

The Mexican War on Drugs: an analysis of the militarised approach and its consequences

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List of Abbreviations

AFO	Arellano Felix Organisation
BLO	Beltran Leyva Organisation
CFO	Vicente Carillo Fuentes Organisation
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
ESOC	Empirical Studies of Conflict
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IEP	Institute for Peace and Economics
JMP	Justice in Mexico Project
MPI	Mexico Peace Index
NAFTA	North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement
OAS	Organisation of American States
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)
PEMEX	Petróleos Mexicanos (Mexican Petroleums)
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)
SHCP	Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público (Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit)
SOA	School of the Americas
U.N.	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
U.S.	United States
WOD	War on Drugs

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Abstract

The following research analyses the impact of the War on Drugs in Mexico. Albeit acknowledging the importance of the United States in the counter-narcotic efforts, the research is focused on the actors that experienced the conflict in the first place: the Mexican state, the cartels and the Mexican population. The research exits the realist perspective and discusses the case study from a constructivist point of view, with a focus on the securitisation of the narcotic aspect. The research concludes that, despite a decade long conflict, organised crime is still present. The War on Drugs strategy did not manage to respect the initial promise of dismantling drug cartels and instead pushed them towards a structural and territorial fragmentation as well as hyper-militarisation. Moreover, the rigid approach led to a diversification of illicit activities which are currently a direct threat for human security. The final results show that organised crime has high probabilities of surviving due to several key-factors: economic resources, violent means, corruptible legal actors, a constant demand of illicit goods and ungoverned spaces.

Key words: “war on drugs”; “Mexico”; “kingpin”; “cartel”; “narco”

1

Introduction

The Latin American continent is seldom considered from a security point of view. After decades of authoritarian regimes, the region has experienced a new wave of democratisation and a rapid economic development which transformed the area into one of the most peaceful in the world. Officially, the continent has no on-going interstate or intrastate armed conflicts. However, several scholars question the official utopian discourse and consider that despite being relatively tranquil, Latin America is currently experiencing a combination of old security problems and new regional menaces, organised crime and drug-trafficking *in primis* (Hernández-Roy, 2007:32). Albeit the seriousness of organised crime's activities, until recently, criminal groups were analysed by criminologists rather than political scientists (Allum and Gilmour, 2012). This approach was due to the fact that political scientists were more focused on analysing full developed democracies rather than the so-called Third World countries (and for a long period of time, criminal activities were considered a product of the political instability common in the abovementioned nations). Fortunately, perceptions have changed and the growing interest is linked to the fact that organised crime has the extraordinary capacity to adapt to any type of political environment (Allum and Gilmour, 2012). Every country in the world experienced, to a certain extent, criminal activities perpetrated by organised crime. Moreover, organised crime has the ability to rapidly adapt during periods of crisis, despite the attempts of diminishing its influence. One of the most famous militants against organised crime, the Italian judge Giovanni Falcone, explains this chameleonic capacity by declaring that criminal groups "live in perfect symbiosis with a myriad of protectors, accomplices...informers, and people from all strata of society" (cited in Allum and Gilmour, 2012). Malone and Malone-Rowe argue, more specifically, that criminal groups strengthen their operational power particularly during a democratisation process which "fundamentally changes the politics, economies, and societies of most countries" (2014:475). Falcone, being a judge, considered that organised crime's activities should be fought at an institutional level by strengthening the state's legal and judicial capacities, rather than adopting austere methods. One important rigid

approach against illicit activities, more specifically drug-trafficking, is the War on Drugs (WOD) policy. Vellinga offers a concise and clear explanation for the abovementioned technique by stating that “the War on Drugs strategy has been focusing primarily on the interdiction of drug production and trade” (2000:118).

The United States (U.S.) is one of the major actors in using the “strong hand” policy in tackling the drug problem and through the decades managed to involve in this process also other nations (voluntarily or not). Albeit being called a WOD, officially, this policy, is far from being considered an armed conflict. More specifically, it is considered a low-intensity conflict which justifies the deployment of military personnel in a non-war zone (Dunn, 1997). It should be mentioned that narco-groups are not a separated reality typical of the suburbs or of the poor rural areas, instead they are well rooted in all societal levels and a WOD designed exclusively for the criminal groups will most definitely affect the entirety of the society they are operating in. The Latin American region has experienced several WOD which had the same outcome: the relocation of the drug production to a neighbouring country which creates a vicious circle of death and violence. Therefore, from a regional security point of view, organised crime is a serious threat. In fact, the criminal groups, which are in search of increasing their profits, are a direct threat “to democratic states struggling to establish and uphold the rule of law” (Malone and Malone-Rowe, 2014:471) and weak institutions are a promising soil for political corruption and illicit activities.

The following research intends to focus on a specific case study, Mexico, in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the situation covering the 2006-2016 timeframe. The originality of the analysis is the fact that the author aims at taking the distance from the traditional approach which focuses its attention primarily on the role of the U.S. in the WOD policy. The Mexican WOD will be discussed by analysing its interaction with the actors that experienced it directly: the Mexican state, the cartels and the Mexican populace. Ultimately, the research aims to determine if the violent counter-narcotic strategy failed its original goal of weakening criminal groups and has instead empowered them. The research intends to analyse the impact of the WOD in Mexico through a qualitative approach. The entirety of the Mexican society was affected by the WOD, therefore the violent approach will be analysed in relation with violence, territory, political corruption and population. Chapter 2 will present the role that the U.S. had in creating counter-narcotics policies with regards towards a very specific region, Latin America. Moreover, it will be analysed the development of the concept of “threat” in the region, with a passage from Communism to narcotics, by presenting the Colombian and the Mexican cases. Chapter 3 will guide the reader through the literature review which presents the interaction of three particular subjects in the WOD: the state,

the criminal groups and the populace. Chapter 4 will help the reader to understand how a practical and active strategy as the WOD can be integrated within a theoretical framework. The main theories that will be the *fil rouge* of the research are constructivism and securitisation which will have the final aim of explaining how such a violent strategy was rapidly implemented from a political point of view and immediately accepted by the majority of the population. Chapter 5 will present the methods that the researcher followed in order to fully analyse the Mexican case study. Chapter 6 and 7 will present the final results of the research. The research intends to reduce the limited existing literature regarding the security threat posed by narco-groups. The main problem is that cartels are solely related to murderous violence and obtain international interests only when an atrocious event verifies. However, the following research intends to demonstrate that the imposing presence of cartels is a structural problem and their capabilities are perilous. Decades of political corruption and lack of democratic stability created the perfect environment for criminal groups and the lack of critical literature is the astounding example of the minimisation of cartels' perceived impact on security.

2

Historical background

Defining and isolating illegal substances is a complex issue. For decades heroin and cocaine have been used as legal medical material and there is no mystery that many Andean countries (such as Peru) consider the use of coca leaves a part of their secular culture (Roth, 2014:11). Narcotic illicit business and the attempts to stop it have an intricate history. The drug trade has a strong impact on societies and often, the countries affected by it, pursue counter-narcotic efforts both by pacific and violent means. The WOD approach is not certainly a new method in order to break the drug chain. The British Empire and China have experienced two Opium Wars (in mid-XIX century) and the rationale behind them was that China decided to start a WOD in order to annihilate the control the East India Company had over the Chinese population which was subject to the massive importation of opiates perpetrated by the Company (Roth, 2014:12). However, already in the first exhaustively documented WOD, the drugs were not precisely the main actor. The central interest was to diminish the sovereign requests China had over its own territory. The first internationalisation of the “strong hand” rhetoric took place in 1909, during the Shanghai Opium Commission, which was specifically requested by a prohibitionist U.S. The 1909 conference was followed by another one in 1911 which put in place the first drug control treaty called the International Opium Convention (Jenner, 2014:66). In less than two decades drugs such as cocaine, hashish, heroin and cannabis were declared dangerous which opened wide the way for a massive illicit business that never stopped because “prohibition causes the formation of an underground black market” (Jenner, 2014:67). However, there is a certain degree of assertion between scholars which admit that the narcotic menace was, at least partially, constructed. What is argued, more specifically, is that certain drugs and their production realities are given a nefarious connotation in order for a stronger state to have leverage on a weaker drug-producing country (Carpenter, 2013:145).

