

A BREAKING POINT FOR MEXICO:  
A NARRATIVE OF EMBEDDED VIOLENCE AND  
THE THREAT TO CITIZENSHIP WELL-BEING

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

To what extent have the policies implemented by the Mexican government since 2006 against the *War on Drugs* further fueled social violence? What have been the effects of violence on security, citizenship well-being, displacement, and human rights? This thesis examines how the pervasive violence in Mexico, despite being overwhelmingly visible recently, has been embedded into the system since long before. Mexico experiences different approaches to violence: ordinary, structural, and drug violence. The research question and my contribution are illustrated from four different perspectives, based on the various types of violence that exist in the country: intercartel, government-cartel, cartel-citizens, and government-citizens. After conducting a case study analysis of specific events throughout the last three presidential administrations, a recurring pattern shows that despite the differences in political background, violence continues to be aggravated through a similitude in strategy. Government officials should take meaningful action to address the security needs of citizens – despite the presence of violence – and consider policy changes that focus on providing safety and well-being.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Growing up in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, I remember living a regular childhood not plagued by violence. However, in 2010, when I was ten years old, I remember the city becoming more dangerous – my parents becoming increasingly attentive to the national and local news, getting picked up early from school due to city threats, and going to get-togethers that ended up with us laying on the floor after hearing gunshots. My childhood, then, consisted of listening about arrests of individuals and national safety concerns, as well as, having family friends suffering from the increasing violence. This shaped me into a mature woman early on and influenced my outlook on life. The following year, moving to the U.S.-Mexico border in Matamoros, Tamaulipas – Brownsville, Texas, I noticed how my interest in studying the violence that engulfed Mexico’s streets continued to grow. I found myself always engaging in conversations with adults and being interested in learning more. This interest has been intellectually driven and strengthened as I have pursued my higher education by my professors and International Studies courses. I am extremely thankful to my friends and all of those who have engaged in conversations with me and have taken the time to listen to me passionately speak about it.

I am very grateful to my thesis advisor, Dr. Alejandro Olayo-Méndez, SJ for his phenomenal contribution and for pushing me to think outside the norm regarding Mexico’s situation. Working together created unique opportunities for me to think

critically – posing sharp questions, essential advice, and precise recommendations. I am appreciative of the possibility of navigating the topic in ways that I had not previously considered. His work and commitment are a source of inspiration as I venture on to pursue a professional career. Lastly, I am forever grateful to my family, who has always believed in me, pushed me to be a better student, and instilled the values of hard work, respect, and commitment.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AFO	Arellano-Felix Organization
AMLO	Andrés Manuel López Obrador
CJNG	Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generación (Jalisco New Generation Cartel)
CONAPO	Consejo Nacional de Población (National Council on Population)
DTO	Drug-Trafficking Organizations
EPN	Enrique Peña Nieto
INEGI	National Statistics and Geography Institute: Mexico
LSI	Ley de Seguridad Interior (Interior Security Law)
MORENA	Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement)
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)
SNSP	Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Publica (National Public Security System)
SSP	Secretaría de Seguridad y Protección Ciudadana (Secretariat of Security and Civilian Protection)



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## INTRODUCTION

As I was completing my study abroad experience in the Fall of 2019 in France, I remember opening my bedroom door at my host family's home and feeling an intense level of frustration and confusion with what I read on the TV. My host mother was watching the breaking news that read “Mexique: la police obligée de libérer un fils d’« El Chapo » après avoir été attaquée à l’arme lourde.”<sup>1</sup> How was it possible that the Mexican National Guard was “forced” to liberate an internationally persecuted criminal? Of all places, France was where I found myself feeling a call back to my home country of Mexico. This unthinkable action forced by the pressure of the cartels and completed by the government encouraged me to pursue the venture of writing this thesis to understand on a deeper level the path that Mexico has followed and what has happened to the country that decisions such as these are being taken. As a Mexican citizen, I feel the need to bring some answers to the concerns about the realities in the country and possibly offer a sense of hope to future generations.

On October 17, 2019, intense fighting erupted in Culiacán, Sinaloa, a city better known as the home to the Sinaloa Cartel, where masked gunmen were throwing up burning blockades and trading gunfire with security forces. On this day, labeled as the Battle of Culiacán, a patrol by the National Guard went into a house to arrest Ovidio Guzmán López, a member of the Sinaloa Cartel and son of the former leader of the cartel,

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Fortunato, “Mexique : la police obligée de libérer un fils d’« El Chapo » après avoir été attaquée à l’arme lourde,” leparisien.fr, October 18, 2019, <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/mexique-arrestation-d-un-fils-d-el-chapo-lors-de-violents-affrontements-armes-18-10-2019-8175258.php>.

Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán.<sup>2</sup> His arrest was quickly overpowered by cartel gunmen filling the city with roadblocks and unleashing heavy automatic gunfire against military personnel and taking the lives of many citizens in the process. Individuals around the area were running in an attempt to find shelter — hiding behind car wheels with hands to their ears and their eyes flinched, squeezing their bodies underneath cars, and trying to get away from the loud, non-stop sound of gunshots.<sup>3</sup>

Finding themselves trapped against a power with no intention of holding back, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s government, with his approval, decided to immediately retreat from the house, without Guzmán, to prevent any further violence in the city and preserve the lives of the few-standing military personnel.<sup>4</sup> A following astounding silence, signifying the backing off of the cartel, could be heard when organized crime protected its leader and won its battle against the government of the country. What does the Battle of Culiacán represent about the future of Mexico? A significant breaking and turning point to the way the government presents itself to the eyes of organized crime.

In the context of this thesis, my argument of a *breaking point* is a representation of a moment in which the country’s government legitimacy and the hope of the citizens reaches a difficult point to reverse – the decision taken by the government permitted the battle to be lost and shook the perspectives of citizens. Is letting go of a

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Luke Johnson, “Revisiting the Battle of Culiacán,” NACLA, November 22, 2019, <https://nacla.org/news/2019/11/22/culiacan-chapo-mexico-drug-violence>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Jo Tuckman, “El Chapo: Mexican Police Capture Then Release Drug Boss’s Son after Battle with Cartel,” the Guardian, October 18, 2019, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/17/el-chapo-violence-breaks-out-in-mexican-city-amid-rumours-of-sons-arrest>.

criminal the best way to achieve peace? It demonstrates a point when there is a change in strategy and approach to protecting the lives of citizens. Despite Andrés Manuel López Obrador's government desire to conduct operations to arrest criminals who endanger the livelihood of citizens, his other similar desire to change strategy led his government to pursue a different route to achieve peace. The Battle of Culiacán is a story of fear, rampage, disorder, and savagery where an illegitimate force ruled. During this day, citizens all over the country watched the news with feelings of despair, impotence, and disappointment, just like I did from across the continent. With the retreat of the government, it was clear that there is an uneven battle that the country is striving to combat, and that has continuously failed to stand up to its policies and plans.

Since the end of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first century, Mexico has been devastated by critical levels of visible violence, scoring high in the ranks of violent attacks, homicides, and state insecurity.<sup>5</sup> Despite the existence of multiple perspectives, most commonly, the heightened presence of violence is mostly pinpointed to the launch of the *War on Drugs* against drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs) by President Felipe Calderón, indicating a radical change to the mainstream political and security approach of Mexico.<sup>6</sup> In the analysis of many scholars and evidence from the living reality of many citizens, the launching of the war has had a main hand in

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<sup>5</sup> Laura Calderón, Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico SPECIAL REPORT," no. Data and Analysis Through 2017, accessed February 11, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug\\_Violence\\_in\\_Mexico\\_SPECIAL\\_REPORT](https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug_Violence_in_Mexico_SPECIAL_REPORT).

<sup>6</sup> Angelica Duran-Martinez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

the destabilization of the country politically, economically, and socially.<sup>7</sup>

How did Mexico reach a critical point? The War on Drugs entailed opening the country to extensive military presence in many communities, reduce the involvement and activity of local and state police forces to their common duties, and attempted to dispatch operations to forcibly find any individuals involved in organized crime, particularly targeting the main leaders. Known as the “kingpin approach,” this measure intended to crack drug cartels by consistently targeting major organized crime figures to disrupt the trafficking networks.<sup>8</sup> The strategy of destabilizing criminal organizations from top-bottom brought intense inter-cartel competition, intra-cartel competition, and a fragmentation of the organizations, resulting in more violence in the country. *Inter-cartel* competition refers to a fight for territory and/or control within the same region between two different DTOs. *Intra-cartel* refers to a division within the same DTO where members fight for hierarchical and command reasons. As a result, the inter-cartel competition was present in regions where there was a fight for routes and the market, while intra-cartel competition rose because of the destabilization of the ruling structure when the head of an organization was arrested or murdered, causing members of the organization to want to fill those spots.

The efforts to fight organized crime have actively overshadowed the history of Mexico with violence and drug-trafficking organizations remarkably since the last two

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<sup>7</sup> Beatriz Magaloni et al., “Living in Fear: Mapping the Social Embeddedness of Drug Gangs and Violence in Mexico,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, November 4, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1963836>.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Calderon, Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, “Drug Violence in Mexico SPECIAL REPORT,” no. Data and Analysis Through 2017, accessed February 11, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug\\_Violence\\_in\\_Mexico\\_SPECIAL\\_REPORT](https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug_Violence_in_Mexico_SPECIAL_REPORT).

decades of the twentieth century. The recent rise of violence has extensively affected opportunities for societal growth<sup>9</sup>, has hindered the legitimacy of governmental institutions, and has exacerbated the lost hope of citizens<sup>10</sup>. Scholar Beatriz Magaloni claims that citizens in Mexico are trapped between two illegitimate forces — the drug gangs and their criminal organizations and the police who are supposed to protect them.<sup>11</sup> Magaloni’s conclusion is one many scholars and researchers agree with, nonetheless, it can additionally encompass other aspects in which Mexican citizens are trapped: the consistent failure of institutions, overarching fear, and deep history of embedded violence.<sup>12</sup>

In an effort to provide Mexican citizens prosperity and welfare, after being overall at unceasing risk, it is crucial that as a researcher I attempt to link patterns and make connections on how the decisions and strategies made by the government have affected citizens. As a result of these broken strategies, it will be evaluated how violence has become intertwined with political leadership, community development, and impacted societal well-being. I will interpret previous events and decisions to understand what has happened in Mexico’s past that led to a critical event such as the one on October 17th, 2019 to happen – an event where a government had to decide to give control to organized crime to prevent further deaths, violence, and exposure. I am interested in showcasing the

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<sup>9</sup> Magaloni et al., “Living in Fear.”

<sup>10</sup> Luisa R. Blanco, “The Impact of Crime on Trust in Institutions in Mexico,” *European Journal of Political Economy* 32 (December 1, 2013): 38–55, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2013.06.004>.

<sup>11</sup> Beatriz Magaloni et al., “Living in Fear: Mapping the Social Embeddedness of Drug Gangs and Violence in Mexico,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, November 4, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1963836>.

<sup>12</sup> Elena Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre,” *Desacatos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 0, no. 40 (December 16, 2013): 13–32, <https://doi.org/10.29340/40.253>.

intensity and the impact of this altercation since it is relatively recent, and how it represents what I consider to be the *breaking point* in the whole path that the country has experienced with organized crime and how it could take a toll in the future. There have been events in Mexico that have fueled violence caused by the arms trade and inter-cartel war, but this was significantly different. It was a statement. In this specific event, we see the livelihood of many Mexican citizens truly at risk and the government choosing to take a step back because of fear. This was the epitome of lost hope for most Mexican citizens. By the end of this thesis, I want to propose a way of foreshadowing what might be the possible considerations to ensure the safety of citizens despite the growing presence of organized crime.

As a result, this paper seeks to deep dive into the current realities of the country, based on the understanding of its history with violence, to provide information and recommendations that could become agents for a process of reconstruction of hope for Mexican citizens. Some of these realities include the failure of the government to offer safe avenues for citizens, the presence of organized crime in all aspects of daily life, the fear with which citizens live, and how decisions taken by the government can indirectly disproportionately affect citizenship well-being. Additionally, I want to provide citizens and interested scholars with a comprehensive study and explanation of certain aspects of the history of Mexico to provide more information regarding some of the roots and challenges that Mexico has experienced – adding to the debates existing today.

The thesis will be divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, I outline the research questions and design of the thesis, the methods of how I will analyze and

compare cases, and provide key information about my interest. Chapter 2 will provide background information on the generalized violence that exists in Mexico, the common debates of this war by scholars when trying to interpret the peak of violence that Mexico has experienced, and the often-unspoken reality of the transition from structural violence to visible, brutal drug violence. Chapter 3 will encompass the scholarly review to provide an analysis of the previous studies conducted by scholars to disentangle the heightened violence. Chapter 4 will provide the key main arguments to answer the question: to what extent have the policies implemented by the Mexican government since the *War on Drugs* further fueled social violence? This will be followed by a case study analysis of the main arguments based on specific events throughout the last three presidential administrations. My contribution will have a four-way approach to understand the current presence of violence and how it has affected citizens from a variety of lenses. Chapter 5 will present a clearer conclusion of the impact that the violence that exists in Mexico has on its citizens and the fear that they endure daily. Then, I will mention key aspects that result from the Mexico-United States bilateral relationship. The United States' hidden market plays a critical role in engaging in a vicious cycle with Mexico's supply of drugs and interest for high-caliber weapons.<sup>13</sup> The existing need to exchange guns and drugs results in major violence for citizens, violation of human rights, and the ability for organized crime to have more equipment and power than Mexico's military.<sup>14</sup> The thesis

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<sup>13</sup> Chelsea Parsons and Eugenio Weigend Vargas, "Beyond Our Borders," Center for American Progress, accessed September 25, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2018/02/02/445659/beyond-our-borders/>.

<sup>14</sup> Arindrajit Dube, Oeindrila Dube, and Omar García-Ponce, "Cross-Border Spillover: U.S. Gun Laws and Violence in Mexico," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (August 2013): 397–417, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000178>.

will conclude by offering ways to slowly restructure the system in a more favorable way to ensure citizenship well-being and some final remarks.

# CHAPTER 1 METHODS

## 1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Mexico, most prominently the last two decades, has suffered from an increased presence of organized crime in the streets impacting civilians directly — through altercations on their way to work, a fear of becoming a victim, and a concern for the security of their families and businesses daily. This reality has often been reflected as an active agent causing a demise in the number of opportunities available for citizens to develop, shining a light on the failing leadership and governance, and portraying a country overwhelmed by criminal activity. Mexico’s economic, political and social development is at continuous risk.<sup>1</sup> The plan for this thesis is to analyze the path dependency pattern that has been clear by the decisions taken by the three presidential administrations since the *War on Drugs* against organized crime began with President Felipe Calderón.<sup>2</sup>

Social scientists generally mention the notion of path dependence to support a variety of claims — such as that “specific patterns of timing and sequence matter; large consequences may result from relatively small events; particular courses of action, once introduced, can be virtually impossible to reverse; and political development is often

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<sup>1</sup> Chelsea Parsons and Eugenio Weigend Vargas, “Beyond Our Borders,” Center for American Progress, accessed September 25, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2018/02/02/445659/beyond-our-borders/>.

<sup>2</sup> Pierson, Paul. *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004. Print.

punctuated by critical moments that shape the basic contours of life.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout the thesis, I will focus on Jacob Hacker’s argument that “path dependence refers to developmental trajectories that are inherently difficult to reverse” with the study conducted by Paul Pierson in his book *Politics in Time* (2004).<sup>4</sup> I will analyze more extensively the reality that despite efforts being implemented by the governmental institutions and leadership, there has been a lack of effectiveness because the approaches have in some ways incentivized and led to more violence. Most importantly, in the Mexican case, it is key to see how the government has changed between three political parties in the last fifteen years and how the results of the fight against organized crime display similitude in approach and outcome.

Pierson formulates an argument of the concept of path dependence defined as “social processes that exhibit positive feedback and thus generate branching patterns of historical development.”<sup>5</sup> He claims how each step along a particular path can create consequences that increase the “attractiveness” of that path to the situations that follow, resulting in effects that generate a powerful cycle of self-reinforcing activity.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, two main positive feedback dynamics exist that are central to the concept of path dependence. First, they reveal how “the costs of switching from one alternative to another will,” in certain contexts, increase over time. Second, they draw attention to the

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Pierson, “POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND PATH DEPENDENCE,” in *Politics in Time, History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 17–53, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7sgkg.6>.

<sup>4</sup> Pierson., pg. 21

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Pierson, “POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND PATH DEPENDENCE,” in *Politics in Time, History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 17–53, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7sgkg.6>.

issues of “timing and sequence,” distinguishing formative moments that reinforce divergent paths.<sup>7</sup> The relevance to politics and decision-making arises in situations such as the possibilities for employing political authority, the ambiguity of many political processes and outcomes, and with change-resistant institutions which are prone to positive feedback.

