Mexico’s Most Dangerous State:

Analysis of the Illicit Drug Trade in Chihuahua

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1. Abstract

Chihuahua played a historically significant role in the development of Mexico’s illicit drug trade. The geographical location of Chihuahua influenced the state’s political development. This paper analyzes this assertion through the lens of historically significant political developments. Beginning during the Mexican Revolution, the United States increased their demand for medical prescriptions and illicit drugs. During World Wars I and II, the United States encouraged and purchased illicit drugs from Mexico, so much that by 1975, Mexico supplied 70-80 percent of the total amount of heroin entering the United States. This relationship continues to impact national security and immigration for each country. This study asserts that these trends reflect each government’s inability to manage the problem of the illicit drug trade through ineffective policy initiatives.

1. Introduction

In a nation plagued by drug trafficking, murders, kidnappings, and corruption, it seems contradictory that Mexico is the home of democratic structures, revolutionary ideals, and a strong national identity. The obvious problems facing the nation and the elements of democracy provides reason as to why the nation struggles to successfully expand democratic power and support within the government and the general population. This contradiction is due in significant part to the illicit drug trade, which has a stronghold in Chihuahua, Mexico.

Beginning in the early 20th century, drug trafficking threatened Mexican national security, strained Mexico and U.S. relations, and caused an increase in citizens fleeing the nation. This paper analyzes how the geographical location of Chihuahua influenced the political development of Mexico, and how the state of Chihuahua became one of the original sites for the illicit drug trade. This assertion will be examined through the lens of historically significant political developments and contemporary political trends in Mexico. In this discussion, research will indicate that the illicit drug trade between the United States and Mexico directly impacts national security and immigration for each country. These issues have led to strained political and social relations between the United States and Mexico, and reflect each government’s inability to manage the problem of the illicit drug trade.

1. Description of Chihuahua

Chihuahua is located in north central Mexico in the middle of the *Sierra Madres* and the *Sierra Madre Occidental*, which are separated by the *Meseta Central* in this region. Chihuahua shares a border with the United States along New Mexico and Texas and is bordered by the Mexican states Sonora to the west, Coahuila to the east, and Durango to the south. Geographically, Chihuahua is the largest Mexican state covering 96,364 square miles (247,087 sq km) and has a mostly dry and warm climate with cooler temperatures at higher elevations. The terrain is comprised of deserts, canyons, and forests at higher elevations. The Chihuahua Desert lies south of the Río Grande River and is larger than the entire state of California, making it the largest desert in North America. The desert covers approximately 175,000 square miles and several Mexican states as well as across the border into the United States. The total state population is approximately 3,052,907 with a 2.3 percent growth rate. The major cities in Chihuahua are Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua City, which is the state’s capital (Day-Macleod 2003: 17).

Chihuahua became an official state in 1824 after the Mexican War of Independence and the region was divided into the two new states of Durango and Chihuahua. The state’s constitution was created by an Act of the National Constitution and approved on July 6, 1824. The constitution established a federal system of government and a bicameral legislature. The first governor of Chihuahua was Colonel José Antonio Arco (Gobierno del Estado de Chihuahua 2009: Historical Facts).

The state’s Congress is comprised of 33 deputies, 22 of whom are elected by plurality, and the remaining 11 of whom are elected by proportional representation. The powers of Congress are outlined in Chapter IV in Articles 64, 65, and 66 of the state’s constitution and designates the state Congress the power to “legislate in all matters concerning the internal state system” (Congreso del Estado de Chihuahua 2009: LXII Legislature). The political parties in Chihuahua include the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), National Action Party (PAN), New Alliance Party, Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), Labor Party, and Green Ecological Party of Mexico. The PRI has the most representation in Congress with 15 members, the leader of which is Mr. Fernando Rodriguez Moreno. The PRI is followed by the PAN, with 12 members, led by Ms. Silvia Susana Muriel Acosta. The Democratic Revolution Party, Labor Party, and Green Ecological Party of Mexico each is represented by one member. Although currently the PRI has the most tangible power in Chihuahua politics, in 1992 Chihuahua was one of the first states in Mexico to elect a governor who was not a member of the PRI. The current president of Congress is Ms. Silvia Muriel, of the PAN. The current governor of Chihuahua is Mr. José Reyes Baeza Terrazas of the PRI.