It is certainly clear that the U.S., which is considered a pioneer of the counter-narcotic effort, had its own historical role in the Latin American region which will be further discussed. In fact, as Jenner argues, “the U.S. is the unofficial leader of the fight against drugs” as it is the country that spends the most on counter-narcotics operations, both home and abroad, and the annual expenditure is around 50 billion dollars (2014:75). The chapter will guide the reader through the history of the War(s) on Drugs in Latin America by focusing on the constructed concept of “threat”, on the Certification Process and on two major operations (Plan Colombia and Plan Mexico). The following section intends to briefly present the rise of the drug trade in Latin America and the subsequent counter-narcotic efforts, which were possible due to the subtle participation of the hegemonic Northern state. The research *per se* is focused on the specific Mexican case, but it is paramount, for a better understanding of current events, to address the historical role the U.S had in the counter-narcotic efforts.

2.1 The threat

The territorial vicinity between Latin America and the United states has always been a source of attrition between the two realities. On the one hand, the U.S. defined Latin America as its own backyard who had to be protected; on the other hand Latin America was never fond of U.S.’ hegemonic interventions in the region (Fernandez, 2017). Porfirio Diaz’s quote “so far from God, so near to the United states” (cited in Mares, 2016:302) explains perfectly the historical resentment that Latin America has regarding its proximity to the U.S. It is acknowledged that the U.S. is an important actor in the region and it always had a dominant relationship with the continent *per se* (Hurrell, 1998:531). Due to its strong influence the U.S. had, in the aftermath of WWII, the power to define “what comprised an existential threat to the hemisphere” (Bagley, 2007:52). The concept of security during the Cold War was primarily related with the U.S. - Soviet Union relations and the antagonist relationship directly affected Latin America (Mares, 2016:302; Tickner, 2016:69).

Historically Latin America was defined as a producer of cocaine due to its territorial and meteorological peculiarities. In fact, the coca bushes can be cultivated only in the South American region due to the specificity of its climate and *de facto*, the totality of cocaine consumed in the world has origins in solely three countries: Colombia, Peru and Bolivia (Jenner, 2014:68). Already in the late 1940s Peru was the main provider of cocaine and the U.S. was its largest consumer (Roth, 2014:14). However, until the early 1970s “the South American cocaine trade remained small” (Roth, 2014:14) which implies that the problem, despite existing, was not considered a menace. In fact, during the most intense years of the Cold War, the drug problem was considered a

secondary issue when compared with the more imposing Communist ideology which was seen as a direct threat to U.S.'s national security. The Communist ideology was considered "the region's largest security threat", and thus reinforced the need to have control over the area (Tickner, 2016:67). Bagley argues that the U.S. was extremely concerned regarding the Soviet threat and unilaterally established that it had "the right to intervene within the domestic affairs of any Latin American state that faced communist political aggression" (2007:58). A major instrument, in order to eliminate the problem, was the creation of the School of the Americas (SOA) which trained more than 60,000 Latin American military personnel in "counterinsurgency theory and tactics" (Tickner, 2016:69). The outcome of this decision was the formation of long and cruel authoritarian regimes led by militaries trained in the SOA. The regimes that terrorised the Latin American population for decades were supported by the U.S (either openly or indirectly). The U.S.'s political establishment considered that an authoritarian right-wing regime was preferable to a liberal state which might have had higher probabilities of being subject to the Communist influence (Bagley, 2007:58). As a matter of fact, during the Cold War period, many Latin American national security doctrines were embedded with the anti-communist discourse supported by the U.S. (Nolte and Wehner, 2016:35). The national documents were focused on the traditional realist concept of security and aimed at exclusively protecting the state and its boundaries, perfectly reflecting that specific historical period (Kacowicz and Mares, 2016:19; Nolte and Wehner, 2016:34).

The drug trade, albeit existing, was hence not considered a vital threat and solely in 1989 the U.S. "replaced its war on communism with the war on drugs" in Latin America (Malone and Malone-Rowe, 2014:473). Indeed, only in the post-Cold War era, the U.S. (through its Department of Defence) broadened the list of vital threats to its national security including new elements such as drug-trafficking and organised crime activities (Bagley, 2007:60; Kacowicz, 2007:102). More specifically, Bagley argues that drug-trafficking became officially a threat in 1991 (2007:62). The recurrent security dilemma is not related anymore solely to the realist view of the asymmetrical power of the states within the region, but also to "states with weak institutional and governance capabilities, and notably ineffective judicial systems and public security" (Marcella, 2016:167) which are a fertile ground for the development of illicit activities. Indeed, Hurrell considers that, after the end of the bipolarity typical of the Cold War, Latin America experienced a widening in different types of security menaces (1998:530) which are disquieting for the northern neighbour. Despite the fact that the rigorous Northern American control softened "due to the combination of global challenges to U.S. leadership and a diversification of Latin America's international

relations”, the U.S. is still an important figure regarding the counter-narcotic efforts in the region (Mares, 2016:302).

2.2 The War(s) on Drugs: Colombia, Mexico and the Certification Process

The modern WOD was officially declared by the American President, Richard Nixon in 1971 and the counter-narcotics policy was consequently enforced by the next U.S. presidents (Jenner, 2014:67). Without a doubt, the U.S.’ peculiarities, such as vicinity to major drug producers and a high level of narcotics demand transformed it in an “ideological centre of the global War on Drugs” (Martin and McCulloch, 2014:108). Historically, states have been invited to join the anti-drugs fight and the adhesion happened both willingly and coercively. A convincing instrument used by the U.S., in order to have leverage on other countries, is the Certification Process. The system, implemented for the first time in 1986, consists in categorising nations, subject to the drug chain, in: producer, consumer or transit (Storrs, 2003). Critically, Bouley argues that the process is used in order “to ensure that Latin American countries conform to U.S. views on the war on drugs” (2001:178). The main objective of the Certification Process is to identify those countries that, from a narcotic point of view, represent a threat to the U.S. The countries that are on the threat-list are subject to sanctions which go from public defamation to a total blockade of economic aid (excluding humanitarian aid). However, the countries could avoid sanctions if the U.S.’s President “certifies that the country has fully cooperated in counter-narcotics efforts” (Bouley, 2001:178). Considering the economic impact of a possible accusation regarding the unwillingness of combating drug-trafficking, several countries have accepted to cooperate with the U.S. in its WOD. Despite the counter-narcotics cooperation between the two actors, the Certification Process is “a major source of tension between the U.S. and Latin America” (Bouley, 2001:178). In short, for many Latin American countries the Certification Process might be perceived as an extreme form of punishment which intensifies the U.S.’s hegemonic presence in the region.

The WOD policy and the violent approach of killing the kingpins are certainly not new. Colombia is probably the first example that comes to mind when considering the drug problem in Latin America as for decades, since the late 1970s, it was considered “the murder capital of the world” (Malone and Malone-Rowe, 2014:473). Undoubtedly, Colombia has experienced decades of drug related violence. In the early 1970s the violent criminal groups known as cartels have joined their forces with the Marxist group FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) which offered in exchange their protection (Jenner, 2014:67). The strange cooperation, between common criminals (at least at the time) craving for profit and a leftist political-driven insurgent group, was

considered dangerous as FARC was defined the “greatest threat” to U.S.’s hegemony in the region (second only to Cuba) (Hylton, 2010:102). The cooperation between cartels and FARC started to challenge the sovereignty of the Colombian state by creating the so-called “competitive nation building” (Malone and Malone-Rowe, 2014:474) where figures such as Pablo Escobar offered protection and social welfare in order to gain the sympathy of the lower classes. It went down in history the arrogant proposal that Pablo Escobar made to the Colombian state which consisted of paying the national debt (Malone and Malone-Rowe, 2014:474). Such proposal perfectly depicted the weakness of the Latin American state compared to the growing power and wealth of the *narco-cartels*. The Colombian and U.S.’ relations in the 1970s have been defined by Franz as “narcotised” which implied the use of economic aid as leverage in order to obtain in exchange more aggressive counter-narcotics policies (2016:571).

The modern hyper-militarised WOD was adopted in Colombia in the 1980s with the main goal of finding and killing the heads of the two major Colombian drug cartels, Medellín and Cali. The Colombian state (economically supported by the U.S.) started a ferocious fight against both the FARC and the cartels. However, the dismantling of the two main cartels, the killing of its leaders and the destruction of the Caribbean drug route did not have a strong impact on the massive narcotics industry (Crandall, cited in Flannery, 2013:190). *In lieu*, the adopted approach “has opened an inter-cartel power vacuum” (Carpenter, 2010:401) which was at the basis of a crescent level of violence. On one hand, the remaining members of the criminal groups created smaller unities which were harder to defeat, and on the other hand, the drug trade migrated towards the natural successor, Mexico, (considering its geographical position) which experienced the passage from a transit country to a main producer and supplier of drugs (Malone and Malone-Rowe, 2014:475). It seems that “a dead king is a replaced king” (Sanchez-Moreno, 2015:37) and Mexican cartels supplanted the Colombian ones.