The central question in research is “To what extent have the policies implemented by the Mexican government since 2006 against the *War on Drugs* further fueled social violence?” The independent variables are the policies created and enacted by the government to provide a positive change in the country. The dependent variables are the implications and consequences for citizens: sociological, emotional, and physical leading to exacerbated violence. For this analysis, *policies* are defined as the legal approaches that governments have decided should alleviate the issue, in this case, violence, that permeates their society.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, to the case that will be studied, the question focuses on how has violence in Mexico changed since President Felipe Calderón’s *War on Drugs* in 2006 up to the new government under Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s *Peace Plan*. Focusing from 2006 on will provide insight on the influence of how a direct tactic towards organized crime through political competition and intercartel fighting could affect social responses. *Social violence* will be defined as that which arises due to a lack of equitable opportunities, grand exposure to crime, and a failed responsibility from

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<sup>7</sup> Pierson. Pg. 19

<sup>8</sup> Center for Disease Control, “Definition of Policy | AD for Policy and Strategy | CDC,” June 18, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/policy/analysis/process/definition.html>.

government institutions.<sup>9</sup> Through a greater appreciation of historical processes in the variation of political life, arguments can highlight temporal ordering and its effect on future events.<sup>10</sup> Using the path dependency theory as a tool for analysis will be helpful in this research as it provides an essential building block for exploring the changes in political parties.<sup>11</sup>

American economist Douglass North defined institutions as “the rules of the game in a society,” meaning the human devised constraints that shape human interaction.”<sup>12</sup> With this, it is claimed that institutional development is subject to positive feedback – making it the role of path dependence to explain the patterns of institutional emergence, persistence, and change – imperative to the social sciences. Politics involves struggles over the authority to establish, enforce, and change the rules governing social action. In the case of Mexico, analyzing the three different administrations allows to interpret how it is often difficult to change the course of action when implementing policy and governance. Developing new approaches to institutions usually entails higher costs, learning and coordination effects, and the adoption of change by the individuals around it. As a result, these new changes increase the “attractiveness” of the existing institutional arrangements compared to the possible hypothetical alternatives,<sup>13</sup> as we will explore in the case of Mexico. For example, Gerard Alexander's (2001) study of democratic

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<sup>9</sup> Javier Osorio, “Democratization and Drug Violence in Mexico,” *Cornell University*, 2013, [https://eventos.itam.mx/sites/default/files/eventositam.mx/eventos/aadjuntos/2014/01/democratizacion\\_and\\_drug\\_violence\\_osorio\\_appendix\\_1.pdf](https://eventos.itam.mx/sites/default/files/eventositam.mx/eventos/aadjuntos/2014/01/democratizacion_and_drug_violence_osorio_appendix_1.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Pierson, “POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND PATH DEPENDENCE.” Pg. 20

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 22

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 27

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 35

consolidation is based explicitly on a rational choice framework, in which actors are voluntarily bound by history because of the “positively perceived trade-off” between short-term costs for long-term improvements. In this case, path dependence is perceived to be the result of a rational cost-benefit calculation.<sup>14</sup> In Mexico, a similar strategy against the *War on Drugs* has been developed and usually performed, despite the intention to switch gears. This implies that the cost of reversing generally rises dramatically, shining light on the increased violence.

A secondary question that I will raise, throughout the thesis, after dissecting the research question is: What have been the effects of violence on security, citizenship well-being, displacement, and human rights? Evaluating how the different policies have impacted the livelihood of citizens is important to measure their effectiveness. *Security* in this question is defined as the social and economic stability, the psychological safety of citizens, and the presence or lack thereof of street violence in the state.<sup>15</sup> *Citizenship well-being* is characterized by the ability for citizens to feel safe, comfortable, and able to live a dignified life.<sup>16</sup> *Displacement*, in this analysis, is defined as the forced moving of citizens from their place of origin to find shelter and safer places to live, mostly leaving valuable aspects of their lives behind.<sup>17</sup> The main definition to keep in mind is *human*

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Greener, “The Potential of Path Dependence in Political Studies,” 2005, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-9256.2005.00230.x>.

<sup>15</sup> Dr Zulia Orozco Reynoso, “The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana.Pdf,” *The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana*, accessed February 11, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/38402161/The\\_Resurgence\\_of\\_Violent\\_Crime\\_in\\_Tijuana\\_pdf](https://www.academia.edu/38402161/The_Resurgence_of_Violent_Crime_in_Tijuana_pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Center for Disease Control, “Well-Being Concepts | HRQOL | CDC,” November 5, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> World Health Organization, “WHO | Displaced People,” WHO (World Health Organization), accessed April 1, 2021, [https://www.who.int/environmental\\_health\\_emergencies/displaced\\_people/en/](https://www.who.int/environmental_health_emergencies/displaced_people/en/).

*rights* defined as the inherent rights that individuals possess for the sake of being human, deserving of respect, and opportunities to enhance their lives.<sup>18</sup>

I am interested in analyzing these questions and attempting to find answers because they are associated with understanding the impact of organized crime in Mexico, its security, the kinds of violence that are experienced, the consequences that citizens have had to endure, and the steps the government has taken to combat crime. The research question will be studied from four different perspectives, based on the various types of violence I have concluded and believe to exist in the country: intercartel, government-cartel<sup>19</sup>, cartel-citizens, and government-citizens. *Inter-cartel violence* is that which takes place when drug trade organizations partake in conflict and fight for territory, power, and control.<sup>20</sup> *Government-cartel violence* is a result of the altercations between the government policies and strategies of the military and the defense mechanisms brought by organized crime. *Cartel-citizens violence* can be seen when organized crime actively pursues actions that are harmful to citizens as a pursuit of further drug-related activity goals or to demonstrate power. *Government-citizen violence* is an aggression that happens between the policies and approaches taken by the government, often overlooked as irrational, but connected to the failed desire and effort to provide safety and stability to the citizens.

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations, “Human Rights | United Nations,” accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights>.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars: Crackdowns and Cartels in Latin America*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Beatriz Magaloni et al., “Living in Fear: Mapping the Social Embeddedness of Drug Gangs and Violence in Mexico,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, November 4, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1963836>.

In my analysis and argument, I will explain more comprehensively the four types of violence that can completely measure the different levels of violence experienced by citizens. This will be followed by a short overview of how social violence has risen because of a spillover of abuse and damage which is showcased between citizen-citizen violence – higher desire to engage in criminal activities due to lack of developmental opportunities. These four types can be compartmentalized into broader sections of violence such as drug-criminal, political-national domestic, and structural violence which will also be mentioned during the theoretical section through the diagram, Figure 1, labeled as *Breakdown of Approaches to Violence in Mexico*.

By relying on experts in the field and the analysis of reports, this thesis will contribute to a more nuanced interpretation of the study of Mexico's rise of violence and the limitations that continue to exist. Many aspects of the research continue to be bubbled in obscurity because of the limited, transparent reports, the embeddedness of corruption in the system and leadership, and the overwhelming fear that exists against speaking of the experiences in the country. All of these need to be continuously addressed to find possible strategies to provide a safer and worthy future for citizens. In this thesis, my approach to discern and understand the soaring violence will consist of an introduction to the kinds of violence that exist in the country, while taking a balcony perspective and a step away from the most manifested type of violence– drug violence – and mention how the government has attempted to create policies to protect citizens and the results of the strategies, and the role that the remarkable inequality has on fueling brutality.

## 1.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research analysis of the matter will occur in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4. In Chapter 2, I introduce a brief historical timeline of the late part of the twentieth century to provide background information on the history of security and stability of Mexico before the 2006 *War on Drugs*. This will be followed by a short overview section, *Generalized Rising Violence in Mexico*, with some main statistics of violent encounters, deaths, and trends during each administration to provide insight into the violence and insecurity in the country.

Then, I will provide some key information on the presence of organized crime and trends of violence in the section labeled as *Three Sexenios* during the presidency of Felipe Calderón and his efforts to fight organized crime, then Enrique Peña Nieto and its policies, then Andrés Manuel López Obrador's new approach to organized crime which in expression differs from his two predecessors illustrated in Figure 5 labeled *The Three Sexenios' Agenda*. This will provide some insight into the context in which different intentions were voiced and the approaches that were taken, due to their political affiliation, and the level of violence at their present time.

The research in Chapter 4 will be composed of a comparative case study analysis, a within-unit with temporal variation in which I will be analyzing the presidencies of Felipe Calderón, Enrique Peña Nieto, and Andrés Manuel López Obrador. A within-unit with temporal variation analysis allows the study to compare the various presidencies within Mexico throughout time. I will analyze following Pierson's argument of the path

dependency theory<sup>21</sup> to dissect the policies and key events of each of the last three Mexican administrations, President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), and President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-present) and how they were possibly connected and, in many ways, with irreversible decisions, each with their respective section. Since the three administrations represent three different political parties, it will provide insight on the way each government decided to handle the repercussions and initiatives from launching the *War on Drugs* and how the well-being of citizens was intended to be protected. Academic literature and other researchers consider hypotheses around a diverse range of factors related to the pervasive violence that exists, however, this research will be tackled by analyzing the violent events and impacts of strategies at different levels. It is important to study the upcoming reality of heightened violence by elaborating on the difference between cartel tactics – showing themselves through visibility and invisibility. The comparative analysis will be conducted to measure the levels of violence, efficacy, and the strategies of each and whether they were appropriate.

Throughout the thesis, researching the cause-and-effect relationship that exists between the implementation of new approaches to combat crime that have resulted in more crime will be highlighted. The data used will be qualitative, through a thorough analysis of policies and specific emblematic events and how they took place, mostly primary and secondary data. The methods of data collection rely on observation and

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<sup>21</sup> Pierson, Paul. *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004. Print.

analysis of previous scholarly work such as surveys taken by scholars about the impacts on citizen development and the sociological implications of heightened violence. The operationalization will rely on ordinal variables to serve comparison in terms of the extent of the danger of each event. Additionally, quantitative data will be used to explain the extent of each event and operationalize the impact of their proceeding. The operationalization will rely on continuous, ratio variables to serve comparison purposes such as measuring the impact through the number of deaths, crimes because of drugs, reports on violence, and forced displacement due to cartel activity or fear of citizenry. Such quantitative data will be an analysis of the reported numbers by reporters, data analysts, and witnesses. The data comes from a variety of scholarly resources such as the Justice in Mexico report by the University of San Diego which has statistics and data for each year. Surveys taken by scholars about the presumed impact that citizens feel and what the media portrays will also be used.

This data will provide insight into the policies in place, the trends of increased violence, political competition, and implicit relationships. This approach will be helpful to have evidence on the role of the different mechanisms in violence. I will be comparing the presidencies—their policies and their political agenda—to see any similarities or differences and how the impact is displayed in society. How have the approaches and results differed? Comparing the policies and specific breakthrough events is necessary to measure the influence that the legal approaches could have had on the patterns of violence. The research method selected suits the objective of analyzing the impact of the policies tackling organized crime top-bottom and with direct strategies. This research

design will provide a comprehensive understanding of key main events and strategies to inform the reader and, similarly, be compared side to side between administrations. This is the most appropriate design to fully encompass main insights and observations throughout the first two decades of the twenty-first century while providing a narrative to the reader. The comparison will help answer the research question of the extent to which violence has exacerbated based on the events that will be described and the role of politics.

Towards the conclusion of the thesis, I will provide some policy recommendations to study the realities of Mexico and how to go about the instability that citizens endure every day. I want to contribute to the growing literature about the effects that DTOs have had on Mexican development, growth, and security at a societal level. I expect to continue shining a light on the issue of violence and insecurity. It is important to consider the drug-arms trade nexus that exists between the United States and Mexico. The equipment and power that drug-trafficking organizations have gained and how it differs from that of the Mexican military has been influenced by the expiration of the United States' Federal Assault Weapons Ban in 2004, as it has been linked to the rising of high-caliber weapons in Mexico.<sup>22</sup> The understanding of the flow of US weapons to Mexico is a key component to analyzing the efforts implemented by both the United States and Mexico to reach a better agreement on how to fight criminal organizations. I will be evaluating the past and current public policies and proposals of the current

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<sup>22</sup> Arindrajit Dube, Oeindrila Dube, and Omar García-Ponce, "Cross-Border Spillover: U.S. Gun Laws and Violence in Mexico," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (August 2013): 397–417, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000178>.

administration. Are the policies achieving the desired outcome and how have they impacted those that they are meant to protect?

## CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Despite the overwhelming rise in violence in the last decades, the presence of working drug-trafficking organizations in Mexico dates back to the twentieth century. Mexico's prime location in drug trafficking routes and proximity to the largest market, the United States, has been the home to criminal organizations that are engaged in illicit activities in collaboration with other Latin American countries. Marijuana and opium production in the state of Sinaloa began around the nineteenth century. Both products were regularly exported to the United States before they were prohibited at the beginning of the twentieth century,<sup>1</sup> where prohibition brought illicit profits to Mexican drug-trade organizations. Mexican producers and smugglers became an important supplier of these commodities, adding heroin, with operations extending to the states of Chihuahua, Durango, Guerrero, and Michoacán.<sup>2</sup> In 1998, about 300,000 farmers in Mexico were engaged in drug production and another half million were directly or indirectly related to drug smuggling.<sup>3</sup> The cartels are fueled by the United States' demand for drugs – using part of their profits to purchase high-powered firearms from states along the border.<sup>4</sup> Criminal organizations have existed since then and succeeded without relying primarily

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars*.

<sup>2</sup> David Shirk and Joel Wallman, "Understanding Mexico's Drug Violence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 8 (December 1, 2015): 1348–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002715587049>.

<sup>3</sup> Lingling Lu, "An Analyze of Anti-Drug Policy and Its Effects of Enrique Peña Nieto's Government in Mexico | International Relations and Diplomacy - Academia.Edu," January 2020, [https://www.academia.edu/42072610/An\\_Analyze\\_of\\_Anti\\_Drug\\_Policy\\_and\\_Its\\_Effects\\_of\\_Enrique\\_Pe%C3%B1a\\_Nieto\\_s\\_Government\\_in\\_Mexico?auto=download&email\\_work\\_card=download-paper](https://www.academia.edu/42072610/An_Analyze_of_Anti_Drug_Policy_and_Its_Effects_of_Enrique_Pe%C3%B1a_Nieto_s_Government_in_Mexico?auto=download&email_work_card=download-paper).

<sup>4</sup> Laura Mehalko, "This Is Gun Country: The International Implications of U.S. Gun Control Policy Note," *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 35, no. 1 (2012): 297–330.

on the use of violence to achieve their financial means and interests.<sup>5</sup>

Since its start in the 1930s, the hegemonic Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) was actively aware of cartel existence in the country and managed them through protection.<sup>6</sup> Mexico was involved in an extensive drug trade, significant in size, which was incorporated into a larger system of economic and political corruption in a mutual relationship with the PRI's party apparatus. The drug trade was growing stronger due to their provision of service as main routes after the diversion of cocaine flow from the Caribbean to the overland Mexico route, and as the Colombian drug-trafficking organizations were splitting and decreasing in hegemony.<sup>7</sup>

The PRI for many years was successful at accomplishing a state of stability through a custom of systemic corruption labeled as "state-sponsored protection." It consisted of authorities, from all levels of the government, regularly extracting bribes from traffickers. Bribery was mostly strengthened by the state, rather than undermined. As a result, the top-down control of bribery was institutionalized. Despite the questionable objectives and approach, the PRI was accomplishing "something," there was *peace* in the eyes of the citizens.<sup>8</sup> Criminals were enjoying high-level protection, or at least a lack of law enforcement, from what we can surely label corrupt government

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<sup>5</sup> Javier Osorio, "Democratization and Drug Violence in Mexico," *Cornell University*, 2013, [https://eventos.itam.mx/sites/default/files/eventositammx/eventos/aadjuntos/2014/01/democratizacion\\_and\\_drug\\_violence\\_osorio\\_appendix\\_1.pdf](https://eventos.itam.mx/sites/default/files/eventositammx/eventos/aadjuntos/2014/01/democratizacion_and_drug_violence_osorio_appendix_1.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars: Crackdowns and Cartels in Latin America*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Pg. 205

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

authorities.<sup>9</sup> This illegal sector, for a long time, was characterized by a long absence of overt and sustained hostilities.<sup>10</sup> This implicit, but very clear relationship ensured cohesion providing the state with the ability to conduct quick enforcement, when necessary, to discipline the behavior of traffickers if it went outside the pre-stated guidelines. The state protection encouraged criminals to hide any violent behavior in exchange for the license to partake in their illicit activities.<sup>11</sup> Drug-trafficking organizations were alive and thriving. Nonetheless, what this says about the governmental institutions in Mexico is something to keep in mind.

Corruption, a prevalent factor that entails the criminal organizations having the economic power to deter the state from using repression against them, was a main component of the PRI ruling.<sup>12</sup> The corrupt implicit relationships with criminal organizations were interrupted by the process of re-democratization of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) towards the end of the twentieth century. While it is important to note that this process of democratization did not eliminate corruption, since it is still an overwhelmingly part of Mexico's roots, it meant that bribe-taking was no longer part of an institutionalized, hierarchy-reinforcing system. The shift in political parties weakened the consent that existed between the government and organized crime, pushing cartels towards more violent strategies to achieve their financial goals. Nonetheless, actual

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<sup>9</sup> Osorio, "Democratization and Drug Violence in Mexico."

<sup>10</sup> Osorio, "Democratization and Drug Violence in Mexico."