Chihuahua’s economy is the twelfth largest in Mexico and is driven by livestock production, silver mining, and assembly plants (*maquiladoras*), which primarily produce electronic components, automobile parts, and textile goods. *Maquiladoras* employ roughly 45,000 people in Chihuahua at the 79 *maquila* manufacturing plants. Companies including Toshiba, JVC, and Honeywell have production sites in Chihuahua. Forty-four percent of Chihuahua’s workforce is employed in commerce and services. Slightly over a third of the workers are employed in mining and industry. Tourism also constitutes part of the economy in Chihuahua. The main tourist attraction is Cooper Canyon, which is larger and deeper than the Grand Canyon in the United States. The total gross state product (GSP) in Chihuahua is approximately 6.2 billion USD, or about 2.9 percent of Mexico’s total gross national product (GNP). Trade and services constitute 53.5 percent of the total GSP, manufacturing is 33 percent, and agriculture is 6 percent. Chihuahua is the leading producer of apples and nuts, second in pine and oak trees nationwide, and Mexico’s leader in raising cattle and sheep (Sustainable Cities 2009: Economy).

To understand the context of Chihuahua within the country of Mexico, we must first examine the colonial, constitutional, and revolutionary histories of Mexico, with specific attention to the significant role of the state of Chihuahua and its cities during Mexico’s political development. These histories provide a solid framework for appreciating the current political situation in state of Chihuahua.

1. Mexico’s Constitutional History

Mexico is comprised of 31 states and a Federal District in Mexico City. It is defined as a federal constitutional republic and has one of the most open economies in the world with its primary business partners being Canada, the United States, and Japan, respectively. The nation has “produced fabulous fortunes in business, politics, oil, and the drug trade” (Hendersen & Joseph 2002: 3). However, the citizens have a “…per capita income (of) barely $5,000 a year, and 40 million of Mexico’s 90 million citizens are poor by standard” (Hendersen & Joseph 2002: 3).

Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, after enduring 300 years of rule by the Spanish crown. Spanish conquerors and the Catholic Church helped to spread the principles of religiosity to indigenous populations and established the *encomienda* system. This system combined the efforts to provide work for and religious conversion of native populations and ensured that the Spanish Crown would be revered as the all powerful authority. In Mexico today, 76.5 percent of citizens claim Catholicism as their religious faith and 92.7 percent speak only Spanish (CIA World Factbook 2009). The conquerors and the Catholic Church succeeded in integrating and decimating the greater portion of the indigenous peoples, their cultures, and systems of religious beliefs. Mexico’s current state of political and religious culture roots itself in the historical roots of conquest by the Spanish, drawing “on two important cultural foundations: European and indigenous” (Camp 2007: 25).

Following independence in 1821, Mexico went through several constitutions before the constitution that governs Mexico today. The struggle to develop a constitution that appealed to liberal and authoritarian leaders and principles helps define Mexico’s contemporary political culture (Camp 2007: 19). From 1821 until 1917, Mexico implemented five different constitutions, alternating between liberal and conservative tendencies and strong versus weak presidential powers. The constitution of 1824 was the first full constitution for the newly independent Mexico. This constitution established a weak presidency and a strong legislature, distributed power among three branches of government, recognized Catholicism as the official religion, and granted the president unlimited powers only in the case of emergencies.

Over the next decade, Mexico abolished slavery, recognized Texan independence, and wrote a new constitution to centralize power. Antonio López de Santa Anna Pérez de Lebrón dominated Mexican politics during the 1830s into the mid-1850s. After being elected to the seat of president in 1833, Santa Anna abolished the 1824 constitution and wrote the third constitution for Mexico. In 1836, Santa Anna imposed a new national treaty known as *Siete Leyes* (Seven Laws), under which power was centralized to the president and the states were restructured as military districts. The new districts were under the leadership of presidentially appointed *caudillos* (strongmen). Santa Anna went in and out of power over the next 22 years before “a large, liberal, reform-minded group of young Mexicans…conspired to oust him” (Rudolph 1985: 39). The group started the Mexican Reform movement and consisted of Mexican intellectuals inspired by the ideas of European philosophers, such as Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Honoré de Balzac, John Stuart Mill and Pierre Joseph Proudhon. The group was led by a man named Benito Juárez. Juárez who eventually served two terms as president of Mexico, developed the Plan of Ayulta in 1854 to overthrow Santa Anna. In August 1855, Santa Anna resigned for the last time (Merrill 1996: Chapter 1).