In 1998 Columbia continued being the indisputable leader of cocaine production, albeit the aggressiveness displayed by the Colombian state, towards cartels, since the 1980s (Jenner, 2014:78). In order to contain the problem, the U.S. and Colombia started another bi-lateral cooperation called “Plan Colombia” which lasted for two decades, until 2008 (Mejia, 2016:3). The main objectives of the programme were to diminish drug production and to help the Colombian government gain sovereignty over its territory by weakening the paramilitary group FARC (Jenner, 2014:78). From an operational point of view, the main approaches were eradication, ignition, aerial herbicides spraying and interdiction (Mejia, 2016). Despite having achieved some limited successes, overall cocaine production had the so-called “cockroach effect” which displaced the

production from cities to more remote areas in the Colombian jungle (Jenner, 2014:78). At the end of Plan Colombia, the country was still producing 51% of the global quantity of cocaine (Jenner, 2014:78). If considered domestically, it can be argued that Plan Colombia had some positive outcomes. In fact, during the 2000-2008 timeframe, “1,842 metric tons of cocaine have been seized...and more than 27,000 cocaine processing laboratories have been destroyed” which represents 27% of the total quantity of cocaine presumably produced during the same period of time (Mejia, 2016:10). On the other hand, scholars such as Hylton, are extremely sceptic about the success of operations such as Plan Colombia. Hylton argues that “besides the police, the secret police, the armed forces, the executive, and local-regional governments run by narco- paramilitary mafias, it would be difficult to point to other Colombian institutions that have been strengthened” (2010:99). More drastically, Hylton affirms that an inheritance of Plan Colombia is the development of corrupt “narco-paramilitary mafias which challenge the state’s sovereignty” (2010:108). It might be perceived that Plan Colombia has benefited solely the economic elites, disregarding the region. In fact, Colombia is not an entity disconnected from the rest of the region and the limited successes within its national borders influenced negatively the Latin American hemisphere (Jenner, 2014:78). Some unorthodox scholars consider that the counter-narcotics approaches in Colombia aimed exclusively at the elimination of leftist insurgencies and stopping the production of cocaine was solely a justification in order to have the approval of the public opinion (Petras, 2001:32). It is indeed argued that the unofficial message of Plan Colombia was to maintain a certain control over strategic territories by eliminating the leftist rebels (Delgado-Ramos and Romano, 2011:95).

The Colombian experience offered a macabre preview of what was going to happen in Mexico solely three decades later. In fact, in his research, Bagley recognises that “Mexico’s current drug-related bloodbath” is a consequence of the Colombian counter-narcotic operations (2013:104). Indeed, in the grey zones created in Colombia after the massive anti-drug violent campaigns, small Mexican criminal groups inserted themselves and became the current multinational powerful organisations. In fact, Sanchez-Moreno confirms this by arguing that when the international community was not focused anymore on the Colombian case, small criminal groups have replaced the historical Medellín and Cali *cartels* amplifying the level of insecurity and violence (2015:37).

The U.S. has always had a special relationship with Mexico, both for geographical and historical reasons. The first attempts of smuggling goods over the border were performed by Mexican criminal groups during the U.S.’s Prohibition period (Medel and Thoumi, 2014:1). Initially, the smuggling was focused mainly on alcoholic beverages, but once the restrictions were

elevated the newly constructed black market was able to transport and provide any prohibited goods (Foster, 2013). It could be argued that almost a century ago Mexico experienced its first diversification in illicit business by shifting the focus from alcohol to other illicit substances, such as marijuana and opium (Foster, 2013). Even then the northern frontier was of paramount importance as the smuggling check points were in small border towns, such as Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, which facilitated the smuggling of the new drugs to the U.S. (Medel and Thoumi, 2014:1). The first Mexican states specialised in drug production and trafficking were Sinaloa, Durango, Chihuahua, and Baja California and to this day are main producers of marijuana (Medel and Thoumi, 2014:1). The legislative acts promoted by the U.S. which limited the import and use of opium and coca leaves such as the Opium Exclusion Act (1909), the Harrison Narcotic Act (1914) and the Narcotic Drug Import and Export Act (1922) instead of debilitating the trans-border trafficking pushed the illicit groups towards inventing new manners of introducing narcotics within the country (Recio, 2002:25). The prohibitionist approach, conveyed by the U.S., ignored “cultural domestic practices in many countries”, as for example the consumption of coca leaves in the Andean countries, which in the aftermath led to a hyper-criminalisation of all types of drugs (Lozano-Vazquez, 2015:51). The production and supply of narcotics functioned uninterruptedly with the criminal actors evolving from small cells of smugglers to more organised criminal groups. It was discovered that after the World War II, the narco-groups were able to smuggle drugs into the U.S. with personal airplanes which was a demonstration of their economic wealth (Recio, 2002:41).

In 1994, with the signature of the NAFTA (North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement) the U.S.-Mexico relationship was included within an economic framework. The exchange ratio between the three participating countries (the U.S., Canada and Mexico) increased notably during the last two decades. At the time, it seemed, that the economic ties had priority. As a matter of fact, Lupsha already declared that the Mexican drug trade was not considered a security priority “in the long term game of power-bloc politics” when compared with the economic benefits of a shared market (1991:56). However, as Stewart argues, the 2001 attack on the U.S. soil shifted the general attention on security and the free movement of people and goods was perceived as a threat with a subsequent request from the U.S.’ Congress for a major control of the borders (2014). The main argument was related to the fact that the techniques and routes used by the organised crime in order to smuggle could be learned by terrorists ready to prepare another massive attack (Serrano, 2007:231). The idea might seem quite paranoid in the aftermath, but at the time it permitted the U.S. to request from Mexico a major control on those broad ungoverned areas which were considered a haven for criminal activity (Serrano, 2007:231). In order to maintain its economic ties with the Northern

neighbours, “Mexico embraced initiatives on border security...that would have been simply unthinkable a few years before” (Serrano, 2007:232). One of the decisions seemed to be the unexpected public declaration of the War on Drugs and Organised Crime in 2006.

Calderón’s decision was “unprecedented in Mexico” as never before federal military forces were deployed in order to openly combat organised crime (Hernández-Roy, 2007:31). It is argued that Mexico would never have started the WOD without the economic help that the country received from the U.S. through the Mérida Initiative, also known as Plan México, which amounts to 1.5 billion dollars (Lakhani and Tirado, 2016). Furthermore, the U.S. went beyond economic help and provided intelligence and know-how support to the Mexican forces by applying counter-insurgency protocols (adopted initially in Afghanistan) in order to fight organised crime (Sanchez, 2013:473). Moreover, scholars such as Delgado-Ramos and Romano question the legality of the 2006 election by contemplating a covert U.S.’s interference and argue that in the aftermath Mexico experienced a rapid closeness between the state, the military and low-intensity-warfare advisors (2011:98). As a matter of fact, according to a leaked document from the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, the U.S. (before the elections) was willing to support a negotiation regarding the reform of the Mexican National Security Law which would have given the Mexican president the freedom of declaring a state of exception without consulting any other institutional body (Delgado-Ramos and Romano, 2011:99). It might be argued that the U.S. considered it necessary to interfere with the internal affairs of another sovereign state in order to reach its own political and economic agenda. Lakhani and Tirado argue that the WOD managed to “create an opaque security industry open to corruption at every level” which gains benefits from the tumultuous situation (2016). However considering that the WOD policy is solely the result of an external pressure relieves of any responsibility the subject that adopted it, the Mexican state. Therefore, it should be further analysed if the Mexican WOD had also a domestic rationale.

2.3 Summary

This chapter presented the important historical involvement of the U.S. in the counter-narcotic efforts. It can be observed that the U.S. has a prohibitionist approach and the country used the Certification Process in order to constrain other states to participate in the WOD. However, as for the Colombian case, the U.S.’s counter-narcotic interventions gained importance solely after the end of the Cold War, when Communism was not considered a vital threat anymore. Scholars have condemned the aggressive WOD policy and its secretive agenda as it brought more complex problems and created an environment of insecurity and uncertainty. Delgado-Ramos and Romano

denounce the WOD approach by arguing that it leads to “the reorganisation of internal power relations between civilian and military groups” as the policy is hyper-militarised (2011:94). Kassab’s position is more drastic and argues that the WOD policy is implemented in order for the U.S. “to pursue its political and commercial interests” and the elimination of the drug problem has a secondary position (2015:3). Despite the unsuccessful results, the strategy continues to be considered as the most effective counter-narcotic approach.