<sup>11</sup> Angelica Duran-Martinez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars*.

visible anti-state violence and citizen threat remained rare until the last years of President Fox and the beginning of Felipe Calderón, from 2004-2008.<sup>13</sup>

At the turn of the century, with the increasing political competition in the hands of a democratic regime, government authorities were motivated to enforce the law against criminal organizations and alter the status quo of protection. As a result, a chain of actions and reactions that generated and aggregated the escalation of violence persisted. The PAN's decisive crackdown was sold as a means to achieve three goals in their agenda: tackle corruption, reduce violence, and alter the state role. The PAN was interested in reducing drug flows and corruption at the cost of short-term violence and tackling the struggle to end the corrupting pattern.<sup>14</sup> As a response, the collapse of the PRI's protection system became a key trigger towards the beginning of inter-cartel violence and, eventually, some instances of government-cartel violence. This collapse offers important insights into the foggy linkages between corruption, violence, and the state's capacity to take a prominent role in the suppression or showcasing of aggression.<sup>15</sup>

Today, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's new rising leftist political party, MORENA, the Movimiento Regeneración Nacional, promises to bring a new outlook and shape to Mexico.<sup>16</sup> President López Obrador has been clear in his perception of both the current laws and institutions of the country as instruments of the corrupted

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars: Crackdowns and Cartels in Latin America*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "MORENA Established As a New Party on the Mexican Left - New Politics," accessed April 12, 2021, <https://newpol.org/morena-established-new-party-mexican-left/?print=print>.

establishment power that persists, leaving many doubts about how he plans to provide a fair democracy for the marginalized communities.<sup>17</sup> His new individualistic governing style can disregard the Mexican institutions that, while weak, have still been set up to ensure the presence of a rule of law – a rule of law that should be strengthened – to guide the country towards the fresh start MORENA believes the Mexican citizenry deserves and should have. Nonetheless, the domestic and internal interest of MORENA has undermined any international support and guidance persisting in further corruption and failing leadership.

## **2.1 GENERALIZED RISING VIOLENCE IN MEXICO**

Mexico has been displayed and portrayed for the past two decades as a country that has experienced uprising violence and often been labeled as a dangerous place. The rising violence in Mexico has been tightly intertwined with the uprising of visible drug violence caused by the disruption of long-precedent PRI political rule. The gradual shift that has occurred over the last several years with the restructuring of the government's efforts against organized crime has led to other strains of violence appearing as a result of the instability of the country. A visible wave of violence against women, femicides, has also experienced a disturbing spike. Violence, insistently, started coming from all directions of the spectrum.<sup>18</sup>

Since then, the illicit drug trade took new routes and shifted towards the

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<sup>17</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Andrés Manuel López Obrador and a New Era of Politics in Mexico," *Brookings* (blog), July 3, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/07/03/andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-and-a-new-era-of-politics-in-mexico/>.

<sup>18</sup> Gabriela Calderón et al., "The Beheading of Criminal Organizations and the Dynamics of Violence in Mexico," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 8 (December 1, 2015): 1455–85, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002715587053>.

proliferation of new forms of organized crime. Citizens were facing more dangerous threats as a result of organized crime embedding itself in ordinary daily activities. The fragmentation of Mexican criminal organizations shook the previous stability of the country opening it to more forms of visible crime in the streets.<sup>19</sup> Roughly a third to half of all homicides in Mexico bear the signs of organized-crime violence, with the use of high-caliber weapons, torture, dismemberment, and explicit messages.<sup>20</sup> Grievously, Mexico has experienced a massive escalation of violence of unprecedented characteristics.<sup>21</sup>

Drug cartels are motivated to fight for strategic points and territories – transportation hubs and international trade logistics such as ports, airstrips, airports, or high-speed highways – close to the US border and major cities in Mexico. Being in control of main points allows DTOs to smuggle drugs into the large market of the United States and gives them the power to tax the long-distance drug trade of other criminal organizations.<sup>22</sup> While DTOs are primarily about the trafficking of narcotics, they have diversified into other illicit activities such as extortion, kidnapping for ransom, oil theft, and human trafficking. These criminal organizations have extended to many realms of society and built a high capacity for violence.<sup>23</sup> The access to massive profits has turned DTOs into powerful organizations, allowing them to recruit citizens to serve as assassins,

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<sup>19</sup> Calderon et al., “Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico.”

<sup>20</sup> Calderon, Rodriguez Ferreira, and Shirk, “Drug Violence in Mexico SPECIAL REPORT.”

<sup>21</sup> Javier Osorio, “Democratization and Drug Violence in Mexico,” *Cornell University*, 2013, [https://eventos.itam.mx/sites/default/files/eventositammx/eventos/aadjuntos/2014/01/democratizacion\\_and\\_drug\\_violence\\_osorio\\_appendix\\_1.pdf](https://eventos.itam.mx/sites/default/files/eventositammx/eventos/aadjuntos/2014/01/democratizacion_and_drug_violence_osorio_appendix_1.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Calderón et al., “The Beheading of Criminal Organizations and the Dynamics of Violence in Mexico.”

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

to buy military arsenals to fight the state, and to buy government officials and law enforcement – their main strategies.<sup>24</sup>

Scholars have analyzed the standard threshold of defining national conflict as a civil war at around 1,000 deaths a year. Lamentably, Mexico faces a death toll caused by organized crime similar to that of civil wars. In the eyes of Felipe Calderón, when starting his government, the single issue that required his immediate action was deploying the armed forces to fighting criminal organizations. His strategy was more violent than ever expected, so the country and the world witnessed horrific acts directed against criminals and innocent people for at least ten years now.<sup>25</sup>

Current pessimism in Mexican society with regards to the *War on Drugs* has harmed the development of a cohesive state. From 2007 to 2010, the fight against DTOs killed about 35,000 people. As noted by Osorio, this death toll represents comparability to the onset of 35 civil wars in four years only, a disturbing amount. The number of deaths since it launched and the feeling of frustration by citizens shows that it will be much longer, blooded, and, based on just the Battle of Culiacán, perhaps continued to be lost.<sup>26</sup> There is fear, as in terms of scale, duration, and impact, since the war is surely the country's most severe conflict since the Mexican revolution.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Magaloni et al., "Living in Fear."

<sup>25</sup> Carlos Vilalta, "How Did Things Get So Bad So Quickly? An Assessment of the Initial Conditions of the War Against Organized Crime in Mexico," *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, accessed February 17, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/36520179/How\\_Did\\_Things\\_Get\\_So\\_Bad\\_So\\_Quickly\\_An\\_Assessment\\_of\\_the\\_Initial\\_Conditions\\_of\\_the\\_War\\_Against\\_Organized\\_Crime\\_in\\_Mexico](https://www.academia.edu/36520179/How_Did_Things_Get_So_Bad_So_Quickly_An_Assessment_of_the_Initial_Conditions_of_the_War_Against_Organized_Crime_in_Mexico).

<sup>26</sup> Vilalta.

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars*.

Crime, then, has had consequences for both the nation's economy and its institutional stability. The trust in institutions was hindered by the implicit relationships of the past and those who are perceived to still exist causing further issues related to social capital and development. The resounding waves of insecurity take a significant toll on the development and growth of strong and healthy populations. Social capital, understood as the density of trust existing within a group and the determination of how easily people work together, serves as an engine for economic growth and development, however, Mexico has experienced a decline in the effectiveness of it.<sup>28</sup> One of the biggest concerns that this paper seeks to address is the serious risk that the problems of corruption and violence have had on the lives of citizens. The combination of the two phenomena has drastically undermined Mexico's democratic system.<sup>29</sup> Citizens' incentives and performance decreased due to the overwhelming amount of presence of organized crime as several government officials reinforced their interests first.

Citizens in Mexico began to encompass a fear that any type of growth or prosperity could shine a sign of success that could rapidly be undermined by organized crime.<sup>30</sup> For example, the rapid increase of assaults and robberies deters many families from attempting to start their own business or show any prosperity. In circumstances such as these is when the failure of protection from governmental institutions and the harmed trust began to weaken the country further. Social capital is associated with better

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<sup>28</sup> Luisa R. Blanco, "The Impact of Crime on Trust in Institutions in Mexico," *European Journal of Political Economy* 32 (December 1, 2013): 38–55, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2013.06.004>.

<sup>29</sup> Laura Calderon, Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico SPECIAL REPORT," no. Data and Analysis Through 2017, accessed February 11, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug\\_Violence\\_in\\_Mexico\\_SPECIAL\\_REPORT](https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug_Violence_in_Mexico_SPECIAL_REPORT).

<sup>30</sup> Magaloni et al., "Living in Fear."

governance and greater political accountability – it has a positive effect in countries where institutions and the rule of law are weak, in which Mexico could benefit.<sup>31</sup>

## **2.2 COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS**

There are misunderstandings of how this level of insecurity developed in the country. The three that will be mentioned throughout the thesis are that violence is and has been part of the Mexican system, that the previous invisibility of violence did not mean there was a lack of harm, and the critical role that security institutions such as the police play in society. Violence is often labeled on the drug trade organizations that, in their pursuit of profitability, take the lives of citizens in the process. However, as previously stated, their involvement in criminal activities goes back for many decades. It is, then, imperative to analyze the embeddedness of violence and how it stems from the roots of the country. To find plausible causation of the weakness that the institutions and government of Mexico are experiencing, it is argued by some academics that the epitome of violence did not surprisingly appear. Violence has, instead, been embedded and entrenched in the Mexican system. Mexico had not resolved many of its issues, concerning institutional weakness, meaning that they had been hidden successfully under the rug by corrupted leadership. Then, despite drug trafficking organizations working through invisibility in the past, it can still be argued that the focus of the government was not directed towards helping out the citizenry. The interests of all top-down individuals involved in the protection racket displayed a blind eye to the development of opportunities for the people. The inability to enrich the opportunities of labor for the

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<sup>31</sup> Blanco, “The Impact of Crime on Trust in Institutions in Mexico.”

youth, to establish a rigid social mobility system, the drastic privileges for certain classes, and the corruption are many of the things that were already prevalent during the PRI hegemony and that had not been resolved when the country was taken aback by violence.<sup>32</sup>

Drug trade organizations, for many years, worked through invisibility because of the implicit relationships with the state. When thinking about this now, a part of the violence was also the idea of leaving them hands-off to ensure peace and stability, which was accomplished for many years by the PRI rule. When visibility began to arise, this was because the state was undergoing changes and organized crime was left hanging.<sup>33</sup> In the concept of violent democracies, introduced by scholars Desmond Arias and Goldstein they argue about the importance of seeing how violence affects political practice and subjectivity of individuals in general.<sup>34</sup> Understanding that violence has remained an instrument for political rule and resistance could bring some sense as to the responses provided by the Mexican government. Studying the relationship between democracy and violence is important to generate arguments about how Mexico can better fight against the growth of crime rates and intensive violent attacks. It can be deducted that by having implicit relationships, the government was being violent to its people, but still giving some sort of protection from street violence.

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<sup>32</sup> Marcelo Bergman, “La violencia en México: algunas aproximaciones académicas,” *Desacatos*, no. 40 (December 2012): 67–76.

<sup>33</sup> Angelica Duran-Martinez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> Daniel M. Goldstein and Enrique Desmond Arias, *Violent Democracies in Latin America* (Duke University Press, 2010).

The limited effective response of the governmental institutions has drastically portrayed a negative sentiment to the citizens that has impacted the incentive of proper collaboration to fight together. Additionally, the active participation of state agents in criminal activities has further amplified the repercussions from crime, has converted the institutions into accomplices of violence, and reproduces further impunity. This overarching impunity has shattered the trust of citizens, deepening the damage to the legitimacy of the regime.<sup>35</sup> Since at least 2012, towards the end of Calderón's presidency, Mexico has been ranked as the most corrupt OECD country, according to Transparency International's 2018 report on the Corruption Perception Index<sup>36</sup>. This ranking goes back for a much longer time, it was smartly hidden.

### **2.3 THE THREE SEXENIOS**

There is a clear rampant growth in the number of deaths associated with the launch of the *War on Drugs*.<sup>37</sup> The Mexican government decided to tackle the implicit relationship that existed between the drug-trade organizations and the long-standing political PRI rule. The levels of violence began to become more visible and negatively impacted the lives of citizens. PAN's President Felipe Calderón was in a position in which he needed to establish decisive legitimacy and quick support, leading to making the most important single decision during his presidency: publicly declaring war on the drug trade — ordering the Mexican army to crack down on cartels in urban areas and

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<sup>35</sup> Azaola, "La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre."

<sup>36</sup> Laura Calderon et al., "Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico," *Analysis Through 2018*, accessed February 11, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/40919565/Organized\\_Crime\\_and\\_Violence\\_in\\_Mexico](https://www.academia.edu/40919565/Organized_Crime_and_Violence_in_Mexico).

<sup>37</sup> Bergman, "La violencia en México."

along major land routes.<sup>38</sup> He intended to not turn a blind eye to the very root of many of the hindering causes to Mexico. However, Calderón's growing concern during his presidency became an enduring crisis of national proportions, altering Mexico's perception in the eyes of the world and its people.<sup>39</sup>

During his presidency, according to the Justice in Mexico Special Report from 2017, no other country in the Western Hemisphere had seen such a large increase in either its homicide rate or in the absolute number of homicides. Between 2006 and 2011, the dramatic eruption of violence associated with organized crime generated more than 50,000 casualties.<sup>40</sup> In the efforts to reduce crime and violence, Felipe Calderón's expenditures on security increased until 2010 up to seven more times than the previous Fox administration, however, there was no existing evidence of the real impact that the resources had on security and criminal justice.<sup>41</sup> President Calderón's strategy was built around his commitment to a repeated frame:

*“War without distinctions or nuances among cartels or organizations.”<sup>42</sup>*

President Calderón's adoption of the “kingpin strategy” successfully fragmented many cartels by arresting or killing their leaders, yet caused a dramatic surge in both government-cartel and inter-cartel violence between 2007 and 2011. Repeated by many academics, Calderón's approach and strategy have been deemed inherently flawed since

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<sup>38</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars*.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Javier Osorio, “Democratization and Drug Violence in Mexico,” *Cornell University*, 2013, [https://eventos.itam.mx/sites/default/files/eventositammx/eventos/aadjuntos/2014/01/democratizacion\\_and\\_drug\\_violence\\_osorio\\_appendix\\_1.pdf](https://eventos.itam.mx/sites/default/files/eventositammx/eventos/aadjuntos/2014/01/democratizacion_and_drug_violence_osorio_appendix_1.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Elena Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre,” *Desacatos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 0, no. 40 (December 16, 2013): 13–32, <https://doi.org/10.29340/40.253>.

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars*.

the beginning as they did not account for the endemic weakness of political institutions in the country. Many scholars claim that the war had been lost since its inception.<sup>43</sup>

PRI's President Enrique Peña Nieto urged for a sense of conditionality at first similar to his hegemonic partners in the twentieth century. His anti-drug policy focused on judicial and administrative reforms.<sup>44</sup> However, despite the difference in political background, initial hesitancy, and vows to reverse the course and the rising violence, as his successor, his government then decided to adopt and follow the militarized, kingpin strategy of Calderón.<sup>45</sup> A similar approach to the fight against organized crime was established, one that had proven to raise the amount of violence. The first connection to the path dependency pattern is seen, despite the demonstration of rising violence and the difference in political party, the strategy showed that there was not much examination of more cohesive approaches to protect the citizenry from visible violence in the street.

During Peña Nieto's first five years in office, he received record-low approval ratings. These ratings can be directly attributed to the perceptions of his handling of issues of crime, violence, corruption, most specifically after the disappearance and murder of dozens of students of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero in 2014. In later detail, this particular event will be analyzed to understand the reasoning behind some of the events

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<sup>43</sup> Vilalta, "How Did Things Get So Bad So Quickly?"

<sup>44</sup> Lingling Lu, "An Analyze of Anti-Drug Policy and Its Effects of Enrique Peña Nieto's Government in Mexico | International Relations and Diplomacy - Academia.Edu," January 2020, [https://www.academia.edu/42072610/An\\_Analyze\\_of\\_Anti\\_Drug\\_Policy\\_and\\_Its\\_Effects\\_of\\_Enrique\\_Pe%C3%B1a\\_Nieto\\_s\\_Government\\_in\\_Mexico?auto=download&email\\_work\\_card=download-paper](https://www.academia.edu/42072610/An_Analyze_of_Anti_Drug_Policy_and_Its_Effects_of_Enrique_Pe%C3%B1a_Nieto_s_Government_in_Mexico?auto=download&email_work_card=download-paper).

<sup>45</sup> Alejandro Hope, "Plus Ça Change: Structural Continuities in Mexican Counternarcotics Policy," *Foreign Policy at Brookings*, no. Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence Latin America Initiative (2016).

that have been at the center of the lost hope of many citizens<sup>46</sup>. Over 116,000 murders are connected to the first five years in the office of Peña Nieto. Justice in Mexico's Special Report from the 2017 analysis suggests that a wide portion of Mexico's increases in violence from 2015 through 2017 were related to inter-cartel and intra-cartel conflicts among rival drug traffickers in the wake of Guzman's arrest in 2016.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, AMLO, a politician that has worked to build his political stature, campaigning for marginalized communities and organizing protests against the corruption that exists in the country, particularly PRI corruption, voiced having a different strategy in mind.<sup>47</sup> In 2018, López Obrador successfully led a campaign that captured one of the highest election margins in Mexican political history, a direct representation of the fatigue of Mexican citizens with the vicious cycle of violence perpetrated by the last political governments. As part of his strategies, he promised to bring "change" to Mexico, which has resonated with the voters. He emphasized his commitment to uproot corruption and address the prevalent issues of poverty and violence. As the main strategy for his administration, he indicated his support for a process of social reconciliation or "amnesty" for dealing with drug traffickers and other criminal offenders.<sup>48</sup> This is a different approach that might allow the country to find different avenues of growth and peace. As the current president, there is still some time in which he could follow through with his proposals and vision. So far, the population has

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<sup>46</sup> Laura Calderon, Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico SPECIAL REPORT," no. Data and Analysis Through 2017, accessed February 11, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug\\_Violence\\_in\\_Mexico\\_SPECIAL\\_REPORT](https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug_Violence_in_Mexico_SPECIAL_REPORT).