After the resignation of Santa Anna, a provisional government was put into power led by the Mexican intellectuals and Juan Álvarez, and the creation of the 1857 constitution began. The constitution of 1857 was similar to that of 1824 but “reflected a more liberal vision of society” by incorporating the Reform Laws (Rudolph 1985: 40). The aim of these laws was to establish a parliamentary democracy, guarantee civil freedoms and liberties, and promote material progress and equality. The years following were politically tumultuous and lay the foundation for the Mexican Revolution.

In 1876, Porfirio Díaz took control of Mexico and remained in power for 30 of the next 34 years. Díaz and his followers saw order as the path to achieve political stability in Mexico and suggested that the previous leaders had based their political thinking on “unscientific” ideas. In an attempt to achieve political stability, Díaz suggested “all citizens of a republic should receive the same training, so that their ideas and methods may be harmonized and the national identity intensified” (Camp 2007: 37). Díaz argued for the value of public education, encouraged economic development primarily within the mining and investment sectors, and attacked the relationship between the church and the state and the role of Indians in Mexican society. The period of rule by Díaz, known as the Porfiriato, “had significant consequences that led to the country’s major social upheaval of the twentieth century, the Mexico Revolution of 1910, and numerous political and social legacies” (Camp 2007: 37). Díaz made significant steps toward improving Mexico’s economy and modernizing the nation. However, he did so at the expense of the citizens’ personal freedoms (Rudolph 1985: 46). Díaz implemented economically beneficial policies, but the main benefactors were the wealthy at home and abroad. Land ownership was the key to gaining economic and social influence. Historians of Mexico suggest

large holders of commercialized agriculture land constituted the top of the pyramid. Land provided the economic core as well as status. From this base large landholders diversified into manufacturing, mining, or other profitable activities. An elite, allied with national and regional political groups with business and personal connections to foreign capitalists and investors, formed an interlocking socioeconomic and political directorate. They used their political, economic, and social influence to reinforce their position (Camp 2007: 39).

The wealthy land owners were among the few reaping benefits under the Porfiriato. In addition to creating greater economic divisions with the country, the Porfiriato was branded by frequent violations of the constitution of 1857.

1. Mexican Revolution and Geographical Significance of Chihuahua

The Mexican Revolution from 1910-1917 molded the foundation of Mexico’s contemporary political culture. The Revolution of 1910 began after Mexican citizens became increasingly dissatisfied with the policies in place under the Porfiriato. Liberal writers and journalists challenged the regime and coordinated their efforts with other liberal clubs at a convention in San Luis Potosi between 1900 and 1901. These groups were responsible for defending the principles of the 1857 constitution. The liberals organized meetings and congresses, but government persecution led many liberals to seek asylum in the United States. On July 1, 1906, the exiles issued a formal proclamation from St. Louis, Missouri that called for the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz. Soon after, strikes broke out among mining and textile workers, which were quickly suppressed by force. The liberals did not abandon their fight and in 1908, the liberals thought they had made a break-through when Díaz told an American journalist he would not be running for re-election in 1910. Liberals and intellectuals started their campaigns to find a candidate. Francisco I. Madero campaigned on the side of the liberals in 22 states and won the liberal candidacy for the election. However, the outcome was not as the liberals hoped. Because of mass repression of opposition and imprisonment of anti- Díaz groups, Díaz won re-election in 1910 (Rudolph 1985: 48).

The following October, Madero drafted the Plan of San Luis Potosí calling for the people to rise up against Díaz to replace him with a provisional government for the purposes of restoring democracy and the principles in the constitution of 1857. Initially, the call for an armed rebellion was not effectively coordinated, but by January 1911 a large-scale uprising began in Chihuahua, led by Pascual Orozco and Francisco “Pancho” Villa. These uprisings led to rebellious groups taking to arms across the country. The rebels staked out in Ciudad Juárez, a border city in Chihuahua, refused to negotiate an armistice with members from the Díaz administration, and continued capturing several of Mexico’s state capitals. During this time, Madero was exiled in Texas and wavered back and forth on ordering a rebel attack against Díaz forces, fearing that U.S. troops stationed in El Paso would intervene. Despite Madero’s hesitation, the revolutionaries took the city on their own accord and fighting broke out among the various revolutionary groups. On May 10, 1911, “Pancho” Villa entered Ciudad Juárez enabling Madero’s faction to demand the resignation of Díaz. On May 25, 1911, Porfirio Díaz accepted rebel defeat and left Mexico for exile in France (Merrill 1996: Chapter 1). These initial feats marked the beginning of the decade-long revolution and reinforced the strategically significant location of Chihuahua as a border state to the U.S. Throughout the revolution, rebels used Ciudad Juárez as a location to transport cattle and captured goods into the U.S. to trade for munitions and supplies to support the efforts of the revolution (Bernhardson, et al 1998: 367).