3

Literature review

Organised crime and the state are often two entities that exist within the same social fabric. The relation between the abovementioned actors is intricate and it can affect the entirety of society. One state's approach to control the influence of organised crime is to accept a cohabitation system, whilst another method is to directly and violently attack the criminal groups and their illicit activities. The following literature review has a contextual purpose as it will offer the reader an overall presentation of the interaction between state, organised crime and populace which will permit to understand in what context the WOD was inserted. The literature review will present general concepts which, through the section, will be applied to the specific Mexican case. The focus on this specific region is due to the fact that generally Latin America is considered a peaceful continent, whilst at the same time it is commonly associated with drug cartels, violence and lawlessness and the author considered that this paradox needed a more in-depth analysis.

The secular existence of organised crime is not plain and simple to explain. Therefore, through the literature concepts such as “patron-client relationship”, “violence”, “corruption”, “territoriality”, and “social fabric” will be discussed. Considering the complexity of organised crime and counter-narcotic approaches there is no defined model that could be applied in order to understand how a specific society might react to a WOD strategy. Despite the lack of a mathematical design, the concepts analysed below are valuable in order to gain a better understanding of the situation that Mexico was experiencing when the WOD was declared.

The WOD is usually seen as an U.S. policy forced onto other countries (Arteaga, 2009). It is undeniable that the U.S. had an important role in defining security and more specifically, counter-narcotics strategies in the region (as broadly discussed in Chapter II), but the current research intends to analyse the WOD strategy from a Latin American perspective. More specifically the literature review will analyse four identified main themes (during the early stages of the research) which are paramount for the organised crime's survival in a period of turmoil: corruption, violence,

territory and popular support. The literature review will present those elements by analysing if they are present or applicable to the Mexican case study. Due to the lack of a major database that could contain an important number of analyses regarding the subject taken into consideration, the researcher consulted several sources. The researches taken into consideration were retrieved from Jstor, the libraries of University of Glasgow/Charles University, CIAO database and Advanced Search from Google by applying key words such as “organised crime”, “narco”, “war on drugs”, “drug war”, and “political corruption” among others. The most relevant researches for this specific case study are further discussed, but the author is aware that other valuable researches might exist.

3.1 State, corruption and organised crime

From a security point of view, the state and criminal groups have three degrees of interaction: coexistence, disruption and elimination (Malone and Malone-Rowe, 2014:478). The Mexican state has generally opted for coexistence by agreeing for a *pax mafiosa* with the kingpins. The agreement implied that organised crime did not have the right to sell drugs within the Mexican territory and violence was to be maintained at a low level. An important aspect that should not be neglected when analysing the coexistence system is the endemic corruption that characterises it. Millard argues that “strong ties have been established, over the years, between the narco-business and the authorities” (1997:73) which implies that the tandem between authorities and criminal groups has historical roots. Also Beittel, specialised in Latin American affairs, argues that Mexico was subject to a “policy of accommodation” between the state and organised crime for too long and the glue of this relationship was corruption (2017:8). Nieto considers that the colonial hispanic elites were the first members of the society that introduced corruption as a method of “political language” and the indigenous people had to adapt to the new rule of law (2014:108). The colonialist period (ended in the XIXth century) was substituted in 1929 by one strong authoritarian party which exacerbated the use of corruption “as a tool of governance among the political elite” (Nieto, 2014:108). Nieto argues that having a political position was the perfect manner to enrich yourself in a short period of time (2014). Also Shelley supports Nieto’s position by arguing that the post-colonial period was characterised by “high-level and pervasive corruption rather than brute force” (2001:215). Moreover, it is argued that the one-party ruling protected Mexico from military regimes, but at the same time permitted the people in charge to create strong roots which developed further towards illicit activities (Shelley, 2001:215).

A coexistence system (also known as cohabitation) is dangerous as it is not clear who has the monopoly of power. Sanchez argues that, in cohabitation, the state has the power, which is

represented by a patron-client relationship, and the arrangement maintains violence at a socially bearable level. Such is possible because organised crime is protected at high-political levels and therefore it is free to operate peacefully and undisturbed (2013:470). Also Correa-Cabrera et al. agree with Sanchez's position by arguing that the state decides which actors are allowed to remain and which ones are eliminated (2015:80). Rios's research considers that the state can have the monopoly of power over organised crime only when the government is ruled by one party (2015:1433). Sanchez, Correa-Cabrera et al. and Rios argue the same, but for the specific Mexican case Rios's research is the most relevant. Such is due to the fact that the research acknowledges that the state has the monopoly of power over illegal actors, but also specifies in which particular case.

Carpenter argues that organised crime is supported by the state primarily for an economic reason as criminal groups are considered "a wealth-generating enterprise", but generally Mexican cartels have cooperated between them in order to create a peaceful environment for their businesses (2010:403). By affirming so, Carpenter considers that, in a cohabitation system, the organised crime has the monopoly of power. Carpenter's analysis is paramount as it offers the possibility to understand the behaviour of the organised crime since the end of the cohabitation system which will be presented in the next section. Vellinga also analyses in-depth the relationship between political corruption, and criminal groups. In fact, the scholar argues that the parasitical relationship between the establishment and organised crime might be destabilised only by a direct attack towards the criminal groups. However, a violent offensive does not necessarily mean a positive outcome. Vellinga urges to be aware of the fact that destroying an operational criminal group might imply that single actors, the so-called couriers, might be interested in continuing the illicit activities with an increment in the level of violence due to the multi-polarisation of the illegal members and in that case the state would lose the monopoly of power (2000:177). Vellinga's analysis is important for the research as it offers a first explanation regarding one of the outcomes of a WOD policy.

3.2 State, violence and organised crime

The *pax mafiosa* between the Mexican state and criminal organisations was disrupted in 2006. Unexpectedly, the newly elected Mexican President declared the total WOD and deployed 6,500 military personnel to his home state of Michoacán in order to contain a problem that until that specific moment was considered manageable with just the police's intervention (Hernández-Roy, 2007:31). Therefore, Mexico experienced an imminent change in the security agenda with a rapid shift from coexistence to elimination, without the mediating step of disruption. Malone and Malone-Rowe are sceptic regarding the declaration of the WOD as "elimination is usually not desirable

from a state perspective, because it tends to be costly, difficult to achieve, and can usher in unintended consequences” (2014:478). Before 2006, organised crime’s activities were not considered a menace for Mexican institutions (Chabat, 2002:138). In fact, as was mentioned before, organised crime prefers cooperation with the legal institutions in exchange of freedom to operate (Carpenter, 2010:410). However, once the opposition party gained power there was an increment in drug-related crimes in Mexico (Correa-Cabrera et al., 2015:80). In support of the abovementioned statement, Rios declares that “it was as if one day Mexican criminal organisations suddenly discovered violence” (2015:1434). The reason that the violence sprung from nowhere is, according to Rios, the end of the *pax mafiosa* (2015:1436). The PAN party is identified by some scholars as the trigger of the violent wave that affected the country (Ferreira, 2016:44). In fact, in Dell’s analytical research it is stated that “violence in a municipality increases substantially after the close election of a PAN mayor and remains higher throughout the mayor’s term and beyond” (2015:1776). In fact, Imbusch et al. argue that “since 2006, Mexico has found itself confronted with a spiral of violence unknown since the days of the Mexican Revolution” (2011:103).

Sanchez-Moreno considers that the Mexican state does not have anymore the monopoly of power and the level of violence is indeed decided by the criminal groups “according to the extent of their control, competition, and the protection schemes they are able to establish with state officials” (2015:39). Several scholars provide their own strategies in order to diminish cartels’ influence. Filippone considers that a criminal group should be “attacked politically, economically, and psychologically in conjunction with military and law enforcement measures” (1994:342). Filippone’s analysis is important because he is one of the few scholars that consider the violent approach as a reliable method, but only if combined with other elements. Bagley (2013), on the other hand, considers that the kingpin strategy could weaken drug cartels and argues that the death of Pablo Escobar, the head of the Medellín cartel, meant also the dissolution of the cartel (2013:102). In short, Bagley considers that there is no essential need to attack the cartel in its entirety, but just his leader. Bagley’s position is reflected in the Mexican WOD. Osorio also supports the violent approach by arguing that a WOD could weaken minor criminal groups (2015:1425). However, it is implied that a WOD will not harm historical well-established major criminal groups. Osorio’s position is interesting as he supports the violent approach, but at the same time is aware that major groups will probably not be affected by it. Osorio’s concept will be confuted through the research in order to understand if the WOD cannot indeed affect historical criminal groups. On the other hand, Flannery is a vivid critic of the WOD and, through his analysis, argues that killing, unexpectedly, the heads of the criminal groups creates a power vacuum where

criminal groups start a competition for leadership positions and resources (2013:182). Indeed, the militarised approach, without adequate political and judicial systems might increase the level of violence (Flannery, 2013:188). Flannery's argumentation is important for the research *per se* as it offers a first explanation of the impact that the passage from cohabitation to destruction had on the Mexican society.