<sup>47</sup> Lucy Clement La Rosa, "The Implications of López Obrador's Security Agenda," *Justice in Mexico* (blog), July 30, 2018, <https://justiceinmexico.org/lopez-obradores-security-agenda/>.

<sup>48</sup> Calderon, Rodriguez Ferreira, and Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico SPECIAL REPORT."

not seen a significant improvement in the violence or a worthy-to-follow approach. At the beginning of 2020, within 8 days of the year starting, 41 homicides were reported in Tijuana linked to cartel violence and organized crime. Simultaneously, in Guanajuato, 100 deaths were linked to drug-related violence in the state.<sup>49</sup> These statistics and the one thing that has been showcased intensively raise the question: is freeing criminals the best way to ensure peace?

## 2.4 STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE → DRUG VIOLENCE

As Mexico is traversing a historical violent period, it is key that I attempt to understand it to its full complexity and at all levels.<sup>50</sup> It is crucial to examine the social context, the political context, economical context, and the cultural context to explain the explosion of violence since organized crime has been the main aspect blamed for the spike in violence and the levels of insecurity.<sup>51</sup> Mexico has been perceived as a country facing many challenges hindering the development of citizens and struggling to provide security mostly directly linked to the rising of violence.

By introducing the kinds of violence that exist in the country, it is possible to dissect the embeddedness of aggression experienced. First, *structural violence* is defined as the violence exerted systematically — indirectly — by everyone who belongs to a certain order, in particular, governments or high-elected officials, which causes discomfort when talked about but leads to the experience of those who live in poverty

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<sup>49</sup> Mariana Ramos, “Arranque Violento En Guanajuato Más de 100 Asesinatos Dolosos,” accessed April 5, 2021, <https://www.milenio.com/politica/comunidad/arranque-violento-guanajuato-100-asesinatos-dolosos>.

<sup>50</sup> Bergman, “La violencia en México.”

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

and are marginalized, the causes of violations of human rights, and great disparity.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, *drug violence* is defined as that which is perpetrated either by drug-trafficking organizations or the state's security personnel when conducting anti-criminal activities.<sup>53</sup> However, this has worked hand-in-hand when thinking about the conditions of citizens and the lack of opportunities that exist. There is a spiral of fear that became embedded into the lives of the Mexican citizenry with the uncontrolled presence of drug gangs.

Drug-trafficking organizations, through their notorious visible presence recently, have signaled that they are in control and will punish anyone who provides information to the government. Due to the failing efforts of the government, citizens have lost the trust in the institutions that can provide the safety and security necessary to live a dignified life. The police have not been able to credibly signal that they can regain control of the streets.<sup>54</sup> This translates into structural violence that is entrenched in the system of the country. Drug gangs operating through visibility deepen the fears of citizens as they operate and recruit members in the streets, leave messages that are widely broadcasted in the media, and behave savagely.<sup>55</sup> As mentioned at the beginning of the work, citizens are trapped in between two illegitimate forces, the drug gangs, and their criminal organizations, and the police who are supposed to protect them.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Paul Farmer, "An Anthropology of Structural Violence," *Current Anthropology* 45, no. 3 (2004): 305–25, <https://doi.org/10.1086/382250>.

<sup>53</sup> Osorio, "Democratization and Drug Violence in Mexico."

<sup>54</sup> Beatriz Magaloni et al., "Living in Fear: Mapping the Social Embeddedness of Drug Gangs and Violence in Mexico," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, November 4, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1963836>.

<sup>55</sup> Magaloni et al.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Most commonly, the victims of structural violence are persuaded not to perceive this pervasive inequality at all. It has become a type of violence built into the structure that exhibits certain stability.<sup>57</sup> Mexican citizens are not just experiencing direct violence such as beatings, kidnappings, and rape, but also endure great suffering from expressions of indirect violence such as poverty, marginalization, hunger, and health threats. Addressing the violence as a case of structural violence is crucial in grasping the complex dynamics that characterized violence — such as the impunity and systematization of violence and the social forces, policies, and institutions that perpetuate it,<sup>58</sup> since finding answers in the past has proven so difficult.

This disparity of opportunities showcases that at least a million Mexican citizens have “jobs” dedicated to the rent of criminal activities.<sup>59</sup> This market sector, while smaller in profits compared to the 20-billion-dollar drug trade with the United States, accounts for a portion of the deaths the country experiences. This market includes extortions, kidnappings, internal drug markets, and robberies.<sup>60</sup> Scholar Sicilia mentions how violence in many ways comes from being forgotten, from being denied opportunities, and from being taken advantage of.<sup>61</sup> For example, the expenditure of 197,000 million pesos in public security in 2010 represents approximately the same amount, around 93%, of the expenditure directed towards public education and is above

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<sup>57</sup> Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91.

<sup>58</sup> Felipe Jácome, “Trans-Mexican Migration: A Case of Structural Violence,” n.d., 38.

<sup>59</sup> Marcelo Bergman, “La violencia en México: algunas aproximaciones académicas,” *Desacatos*, no. 40 (December 2012): 67–76.

<sup>60</sup> Bergman.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

the amount assigned to the health and the social development sector.<sup>62</sup> If there were more opportunities for personal growth and development, the likelihood of citizens going the “easier and profitable” route would be reduced. The Mexican government has to create some kind of strategy that reduces the gaps that lead individuals to follow a life of crime or become accomplices of one.

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<sup>62</sup> Elena Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre,” *Desacatos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 0, no. 40 (December 16, 2013): 13–32, <https://doi.org/10.29340/40.253>.

# CHAPTER 3 SCHOLARLY REVIEW – APPROACHES TO VIOLENCE

Galtung introduces a quite philosophical, yet more encompassing definition of violence in his study of “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research.” Violence is a word that is commonly used in terms that are related to more noticeable violence such as physical harm. Galtung defines violence “as the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is.” This paper seeks to provide a foundation to understand the realities of Mexico, analyzing through Galtung’s definition of violence, to reason the impact that the failure of institutions to provide basic societal needs and opportunities has on citizenship well-being. Violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of the distance.<sup>1</sup> In Mexico, this is a violence that can be claimed to be part of the country since long ago, a kind of violence that further fuels the current drug violence. On a more ordinary and common knowledge level, Osorio, following Kalybas, defines violence as the deliberate infliction of physical harm on people or damage on their property that can be inflicted for several tactical and strategic reasons. Some of these reasons include eliminating a specific target or preventing certain behaviors.<sup>2</sup> This kind of violence has been perceived to have grown due to the presence of organized crime, however, it is also portrayed through patriarchal attitudes which will be mentioned throughout the chapter.

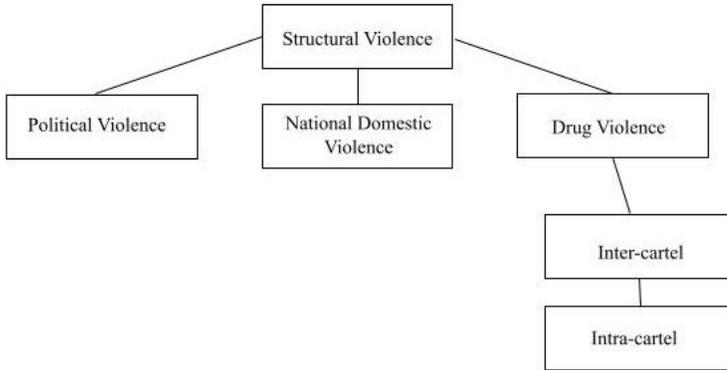
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<sup>1</sup> Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91.

<sup>2</sup> Osorio, “Democratization and Drug Violence in Mexico.”

Organized crime has portrayed that there is another path for citizens to “provide” for their families. In this thesis, both definitions will be used and I will be clear on when to use each to provide the best description to the reader.

**Figure 1. Breakdown of Approaches to Violence In Mexico**



Throughout this chapter, I will introduce the research conducted by previous scholars on the different approaches to violence in Mexico. Figure 1 *Breakdown of Approaches to Violence in Mexico* illustrates comprehensively the violence that can be presumed to exist by the existing literature. *Structural violence*, representing the most encompassing, can be found as that from which all the others stem. Section 3.1 explains *political* and *national domestic violence* as those that are entrenched in the government and nation – through ordinary expressions of violence. Section 3.2 provides a more comprehensive explanation of how structural violence can be perceived as the foundation to the continuous growth of a wealthy disparity and the acceptance of pervasive inequality as part of the country. Section 3.3 narrates the most relevant story to literature and news today, *drug violence*, and how it has embedded itself into the core of the country.

### 3.1 ORDINARY VIOLENCE: ENTRENCHED IN THE GOVERNMENT AND NATION

As Mexico experiences a rise in visible violence that has affected the social, economic, and psychological state of its citizens, the most notable attribution can be given to the denouement of the *War on Drugs*. While it has seemed to be the most reasonable understanding, taking the time to look back to the time before the *War on Drugs* allows providing a more comprehensive explanation of why it escalated to the current dimensions. Scholar Elena Azaola explains the failed responsibility and attention that Mexican reporters, analysts, and citizens play to the *ordinary* expressions of violence.<sup>3</sup> Ordinary expressions of violence encompass those that seem to be “normal” or part of the status quo of citizen’s lives and experiences. These so-called ordinary expressions of violence such as political and domestic have been in many ways linked and have propitiated other types of more visible violence to the public, mostly characterized as drug violence.

*Political violence*, in this thesis, is defined as that which represents a system that is directly managed and influenced by the politics of a country. It defines the opportunities that are given for fair success to citizens, the intention to promote policies that grant values to all, and the role that the police forces play in the government system. As a result, a failure to provide all of these aspects is political violence.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, *National domestic violence* arises from the reality that structural violence causes poverty,

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<sup>3</sup> Elena Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre,” *Desacatos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 0, no. 40 (December 16, 2013): 13–32, <https://doi.org/10.29340/40.253>.

<sup>4</sup> Shirk and Wallman, “Understanding Mexico’s Drug Violence.”

hunger, social exclusion, and humiliation causing further issues in homes.<sup>5</sup> Scholar Marcelo Bergman agrees that the brutal spread of violence has not made a surprising apparition, however, it has been embedded and entrenched in the system. It is an argument that claims that Mexico is now facing the visible results of what its reality has always been.<sup>6</sup>

Mexico has a history of structural violence invisibly entrenched in its culture and society. There is a notable inequality between citizens that persists, a distinct wealth disparity, and a significant lack of opportunities such as education, development, and social security. When saying invisible, it mostly captures the experience of privileged individuals in the Mexican community that has purposefully lived without thinking of the conditions in which the majority of the population lives.

To reach this argument, in an extensive explanation, Elena Azaola introduces the perspective of understanding the current exacerbated violence by explaining the role of the embeddedness of violence in the culture of the country. She claims that citizens have clouded their view and narrowed their attention to the fight against organized crime, tagging the deaths and horrifying experiences to the cause, which impedes the ability to see other types of violence that are ingrained within the society and that ultimately pushed drug violence to its success.<sup>7</sup> To Lessing, however, the biggest tragedy is that Mexico is not particularly a violent society, rather it is violent in structure.

Azaola believes that three things explain the actual levels of violence — “a

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<sup>5</sup> Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre.”

<sup>6</sup> Marcelo Bergman, “La violencia en México: algunas aproximaciones académicas,” *Desacatos*, no. 40 (December 2012): 67–76.

<sup>7</sup> Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre.”

heredity of a previously violent Mexico, a weakening of Mexican state institutions and a series of misguided politics, and a conjunction of social weaknesses that are visible through high levels of marginalization, poverty, and lack of social inclusion.”<sup>8</sup> The deaths that have taken place in the last twenty years have taken the attention and impeded to visualize other kinds of violence. These are all components of the facts that I have previously mentioned in regards to what citizens fear the most and what leads many to find alternatives for survival.

When referring to the weakening of Mexican state institutions, it is interesting to think about the hegemonic PRI rule that lasted for many years that did not necessarily “weaken” the stability of the country at the time, but did impact the legitimacy and the development of a respectable state. The failure of institutions to have the well-being of citizens in mind caused a further rupture in the opportunities to build trust and cohesiveness. Similarly, social weakness and inequality are descriptions of what Mexico represents. These aspects together placed Mexico in a place of vulnerability where the intention of simply wanting to be “better” became a war zone and an area of lost hope.

While it seems that homicides have increased and garnered the attention of the media, Azaola, surprisingly, argues that homicides constitute the last expression of violence in Mexico, which is the most severe and irreparable, but do not constitute a large proportion of the other manifestations of violence that exist. She claims that other forms of violence leave small prints and cause damage that becomes more profound and alters the lives of many citizens, limits or blocks their developmental possibilities, and, overall,

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<sup>8</sup> Bergman, “La violencia en México.” Pg. 68

has an impact on the collective society.<sup>9</sup> As shortly mentioned in the beginning, the expressions of violence begin and are mostly represented in the intimacy of citizen's homes, where the frustration and lack of educational opportunity deeply impact family development and formation. This is an important argument as it represents how the main concern of the governmental administrations and where most of their expenditures go to might not be what they should be prioritizing.

### **3.2 STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: WEALTH DISPARITY AND ACCEPTED INEQUALITY**

Galtung provides a detailed recognition of looking beyond the common understanding of drug violence, bloodshed, and physical tragedy. Referencing back to his definition of violence, as the potential versus the actual, it is the capacity that a society has to develop avenues of opportunity for its citizens to live a dignified life, but that is not being taken advantage of or offered.<sup>10</sup> Mexico, in the eyes of many scholars, is a country that has embedded structural violence into its culture.<sup>11</sup> Structural violence represents the framework characterized by poverty, social inequality, and gender inequality. This failing potentiality is a representation of structural violence from the government institutions to its citizens. These structures of violence, however, are not limited to poverty and lack of opportunities but manifested in high levels of lawlessness, corruption, impunity, and the absence of a rule of law.<sup>12</sup> *Structural violence* refers to the

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<sup>9</sup> Azaola, "La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre."

<sup>10</sup> Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91.

<sup>11</sup> Bergman, "La violencia en México."

<sup>12</sup> Felipe Jácome, "Trans-Mexican Migration: A Case of Structural Violence," n.d., 31.

harm inflicted by the social forces that systemically assault and hinder human dignity, constrain agency, and prevent people from meeting their basic needs.<sup>13</sup> This concept was developed by Galtung in 1969 and has been used to address the toll of social structures such as grinding poverty, racism, and sexism on the most disadvantaged populations of the world. Mexico, by having embedded structural violence in its system, triggers other kinds of violence. Although, the object suffering from structural violence can be persuaded to not realize or perceive this violence at all.<sup>14</sup>

According to Felipe Jácome, this type of violence requires a clear understanding of the “impunity that characterizes it, the systemic nature of its perpetration, and the social forces, policies, and institutions that continue to perpetuate it.”<sup>15</sup> It is indeed in Mexico that silence and violence have become the centers of dominion for the country. There is a tremendous disproportion of opportunities that have been made much more difficult to overcome with an illicit profitable market calling the attention of underserved populations. When Jácome speaks about structural violence, he does so through his studies of trans-Mexican migration and the experiences of migrants when they attempt to reach the US-Mexico border.

Structural violence is not particular to Mexico; however, it is a systemic exertion in which all members of society indirectly partake due to its embeddedness in the system structure. According to a study by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, Farmer joins in the conversation claiming that this violence is the experience of people who might live in

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Pg. 38.

<sup>14</sup> Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research.”

<sup>15</sup> Jácome, “Trans-Mexican Migration: A Case of Structural Violence.”

poverty, are marginalized, suffer from gender equality, or experience all simultaneously.<sup>16</sup> Similar to Azaola, for Farmer, the efficacy of the concept of structural violence lies in its ability to render visible the social machinery of oppression. The violence of inequality is structural and it has been normalized, however, it plays a huge role in the exacerbation that individuals see today making a key point of analysis.

The exclusion from areas in society such as education and labor opportunities are factors that propitiates manifestations of violence. According to the National Council on Population, 3.7 million children under the age of 17 did not go to school in 2010, and 7 million young people 18-29 years of age did not study or had a job. Studies suggest that the young population lacks the incentive to stay in school because there is a shortage of labor opportunities that suit their areas of studies and interests. As a result, many of these young people opt to shift towards informal or criminal activities.<sup>17</sup> The exclusion and privation from opportunities keep exacerbating structural violence since citizens do not feel tied to a society and community aspect.

The description of violent democracies introduces, relevant to this case, how violence affects political practice and the subjectivity of individuals in general.<sup>18</sup> Violence has influentially remained as an instrument for political rule and resistance – becoming a mechanism for keeping in place the very institutions and policies that democracies have fashioned and as an instrument for coping with the same problems they

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Farmer, “An Anthropology of Structural Violence,” *Current Anthropology* 45, no. 3 (2004): 305–25, <https://doi.org/10.1086/382250>.

<sup>17</sup> Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre.”