Two of the successors to Díaz were Francisco I. Madero, leader of the liberal opposition and Victoriano Huerta, leader of the federal forces. Madero took leadership immediately following the exile of Díaz and two years later was accused of abandoning the principles of the Plan of San Luis Potosí. An organized offensive was launched against Madero’s government in March of 1912. Victoriano Huerta joined the coup against Madero and organized the arrest of both President Madero and Vice President José María Pino Suárez. With the aid of the United States ambassador Henry Lane Wilson, Huerta negotiated the resignation of Madero and Pino Suárez, appointed himself as secretary of the interior, which strategically positioned him as the successor to the presidency under the terms of the constitution of 1857. By 1914, however, Huerta lost support on all fronts and resigned as president on July 8 (Rudolph 1985: 53).

The next leader of Mexico, Venustiano Carranza, gained official political recognition from the United States and negotiated the course of Mexico’s future by initiating the need for a new constitution. The Constitution of 1917 was a progressive document and marked the beginning of the end of the Mexican Revolution and set Mexico on a clearer path toward the actualization of a democracy. Ratified on February 5, 1917, the Mexican constitution was “considered by many to be one of the most radical and comprehensive constitutions in modern political history,” and included one of “the most advanced labor code(s) in the world at its time” (Merrill 1996: Chapter 4). The constitution also ensured national autonomy and social justice through the charter of individual freedoms, separation of powers, federalism, and a bill of rights.

1. The Beginning of the Drug Trade

Chihuahua played an integral role in providing a strategic location for the transfer of goods between the U.S. and Mexico. This transfer of goods was beneficial to the revolutionaries during the years of fighting as it provided a route to acquire supplies that were otherwise unavailable as well as a steady source of funding. Research indicates that revolutionaries used the drug trade to fund their activities in so far as “…illicit drug trafficking made available a financial base to sustain regional independence in Mexico for at least the period of violence of the Mexican Revolution” (Sandos 1984: 213). “Pancho” Villa is suspected of at least knowing of the illicit drug trade occurring in Ciudad Juárez during his time as general in the Revolution, given that he was a powerful and influential actor in the state of Chihuahua (Sandos 1984: 212).

The state of Chihuahua was influential in shaping Mexico’s constitutional and political histories, due to its strategic location on the U.S.-Mexico border and to its being the home of the revolutionaries who took advantage of the state’s location to instigate rebellion and political reform. The colonial and constitutional histories of Mexico and the Mexican Revolution from 1910-1920 provide a solid foundation for understanding the geographical significance of Chihuahua, which contributed to the success of the illegal drug trade.

The problem of drug addiction and trade has its roots in the Mexican Revolution as doctors prescribed “narcotic tablets” to cure pain and illness, thus causing their patients to become addicted to these medically prescribed drugs. Consequently, this catalyzed the buying and selling of narcotics. In one particular example, Madero’s Surgeon General, Ira J. Bush prescribed “narcotic tablets” to a desperate Mexican mother whose child had been shot in the intestines during the fighting in the Battle of Juárez. Bush prescribed the narcotics as the baby’s only hope and advised that the child be kept on “the verge of opium poisoning” (Sandos 1984: 195). Since doctors regularly prescribed narcotics, it can be reasonably concluded that many patients developed an addiction to these narcotics, leading to an increased demand for the drugs within Mexico.

The culture of drug use and trafficking became profitable for Mexico first during the Revolution and was the result of an increased demand for medical prescriptions of narcotics and use of illicit drugs in the United States. During the Mexican Revolution, the United States was preparing to enter the Great War. Entrance into this war marked an increase in illicit drug use among young men attempting to avoid the draft. Addiction to drugs “constituted a valid reason to reject men for the draft” (Sandos 1984: 202). Mexico began capitalizing on illicit drug trade and “became the principle entrepôt for smuggled goods…P.B. Altendorf of the U.S. Army’s Military Intelligence Division estimated that opium smuggling through Mexico constituted a multi-million dollar annual business” (Sandos 1984: 202-203). The profitability of the market and the demand from the United States encouraged Mexican drug makers to continue the production of the substances.

