

## **Abstract**

Over the last four decades organized crime groups, particularly, drug trafficking organizations or drug cartels, have managed to be under the spotlight of the security agendas of American countries such as Colombia and the United States. During the last two decades, however, the global securitization of the drug trafficking issue, has led them to become a major security threat not only for the Americas, but also for Europe and more recently for West African countries. These organizations pose a threat not only to the security of the state, but to the very essence of it, by corrupting and damaging everything they come in contact with at the political, social, economical and even cultural level. This graduate thesis presents an analysis on Latin American drug trafficking organizations or drugs cartels, as they are commonly known, focusing on the cases of Colombian and Mexican drug cartels. By comparing these two case studies, I suggest that today's Mexican drug trafficking organizations have gained their momentum and incommensurable strength by following the footsteps of the big three Colombian drug cartels that existed between the 1980s and 1990s. The first chapter will expose the definitions and concepts surrounding the research of organized crime. In the second and third chapters, both the Colombian and Mexican cases will be analyzed up to the security situation of today, from non-state actors to the respective governmental responses. The last chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of international policies against drug trafficking organizations, their failures and successes, and it will present the legalization and decriminalization of drugs as the new alternatives to tackle the issue, and as the possible substitutes to the evident failure of the War on Drugs.