<sup>18</sup> Goldstein and Arias, *Violent Democracies in Latin America*.

generate.<sup>19</sup> Violence has let structural violence persist for years. Goldstein and Desmond-Arias claim that in this type of democracy, rather than seeing it as a failure of democratic governance and institutions, they call attention to “violence as an element integral to the configuration of the institutions – necessary for their maintenance and as an instrument for the challenges to their legitimacy.”<sup>20</sup> To this concept, these scholars add the idea of violent pluralism. *Violent pluralism* refers to the paradox of dynamic, democratic practices that “elect certain actors to political power while coexisting with other actors who are fighting for control of territories where corruption, oppression, and coercive forms” are necessary to maintain democracy.<sup>21</sup> The argument expresses that there is a need for a parallel dynamic in which violence is endemic to the process of fighting it to ensure a better chance for success.

Goldstein and Arias suggest that violent pluralism offers a way to think about violence, not just as indicative of democratic failure, but see it as a critical foundation of democracies in Latin America, critical to the maintenance of such democracies, and part of the political behavior of democratic citizens. Violent pluralism allows to see the role that violence plays in preserving a particular form of democracy and not as a way of stepping away from it.<sup>22</sup>

There are complex dimensions needed to be understood about the brutality that is taking place and the social structures perpetuating this violence.<sup>23</sup> For example, it is often

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Goldstein and Arias.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Jácome, “Trans-Mexican Migration: A Case of Structural Violence.” Pg. 3

ignored how certain expressions of violence, significantly family and institutional violence as a response to patriarchal attitudes, can be linked to and proliferate other forms of violence. As I will explain further, this type of violence has been extending beyond what individuals usually study because the aggressive and visible drug violence takes all the attention. To properly fight against violence and provide any possible remedies, it is necessary to understand the root causes.

The Justice in Mexico Report labels data and analysis of trends that have successfully separated the signals from the noise that frequently reaches scholars and researchers from other parts of the world.<sup>24</sup> It is a source that provides a better understanding of the facets, implications, and possible remedies to the ongoing crisis of violence, corruption, and human rights violations associated with the war on drugs which will be used throughout my analysis.

### **3.3 DRUG VIOLENCE: THE STORY TODAY**

Drug violence results from organized criminals using violence against state authorities in an attempt to maintain the power structures that permit them to extract profits from illicit markets.<sup>25</sup> Osorio in his study defines *drug violence* as the violence that is perpetrated either by drug-trafficking organizations or the state's security personnel when conducting anti-criminal activities.<sup>26</sup> Numerous times, to establish credibility and fear, convoys of highly armed hitmen carrying high-caliber weapons

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<sup>24</sup> Laura Calderón, Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico SPECIAL REPORT," no. Data and Analysis Through 2017, accessed February 11, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug\\_Violence\\_in\\_Mexico\\_SPECIAL\\_REPORT](https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug_Violence_in_Mexico_SPECIAL_REPORT).

<sup>25</sup> Osorio, "Democratization and Drug Violence in Mexico."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

battled members of rival criminal groups or government authorities amid crowded public areas.<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, organized crime is a major contributor to Mexico's problems of violence and fear. To Osorio, the term *organized* in organized crime refers to the ability of individual criminals to overcome dilemmas of collective action and coordinate efforts to conduct violence and engage in criminal activities. Following Reuter, *organized crime* is a set of stable, hierarchically organized groups of criminals with the ability to use violence – or the threat of it – for acquiring or defending control of illegal markets to extract economic benefits from them.

Mexico's story today is narrated through the lens of the uprising drug violence that persists in the country, mostly focused on the years following the end of the twentieth century. As introduced, this paper seeks to bring attention to how violence was experienced before the uprising and how that background of violence potentially became visible from the beginning of President Calderón's administration. Drug violence is pervasive in Mexico today as a result of violent encounters between drug trade organizations, the government forces, and an environment that presents fear.

The strategy proposed by the presidency of Felipe Calderón more often than not resulted in negative consequences in terms of the violent repercussions from the fragmentation and competition within and among criminal organizations.<sup>28</sup> The democratization eroded the peaceful configurations between the state and criminal organizations, while tied to the motivation of politicians to fight crime to establish

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Calderon, Rodriguez Ferreira, and Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico SPECIAL REPORT."

legitimacy. What followed was a triggered wave of violence between the state and organized crime and among criminal groups fighting to control valuable key territories.<sup>29</sup>

Calderón's approach pushed Mexico into a new equilibrium in which the presence of militarized drug war became the new normal.<sup>30</sup> The city centers and their surroundings became places in which the inter-cartel war became commonplace, where the cartels fought the state for power, and where it was difficult to differentiate whether it was a war zone or citizens' homes. Populations became displaced. In Calderón's words, the "social fabric" was being rented. This raises the role of state violence, since according to Osorio, state violence motivates criminals to conduct violent retaliation against authorities and generates opportunities for criminal organizations to engage in violent competition against their rivals.<sup>31</sup>

For example, the main violent events in Tamaulipas in 2005, that precipitated the operative "Mexico Seguro" and the absolute chaos in the state of Michoacán in 2006 previewed an extremely bloody fight with cartels and intercartel. Mexico Seguro was part of an integral strategy by the government to combat organized crime more decisively and find proof to prosecute dangerous criminals who are at the margins of corruption and citizen intimidation. The operation sent out 700 army troops and federal police officers into Nuevo Laredo to then be extended throughout the country.<sup>32</sup> As a result of these unprecedented militarized deployments, annual drug-related homicides nearly doubled. Followed by the *War on Drugs*, the escalation and intensity of these strategies were

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<sup>29</sup> Osorio, "Democratization and Drug Violence in Mexico."

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars*.

<sup>31</sup> Osorio, "Democratization and Drug Violence in Mexico."

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

impossible to know and measure, nonetheless today we know that, as Bergman claims, we have been witnesses to significant and fiery violence.<sup>33</sup>

Mexico's drug war can be ultimately understood as a product of domestic politics and policies.<sup>34</sup> For example, Tijuana has been a city experiencing violence at unprecedented levels. Scholars in a Justice for Mexico: Policy Brief speak on the difference of characteristics of violence in 2015-2017 vs 2008-2010 when the city experienced the change in the disruption of the Sinaloa Cartel leadership, after Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman was recaptured and in the waiting time up to his extradition to the United States and tied to the emergence of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG). The violence in 2015-17 tended to be more geographically concentrated in the outskirts of the city where the most impacted were the marginalized and poor communities. In contrast, they claim that the levels of violence that had been experienced in 2008-2010 were highly visible – impacting the city's previous public security crisis. In this earlier period, there was a greater frequency of high-profile violence such as "running gun battles in the streets, mass casualty accidents, bodies hanging from bridges, gangland-style executions," which impacted dramatically the life of all parts of the city.<sup>35</sup>

Scholars Angela Duran-Martinez and Benjamin Lessing support general conclusions of labeling organized crime as a key driver of violence in Mexico. Similarly, they support claims of the harms caused by corruption and collusion of criminal organizations in the illicit drug trade. Most importantly, they stand by the argument of the

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<sup>33</sup> Bergman, "La violencia en México."

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars*.

<sup>35</sup> Orozco Reynoso, "The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana.Pdf."

failure of current government strategies to address the uprising levels of drug violence in the streets.<sup>36</sup> The loss of trust in institutions is a result of reports claiming the reality that the Federal, State, and Municipal Police forces are main perpetrators of violence in Mexico state from the existing collusion with DTOs.<sup>37</sup>

During the last elections in 2018, Mexico's number of drug-related homicides rose 15% from the previous year reaching a record high. Most intensely, Mexican cartels killed at least 130 politicians and candidates in the lead-up to the elections.<sup>38</sup> The heightened violence has been portrayed in all aspects of the country harming citizens from all directions. The process of democratization and attempting to suppress violence has led to further incentives to propagate it when drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs) want to pursue a goal. Additionally, the harm to social capital and development has pushed many young individuals to follow a life of crime because of the presence of violence in their surroundings.

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<sup>36</sup> Calderon et al., "Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico."

<sup>37</sup> Jácome, "Trans-Mexican Migration: A Case of Structural Violence."

<sup>38</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "Criminal Violence in Mexico," Global Conflict Tracker, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/criminal-violence-mexico>.

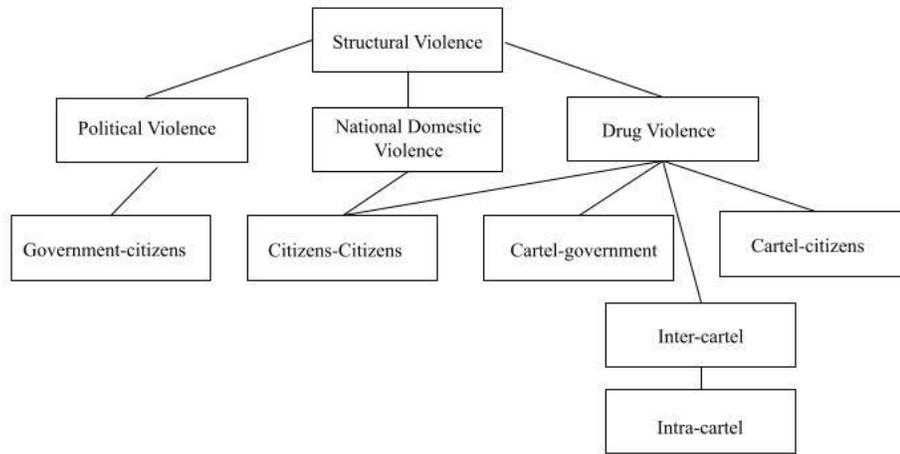
## CHAPTER 4 THE MEXICAN CASE – THEORY

As introduced throughout the scholarly review, Mexico can be described to have a variety of approaches to violence. To present my theory and argument, as an attachment and build up from Figure 1, I have created Figure 2 *Breakdown of Approaches and Types of Violence in Mexico* to illustrate the arguments succinctly provided by scholars visualizing how violence can be experienced through different spectrums, but with the respective types of violence that demonstrate how each is presented and impacting the citizenry.

Figure 2 goes into a deeper analysis of the interconnectedness that exists between the kinds of violence and who the main individuals who are affected by it are. The extent to which the *War on Drugs* further fueled social violence can be broken into four types of violence that are experienced in the recurring violent events that take on in the streets. Through the analysis of the three administrations, it will be possible to measure the entanglement of each type of violence to its main approach and how it is affecting security, citizenship well-being, displacement, and human rights. Section 4.1 will provide more information on how the literature provided by scholars and the approaches to violence can unfold into the types of violence. Section 4.2 will have each type of violence broken down as a four-way argument and defined to provide a better understanding as the analysis takes place in the following section. Section 4.3 dives into the examination of the three administrations and critical events in each that portray the different levels of violence that Mexico has experienced –through an interpretation of the path dependency

theory as a result of the strategies and policies.

**Figure 2. Breakdown of Approaches and Types of Violence In Mexico**



#### **4.1 THE LENGTH AND LEVELS OF VIOLENCE IN MEXICO**

The main conclusions that have been drawn by the scholarship allow formulating an argument in which it is recognized that violence has been entrenched into the Mexican system and the roots of its history. The previously “controlled” social impact of violence had been successfully hidden to avoid the involvement of citizens in a more visible arena. Through a better understanding of the violence in the past, it is possible to say that invisibility did not mean that there was a lack of harm.<sup>1</sup> Instead, there was harm that had been allowed to permeate aspects of the development of better opportunities and becoming a factor in the way Mexico constructs its systems, infrastructures, policies, and avenues for growth. The failure of institutions and policies has been a driver to the exacerbation of violence in the streets, the violence perceived by citizens, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Angelica Duran-Martinez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

aggression that has become part of the status quo. The structural inequality has built an arena for violence to come in and alter the formation of cohesive community building and prosperity.

As a result, the research question will be studied from an evaluation of the types of violence that exist in the country to analyze the extent and impact they have on the current state of the country. Introducing the types of violence that derive from structural violence, including political, domestic, and drug violence is crucial to understanding the current state of Mexico as illustrated by Figure 2 *Breakdown of Approaches and Types of Violence in Mexico*. These are characteristics that tend to be pushed to the side and hidden when trying to understand the disproportionate growth of violent attacks and hatred that exists between citizens. As violence has become visible, the violence that is perceived more notably and receives the most attention include inter-cartel, government-cartel, cartel-citizens, and government-citizens. The spillover of physical, emotional, and psychological abuse has permeated the country in ways that distort what life should be like and damages citizen's livelihoods.

There is an unfolding narrative when analyzing the various approaches of violence that exist in the country. Structural violence represents the main level from which political, domestic, and drug violence arise. Political violence is a representation of a system that is directly managed and influenced by the politics of a country: the opportunities that are given for fair success to citizens, the intentions to promote policies that grant values to all, and the role that police forces play on the government system. As pictured in Figure 2, the violence derived as government-citizens is represented by

political violence. On the other hand, national domestic violence represents a much more private and intimate type of disturbance. In Mexico, family violence is one of the social institutions with the highest degree of brutality. These behaviors are a response to the socio-economic and political exclusions that make it seem that violent behavior is the only option within their circumstances.<sup>2</sup> This is a type of violence that occurs citizen-citizen, based on the research available, it is mostly portrayed at home because of the patriarchal society, but also, as an expression of the frustration that arises from the lack of opportunities. Drug violence is the one that holds the reputation as the most violent, brusque, and overpowering in the country. The statistics about executions and homicides clearly show that after the *War on Drugs* there was an exponential growth in the number of deaths associated with its launch.<sup>3</sup> Drug violence does entail many brutal components which makes its reach more noticeable. It is important to mention that drug violence is the visible intention to pursue a profit despite harming the lives of others, however, diving further into the role that the system deficiencies play in making it much more destructive is critical.

## **4.2 THE FOUR-WAY ARGUMENT: TYPES OF VIOLENCE**

I identified four drivers, types of violence, that have been present in the exacerbation of violence in Mexico since the decision to launch the *War on Drugs* leading to further fuel social violence. The four different perspectives, based on the

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<sup>2</sup> Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre.”

<sup>3</sup> Bergman, “La violencia en México.”

various types of violence, intercartel, government-cartel<sup>4</sup>, cartel-citizens, and government-citizens will be defined. With the analysis of specific events in each administration, it will illustrate when each type is portrayed in action.

*Inter-cartel violence* is that which takes place when drug trade organizations partake in conflict and fight for territory, power, and control.<sup>5</sup> Analyzing the rise in inter-cartel violence after 2006 can bring an understanding of how impactful it has been in daily life. The inter-cartel turf war has been dominant in Mexico, as this fighting amongst cartels triggered the initial state crackdown and continues to account for the bulk of the violence.<sup>6</sup> When a government targets a DTO's leader, it weakens the organization, creating incentives for other cartels to challenge its control over trafficking routes and for lower-rank members to fight for a leadership position.<sup>7</sup> The competition for territory, routes, and support from the government is the main key driver for disagreement as the strategic points increase the profitability of the organization as mentioned in Section 2.1. For example, in 2008, with the separation of an important member of the Arellano-Felix Organization (AFO), Teodoro Garcia Simental, with the support from the Sinaloa Cartel, the number of homicides in Tijuana increased by almost 300% percent and periods of extreme violence lasted until 2010. The homicide rate in Tijuana rose from 49 to 80 per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> Inter-cartel disruptions and fights lead to increases in violence.

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars: Crackdowns and Cartels in Latin America*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Beatriz Magaloni et al., "Living in Fear: Mapping the Social Embeddedness of Drug Gangs and Violence in Mexico," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, November 4, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1963836>.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars*.

<sup>7</sup> Calderón et al., "The Beheading of Criminal Organizations and the Dynamics of Violence in Mexico."

<sup>8</sup> Orozco Reynoso, "The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana.Pdf."

*Government-cartel violence* is that in which the Calderón administration more formally engaged in by directly tackling drug trade organizations in its efforts to suppress their presence in society. This violence is a result of the altercations between the policies and strategies of the military and the defense mechanisms brought by organized crime. Formally measuring the extent of increasing government-cartel violence can provide an image of the impact that it has had on social violence. Scholar Benjamin Lessing argues about the importance of the puzzle that government-cartel conflict poses, claiming that it is usually overlooked by scholars who are more focused on inter-cartel violence, while it accrues intense violent encounters.<sup>9</sup> The current statistics and the trends of violence all coincide that the intervention of the government in the *War on Drugs* has had an important role in the unleashing of high-intensity violence.<sup>10</sup> Referencing the situation in Tijuana during 2008, as the government dismantled the Arellano-Felix Organization (AFO), it caused again a brief increase of violence in the following months, but homicide rates began to decline significantly briefly after a subsequent organization remained.<sup>11</sup> This demonstrates that this fight for territory can be short when and only a new reigning power resides in the territory. Consequently, a question that can be raised is: whether or not the government should get involved in and when DTOs fight for territorial control? As has been the case, the spike in violence can be correlated to the involvement of the government.

*Cartel-citizens violence* can be seen when organized crime actively pursues

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<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Lessing.

<sup>10</sup> Bergman, "La violencia en México."

<sup>11</sup> Orozco Reynoso, "The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana.Pdf."

actions that are harmful to citizens when furthering drug-related activity goals, when demonstrating power, and when threatening them to join their organizations. This violence has been portrayed through mass killings, kidnappings, assaults, and robberies in which there has not been a limit on the innocent and forced involvement of innocent individuals. It is crucial to see to what extent cartel-citizens violence has grown, and if, exponentially, to determine the role of the policies after 2006. Additionally, the direct involvement of DTOs with citizens raises the dangerous possibility of citizens getting engaged in criminal behavior: from threats or as a response to the structural deficiencies reducing other alternatives. Violent behaviors and approaches are a response to the socio-political and socio-economic exclusions that make violence seem like the only viable option.<sup>12</sup>

*Government-citizen violence* is the aggression that happens between the policies and approaches taken by the government, which can be considered irrational but connected to the failed desire and effort to provide safety and stability to the citizens. Analyzing to what extent government-citizens violence keeps growing and how there are no efforts to restructure the inequality that arises from structural deficiencies is important. More often than not, it has been clear that the pursuits for power of the leadership have overpowered the intention to provide access to basic opportunities and provide rightful services to citizens.