By the 1930s, Mexico became a commercial producer of opium, the base for the production of heroin. During World War II, the United States encouraged Mexico to approve the legal production of opium to ensure there would be enough of the product to produce morphine to be used in the treatment of the wounded. However, by 1942, the United States became concerned that licit drugs were leaking into the illicit market. U.S. officials provided the Mexican government with detailed information on forcing the end of the leakage. From 1940-1970 production of opium fluctuated and remained concentrated in three northwestern Mexican states of Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Durango. By1975, Mexico was supplying 6.5 tons or 70-80 percent of the total amount of heroin entering the U.S. (Reuter, Ronfeldt 1992: 93). Research indicates that the illicit opium harvested during the late 1970s in Mexico in the regions of Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua likely had their origins in plantings made during the Mexican Revolution (Sandos 1984: 199).

1. Policies to Impede Drug Trafficking and Address National Security

The U.S. government attempted to curb the illicit trade by imposing an eradication campaign in the mid-1970s and succeeded in decreasing production for a short period of time. Despite their efforts, by the late 1980s total production rose again and exports increased dramatically between 1984 and 1988. According to the National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee (NNICC), exports in 1984 were approximately 2.0 tons, and by 1988 the figure rose to 4.5 to 5.5 tons. In1988, the illegal drug industry accounted for “more than 1.25 percent of Mexico’s gross national product (GNP)” and “a share of export earnings of about 20 percent” (Reuter & Ronfeldt 1992: 95). Because of the increased demand by the U.S. market, production of opium spread south into Michoacán, Nayarit, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas (Reuter & Ronfeldt 1992: 92-94). The central location of Mexico provided opportunity for the nation to develop as a major site for the transnational shipment of drugs from other countries in Latin America into the United States. For these reasons, “the national security issue of greatest significance and long duration in bilateral affairs is that of illegal drug trade” (Camp 2007: 247).

After years of relatively ineffective policy initiatives and campaigns, in 1986 President Ronald Regan became the first U.S. president to officially declare that the drug trade was a threat to national security (Reuter & Ronfeldt 1992: 94). It is important to note that currently, “more than two-thirds of the cocaine entering the United States is estimated to pass through Mexico,” and “the United States…is the largest illegal drug market in the world” (Camp 2007: 247). The illicit drug trade continues to cause concern for both the Mexican and United States governments over the issue of national and state security. In Mexico, the issue of security requires military forces to focus primarily upon maintaining national security, by participating in drug raids and policy making, as opposed to national defense (Camp 2007: 141). In doing so, the military participates in drug raids and policy making to address national security. This decision by the Mexican government to use the Mexican armed forces in intercepting and identifying illicit drug activity “has exposed the military at all levels to drug-related corruption” (Camp 2007: 142).

Military integration in drug control dates back to the 1940s when the Mexican army primarily focused on crop eradication. The government exhibited a strong preference for capturing drugs rather than people. From the 1940s through the 1960s, the Mexican military lacked necessary equipment and personnel to execute these operations. This, coupled with a long-standing concern for arresting impoverished farmers, led to the failure of the military’s eradication initiative. This has been a trend in Mexico’s attitude toward illicit drug-trade and was strengthened by traditional Mexican nationalism.

From a traditional Mexican nationalist perspective, a smuggler who sells to Americans is anti-American and keeps his money in Mexico may be more respectable, and less suspect in terms of nationalist credentials, than a businessman who admires and works for Americans in Mexico (Reuter & Ronfeldt 1992: 101).

Supporting nationalist sentiments manifested themselves in the system of organized drug smuggling by gaining a base within the Mexican *camarillas*, well-established, elite political circles or cliques. Once a smuggling operation gained support inside a *camarilla* at the national and local levels, or had an individual contact with a group, the operation had a direct connection with Mexico’s political elite (Reuter & Ronfeldt 1992: 101). Since *camarillas* and smuggling operations tend to be family and regionally based, a sense of loyalty pervades the activity of each of the groups. By 1989, marijuana and poppy-related production and smuggling was so intertwined into the political system that the PRI, PRD, and PAN had all been accused of having leaders or partisans associated with the drug trade (Reuter & Ronfeldt 1992: 103).