The existent literature focuses its attention mostly on the link between the WOD and the augmentation in violent crimes (Osorio, 2015) neglecting the reasons which led both to the WOD and to an augmentation in violence. Violence cannot be considered only a mere consequence of the presence of organised crime within a state as "violence stems primarily from the political, social and cultural context in which the organisations are operating" (Williams, 2009:324). Furthermore, Williams argues that despite the common perception of violence perpetrated indistinctively by organised crime, criminal groups, as a matter of fact, prefer to avoid using violent methods against other groups or against the state itself. Williams' position is supported by Longo's analysis which concludes that organised crime "is an economic and financial enterprise which adopts rational, even if illegal, choices and strategies aimed at maximising benefits and reducing costs of its (illegal) business" (2010:18). In short, organised crime has an entrepreneurial stamp with limited interest for public display of violence. Williams' analysis is paramount for the format of the following research as it considers violence within the socio-political and cultural factors of a society, and not as a separated feature. More specifically the research will benefit from two concepts developed through Williams' analysis: transitional violence and the culture of lawlessness. Williams argues that transitional violence happens when "one set of arrangements dominated by the state...has broken down and although alternative codes of conduct between the state and organised crime are being developed they have still not been institutionalised" (2009:327), whilst he connects (surprisingly) the concept of *machismo* (=exaggerated masculinity) to an embedded cultural lawlessness. The concepts are important because they provide a first attempt of explaining the raising in violence since 2006. In fact, if combining a secular tradition of *machismo* with a period of violent turmoil due to a change in the political spectrum, it would be easier to understand why the Mexican organised crime became so violent in a short amount of time. Moreover, the *machista* behaviour would explain the gruesome of the killings, which shifted from an impersonal killing to protect the business to a more personal ferocity with public display of the casualties.

Schorr develops further the concept of violence as she considers that it cannot have only one explanation, but it should be rather analysed within a specific social context. Violence might be the result of fear, desire for more profit, competition between criminal groups or weakness of state's

institutions (2013:57). Schorr's research focuses on a particular type of violence, the so-called transitional violence, which verifies when the state decides to interrupt their sponsored protection to the organised crime (2013:58). Such is due to the fact that new political actors, not involved within the criminal activities, gain power and disrupt original agreements between the state and organised crime. Schorr's explanation is useful for the following research as it presents the political change that Mexico experienced with the 2000s political elections where the opposition (PAN party), after a 71 years hiatus, obtained the power. Considering the elements previously analysed, the specific concept of "transitional violence" appears to be the most suitable for the current Mexican situation.

3.3 State, territory and organised crime

Organised crime is able to put down roots in territories with specific features such as "pervasive rural and urban poverty, entrenched corruption in existing governmental structures, and...cultural association of drug-lords with modernity and progress" (Carpenter, 2010:415). Carpenter develops the entrepreneurial factor and argues that organised crime, in order to survive, needs a territorial presence within an economically poor environment. Moreover, Ungar argues that "in Latin America...organised crime maintains widespread control" for the abovementioned reasons (2013:1192). Carpenter's research is paramount as it defines the territorial and cultural factors that ease the spread within a geographical region whereas other scholars consider the territorial aspect as less important when analysing organised crime's behaviour. Flannery, for example, considers that criminal groups have no territorial interest and in response to a vital crisis the illicit activities will undergo through a diversification in order for the group to survive, rather than geographical delocalisation (2013:183). Flannery's position is supported also by Correa-Cabrera et al.'s research, which argues that criminal groups are "fundamentally money-driven" (2015:83) with little attention for the territories they are operating in. Also, Sanchez-Moreno considers that "the illicit market in drugs by its nature generates massive profits for organised crime" (2015:39) which implies that criminal groups will always find a solution to continue their activities with little interest of physically possessing territories. However, by analysing Wikileaks documents, Aguilera affirms that the Mexican government was aware that, before 2006, some impoverished areas of the country were controlled by criminal groups (2013:29) which recalls Carpenter's analysis.

The territorial aspect is paramount in order to understand organised crime's behaviour. Chelluri argues that directly attacking territorial areas will remove the main source of income for the organised crime, the criminal routes utilised for human and drug trafficking and subsequently will weaken the criminal groups (2011:54). However, according to Osorio, losing territories for an

organised crime group would imply interference from neighbouring criminal groups interested in those specific areas which will result in higher levels of violence (2015:1404). In fact, it is argued by some scholars that violence in Latin America has a territorial aspect (Aguilera, 2013:21) which implies that violent acts are perpetrated only in some areas, interested by illicit activities. Ferreira, on the contrary, argues that the violence related to drug cartels does not necessarily follow an established path (2016:52). In fact, according to Ferreira there was a shift of violent acts from the historical northern border regions, to more peaceful central regions (2016:47). Ferreira's research is important as it is a first attempt of arguing that, since the beginning of the WOD, violent actions spread across the country and cannot be relegated anymore to historical drug-producing areas. This is due to the fact that criminal groups started to expand in territories which were not subject to drug-production or trafficking (Ferreira, 2016:47). Ferreira's analysis is important as it considers the geographical delocalisation as a consequence of the WOD and it will be further analysed. The territorial aspect is added to previously mentioned phenomena such as cohabitation, elimination and transitional violence in order to be able to analyse in-depth the impact the WOD had on criminal groups and society in general.

3.4 State, populace and organised crime

Few scholars consider the leverage that drug cartels have on local communities. In fact, Carpenter argues that a combination of economic benefits and protection might in "a certain degree of loyalty" (2010:407) mostly where governmental institutions are deficient. Correa-Cabrera et al. argue that since 2006, "some local governments have fallen under the control of criminal organisations" and there were instances when organised crime assumed the role of a parallel state (2015:78). The abovementioned affirmation is important for the research as it supports the idea that in some occasions organised crime groups managed to overcome the influence of the state. Drug-cartels have generally avoided targeting civilians because it is considered that maintaining a certain level of wellbeing within the communities will avoid incursions from the state. Moreover, it is argued that drug cartels are interested in maintaining the lawful institutions along the parallel network created as they do not have any interest in offering a complete selection of social services (Carpenter, 2010:407). However, since the beginning of the WOD there was "a shift in the cartel's preference for public and symbolic violence" (Carpenter, 2010:409). Regrettably, Carpenter does not offer further explanation about the reasons behind this change in organised crime's behaviour. Carpenter's lack of explanation invites the researcher to analyse the reason behind organised crime's behavioural change towards the population and if such change is a consequence of the WOD.

Filippone, by analysing the WOD strategy adopted in Colombia, declared that the policy illustrated “a lack of understanding of the strength of the cocaine cartels and their positions in their societies” (1994:323). Furthermore, Filippone argues that the strategy adopted in Colombia was not strong enough to destroy an organisation “with the level of resources, sophistication, and influence of the Medellín cartel” (1994:324). In fact, Filippone argues that despite having had the drug-leaders either in prison or dead, the criminal group continued to produce and export cocaine with the local support (1994:341). According to Filippone, identifying some names with the cartel, without analysing the mechanism that keeps a cartel alive and its importance for its own community, is the wrong approach (1994:342). Filippone certainly analyses a sensible subject but he does not offer an explanation regarding the causes of the popular support or if such support was coerced. Some scholars emphasize the fact that the drug industry “has become an integral part of societal dynamics” (Vellinga, 2000:125). It should not be neglected the fact that criminal groups often depict themselves as protectors of the communities they operate in (Ungar, 2013:1208). The concept of security corruption which implies that being protected by a narco-group is beneficial for the people (Ungar, 2013:1208) is important and should be further analysed as it offers a first glimpse of explanation about the intricate relationship between the populace and criminal groups.