There is an alarming presence of weakness and fragility in many Mexican citizens leading them to enter the world of violence. Many things have been wrongly enacted

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<sup>12</sup> Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre.”

making this to become the only option.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, despite having a full monopoly of the legitimate use of violence, the police forces and National Guard continue to exceed themselves in the use of violence in the country for the wrong reasons, demonstrating increased rates of state violence.<sup>14</sup> According to the statistics provided by Blanco, it is clearly outlined that there is a drastic decrease in the trust of institutions and that many citizens fear for their safety as violence comes from the same people that are meant to protect them.

When it is the authorities that have gone above the law, the effects are drastically more severe, since their actions become the principles of social trust, and put into doubt the legitimacy of power, undermine the trust and credibility that citizens have on them, and destroy whatever linkages left that make social cohesion possible.<sup>15</sup> As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 2, while the interruption of a hierarchical bribe system occurred, it did not mean that it was completely eliminated. Corruption continues to be a main component of Mexican life and rule, as a result of lack of opportunities and thirst for power, hindering the legitimacy of institutions and trust in governmental organizations and police forces.

### **4.3 ANALYSIS: PATH DEPENDENCY THEORY AND THE THREE SEXENIOS**

Throughout this section, the three presidential administrations and critical events in each that portray different levels of violence will be examined. The analysis will be

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<sup>13</sup> Bergman, “La violencia en México.”

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre.”

conducted through an interpretation of the path dependency theory as a result of the strategies and policies. Beginning with Section 4.3.1, events during the presidency of Calderón will be presented and interpreted based on the policy strategies that his administration put forward. Section 4.3.2 details Enrique Peña Nieto’s policies and critical circumstances during his administration that portray the violence embedded in the country’s structure. Lastly, Section 4.3.3 will dive into the current administration under Andrés Manuel López Obrador and key events during his first years.

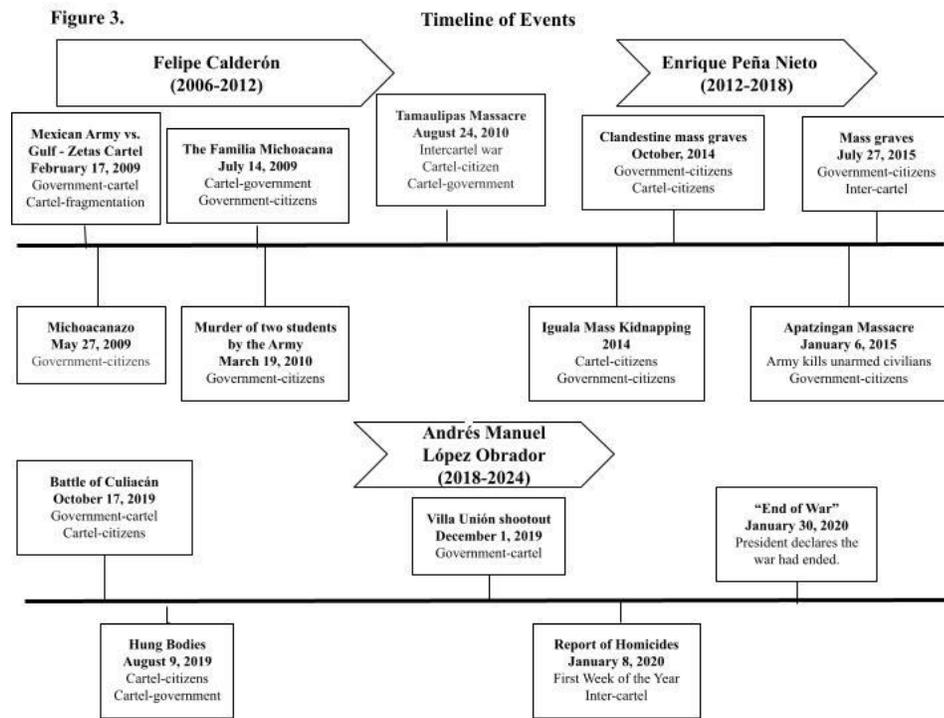


Figure 3 labeled *Timeline of Events* illustrates fourteen major events and specific dates where Mexico represents an emblem and umbrella of diverse violence. I will thoroughly explain and analyze two events per administration to see the types of violence that are seen in the country in each respective event while considering the strategies proposed by each president. These events illustrate the role that the different types of

violence perpetuated play and aid in answering the second research question on the effects of security, citizenship well-being, displacement, and human rights. Through these events, it is possible to see the impact that the violence can have depending on the approach it comes from and the intention behind the exacerbation of them.

### **4.3.1 FELIPE CALDERÓN (2006-2012)**

President Felipe Calderón had three strategy objectives: to recover the lost territory in the hands of criminal organizations that was slowly taken away for several years, to reduce the production and flow of illegal drugs into Mexico by directly tackling fields and areas of its agriculture, and to finish with the gravely detrimental crimes and effects to Mexican society such as extortions and kidnappings.<sup>16</sup> During this time, the newly introduced fight against DTOs brought violence into the streets making it a part of the lives of citizens.

President Felipe Calderón chose the state of Michoacán to launch his military offensive against the cartels at the beginning of the war as part of a political and strategic end.<sup>17</sup> As illustrated in Figure 2, I have presented five events during the administration where violence impacted citizenship well-being and state safety. During the event labeled as the “Michoacanazo,” on May 27, 2009, Mexican authorities arrested 27 high-ranking officials suspected of collaborating with drug-trafficking organizations in the state.<sup>18</sup> When operationalizing ordinarily the statistics of this date, the extent can be categorized

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<sup>16</sup> Vilalta, “How Did Things Get So Bad So Quickly?”

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars*.

<sup>18</sup> BBC, “Mexico Arrests Mayors in Drug War,” May 27, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8069410.stm>.

as high involvement, involvement, and low involvement. The government members faultily involved in this operation can be considered to be highly involved. Additionally, the number of high-ranking officials represents a large presence of leadership in organized crime including ten mayors, a judge, and aid to the governor of Michoacán. The ratio of involved members is a significant statistic based on the state and the reality that there should not have been any at all, even less of high-ranking and influential positions. The drug trade in Michoacán is controlled by the La Familia cartel - considered to be one of the most violent DTOs in Mexico. These arrests followed as a result of the captures of suspected members of the La Familia cartel, who decided to share who were the government officials that facilitated their work and helped them accomplish their goals. This event is a representation of a wave of detentions in which the government went against a large group of mayors – showcasing government-citizen violence and government-cartel violence. Government-citizen violence stems from the innocent lives that were impacted through the street operations, as well as, the failed responsibility to promote a legitimate system of protection – structural violence. Additionally, it represents political violence as these government officials are inherently acting against what their political responsibilities are. The suppression of the bribe system was supposed to help reduce corruption, nonetheless, this event represents that the implicit relationships between the government leaders and cartels are prevalent. Government-cartel violence is, similarly, a spillover from the strategy of Calderón and action to combat illicit activities. Among the detained mayors was the mayor of Uruapan who had received, earlier that year, a message from a cartel organization, given through the

dumping of human heads on the dance floor of a bar – representing cartel-citizen violence, a way of communicating by the cartels to put a point across, but taking innocent lives in the process. The savagery and inhumanity of these messages show that there is a spillover of physical, emotional, and psychological abuse that damages citizen's livelihoods.

On August 24, 2010, following a gunfight in the state of Tamaulipas between gunmen, alleged to be drug traffickers, in which four people were killed – three gunmen and a marine – 72 more bodies were recovered from a remote ranch. The Tamaulipas Massacre is known to be “the biggest single discovery of its kind.”<sup>19</sup> As a result of the deaths of defense units and organized crime members, this event represents government-cartel violence and inter-cartel war. From the bodies recovered, cartel-citizen violence, the 58 men and 14 women were believed to be migrants from South and Central America detained before they attempted to cross the US-Mexico border. The bodies were found in a room piled up on top of each other.<sup>20</sup>

A surviving migrant has claimed that they were kidnapped by the Los Zetas cartel and killed after refusing to work for them.<sup>21</sup> This particular event brings back Jacome's description of structural violence hitting trans-Mexican migration. In this operation, officials seized 21 rifles, 101 ammunition clips, bullet-proof vests, camouflage uniforms, and vehicles. When operationalizing this continuously, the ratio from the statistics of this

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<sup>19</sup> Robin Emmott, “Drug Hitmen Dump 72 Bodies at Mexican Ranch,” *Reuters*, August 26, 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-drugs-idUSTRE67O2NF20100826>.

<sup>20</sup> William Booth, “Survivor: Drug Gang Massacred 72 Migrants in Northern Mexico,” August 26, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/25/AR2010082506776.html>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

date shows the high amount of lives lost, the confiscation of vehicles, and the seizing of high-caliber weapons. Ordinarily, it is possible to measure the level of cruelty and savagery of this discovery. This day shows high levels of cruelty. These statistics, particularly the number of deaths of innocent civilians, illuminates the reality of what happens when refusing to collaborate or engage in criminal activities in Mexico. While the policies imposed by Calderón are to reduce violence, it is critical to think of other avenues to provide citizens protection to deter from such encounters. The threat and enforcement of violence stem into other areas of the Mexican community.

In 2010, at the Conflict Barometer from Heidelberg University, the violence in Mexico was comparable to that of Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan, where brute force was utilized constantly, in a structured and systematic manner.<sup>22</sup> The path dependency pattern could potentially show that with Calderón's approach to combating violence an even higher presence of violence was established through heightened inter-cartel war and government-cartel violence. The argument that "developmental trajectories are inherently difficult to reverse" show that as violence rose, it became a more common ground for those patterns to follow. Additionally, available measures such as the cartel-government homicides presented by the SNSP database and the Freedom of Information Act reports from the army about cartel attacks versus the government reveal that it escalated by a scale of magnitude during Calderón's administration.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Elena Azaola, "La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre," *Desacatos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 0, no. 40 (December 16, 2013): 13–32, <https://doi.org/10.29340/40.253>.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars*.

Calderon's strategy brings back Alexander's sample study of democratic consolidation where it was based on a rational choice framework, where his administration chose to impose an approach fighting the history of embedded institutions of corruption and protection, because of the trade-off of short-term costs for long-term improvements. As claimed by some scholars, this war could have potentially been lost since the beginning because institutions were inherently flawed and permeated with weakness.<sup>24</sup> Path dependence is perceived to be the result of a rational cost-benefit calculation – targeting the leaders was the tactic believed to provide the most security in the long run. The PAN was interested in reducing drug flows and corruption at the cost of short-term violence and tackling the struggle directly to end the corrupting pattern. Nonetheless, as seen from the government-cartel interactions, these have accounted for the stemming of further violence into the streets.

### **4.3.2 ENRIQUE PEÑA NIETO (2012-2018)**

Enrique Peña Nieto campaigned with a variety of approaches and intended strategies in his attempt to protect citizens and bring back support to the Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI. While homicides experienced a decrease from 2011 through 2014, the number began to rebound during the last half of Peña Nieto's administration, with levels exceeding those of the Calderón administration.<sup>25</sup> Based on INEGI's official statistics from 2013-2016 and with slight projections for 2017, it appeared that approximately 116,000 people were murdered over the first five years of Peña Nieto's

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<sup>24</sup> Vilalta, "How Did Things Get So Bad So Quickly?"

<sup>25</sup> Calderon et al., "Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico."

term, which represents nearly more than 4,000 per year than his predecessor.<sup>26</sup>

During his time as president, the International Security Law (LSI) gave Peña Nieto the power to order Mexico's federal security forces, including the two branches of the Armed Forces (Army and Navy), to intervene when wanting to address any security threats if other authorities were deemed incapable of doing so.<sup>27</sup> This granting of power represented the need to use stronger force when addressing threats from DTOs as his intended strategy was focused on internal national security. Additionally, the fight against the *War on Drugs* continued, showing the path dependency pattern where governments struggled to find distinct alternatives to combat violence.

During his administration, the Iguala Mass Kidnapping in 2014 garnered the attention and the frustration of Mexican citizens and worldwide. On September 26, 2014, students from a teacher training school in southern Mexico took some buses on their way to Mexico City for a demonstration. However, those buses never arrived – 43 students went missing along the way, without much explanation. As time went on and a huge amount of failed investigations took place, it was presumed that they were killed around the town of Iguala.<sup>28</sup> To this day, their remains have never been found and their deaths have been blamed on corrupt local politicians and police officials, as well as, higher leadership in the Mexican military, government, and drug-trade organizations.

While this investigation and debates on the truth have been ongoing for at least 6

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<sup>26</sup> Calderon, Rodriguez Ferreira, and Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico SPECIAL REPORT."

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Lulu Garcia Navarro and Anabel Hernandez, "What Happened To Mexico's Missing 43 Students In 'A Massacre In Mexico,'" NPR.org, accessed April 5, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/21/658900014/what-happened-to-mexicos-missing-43-students-in-a-massacre-in-mexico>.

years now, scholar Anabel Hernandez in her new book, *A Massacre in Mexico: The True Story Behind the Missing 43 Students*, shares more specific aspects about the truth of what happened that day based on her extensive and brave research. The official version always stated that the army and the Federal Police knew nothing about what happened and heard after a couple of hours what had presumably happened. Nonetheless, Hernandez's investigation – official reports and interviews with drug criminal informants – allowed her to discover that the army and Federal Police, not just were aware, but were chasing the students for at least three hours before the attack. These government forces were waiting for the students, as they changed buses, and targeted only two of the five buses that had onboarded students. She answers the question about why the Federal Police opened fire against the buses and why the students disappeared.

According to her investigations, those two buses had been monitored by armed forces because they had a secret compartment carrying two million dollars of heroin without the knowledge of those onboard, but with the awareness of the army and Federal police. The aftermath of this event led Mexico into a political crisis amid shifting explanations and inconclusive investigations. As victims of the circumstance, these students had boarded buses that were being used by DTOs to transport drugs. Hernandez claims that her source, an informant of a high-ranking DTO leader, labels the first responsibility of the crime to the colonel that received the order to rescue the drugs.<sup>29</sup> This crime remains full of impunity and represents a flashback to the implicit relationships that have existed in the country since before the onset of the *War on Drugs*.

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<sup>29</sup> Lulu Garcia Navarro and Anabel Hernandez.

It also represents the importance of historical evaluation as the PRI's leader was falling back to his previous counterparts' old way of governing.

The more nationwide knowledge is the conclusion that with solely finding the remains of one student, all were killed by a violent DTO in their pursuit of profit. These assumptions were the result of the case, but with inconclusive evidence to confirm any suspicions.<sup>30</sup> This event represents cartel-citizens violence, government-cartel violence, and government-citizen violence. This case was terribly handled causing outrage because of the corrupted leadership and poor analysis of crucial evidence. Institutions such as the United Nations, Mexico's National Human Rights Commission, and others have also criticized the investigation. These organizations have denounced "what they call errors, inconsistencies, obstruction of justice and human rights violations in the investigation, including repeated acts of torture against people arrested in the case."<sup>31</sup> In 2019, the main suspect named López Astudillo, a DTO member, was released because 62 of over 100 pieces of evidence against him were deemed inadmissible for various reasons such as being obtained through torture methods or simply not being sufficient enough to support a conviction.<sup>32</sup> The violence present and the impunity during the Peña Nieto administration represented the conditionality that his political party had, as well as, the corruption in the country being placed over giving the truth to parents and the nation.

Even more outrageous to the Mexican citizenry, on July 27, 2015, while searching

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<sup>30</sup> Dana Cornacchio, "Reopening the Case of the Mass Kidnapping in Mexico," *Panoramas*, October 3, 2019, <https://www.panoramas.pitt.edu/news-and-politics/reopening-case-mass-kidnapping-mexico>.

<sup>31</sup> Lulu Garcia Navarro and Anabel Hernandez, "What Happened To Mexico's Missing 43 Students In 'A Massacre In Mexico.'"

<sup>32</sup> Dana Cornacchio, "Reopening the Case of the Mass Kidnapping in Mexico."

for the 43 disappeared students, another and a total of 60 mass graves were discovered in Iguala, Guerrero with a total of 129 bodies. None of the remains were linked to students.<sup>33</sup> This discovery showcases the most possible case of cartel-citizen and government-citizen violence as there is an extensive death toll in the country. How is it possible that in the search for a significant amount of bodies and an even worse number is found? Mexico has established itself as a mass graveyard all over the country.

From the three initiatives and strategies proposed by Peña Nieto, as illustrated later in Figure 5 labeled as *The Three Sexenios' Agenda*, only the redirecting of decisions and responsibilities to the Government Secretary was fulfilled.<sup>34</sup> Despite this implementation, the government of Peña Nieto proved to be unsuitable and highly corrupt, crushing the hope of citizens in the country. As path dependency evaluation, the decision-making of Peña Nieto showed that the strategies have failed to be implemented in a way that provides safety and security to the citizens. Societal well-being is difficult to be ensured when there is a ramping feeling of fear and disappointment with the country's leadership and failed promises.