 Over the last decade, Mexico and the United States have made efforts to reduce the impact of the drug trade by enacting new initiatives, which have proven to be largely ineffective. In 1988, the *Procuraduría General de la Républica* (PGR), or Attorney General’s Office, was recognized as the official body responsible for investigating and prosecuting federal crimes. In this year the PGR created the Office of the Assistant Attorney General for the Investigation and Combat of Drug Trafficking that added 1,500 positions to the Federal Judicial Police to create special rapid interdiction units. In 1990 the PGR added the General Coordination for the Investigation and Combat of Drug Trafficking (Reuter, Ronfeldt 2009: 113). Within the last ten years, the PGR has created programs such as the Permanent Program for the Destruction of Illegal Crops, the Cooperation and Collaboration Accords on Law Enforcement, and a campaign titled “Let’s Fight Drugs like Tigers,” which focuses on combating drug use among Mexican teens (PGR 2002: par. 1). The Cooperation and Collaboration Accords were signed in 2002:

…with ten states in the north and northwest of the country, specifically designed to deal with crime in each one of them in an effort to consolidate democratic governability, based on consensus, cooperation and collaboration, strengthen the State of Law and combat the impunity and corruption that undermine Mexico (PGR 2002: par. 1).

The efforts by the PGR have proven relatively ineffective. Although the PGR has arrested and prosecuted many associated with the drug trade, the office has not been able to adequately address the roots of the problem, the high demand for drugs from the U.S. market and the profitability of the drug trade.

 The United States also has made countless policy initiatives over the last decade but has not seen widespread success. From 1975 to 1985, the Bureau of International Narcotics Matters provided $115 million to Mexico for drug control efforts. This trend continued into the late 1980s and early 1990s as, “Mexico remained the single largest recipient ($15 million each year, out of a total budget that has expanded to over US$ 100 million per year)” (Reuter, Ronfeldt 1992: 127). In 1988, as demand for drugs in the U.S. was on the rise, the U.S. Department of State’s International Narcotics Matters (INM) coordinated the interagency International Narcotics Control Strategy and Implementation Plan which established six policy goals:

-reduce the amount of cocaine shipped from Latin America to the United States through an integrated program of narcotics control;

-reduce the amount of heroin shipped from Asia and Mexico to the United States through an integrated program of narcotics control;

-reduce the amount of marijuana entering the United States from worldwide sources through an integrated program of narcotics control;

-increase intolerance for illicit drugs and stimulate focused support for effective narcotics control worldwide through public diplomacy initiatives which incorporate concepts of public awareness and demand reduction;

-eliminate major trafficking networks and cartels through seizures, arrests, prosecutions, convictions and forfeiture of assets;

-secure increased international cooperation in worldwide narcotics control matters through diplomatic program initiatives (van Wert 1988: 7).

These policy goals established the broad foundation upon which the United States has fought the international drug trade.

Another key player in the war against the illicit drug trade is the Drug Enforcement Agency. During the Nixon administration the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) was formed to “establish a single unified command to combat ‘an all-out global war on the drug menace’” (U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency 2009: History). During the 1990s the DEA took significant steps in addressing the drug trade such as increasing its presence in Mexico. More recently, the DEA is collaborating with Mexican law enforcement agencies to “systematically dismantle the cartels” and “has the largest law enforcement presence in Mexico with 11 offices and a decades-long history of working with the Mexican government” (U.S. Department of Justice 2009: Fact Sheet). Despite concerted efforts on the part of the Mexican and U.S. governments, “the bloodshed escalated to unprecedented levels as the cartels use violence as a tool to undermine public support for the Mexican Government’s vigorous counter-drug efforts…Traffickers display the bodies of their tortured victims to intimidate government officials and the public alike” (DEA Congressional Testimony on Border Violence and Agency Coordination 2009: par. 1). The policy fight to reduce the impact of the illicit drug trade and to end the violence resulting from such trade is discouraging. According to the Crime and Narcotics Center, Mexico ranked as the third highest producer from 2002 to 2006 of heroin, behind only Afghanistan and Burma. Production of heroin increased from approximately 6.8 metric tons in 2002 to approximately 12.7 metric tons in 2006, supporting the assertion that Mexican and U.S. policy initiatives to eradicate drug production are relatively ineffective (National Drug Intelligence Center 2009: Appendix B, TableB9). Drug cartels in Mexico are integrated and powerful and the demand from the U.S. market motivates them to continue supplying illicit substances to citizens within Mexico and across the border.

