduction

El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele secretly negotiated with MS-13 to reduce violence in the country in exchange for party support and better prison and other facilities for the gang, according to investigative reports published by El Faro in September of 2020. (Newsweek, 2022). In spite of Bukele's denial, homicides decreased by approximately 50 percent during his first year in office, indicating that negotiations had a positive effect on reducing violence.

This paper examines the potential for a comparable agreement in Mexico. In order to comprehend the viability of implementing El Salvador's experience. The first part examines Mexico's and El Salvador's histories and determines whether negotiations or a violent approach has been effective in containing cartel violence. Further the similarities between El Salvador's

drug trafficking organisations, and gangs. Lastly, Mexico's drug cartels by gaining an understanding of both nations' landscapes. In conclusion, the likelihood policy Perspectives are explored.

History of Drug Trafficking

During its rule, the PRI party of Mexico (1929-2000) maintained significant control over drug trafficking organisations. Members of the PRI viewed drug trafficking as a lucrative business in exchange for protecting traffickers and preventing violence (Astorga, 2019). In the 1990s, opposition candidates won governorships, and the PAN party won the presidency in 2000, propelling Mexico toward a democratic transition. Long-term commitments weakened as a result of decentralisation, allowing DTOs to become violent (Snyder and Martinez, 2009). The opposition governors, who lacked the same power and were not supported by federal governments, gave freedom to traffickers, destroying age-old mediations and thereby increasing violence throughout the country (Astorga, 2019).

In addition, the United States' "war on drugs" declaration and President Felipe Calderon's militarised campaign in 2006 affected drug lords and exacerbated the violence. The militarised campaign aimed to arrest thirty-seven kingpins and captured twenty-five of them (Jones, 2019). This prompted other drug lords to move their operations to new locations, fragmented existing organisations, and led to the formation of new cartels, thereby increasing violence in the country as cartel competition increased. The rise from six to thirty-seven cartels (Monrow, 2019) led to the formation of more violent cartels such as CJNG. In areas where the CJNG exploited power voids created by Guzman's removal, the Justice in Mexico report notes a rise in violence. Thus, the 'war on drugs' was unsuccessful (Bagley, 1995).

By analysing the past, one can conclude that the PRI's approach to negotiations, despite the corruption and symbiotic relationship (Lupasa's model) between authorities and cartels, has contributed to the maintenance of peace. On the other hand, the militarised approach and 'war on drugs' have failed miserably in Mexico, producing only a balloon and cockroach effect.

In addition, violence escalated after the arrest of Ovidio Guzman, son of 'El Chapo' Guzman, causing the authorities to release him. Even in El Salvador, government and church-brokered negotiations between MS13 and Barrio18 in 2012, which granted concessions to the gang leaders in exchange for a reduction in violence, led to a decline in homicides. In 2014, as a result of the collapse of the truce, violence began to rise again in the country (Insight Crime, 2020).

Working Methods and Violence of El Salvador's DTOs and Gangs and Mexico's DTOs

Both Mexico and El Salvador served as transshipment points, obtaining supplies from Colombian, Bolivian, and Peruvian groups and delivering them to the United States. However, internal cartel wars in 2003 and Columbia's massive crackdown created a power vacuum that was exploited by various groups, including Mexican organisations such as the Gulf, Juarez, Tijuana, and Sinaloa Cartels, to gain control over drug routes. This shifted Mexican cartels from merely transporting drugs to profitably controlling drug market territories and routes. In addition to drug trafficking and transportation, violence has become a common occurrence as rival groups in both countries vie for control of a region dominated by drug cartels.

About 245,000 people have been killed since the 'war on drugs' (Molly Molly, 2018), with at least a third attributable to organised crime (Justice in Mexico). Cartels in Mexico are now confronting the government by taxing oil, the agricultural industry, and legal products such as avocados (Jones, 2019). This has increased competition between cartels for territory control. In addition, domestic drug use has contributed to an increase in violence, as drug dealers resort to violence to maintain control. El Salvador's DTOs receive, store, and transport drugs to the United States while also distributing them locally. In addition to DTOs, there are gangs/maras that control the drug trade. The two largest gangs are Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio18, which are competitors. Since the 'iron fist' approach, youth have been arrested for petty crimes ranging from murder to extortion. This has led gang members to operate, organise, and strategize their businesses through jails due to the presence of a communication system, which was recently discontinued. These gangs engage in extortion, kidnapping, the control of markets from traditional distributors, the murder of rivals, neighbours, and security personnel, and the local distribution and control of drugs in their neighbourhoods. They are also employed as assassins by larger organisations. Consequently, these organisations have contributed to a high level of violence in both countries, which has hampered their security.