When referencing back to North's claim of the role of institutional development as subject to positive feedback – making it the role of path dependence to explain the patterns of institutional persistence and change<sup>35</sup> – President Peña Nieto did follow

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<sup>33</sup> Laura Martin, "Research Guides: Mexico's Mass Disappearances and the Drug War (Ayotzinapa: The Missing 43 Students): Drug War Timeline 1930-2015," accessed April 5, 2021, <https://researchguides.library.wisc.edu/c.php?g=560513&p=3904772>.

<sup>34</sup> Mónica del Carmen Serrano Carreto and Mónica del Carmen Serrano Carreto, "La estrategia de seguridad de AMLO. ¿De la pacificación a la militarización?," *Revista IUS* 13, no. 44 (December 2019): 207–28, <https://doi.org/10.35487/rius.v13i44.2019.615>.

<sup>35</sup> Pierson, "POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND PATH DEPENDENCE."

previously instituted policies and strategies by President Calderón because it could have been potentially more difficult to attempt to reconstruct what had been previously set up. There was a sort of attraction towards existing institutional arrangements compared to the alternatives. Continuing the strategy efforts that began with President Calderón lead to see the pattern in decisions, mostly not thought out coherently, and the continuous exacerbation of violence. While it could be argued that shifting gears and attempting a new approach, as originally planned by the Peña Nieto administration, could have led to higher costs, Mexico, more than ever, saw an increase in violence that took a greater cost – that of human lives.

The protection of human rights should have been placed at the forefront of this administration after looking at the casualties that arose from the initial launch of the *War on Drugs* during the previous administration. Path dependency decisions were the most logical approach to the Peña Nieto administration to avoid further repercussions from the lack of appropriate efforts to protect Mexican citizens. By relying on historical patterns, it provided a more convenient avenue to not fulfill political rights in the most efficient and fair way to the people.

#### **4.3.3 ANDRÉS MANUEL LÓPEZ OBRADOR (2018-present)**

The landslide victory of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in the 2018 presidential elections ushered an era of uncertainties, as well as, opportunities for Mexico. There are many speculations about his approach from political rivals, however, to this date, a similitude has been perceived from his diverse preceding counterparts. Noted as “new-old populism” by Felbab-Brown, López Obrador’s victory represented a dramatic change

being the first leftist politician to be elected.<sup>36</sup> The crushing victory was an expression of protest and disillusionment the Mexican citizens felt with traditional parties – tying to the global tide of populism.

The disenchantment with the traditional parties reflected the basic failures of the Mexican government, most reflected during the Peña Nieto administration. First, the high-level corruption among the Mexican political elite, involving outgoing President Peña Nieto, and the escalating violence that was experienced during the past administration kept being increasingly shoved under the rug. Second, it reflected the deep disappointment with Mexico’s unequal economic growth and failure to aid and empower many of the country’s underprivileged citizens over decades, persisting in poor public safety and weak rule of law.<sup>37</sup>

López Obrador campaigned with the dramatic promise of transforming Mexico through the empowerment of the underprivileged and reducing violence. As a strategy, he scolded the long-standing “mafia of power,” political and business elite, and vowed to eliminate corruption, not solely reduce it. As displayed in Figure 5 *The Three Sexenios’ Agenda*, his agenda proved to be ambitious, but largely vague. Despite his populism, the main key focuses of the administration are vital to Mexico – tackling the poverty, inequality, and marginalization of large segments of the population – as they attempt to reduce the gap between the two Mexico’s.

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<sup>36</sup> Felbab-Brown, “Andrés Manuel López Obrador and a New Era of Politics in Mexico.”

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

By planning to provide money for youth programs, pensions, and infrastructure – the economic policy agenda was deemed his most concrete plan. He claimed to be able to accomplish these goals without creating a large budget deficit by focusing on government austerity and recovering money lost to corruption. His successful mayoral period in the early 2000s, leaving with an 85% approval rate, was a result of the expanding social spending and boosting pensions. Nonetheless, the lack of a clear plan of security action has hindered the plans in the first years of his administration. By vaguely planning to reduce criminal violence, he proposed a sort of amnesty for drug traffickers, which was then reformulated into leniency for low-level, non-violent offenders. In Mexico, this leniency fails to address the key drivers of violence.<sup>38</sup> After winning the election and assuming office in 2018, López Obrador announced the creation of a new National Guard – hybrid civilian police and military force – to fight cartels.<sup>39</sup>

Tied to the 2014 Iguala Mass Kidnapping, he campaigned with the promise to open this investigation again because it was the humane thing to do. He stated that it is about “justice, about humanism, and also about Mexico’s reputation,” while denouncing the release of key suspects to the public and the parents of victims.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, parents have claimed in 2020 that President López Obrador has not done enough to continue the investigation two years after he took office. The victims’ families, as well as, the rest of Mexico anxiously await the prosecution of the ones responsible for this devastating act of violence.

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<sup>38</sup> Felbab-Brown, “Andrés Manuel López Obrador and a New Era of Politics in Mexico.”

<sup>39</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, “Criminal Violence in Mexico.”

<sup>40</sup> Dana Cornacchio, “Reopening the Case of the Mass Kidnapping in Mexico.”

The Battle of Culiacán can be defined as a representation of government-cartel and cartel-citizen violence. The city was on a battlefield – cars and buses set on fire, drug cartel members with high-caliber weapons in “key areas,” and citizens running for safety. According to the Sinaloa state’s head of security, the preliminary information showed two people had been killed and 21 were injured. The numbers are quantitative information on the impact that a few minutes had and what the government attempting to do the “right” thing, capturing a DTO leader, can cause. The operationalization of the continuous variable, the number of victims, can be stated with the statistics available. In this particular event, social media took a big presence with pictures and videos showing what appeared to be dead bodies on the streets, suggesting a much higher death toll. Simultaneously, during the fight, an unknown number of inmates were escaping from the local Aguaruto prison. Operationalizing the different variables is possible ordinarily with the likelihood of fear measured by the comments of present witnesses such as the footage of a girl asking her father in fear: “Why are they shooting bullets?” This girl was highly experiencing trauma.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, with the expansion of live video of the situation, the whole country was brought to the experience, leading to a high likelihood of frustration and disappointment.

There is a significant failure of strategy in the approach to arresting criminals with the new National Guard proposed by President López Obrador. Despite the urge to change dynamics, López Obrador fell into a trap that he had mostly reprimanded from the

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<sup>41</sup> Juan Carlos Perez Salazar, “El Chapo: Mexican Police Free Drug Lord’s Son as Culiacán Battle Erupts,” *BBC News*, October 18, 2019, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-50092641>.

other administrations, representing a similar path dependency pattern. If wanting to say that he did something else, in this case, releasing a criminal, it can be demonstrated that it inspired an even greater source of embarrassment for the government and outlined a message to DTOs of the power they have in the country.

Another emblematic event occurred as the celebrations of his first anniversary arrived, on December 1, 2019, where clashes sparked between cartel gunmen in Villa Unión killing at least 31 people. Riding into the convoy of heavily armed pickup trucks, gunmen sprayed the offices of the mayor of Villa Unión with bullets in a fight lasting approximately 1.5 hours.<sup>42</sup> It placed President López Obrador under further pressure because of its proximity to the border after President Trump had announced his commitment to label DTOs as terrorists. As previously mentioned, President López Obrador has claimed his unwillingness to accept any outside intervention because Mexico is a “free, sovereign country”.<sup>43</sup> This encounter was a result of government-cartel violence where numbers and statistics continue to be pending where 14 gunmen were first reported to be killed, then the state government added the death of at least 17 others.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, four police were also killed raising even further criticism. While homicides were at record high levels in 2018, they were on track to surpass them in 2019.

The path dependency pattern resonates as President López Obrador’s strategy has continuously followed that of the previous administrations where the spillover of violence continues to take place in the country. In this case, based on his intended

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<sup>42</sup> Dave Graham, “Shootings in Northern Mexico Town Kill 20, Pile Pressure on President,” *Reuters*, December 2, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-violence-idUSKBN1Y515O>.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Graham, “Shootings in Northern Mexico Town Kill 20, Pile Pressure on President.”

strategy, following the historical approaches and policies to violence was not the main objective. However, as the number of homicides, shoot-outs, and displays of violence persist, it is unreasonable to think that the strategy would not be to try capturing or detaining any criminals. The Battle of Culiacán showcases a day important to keep in mind in future scholarship as the future temporal effects, as a result of path dependency, could continue to rise. The decision-making process by the administration demonstrated that by attempting to tackle and/or fight criminal organizations, government-cartel violence will appear and most likely respond with destructive altercations in the streets. This is how DTOs show that they are higher in power compared to the government, signaling they can do as they please.

These developmental trajectories of permitting violence have proven to be difficult to reverse. The López Obrador administration is in a position where his strategic steps to reducing violence are further undermining the little legitimacy left. While President López Obrador has been clear in his perception of both the current laws and institutions of the country as instruments of the corrupted establishment power that persists, the current method of releasing criminals to ensure peace must be re-evaluated to ensure that short-term decisions do not have a deeper long-term cost. His approaches could create a new path-dependent policy that could wrongly extend to the years to come, leaving the future situation of the Mexican community at an unsettling risk.

**Figure 4. Notable Events with the Four-Way Argument: Types of Violence**

Presidents	Violence Present			
	Inter-Cartel Violence	Government-Cartel Violence	Cartel-Citizens Violence	Government-Citizens Violence
Felipe Calderón	- Tamaulipas Massacre	- Mexican Army vs. Gulf-Zetas Cartel - The Familia Michoacana	- Tamaulipas Massacre	- Michoacanazo - The Familia Michoacana - Murder of Two Students by the Mexican Army - Tamaulipas Massacre
Enrique Peña Nieto	- Mass graves		- Iguala Mass Kidnapping - Clandestine Mass Graves	- Iguala Mass Kidnapping - Clandestine Mass Graves - Apatzingan Massacre - Mass graves
Andrés Manuel López Obrador	- Report of homicides	- Battle of Culiacán - Hung bodies - Villa Union Shootout	- Battle of Culiacán - Hung bodies	

*Figure 4 Notable Events with the Four-Way Argument: Types of Violence*

illustrates the arguments put forward more succinctly categorized in the respective type of violence that is present in the encounter. It serves as a point of reference for clarity on how each event can represent a variety of perspectives of violence impacting citizens from different directions. For example, insecurity is represented by the report of homicides within the first few days of the López Obrador administration, as well as, how the apparition of hung bodies can harm the formation of citizens as dignified, human beings. The secondary question is answered throughout the paper as the events and statistics shine a light on the disparities in offering a cohesive, wholesome development and ensuring stability to citizens. The different types of violence are becoming part of the events and exacerbated through the different tactics that the operations against DTOs entail and with the role that DTOs play in their process of defending their position.

**Figure 5. The Three *Sexenios*' Agenda**

President	National Security Plan (Policies/Programs Implemented)
<p>Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) PAN: National Action Party</p> <p><b>War on Drugs</b></p>	<p>I. Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Operations for high-level arrests → “kingpin” strategy</li> <li>B. Greater presence of military and police forces in the streets</li> </ul> <p>II. Agenda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Operation Michoacan</li> <li>B. US and Mexico: Mérida Initiative</li> </ul>
<p>Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) PRI: Institutional Revolutionary Party</p> <p><b>Internal National Security and War on Drugs</b></p>	<p>I. Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Recentralize security decisions to the Government Secretary → Achieved</li> <li>B. Disappearance of SSP (Secretariat of Security and Civilian Protection) → Not Achieved</li> <li>C. New public force: gendarmerie and reorganization of state and municipal police into one order → Not Achieved</li> <li>D. Multidimensional politics</li> </ul> <p>II. Agenda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Operations for “kingpin” strategy</li> <li>B. Intertwined with organized crime</li> <li>C. US and Mexico: Mérida Initiative</li> </ul>
<p>Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-present) MORENA: National Regeneration Movement</p> <p><b>Security and Peace Strategy</b></p>	<p>I. Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. National Guard → the new police forces</li> <li>B. Social and community-focused: Empowering the underprivileged and marginalized</li> <li>C. Amnesty and leniency scheme → purpose of reducing cyclical patterns of socio-economic insecurity in Mexico</li> </ul> <p>II. Agenda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Vague plan: restructuring national security</li> <li>B. US and Mexico: Mérida Initiative</li> </ul>

Through the mentioning of the different events, there is a resemblance and notable continuation in the violence in the state perpetuated in the different levels. As a result, the path dependency pattern is theoretically followed by seeing in Figure 5 *The Three Sexenios' Agenda* the intention of the security plans of the different administrations, but how the results of each ended in a common denominator = more violence. It is critical to see how such an impactful and overwhelmingly focus on violence and in failing humanity takes a huge toll on citizenship well-being, in the further displacement of homes, on the feeling of safety and security, and in ensuring dignified human rights to all.

Pierson's interpretation of path dependence as the “social processes that exhibit

positive feedback generating branching patterns of historical development” resonates with the case of Mexico’s *War on Drugs*.<sup>45</sup> While there have been governmental voiced intentions, citizen protests, and overwhelming waves of violence, the administrations keep falling back into the same pattern of approaching criminal activities similarly. As a result, the reality of structural violence presents itself again, where Mexico needs to develop possible alternatives to the embeddedness of inequality and vicious realities.

The *War on Drugs* was the onset of ongoing violence that preserves to this day. The approach by López Obrador as a *Peace Plan* has not demonstrated much success. It is important that by focusing on the prosperity of the marginalized communities, there exists a strong desire to fortify the areas that have had positive development and provide avenues for growth to actively stem individuals away from falling into the trap of illicit activities and crime. The strategies implemented by both President Calderón and President Peña Nieto, while tackled many of the DTOs and led to some arrests, did spill over much of the violence of the operations into the daily lives of citizens. Currently, it is possible to see links and similitude with the “new” approach that President López Obrador is taking. Violence continues to be experienced as a historically embedded part of the society in Mexico, of today’s reality, and unfortunately, any progress is very unclear for the future.

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<sup>45</sup> Pierson, “POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND PATH DEPENDENCE.”

## CHAPTER 5 IMPACT OF RISING VIOLENCE – BREAKING POINT

According to the Citizen Perception Survey conducted in 2017 in Tijuana, 92% of residents think that they live in an unsafe city, while many citizens claim that they have personally witnessed various forms of crime – vandalism, drug sale or consumption, robberies, assaults, and gunshots.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in the study by Justice in Mexico, in 2017 Mexico’s recent economic difficulties – stagnant economic growth, a devalued peso, a serious fiscal crisis due to falling oil prices – were often cited as major contributors to the recent increases in violence.<sup>2</sup>

Individuals have been displaced from their homes and their businesses as a result of inter-cartel violence, then perpetrated as citizen-citizen violence. Unfortunately, violence includes a full assault on personality, dignity, and the sense of worth of all victims causing a tremendous negative impact on the development of citizens and a violation of their human rights.<sup>3</sup> Citizens in Mexico continue to live with the expectation that there are very limited growth opportunities and have instead thought of more ways to at least go by their daily lives without feeling a constant fear.

The rise of violence has placed citizens in an environment where it has become

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Zulia Orozco Reynoso, “The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana.Pdf,” *The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana*, accessed February 11, 2021,

[https://www.academia.edu/38402161/The\\_Resurgence\\_of\\_Violent\\_Crime\\_in\\_Tijuana\\_pdf](https://www.academia.edu/38402161/The_Resurgence_of_Violent_Crime_in_Tijuana_pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Laura Calderón, Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, “Drug Violence in Mexico SPECIAL REPORT,” no. Data and Analysis Through 2017, accessed February 11, 2021,

[https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug\\_Violence\\_in\\_Mexico\\_SPECIAL\\_REPORT](https://www.academia.edu/40919564/Drug_Violence_in_Mexico_SPECIAL_REPORT).

<sup>3</sup> Elena Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre,” *Desacatos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 0, no. 40 (December 16, 2013): 13–32, <https://doi.org/10.29340/40.253>.

extremely difficult to trust authorities to provide the safety networks and security to live a protected life. Figure 6 *Percentage of Corruption Perception* shows the results of a survey of the perception and percentage of individuals in Mexico who believe that the people who are meant to protect them are corrupt and untrustworthy, leading to a feeling of constant unsafety. The data suggests the military is not being fully trusted, yet it is the best available option from the point of view of citizens. As President López Obrador suggested a National Guard, it can represent a viable option that could receive support from the Mexican population.<sup>4</sup> However, a very high proportion of citizens still live in fear – affecting the perception of the government’s intentions, strategies, and policies.

Figure 6. Percentage of Corruption Perception

	High	Middle	Low
The municipal police	48	55	42
Prosecutors	36	43	41
The federal police	45	27	31
The governor	22	27	20
The army	16	10	13

Source: Survey on Public Safety and Governance in Mexico (2011).

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To many observers, the violence in Mexico is not surprising given the conditions in which it finds itself: the profit margins from the drug trade in which DTOs engage, DTOs location and proximity to the United States, the supply of weapons from the United States, widespread corruption, weak and failing institutions, and limited legitimate economic opportunities that could prevent the younger generations from joining a criminal life.<sup>6</sup> Despite it not being surprising, the government is responsible for

<sup>4</sup> Magaloni et al., “Living in Fear.”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Lessing, *Making Peace in Drug Wars: Crackdowns and Cartels in Latin America*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

establishing opportunities and the simple possibility of feeling secure at home.