3.5 Summary

Historically, organised crime was entangled with the state and benefited of political protection (Astorga cited in Carpenter, 2010:404). Corruption and economic interests were at the basis of the agreement between the two subjects which permitted to control the level of violence. Therefore an augmentation in violence might be connected to the absence of coordination between criminal organisations and new political subjects (Correa-Cabrera et al., 2015:78; Rios, 2015:1449). When a WOD ends a long period of cohabitation between the state and organised crime, the high level of violence cannot be limited to the sole activity of criminal groups. It should be rather considered transitional violence as the criminal groups are adapting to the new environment. A political transformation might result in the weakening of the central government and the criminal groups could take advantage by extending their territorial presence and social influence. Scholars have generally focused on analysing subjects affected by the WOD separately, without considering the interaction between them, and the following research aims at reducing this gap.

4

Theoretical framework

Latin America, during the Cold War, was marginal within the world power structure, therefore it provided little interest for security-related theoretical analysis (Nolte and Wehner, 2016:36). As Buzan and Hansen argue “theories are filters through which particular facts and events are granted more significance than others” (2009:44) and Latin American internal security aspects were eclipsed by the hegemonic presence of the U.S. Moreover, according to Hurrell, in the post-Cold War period, the continent continued being irrelevant in the security studies field due to the fact that it lacked both military crises and strategic centrality (cited in Buzan and Hansen, 2009:179). Considering that the Latin American reality was generally analysed within the realist perspective, Hurrell’s affirmation has a grain of truth. However, in the last three decades Latin American security studies have experienced a growing interest both by national and international scholars which distanced themselves from the realist perspective (Tickner, 2016:67). Merke affirms that the current academic interest addressed towards Latin America is due to the fact that the region is experiencing a mix of old and new security issues and such cannot be analysed through the static realist lens (2016:92). Moreover, such an important broadening of the security agenda permitted “analysts to refer to both traditional and non-traditional threats” by applying a critical view on different subjects (Kacowicz and Mares, 2016:26). Norden, more specifically, argues that the Latin American reality is challenged by specific issues such as “Mexico’s violent narcotics cartels, guerrillas on the Ecuadorian border, and gang violence in Central America” (2016:251) which challenge the traditional security concepts. The following section will incorporate the Latin American region within a theoretical framework. The constructivist theory will be analysed in relation with the broadening concept of the security menaces in Latin America and two specific theories (securitisation theory and ungoverned space) will be presented in order to explain how are applicable to the specific case study.

4.1 Broadening security concepts and constructivism

The end of the Cold War requested a reconceptualization of security threats by focusing also on elements other than the state (Kassab, 2015:27). The realist view, which is state-centric, had difficulties in explaining both the presence of non-state actors as well as their violent activities against the state (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010:54). For the specific Latin American region, Hurrell declares that “there are increasingly common and increasingly strident arguments that security should be broadened to include drug trafficking, drug-related violence and criminality” (1998:541). Also Buzan and Hansen argue that, besides military, equal emphasis should be given to “domestic and trans-border threats” (2009:188). In fact, with the Managua Declaration of 2006, the Latin American ministers of defence declared that “terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking, organised crime, money laundering, corruption, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons all pose significant threats to Latin American security” (cited in Kacowicz and Mares, 2016:26). This declaration is important as it exits the realist competition between states and enters in a new dimension, of an interconnected regional security. The realist view focused on “survival, autonomy and protection from external forces” does not have the instruments of analysing the current menaces (Kassab, 2015:26). The main reasons for taking the distances from the realist perspective is the fact that, for the specific Mexican case, both the state and the population are menaced by an internal threat. As a matter of fact, the new security menaces will be analysed within a constructivist framework which is considered a more pertinent theory.

Constructivism, since the end of the Cold-War period, is “one of the dominant modes of analysis in international relations and security studies” (Agius, 2013:102). The constructivist theory considers that subjects behave according to their own social fabric, which changes from one reality to another and therefore some aspects of International Relations (such as enmity or collaboration between states) were built throughout the time rather than being given concepts (Durepos et al., 2010:220). The reason of analysing Latin America within the constructivist framework is the fact that it permits to analyse in-depth a phenomenon such as the WOD from a socio-political and historical point of view. This reasoning is supported by Reus-Smit which argues that with constructivism “the social, historical and normative have returned to the centre stage of debate” (Reus-Smit, 2009:229). The WOD is a response to a new type of security menace which has to be analysed within its own specific reality. In fact, Agius confirms that “interests are not fixed over time...and are open to change and revision” (2013:89), whereas McDonald considers security as “a social construction” (2013:65). What is affirmed, within the constructivist dialectic, is that the

society evolves and so do threats. As it was mentioned in the second chapter, the security interests have changed through the time, passing from communism to broader issues such as organised crime and drug-trafficking (among others).

Furthermore, constructivism focuses on an important aspect of today's society and in fact, argues that the use of language is important as a particular issue can be institutionalised through rhetoric (Durepos et al., 2010:223). A political discourse, if successful, can construct anything from scratch, including a new security menace (Huysmans, 2002:45). Agius explores more the importance of communication by asserting that language forms speech acts which could be divided in: "assertions, directives, and commitments" (2013:98). If considering the WOD strategy, despite being applied to different realities, it generally initiates with a commitment where the person in charge promises that the security issues related to narco-trafficking or organised crime will be solved (Salazar, 2012). The security language is important to be taken in consideration as it has the ability of providing "a different picture about a social problem or a source of insecurity" (Agius, 2013:98). McDonald considers that specific political actors, within a reality, define what values should be protected and through a constructed speech the public is informed about their decision (2013:69). It is clear that, in the WOD strategy, the security language should be carefully analysed. In fact, one brief remark is certainly required. It is indeed curious how the term "war" is utilised when referring to a non-bellicose event which is officially a counter-narcotic strategy. Booth argues that the "war" rhetoric is extremely influential at a political and societal level (cited in Sanchez, 2013:475). Moreover, Sanchez argues that the sole action of accepting the war rhetoric gives freedom to the political spectrum to go beyond its constitutional powers (2013:475). In Latin America, Salazar argues that the state has utilised the "war" rhetoric in public speeches in order to depict the drug problem as a menace that justified the extraordinary security mechanisms put in place in the afterwards (2012). The constructivist theory permits to analyse the impact that a term, "war", might have in the long term. Security, after the end of a predominant realist view, has broadened its significance and constructivism helps to analyse security issues by including them within their own "social and historical context" (McDonald, 2013:65). The Mexican case-study will be analysed within the securitisation theory, which Buzan defined as "radically constructivist" (cited in Lozano-Vazquez, 2015:48).

4.2 Securitisation theory

The premise of the securitisation theory is that “no issue is essentially a menace” (Balzacq, 2010:1; Buzan et al., 1998:24), but with the proper political discourse it can become one. Furthermore, Buzan et al. argue that an existential threat, if successfully presented, “legitimises the use of exceptional political measures” (cited in Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010:76). In fact, when a security issue is securitised it is treated with the same urgency as a military threat (Buzan et al., 1998:23) and “will receive the necessary financial resources” (Bagley et al., 2015:XIV). This concept might be the perfect explanation for the state of emergency enacted by the former Mexican President, Felipe Calderón in 2006. According to Buzan et al. a securitisation process is “always a political choice” (1998:29). More precisely, Buzan et al. declared that the securitisation happens through three steps:

“Nonpoliticised (the issue is not a political issue) → Politicised (the issue is part of the public policy debate) → Securitised (the issue is considered an existential threat and ... justifies responses that go beyond normal political practices)” (Buzan and Hansen, 2009:214)

Waever argues that the process presented by Buzan et al. should start with a “speech act”. More precisely, Waever declares that such happens “when an issue not previously thought as a security threat comes to be spoken of as security issue by important political actors” (cited in Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010:78). That is exactly what happened when Felipe Calderón declared, all of a sudden, that narco-groups were a threat to national security. However, Lowenheim argues that drug trafficking is not an essential menace towards the state (2002:535). Chabat shares Lowenheim’s position by arguing that before the declaration of a WOD, drugs *per se* were not considered a social threat (2002:146). However, it is argued that in order to have an accomplished securitisation the audience receiving the “speech act” has to be impressed (Balzacq, 2010:9). Also Kassab declares that only a successful speech act can take an issue “from the level of criminality to the level of war” by appealing to arguments such as freedom, personal values (or fears) and democracy (2015:28). In fact, the Mexican society was aware of the existence of organised crime but, by politicising it, the former Mexican President managed to securitise the issue and to justify the start of the WOD. Calderón’s political discourse was, in fact, pointing towards family values and parental love in order to gain the public’s support by utilising the slogan “*para que la droga no llegue a tus hijos* (keep the drugs out of your children’s reach)” (*El Financiero*, 2017).