1. Mexico’s Most Unsafe State

The issues of military intervention, ineffective policy initiatives, and corruption accompanied with the illicit drug trade along the Mexico-U.S. border are responsible for outbreaks of violence. Drug-related violence has resulted in the deaths of more than 14,000 people since 2006, when President Felipe Calderón took office and deployed over 50,000 troops across the country to combat the brutality (Women slain in drug wars 2009: par. 8). Violence related to drug activity is concentrated in the northern states of Mexico with significant activity in Chihuahua, the state “considered to be the most violent region of the country due to the huge number of murders by organized criminal elements last year and so far in 2009” (Twelve-hundred More Mexican 2009: par. 2). The death toll for 2009 in Chihuahua has reached approximately 2,300 (Women 2009: par. 3). President Calderón said he will continue to keep the presence of the 50,000 troops in northern Mexico, 9,000 of which have a presence in Ciudad Juárez alone.

Despite these efforts by the president, “the bloodshed continues (in Chihuahua), stemming from a variety of forces: rival cartels, conventional street gangs and small-time crooks, dirty cops and the government crackdown” (Ellingwood 2009(b): par. 28). Tony Payan, professor of political science at the University of Texas said: “You can safely say things have been getting worse…Chihuahua remains the most unsafe state in the country, and Juárez remains the most unsafe city in Mexico” (Borunda 2009: par. 1). The issue of the drug trade at the Mexico-U.S. border continues to “pose a national security threat to Mexico and an organized crime threat to the United States…Drug-related violence, including kidnappings and increasingly gruesome murders, has skyrocketed in recent years in Mexico, particularly near the border with the United States” (U.S. Dept. of Justice, Congressional 2009: par. 1). The threat of violence and the government’s inability to quell such violence contributes to the significant number of Mexican citizens fleeing the country to seek safety within the borders of the United States.

1. Immigration and Deportation Trends

Immigration into the United States from Mexico has significantly increased since pre-1980. This increase may be partially due to the increase in drug-related violence in Chihuahua since this time period. The chart below demonstrates the recorded increases from pre-1980 until 2000.

**Mexican-born US residents by period of entry and authorization** (millions)

Period of entry Total Authorized Unauthorized Percent unauthorized

Pre-1980 2.2 2.2 n.a. n.a.

1980-84 1.0 0.9 0.1 10

1985-89 1.7 1.0 0.7 41

1990-94 1.9 0.4 1.5 79

1995-2000 3.0 0.4 2.6 87

n.a. = not available

Source: Jeffe Passel, Urban Institute (based on 2000 US Census).

(As found in Hufbauer, Schott 2005: 448)

Based on the data presented in this table, it is evident that immigration to the United States from Mexico has increased before pre-1980 to 2000 with a higher percentage of unauthorized residents. These trends may be due partly to the increased violence in Chihuahua, which has caused an influx of citizens fleeing the state seeking asylum in the United States.

Juárez sits on the Mexico-U.S. border in close proximity to El Paso, Texas. Recently, El Paso has become a safe haven for citizens fleeing the drug killings in Juárez. According to a 2009 report from the Brookings Institute, El Paso is ranked seventh out of ten for metropolitan areas with the highest proportion of immigrants. Citizens of Juárez began fleeing the city in May 2008 and seeking asylum in the United States at a rate of about 15 persons per week, according to Ray Rojas the executive director of Las Americas Immigration Advocacy Center in El Paso. Approximately, 3,000 families have fled from Juárez into El Paso, Texas (Valdez 2009: par.14). These families currently are seeking political asylum, a process that can take more than one year to complete. In order to attain political asylum, individuals must be able to prove that they are being persecuted by a world government because of their religion, political beliefs, or social class, and must prove they are not safe in their homeland (Valdez 2009: par. 17). Proving persecution by the government in Chihuahua is almost impossible. Drug lords are powerfully integrated within Mexico’s structurally democratic system. The powerful role of political *camarillas* and the ability of drug lords to maintain leadership and credibility within these groups fosters an environment of corruption. By providing evidence of persecution, the powerful elites would be admitting corruption and illegal activity. The political support system exists and it is difficult to act against those who share the same *camarilla*. Because of the powerful integration of the drugs lords within the political structures and their ability to circumnavigate the laws, providing substantial evidence of persecution is difficult.