The serious risk that the problems of corruption and violence have had on the lives of citizens is extremely detrimental to the development of a new, strong foundation from which citizens can prosper. The combination of the two phenomena has drastically undermined Mexico's democratic system. This, tied with the structural violence that persists, can show how the current efforts are not building a more cohesive state. Therefore, the loss of hope has to be slowly redeemed by encouraging individuals who have been privileged in the Mexican communities to offer avenues of prosperity to those who have been disadvantaged. From understanding the history of failing government institutions, it will be a challenge to attempt to restructure the government through initiatives or efforts. It will also require individual efforts and citizen-citizen support to encourage each other and demand better opportunities for themselves.

## **5.1 MEXICO-UNITED STATES BILATERAL RELATIONS**

The Mexican government and the DTOs, through much of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, when the relative "peace" existed during the PRI hegemony, experienced a relative equilibrium. As the competition among DTOs increased and the political competition began, hindering the government-cartel implicit relationships, the equilibrium began to break down.<sup>7</sup> DTOs, during this time, had access to firearms to establish control over drug trafficking routes leading to the United States, but most of the violence was covert to avoid issues with the government. Since the

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<sup>7</sup> Colby Goodman and Michel Marizco, "U.S. Firearms Trafficking to Mexico: New Data and Insights Illuminate Key Trends and Challenges," *University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute*, n.d., 35.

beginning of the twenty-first century, the more regular use of firearms in open combat as a result of inter-cartel war and intra-cartel war has been prevalent between each other, the Mexican government, and the public.

Throughout all of the events mentioned, the Mexican DTOs are conducting their business in a sphere that is usually given to those with much more political stances such as terrorists or paramilitaries.<sup>8</sup> The trade of weapons from the United States' straw purchasers to Mexico's drug cartels has placed the government in a disadvantaged position to fight the cartels successfully. DTOs are demanding more sophisticated firearms with larger quantities of arms and ammunition – increasing the murder rate. Reflecting on the Battle of Culiacán, Mexico's democratic governance is at severe risk because it can no longer fight against a power that overly overpowers them.

The profitable market of engaging in arms trafficking and smuggling tied to lack of opportunities and the possibility of easy gains is appealing in an environment that has consistently failed its citizens. The build-up of the lack of trust in institutions can be argued to be a result of the structural violence that stems from long before. The security forces have continuously become an institution that acts through corruption and bribery as an alternative to provide more for themselves. Throughout this analysis and research, it seems like many of the decisions taken by either the citizens, the security forces, or members of the government are of last resort or stem from generations of violence.

During the presidency of Calderón, the most reformative effort with the United States began through the Mérida Initiative, a US\$1.6 billion security cooperation

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<sup>8</sup> Goodman and Marizco.

agreement, as displayed in Figure 5, where there were significant efforts and investments in combating the *War on Drugs*. The Mérida Initiative, to this day, has four main pillar strategies: combating transnational criminal organizations through intelligence sharing and law enforcement operations, institutionalizing the rule of law while protecting human rights, creating a “21<sup>st</sup>-century” border while improving immigration enforcement in Mexico, and building strong communities by piloting approaches to reduce the root causes of violence, reduce drug demand, and build a culture of “lawfulness” through education.<sup>9</sup>

This initiative was built on the idea of a “shared responsibility” where the Mexican government pledged to tackle corruption and the United States government pledged to address the demand for drugs and the illicit arms trade. However, both governments have struggled to fulfill their respective commitments.<sup>10</sup> Still, the Mérida Initiative continued to be the main bilateral agreement with the Peña Nieto administration and now with President López Obrador. Additionally, it has represented the international complement to the United States’ domestic efforts to reduce the demand for illegal drugs, reduce the trafficking of firearms and weapons, and prosecute criminals engaged in drug trafficking.<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of President Trump’s administration, he implemented two executive orders to refocus the Mérida Initiative towards combatting transnational criminal organizations and enhancing border security – prioritizing the reduction of drug

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<sup>9</sup> Clare Ribando Seelke, “Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2020,” n.d., 3.

<sup>10</sup> Seelke.

<sup>11</sup> Laura Mehalko, “This Is Gun Country: The International Implications of U.S. Gun Control Policy Note,” *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 35, no. 1 (2012): 297–330.

production, border interdiction and security, and combating money laundering.<sup>12</sup> As he finished his term, there was a stronger desire to get involved in the fight by targeting DTOs as terrorist organizations, placing further pressure on the government of Mexico. It has been very challenging to achieve a cohesive collaboration that can ensure that the efforts are applied in a mutual arrangement that reduces the demand for drugs in the United States, but most importantly, the supply of high-caliber weapons to DTOs by placing stricter gun controls.<sup>13</sup> If collaborations such as the Mérida Initiative continue to be part of the joint efforts to suppress and combat DTOs, the United States must prioritize the evaluation of its role in the vicious cycle of crime stemming from its lax gun control laws.

As of today, the United States Congress has increased its mission of bilateral efforts after the death of a family of dual citizens near the Arizona border in 2019. Similarly, the U.S. arrests of former Mexican public security minister in December 2019 and the former defense minister in October 2020 on drug trafficking-related charges have raised concerns about the failure of Mexico to fulfill its commitment to reducing corruption. President López Obrador, with leftist MORENA, has voiced his desire to focus on the domestic and internal interests, undermining any international support and guidance. As of December 2020, there was a possibility of a dangerous backtrack to the U.S.-Mexico security relationship. As a result of the detentions, the Mexican Congress passed a new law severely restricting the operations of foreign law enforcement agents in

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<sup>12</sup> Seelke, “Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2020.”

<sup>13</sup> Arindrajit Dube, Oeindrila Dube, and Omar García-Ponce, “Cross-Border Spillover: U.S. Gun Laws and Violence in Mexico,” *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (August 2013): 397–417, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000178>.

Mexico, particularly the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. The legislation mandates that all Mexican officials and law enforcement officers at all levels must report to the federal government any communication with foreign enforcement officers.<sup>14</sup>

Through the new restrictions and protocols, the law paralyzes Mexico's cooperation with international counterparts and places it in jeopardy.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, it makes international enforcement officers report to institutions that they have deemed to be inherently corrupt or that could play a role in hindering potential operations. The relationship between the two countries is in a difficult standing as the domestic interests and protections that President López Obrador seeks to place can severely affect the long-standing deals and initiatives that existed.

Despite any positive result of the Mérida Initiative, its overall efficacy is in question as violence continues to escalate in Mexico and drug overdose deaths in the United States rise.<sup>16</sup> Through the initiatives planned in collaboration with the United States government, Mexico must establish a better-designed border security system to reduce the flow of weapons coming into the country. Unfortunately, because of the structural violence that exists and the adverse circumstances that many enforcers endure, bribing methods continue to come above following the law. Any efforts currently in place are overpowered by the idea of receiving and having more when joining efforts with the DTOs and as a response to the lack of appropriate compensation to security enforcers.

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<sup>14</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, "A Dangerous Backtrack on the US-Mexico Security Relationship," Brookings, accessed April 15, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/12/21/a-dangerous-backtrack-on-the-us-mexico-security-relationship/>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Seelke, "Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2020."

## **CONCLUSION**

### **WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF MEXICO LOOK LIKE?**

Mexico, with the changes in political administrations, has attempted to reform itself to provide better opportunities and safety to its citizens. From the analysis conducted in Chapter 4, it can be concluded that the scholarship available about the embeddedness of violence as part of the structure of the system is a reality that still prevails. Most importantly, it is a reality that must be studied further to create more effective steps to alleviate some of the social issues the Mexican citizenry experiences. President Calderón came into his administration with extreme hope to combat organized crime and with a clear strategy, however, it failed to account for the approaches to violence that persist in the country and the weakness of institutions. The ordinary acts of violence have the power to cloud efforts to reduce violence in the streets. While President Peña Nieto began his administration with intentions to change policy to combat organized crime and provide further national internal security, the historical pattern of returning to old ways proved to be the easiest avenue during his time as government leader. Currently, under the López Obrador administration, there is still some optimism remaining from the hopeful voters during the last election. Nonetheless, the research today suggests that the governmental administrations have failed to provide safety nets to citizens and avenues for future well-being and security. While President López Obrador intends to reduce violence in the streets, the peace strategy might continue to fuel the illegitimacy of institutions and exacerbate the difficult realities of living in a Mexico that reached a breaking point.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR A PROCESS OF RESTRUCTURE

The future of Mexico depends on addressing social and economic marginalization, combating organized crime, attending to the population of young people, implementing better approaches to drug violence, and improving the analysis of crime and violence.<sup>1</sup> From conducting this analysis and research, it is simple to recognize some necessary steps that need to be taken concerning citizen development at the individual level to improve the livelihood of Mexico. There is an urgent need for more effective efforts to address the socio-economic roots of violence. It is vital to provide a decent education and employment opportunities so that young people have viable alternatives to crime and violence.<sup>2</sup>

From the perspective of institutions, it is crucial to enhance citizen trust within communities and attempt to shift the reputation of police forces while simultaneously improving the judgment of justice to walk towards a possibility of strengthening the social fabric.<sup>3</sup> According to Vilalta, the best tool in Mexico to deter the high rate of increase in deaths associated with the effects of organized crime would be the development of community programs and strategies to mutually empower individuals and their communities.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Orozco Reynoso, "The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana.Pdf."

<sup>2</sup> Calderon, Rodriguez Ferreira, and Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico SPECIAL REPORT."

<sup>3</sup> Beatriz Magaloni et al., "Living in Fear: Mapping the Social Embeddedness of Drug Gangs and Violence in Mexico," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, November 4, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1963836>.

<sup>4</sup> Carlos Vilalta, "How Did Things Get So Bad So Quickly? An Assessment of the Initial Conditions of the War Against Organized Crime in Mexico," *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, accessed February 17, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/36520179/How\\_Did\\_Things\\_Get\\_So\\_Bad\\_So\\_Quickly\\_An\\_Assessment\\_of\\_the\\_Initial\\_Conditions\\_of\\_the\\_War\\_Against\\_Organized\\_Crime\\_in\\_Mexico](https://www.academia.edu/36520179/How_Did_Things_Get_So_Bad_So_Quickly_An_Assessment_of_the_Initial_Conditions_of_the_War_Against_Organized_Crime_in_Mexico).

In terms of collecting more accurate information and having proof of the impact of crime on citizenship, it is crucial to reinstall a culture of reporting. Since there has been a tremendous loss in the trust of institutions, the majority of crimes do not get reported. During 2017, when Tijuana was undergoing a significant experience with violence about 92.2% of crimes went unreported.<sup>5</sup> Because law enforcement usually targets violence in the mainstream and more notable areas of the cities, where the wealthy individuals and commercial establishments reside, there seems to still be a disconnect from the marginalized areas of the country. There must be a more efficient strategy to target communities where there is a significant need and where the most vulnerable populations live to attempt to restructure their upbringings as intended by President López Obrador.<sup>6</sup>

### **SHOULD IT BE LET GO? ACCEPTING VIOLENT PLURALISM**

It has been perceived that a key driver of peace in the nation has to do with a DTO emerging as a leader, as a result of pacts between criminal organizations, and from the establishment of implicit relationships with some government leaders. Under these arrangements, DTOs operate in a hierarchical system that allows each to benefit from their routes, to profit in their own way, and to continue to pursue their goals.<sup>7</sup> When these pacts are settled, the majority source of violence comes from stemming low-level citizens that earn a living by tormenting the streets.

The possibility of accepting violent pluralism can take us back to the argument

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<sup>5</sup> Orozco Reynoso, "The Resurgence of Violent Crime in Tijuana.Pdf."

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

provided by Elena Azaola where all other kinds of violence, specifically those seen as ordinary, leave strong footprints and bring out the harm that can be extremely profound and alter the course of life of many individuals.<sup>8</sup> It limits and blocks their possibilities of development, while simultaneously affecting and impacting the collective life of the citizenship. These are the vibrant effects that can be noticeable in the displacement of individuals and the harm to their human rights and dignity.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, violent pluralism refers to the paradox of dynamic, democratic practices that enable and elect a political leadership that coexists with illicit actors trying to control territory with corrupt and coercive forms.<sup>9</sup> Goldstein and Arias suggest that violent pluralism offers a way to think about violence, not just as indicative of democratic failure, but as a foundation of the democracy that Mexico currently lives under. This violence could be critical to the preservation of such democracy and an embedded reality of the political behavior of democratic citizens.

Is the approach taken by President López Obrador the most effective way to preserve peace in the Mexican community? His vague *Peace Plan* has called for a variety of different efforts to appease the violence in the country, as his order demonstrated during the Battle of Culiacán. President López Obrador stated that his “adversaries can say that [he] showed weakness, but nothing is more important than people’s lives.”<sup>10</sup> It is important to think about what leveling the playing field with criminal organizations will entail in the future of the country, perhaps, letting DTOs rule and bribe their way into the

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<sup>8</sup> Azaola, “La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre.”

<sup>9</sup> Magaly Sanchez R, “Violent Democracies in Latin America Edited by Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel M. Goldstein Analysis,” *American Journal of Sociology*, no. Princeton University (n.d.): 4.

<sup>10</sup> Graham, “Shootings in Northern Mexico Town Kill 20, Pile Pressure on President.”

system might be one of the ways to ensure that citizens' dignity, rights, and stability are preserved. What would remain as concerning is the low-level individuals engaging in violent approaches because of the lack of opportunities and as a result of the feeling that this is the only way to survive, meaning that reversing and restructuring the structural inequality is crucial to the country. Similarly, realizing that ordinary violence is pervasive will provide better avenues to ensure that the root of the cause is targeted, starting at home. President López Obrador's response can be interpreted as an illustration of the role that violence plays in preserving a particular form of democracy as suggested by violent pluralism.<sup>11</sup> Violent pluralism illustrates what the relationship is between civil society, the violent actors, and now with the government leadership of the country.

It is dangerous to conclude that democracy is only possible under conditions of violent pluralism, allowing the state to tolerate and integrate violence through a variety of violent actors.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, with the current state of Mexico, it is important to consider approaches that will ensure citizens at least experience some sort of safety. Citizenship well-being and human rights need to be enhanced by developing growth opportunities, despite possible recurring violence around. Violent actions are the result of the entrenched and pervasive inequality that has been allowed to grow.

## **FINAL REMARKS**

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I found myself talking to friends and family about the inspiration and what drew me to pursue this venture. Deciding to

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<sup>11</sup> Goldstein and Arias, *Violent Democracies in Latin America*.

<sup>12</sup> Sanchez R, "Violent Democracies in Latin America Edited by Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel M. Goldstein Analysis."

narrate the storyline of Mexico and its relationship with organized crime was something that I did not take lightly, but rather found common understanding in believing that this day was one that is ingrained in the minds of many Mexicans.

The loss of trust in institutions has deeply affected the cohesiveness of the government and its relationship with the people. Since the case of the mass kidnapping in Iguala and the lack of answers, it is a fact that the citizenship felt betrayed, unheard, and failed by the government. While completely different circumstances, the Battle of Culiacán showcases the intensity and the impact of an altercation between the government and organized crime, a significant breaking point to the story of Mexico. In my perspective, it is a breaking point that does require immediate action and an extensive evaluation of the current structures of the country. It is a representation of the epitome of lost hope for most Mexican citizens who are tired of running for their lives, of hiding behind car wheels with hands to their ears and their eyes flinched, of squeezing their bodies underneath cars, and of trying to get away from the loud, non-stop sound of gunshots.<sup>13</sup>

To this day, there are holes and gaps in this study that will hopefully continue to be filled despite the many limitations that exist due to the risks, obscurity, and difficulty in accessing accurate information. While we have approximations of how devastating and how extensive the impact of violence has been to the population, as we saw reflected, when the Mexican government conducts investigations, it runs into other upsetting realities such as finding more victims of the drug war. Field studies and surveys provide

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<sup>13</sup> Johnson, "Revisiting the Battle of Culiacán."

some sort of knowledge on how citizens feel about the leadership, how the war is being handled, and the negative repercussions the violence has, but fear still takes a toll on honesty and transparency. The structural violence that persists shadows the reflection of accurate information shared in the news and to scholarship.

The field and study require tremendous courage for which I am truly grateful to the scholars mentioned throughout the writing and analysis. Many of the events connected to violence and organized crime are difficult to tie back to a specific phenomenon or take a much longer time to be dissected such as the 2014 Iguala Mass Kidnapping. It takes a long time to learn the truth of a damaging event to the Mexican community, if ever. The intentional hiding and confiscation of information have proven to be the most effective way for governments to attempt to avoid further repercussions and demands from citizenship.

Many citizens continue to keep information due to fear of repercussions, threats, or because it is a waste of time because of the impunity. However, staying quiet can negatively impact the sociological and emotional well-being of citizens in the long run. The dignity and rights of Mexican citizens are hindered as a result of the lack of development opportunities, the failure of provision of safety and security, and of diminishing the recognition of their humanity. After remembering the Battle of Culiacán and seeing the faces of fear, it is more important than ever, to uplift and bring hope to citizens. Moving forward requires civilian strength and perseverance as recuperating from such disappointment can be difficult to achieve.

The breaking point has provided a narrative of the realities that are entrenched

into the Mexican community. I am hopeful that this thesis provides a better understanding to those who are new to the story of Mexico, a foundation of knowledge to encourage each individual to find answers and reach their own conclusions, and inspire a new perspective to approach the violence in Mexico. The insight of the embeddedness of the various levels of violence allows the scholarship and the government to consider thinking beyond the usual approach to violence – combating drug violence – and instead focus on policy changes that emphasize providing safety and well-being that could start in nearby locations, and, even at home.

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