The three “felicity conditions” for a successful securitisation established by Waever are found within the Mexican case. First of all, the legitimization of adopting extraordinary measures when there is an existential threat (the cartels). Second of all, the personality securitising the issue has a position of authority and has enough political power to convince an audience (Felipe Calderón). And lastly, if the existential threat “carry historical connotations of threat, danger, and harm” it will be easier to convince an audience (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010:79). If considering the long history of violence perpetrated by the organised crime in Latin America, Felipe Calderón was in the position of easily having the public’s acceptance for the WOD policy.

The securitisation discourse albeit being important, considering the authoritarian and un-democratic regimes typical of Latin America, is constantly neglected in the security studies field (Tickner, 2016:72). Furthermore, the scholar argues that there is no analysis of the political impact of the security “speech acts in terms of militarisation and de-democratisation” and subsequently, there is no analysis of “what or who is to be secured” (2016:72). According to Buzan and Waever, the securitisation theory has a constructivist connotation considering the fact that an issue becomes a menace solely after a well-constructed act speech (cited in Balzacq, 2010:56). According to Buzan et al., “security is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issues either as a special kind of politics or as above politics” (1998:23). Moreover, it is argued that when something of a non-military nature threatens the sovereignty of a state, it could be considered a security issue (Buzan et al., 1998:22). For Hurrell, due to the complexity of the dynamic and interconnected world we live in, a referent object cannot be exclusively the state, but this concept has to be applied to “individuals and collectivities” (1998:542).

More security does not necessarily mean a better situation. In fact, the securitisation of an issue, due to the lack of time and space for discussions, “brings into play a particular, militarised mode of thinking” (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010:83). Tickner also supports this position by arguing that “securitisation is often adverse to democracy” (2016:68) and adopting exceptional extra-legal measures might lead to a militarisation of the issue. Tickner defines militarisation “as a process by which societal acceptance of military participation and militaristic means for solving distinct problems becomes normalised” (2016:75). Emmers criticises securitisation by arguing that, in a society experiencing this process, the militaries and special security forces, might gain major powers and undermine the civilian control of the society (2013:136). Needless to say that Mexico experienced an over-militarisation of the WOD policy which led to a decade long on-going conflict.

Considering that Mexico is a newly formed democracy after 71 years of one-ruling party, the securitisation of the drug problem and its hyper-militarisation is worrisome.

4.3 Ungoverned spaces

A failed state is defined as being unable of providing security and public goods to its citizens, collecting taxes, and implement policies (Debiel and Lambach, 2010:159). Latin America, despite frequent governance flaws, has no failed state within its continent and in fact, Hurrell invites to avoid exaggerations when analysing state capacity in Latin America (1998:542). For this reason, the research will focus on the theoretical concept of ungoverned spaces which limits security issues to a local (and not national) level. More specifically, the research will consider the definition provided by Peters and Rabasa which define ungoverned spaces as “territories...outside the control of government that holds nominal sovereignty over the territory in question” (2007:4). However, Peters and Rabasa clarify that those specific territories are governable: the problem is that the state *per se* is not capable or willing to do so (2007:4). In fact, as Clunan and Trinkunas noticed “all ungoverned spaces are actually governed”, but not always by the State (2016:106).

Latin America has generally combined spaces with high-state presence and ungoverned areas (Clunan and Trinkunas, 2016:99). Moreover, as Font and Rufi argue, Latin America is still experiencing a chaotic coexistence between fully controlled areas and ungovernable zones that have their own internal logic (cited in Florido Alejo and Preciado Coronado, 2014:71). After the third wave of democratisation during the 1980s, former authoritarian Latin American states experienced a democratisation process which created a power vacuum, subsequently filled by “illicit economies and actors” which decided to provide governance functions (Clunan and Trinkunas, 2016:100). It is certainly evident that ungoverned spaces are a threat towards the sovereignty of a state and the lack of control permits the flourishing of illegal activities (Hurrell, 1998:542). Those ungoverned spaces became safe areas which permit lawless actors to operate undisturbed (Lamb, 2008:17). Certainly globalisation and technological innovation improved the capabilities of non-state actors to “mobilise, exercise influence, and provide governance outside the state” (Clunan and Trinkunas, 2016:101). The majority of ungoverned spaces are located along the national borders as their distance from the core permits illicit actors “to pursue their own interests...that are predatory or damaging” (Clunan and Trinkunas, 2016:103). An infamous example is the U.S.-Mexico border. Consequently, the illicit activities create a fertile ground for conflict with both the state and other criminal competitors (Insight Crime, 2011). Also, criminal actors create a type of patronage within

the communities in order to gain popular support and shield themselves “from the occasional interest of the state” (Clunan and Trinkunas, 2016:104). Undoubtedly, popular support is gained from a combination of welfare benefits and violence, the so-called security-corruption (Williams, 2016:271). Ungoverned areas might be also a reason of diplomatic dispute between two states and the stronger state might oblige the weaker to adopt a strong-hand policy in order to eliminate the threat that an ungoverned area might pose (Lamb, 2008:54). According to Clunan and Trinkunas that was one of the mechanisms behind the Mexican WOD.

4.4 Summary

The Latin American continent is underrepresented in the security studies field. The little interest might be related to the fact that it was always perceived as an extension of the U.S.’s Grand Strategy and even the little attention offered by the Western scholars was mostly related to the North-South unilateral communication. However, as it was discussed in this chapter, Latin America is gaining relevance due to the end of a bi-polarised world and a subsequent shift in the regional security agenda. The broadening of the security agenda includes new actors and new security threats, separated from the realist view (Merke, 2016:92). However, the inclusion of new menaces within the security discourse provides an advantageous environment for securitisation. The chapter argues that the Mexican WOD was constructed through the security language. Moreover, the research will have the aim to understand if Hurrell’s declaration- “generally, a certain issue gains political importance when there is a combination of state power and interests rather than an objective concern” (1998:531) -might be applied to this specific case study. The last aspect taken into consideration is the theoretical concept of “ungoverned space” which diminishes the role of the state and gives free space of action to illicit actors. The research intends to analyse how the combination of securitisation and ungoverned space has influenced the Mexican society during the WOD.

5

Methodology

The WOD policy, implemented in Mexico in 2006, had a strong impact on the entirety of the society. Undoubtedly, the conflict has influenced every aspect of the country, exacerbating the level of insecurity and uncertainty (ESOC, 2017). A decade later, the WOD strategy did not create the peaceful and secure environment promised by the former Mexican president, Felipe Calderón (Ortega, 2016). The complexity of the WOD policy is linked with the multiple actors involved in the process: the state, the criminal organisations and the population (AFP, 2016). The following research intends to analyse the impact of the WOD on the Mexican society, with a particular focus on the infamously known cartels. It is paramount to understand the actors and rationale behind the WOD, the pursued strategy and the specific outcomes. The research has the aim to respond to a precise central question: “Did the WOD strategy empower drug cartels instead of debilitating them?” The analysis is arduous due to the complexity of the phenomenon taken into consideration. The first section of the chapter will introduce the overall methodological approach used to examine the research question and in the second part of the chapter an explanation of the main sources for data-gathering will be provided.

The WOD policy has been adopted by many Latin American countries affected by drug production. Albeit being a historical approach, each WOD has its peculiarities. For this reason the research will focus on a specific case because, as Simons argues, “studying the singular... is to understand the uniqueness of the case itself” (2014:466). Indeed, studying a particular event provides the freedom of analysing the mechanisms behind it (Gerring, 2011:1135). The decision of focusing on a unique case study is driven from the desire of providing an exhaustive explanation and understanding the peculiarities of this specific example. In fact, focusing on a single case study provides the researcher with the opportunity to an “in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives” (Simons, 2014:457). The following research will be, as Stake defines it, an “intrinsic case study” (cited in Simons, 2014:459) which signifies that the case is analysed in order to gain an in-depth

knowledge about the case itself. The abovementioned typology of case study was chosen because it is “exploratory in nature” and helps the researcher to avoid generalisation (Durepos et al., 2010:240). Generalising an event might be considered an easy escape route as it might permit applying a specific model to all Latin American countries that have experienced a WOD on national soil. However, as it was mentioned, all WOD in Latin America are different from each other (HRW, 2017). Despite focusing on one specific case study, Mexico is not extrapolated from its regional context. As it was discussed in the previous chapters, the research acknowledges the importance of actors such as the U.S. or other WOD policies. Furthermore, the analysis of the specific Mexican case might be beneficial for future research regarding other WOD policies as “the intensive study of a single case has the purpose of understanding a larger class of cases” (Gerring, 2011:1138).