 As the United States attempts to address the issue of illegal immigration, Mexican citizens are being deported, a large portion of whom are sent to Juárez. Chihuahua is one of the largest recipients of deported illegal aliens (Mexican official says most immigrants deported from USA arrive in Chihuahua 2008: par. 1). According to Mexican officials, “most immigrants deported from USA arrive in Chihuahua” (Mexican official says 2008: par. 2). In some instances, the Mexican immigrants are deported back into the violence from which they attempted to escape. In one particularly controversial example, a high school student living in New Mexico was recently deported to Chihuahua. High school senior Karina Acosta at Roswell High School was ticketed for blocking a fire lane and driving without a license. The Roswell officer who stopped her asked if Acosta had legal U.S. residency when learning that she did not, the officer telephoned the immigration authorities. Acosta, 18 and pregnant, was immediately deported to Mexico after being held in a juvenile detention center. Instead of fighting deportation, Acosta finally agreed to be sent back to the Mexican state of Chihuahua in the early part of 2008 due to the unlikely chance of being granted legal residency (Baker 2008: pars. 1-9).

According to 2007 reports, Chihuahua received 239,418 deported persons. In the first 45 days of 2008, Chihuahua reported receiving 8,500 deported Mexican citizens. The responsibility of the United States and Mexican governments to create stable living environments for their citizens in the shadow of increased illegal immigration and recent deportation trends indicates that the relationship between the two nations is both mutually dependent and exclusive. Each country has an individual responsibility to its citizens but due to the dependent natures of the Mexican and U.S. economies, and the realities of the drug market, the two countries cannot address these problems independently.

1. Conclusion

Mexico is no stranger to violence as can be traced throughout its political development with strong connections to its colonial past, constitutional development and history of revolution. In this context, Chihuahua, Mexico has a strategic position in the development of Mexican politics. Historically speaking, it was the site of pivotal battles during the Mexican Revolution from 1910 to 1920, which led to the creation of the 1917 Constitution of Mexico. Ciudad Juárez served as a point through which revolutionaries could pass into the United States to trade for goods. Chihuahua served as the birth place for the illicit drug trade which has come to define the politics of the region, the democratic development of Mexico, and the strained relationship between with the United States. The trends of the illicit drug trade, historically and currently, indicate that the leaders of Mexico and the United States cannot develop policy to effectively eliminate the problem. Research indicates that although each of the governments has responded to the violence and corruption associated with the drug trade with numerous policies, initiatives, campaigns, and government groups, the issue is interwoven into the politics of Mexico. The U.S. demand for illegal substances continues to be the highest in the world, and Mexican drug lords continue to undermine the governmental efforts thus the issue of illegal drug trafficking remains, unresolved. In summary, Mexico and the United States have a mutually reliant and mutually destructive relationship.

The nations have relied upon each other as trade partners prior to the Mexican Revolution. With the inception of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 the reliance became even more significant. The trade partnership resulting from NAFTA has allowed the economies of each country to grow to some degree. However, the illegal drug trade, while economically beneficial to the drug cartels, has created serious tension between the Mexican and U.S. governments, specifically when it comes to casting blame. According to one Mexican analyst:

while Mexican officials can be easily corrupted by drug money, the source of the corruption is a sector of the U.S. society equally prone to corruption. It follows that Mexico is not creating problems for the United States; on the contrary, the demand for drugs in the United States is the most serious national security problem for the Mexican government. It is fueling corruption, creating private armies, and taking a heavy human toll (Reuter, Ronfeldt 1992: 115).

The trends presented in this analysis support that the drug trade and the associated violence are out of the control of the democratic leaders of Mexico and the United States and are playing a role in increasing immigration and deportation trends. To solve the problems associated with the historically and globally significant illegal drug trade I argue that countries have three options 1) Reduce the available supply of illicit narcotics internationally to (van Wert 1988: 1), 2) eradicate the demand for illegal substances, or 3) legalize the use of these substances. Otherwise, the problem will continue to exist. Considering these options issues will allow each country the opportunity to analyze the international significance of drugs. The structures already exist through which these changes can be made. In addition to analyzing the issue from a strictly drug-oriented perspective, future research should focus on the interconnectedness of the economies between border cities to examine specifically how the relationship defines the exchange of goods, people, and in this case, drugs.

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