Government Affiliations

The governments of both nations are fragile, corrupt at all levels, and have ties to these gangs. In El Salvador, DTOs and gangs maintain ties with the government and even fund public works and political campaigns. Their ability to outspend governments frustrates both the government and its ability to limit their role. Los Perrones, a transport organisation, has ties to police, a high-ranking officer, a high-ranking prosecutor, and a senator (Dudley, 2013). Additionally, the connection between gangs and international DTOs is growing (Dudley, 2013). For instance,

the arrest of 'El Barny,' the leader of MS-13 and a member of a La Normandy cell, with seven kilogrammes of cocaine near La Libertad indicates an increase in Zetas' control over the drug markets in La Libertad and La Normandy, two regions of interest to the organisation. Additionally, police intelligence documents revealed MS-13's ties to the Zetas (Dudley, 2013). In Mexico, organised crime has taken over all levels of government. Many governors have become targets of cartel corruption as a result of the decentralisation of power from the federal government to the states, and there have been numerous scandals involving Mexican DTOs and corrupt governors. Javier Duarte, former governor of Veracruz, was believed to be on the payroll of the Zetas; Cesar Duarte, former governor of Chihuahua; Tomas Yarrington and his successor Eugenio Hernandez, governors of Tamaulipas; Rodrigo Medina, Governor of Nuevo Leon; Guillermo Padres, Governor of Sonora; Roberto Borge, governor of Quintana Roo; Roberto Borge (Jones, 2019). In addition to assassinations, threats, intimidation, and corruption, these groups have targeted local candidates. Numerous political assassinations occurred during the 2018 elections, and several candidates withdrew citing violence and threats. Moreover, in states like Tamaulipas and 'criminal enclaves' where criminal actors operate independently of state authority (J.P. Sullivan), organised crime actors maintain greater control than in a weak state.

Though the federal government has the authority to target these criminal organisations, it lacks the manpower to permanently withdraw from any given area, and even if it could, other regions erupt, rendering the government powerless to combat crime. In addition, the state's inability to combat crime everywhere at once has led to the formation of more violent managers and smaller groups in other areas (Jones, 2019). Even corruption exists, and intelligence has been gathered regarding Los Zetas' connections with Mexican counterparts. The 2008 discovery that thirty-five SIEDO anti-mafia unit agents were on the payroll of the BLO, the conviction of President Carlos Salinas's brother for accepting bribes from the Gulf cartel, and the discovery that Drug Czar General Rebollo was on the payroll of the Juarez cartel all suggest this (Jones, 2019). Thus, both countries are infested with corruption, have experienced an increase in violence, are home to dangerous cartels and gangs that have wreaked havoc in the countries, and have government officials who have connections to and are paid by the gangs. The Mexican government should take advantage of cartels' symbiotic relationship and negotiate with them to reduce violence. Since both countries share similarities, and the workings and operations of cartels and gangs are comparable, Bukele's negotiation strategy can also be effective in Mexico.

Conclusion

As evidenced by the histories of both Mexico and El Salvador, violent solutions would not be effective in reducing violence in these nations. This would cause further fragmentation and the formation of new, more violent organisations. The violent strategy would result in a civil war between cartels and states and would necessitate highly-trained security forces to operate in diverse terrains, such as deserts, jungles, and urban areas, where these cartels are headquartered. In addition, various cartels are present in urban areas, and the militarised war and violence would pose a threat to the populace due to the impact of military operations (Morfini, 2019). AMLO, the current president of Mexico, has promised similar measures to combat corruption and violence as Bukele did. He has proposed "hugs not bullets" (Reuters, 2022) and "socio-economic anti-crime programmes" to reduce crime (Brown, 2019). Additionally, he has proposed amnesty for drug traffickers (Jones, 2019). Although the concept is vague, it may involve negotiating and striking deals with drug traffickers in exchange for a reduction in violence. In addition, the homicide rate has decreased by 3.6% since he came to power in 2021. (Reuter, 2022). Consequently, these measures could provide a renewed foundation for negotiations with gangs and reduce violence in Mexico. Although the strategy of negotiations would be difficult to implement due to the instability of various groups and cartels, it would be preferable to a militarised approach. Therefore, it is likely that the same model will be implemented in Mexico.

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