The complexity of the argument taken into consideration asserts that different paths should be followed in order to gain a better understanding of the problem as well as being able to answer the research question without neglecting important details. The research will have a qualitative approach. A frequent critique towards qualitative research is that it “simply takes various accounts or observations of some domain of interest and weaves them into a narrative with little or no conceptual depth or practical relevance” (Bryant, 2014:120). For this reason, the research will be contextualised and situated within an auxiliary analysis of consistent quantitative data. The quantitative support for the qualitative research is related to the complexity of the subject and to the fact that the research has no intention of being a plain narration of the Mexican WOD. Likewise, the researcher considered that neither a pure quantitative analysis of data will be able to present the complexity of the WOD policy, mostly regarding the socio-political aspects of the abovementioned strategy. In fact, Simons argues against the exclusive analysis of data as the only method of research as it is limiting to analyse just numbers without a holistic approach (2014:464). More explicitly, the author argues that there is more than numbers and a certain degree of attention should be devolved towards interpretation which, as a “more intuitive process”, (Simons, 2014:464) will allow the researcher to gain more in-depth knowledge about a specific issue.

The research *per se* will be focused, from a qualitative point of view, on the method of *content analysis* by examining published reports, newspapers, web pages and other forms of documentation. As it can be easily understood a long-term policy as the WOD has provided a massive quantity of written sources ranging from official documents to interviews and researches (among others). A content analysis method is particularly helpful in “intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon” (Bowen, 2009:29) and for this reason it was considered

as the most prolific method to be engaged when analysing the WOD impact in Mexico. Simons (2014) considers the analysis of documents as paramount. In fact, the author declared that it “is useful for establishing what historical antecedents might exist to provide a springboard for contemporaneous data gathering” (2014:463). Moreover, written documents might be able to “provide supplementary research data” (Bowen, 2009:30). The research, during the initial stages, adopted the so-called *progressive focusing strategy*. The strategy, as defined by Parlett and Hamilton (cited in Simons, 2014:464) implies identifying specific themes which could be further analysed in order to provide findings. In fact, during the preliminary part of the study, the researcher was focused on analysing existing documents regarding the WOD in Latin America in order to identify main themes that could be beneficial in answering the research question. More specifically, the research focused on applying a *thematic analysis method* which identified specific emerging themes (violence, political corruption, illicit activities, social fabric and territoriality) that in the end will become the definitive categories for analysis (Bowen, 2009:32). Each of the abovementioned elements will be analysed, and the combination of the findings will attempt to answer if the WOD empowered cartels rather than debilitating them.

An important aspect of analysing written sources is the fact that they are stable. In fact, as Bowen argues, the presence of a researcher “does not alter what is being studied” (2009:31) and more importantly the documents taken into consideration can be analysed further in time. Another positive aspect of utilising documents as a source of primary data is the exact details that they offer, such as names, locations or specific details (Durepos et al., 2010:226). Moreover, written sources are able to cover a broad range of events (Bowen, 2009:31). Nonetheless, the sole analysis of documents could be limiting as they might provide insufficient information in order to fully analyse the researched issue (Bowen, 2009:32). Also, there is always a risk of lack of authenticity or accuracy (Bowen, 2009:32). For this reason, the documents taken into consideration will be collected from independent and international sources. The challenging aspect of gathering information from international organisations is the fact that those organisations (World Bank and the United Nations *in primis*) retrieve their information from the national governments which sometimes result in poor or incomplete data, whilst independent organisations often do not have the resources to offer a total coverage about a particular subject. In fact the combination between independent and governmental data will be crucial for the main analysis of the following research. Additionally, the quantitative data as per below will have the function of providing a visual support to the qualitative analysis.

5.1 Sources for quantitative and qualitative analysis

The major pools of retrieving quantitative data are the LatinoBarometro and NarcoData by *Animal Politico*. The LatinoBarometro has the main goal of analysing the socio-political and economic situation in all Hispanic countries (including Spain) separately. The data is gathered at a national level through surveys and the appeal of LatinoBarometro is its independence from any form of political incursion. The LatinoBarometro databases were considered because they cover the timeframe 2006-2016 which is of vital interest for this research. The LatinoBarometro's policy is full transparency and in fact, it offers both an already existing online analysis as well as raw data to be independently analysed. More specifically, the quantitative data taken into consideration is focused on the perception the populace has regarding the most salient problems within the country. Another major database of quantitative data that will be analysed is the dataset offered by the independent newspaper *Animal Politico*. The newspaper started a project called NarcoData which has the aim of analysing the evolution of Mexican organised crime throughout time. The datasets are extremely valuable for this research as they are retrieved from both official databases and independent organisations and cover the timeframe considered in the research. Moreover, NarcoData is the first project that focuses on quantitative data regarding exclusively organised crime. The analysis and interpretation of the *Animal Politico*'s datasets will provide a quantitative support for a better understanding of the geographical location of the organised crime and the economic capacity of their illicit activities.

From a qualitative point of view, the researcher will analyse the data provided by the Institute for Peace and Economics (IEP). The Institute, established in 2007, offers a wide range of documentation regarding the impact of organised crime on Mexico's economy since the beginning of the WOD and the archives are freely consultable. The publications will be individually analysed and the conclusions will be compared with the quantitative datasets taken into consideration. The content analysis will be focused also on online blogs and investigative journals. The major sources taken into consideration will be Insight Crime and Proceso. A content analysis is a long and tedious process as each source has to be analysed individually. In order to ease the research, in the preliminary part of the study several key-words, both in Spanish and English, were identified ("organised crime", "narco", "matanza", "kingpin", "violence", "war on drugs", "Mexico") and they will be further used in the search engines within the qualitative data providers.

5.2 Research limitations

The main limitation when researching the WOD in Mexico is certainly the realistic lack of data and the lack of transparency in the existing data. In fact, Heinle et al. argue that “because of the limitations of government data—and a lack of transparency on how these data are collected—several media sources, non-governmental organisations, and researchers conduct their own independent monitoring” which emphasizes the difficulty that a researcher has when analysing the WOD situation in Mexico (2015:44). The many blind spots in the governmental databases are filled by independent researches. However, the dispersion of data slows both the gathering process and the analysis of data. Another important limitation is the fact that there is a randomised coverage along the years. One reason for considering the important datasets that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has is that the data is available for the entirety of the 2006-2016 timeframe. This aspect is important considering that since the beginning of the following research, very few databases covering the entirety of the interested period were found. Imbusch et al. are aware of the lack of reliable data regarding specific topics by arguing that “there are no comprehensive studies on violence in Mexico” (2011:103). Ferreira confirms the difficulties that researchers have when analysing the criminal groups by declaring:

“Still, there are many gaps in the data on the victims of violence associated with organised crime. Both government and independent data exclude finer details that would lend a better understanding of violent crime. For example, there is no information about the authorship of killings, making it impossible to determine whether the victims were killed by the military or the police, or in clashes between organised crime groups. Additionally, there are still many missing persons whose fate remains unknown” (Ferreira, 2016:56).

Such is important in order to understand the difficulties that a researcher encounters while analysing the Mexican reality. In fact, obtaining relevant data is the main impediment of any research related with the effects of the WOD in Mexico. Another evident gap in the literature is the lack of analysis regarding the interaction between organised crime and the population. There is a certain tendency to depict people as passive actors which suffer in silence the atrocities perpetrated by the organised crime or the state. For this reason, the following research aims to present the active responses of the population in order to remove the victim stigma. The author is aware that the available research is mostly qualitative rather than quantitative which might lead to a hyper-analysis of the problem.

However, the online resources provided by organisations such as the UNODC, Transparency International, NarcoData or the Institute for Peace and Economics (among others) will limit the existing quantitative data gap and will help to better analyse the qualitative information. Undoubtedly, the uncertainty and the illegality will never permit to have a complete idea about the actual numbers of the drug empire considering that the statistics regarding drug industry “will never be more than educated guesses” (Vellinga, 2000:123). Nonetheless, such limits should not discourage continuous research regarding the subject taken into consideration.

6

The impact of the War on Drugs in Mexico

Mexico's geographical position, between the U.S. (the world's largest drug-consumer) and several production countries, explains to some extent its main role within the drug chain. Williams considers Mexico's position as being a "location curse" which inevitably led to the integration of the country within the drug trade (2009:325) as it was discussed in Chapter II. However, if the drug trade was the consequence of a combination between geographical location and a high demand of drugs, the WOD approach is more difficult to explain. After the experience in Colombia, scholars have invited to critically consider the WOD policy and its indiscriminate application. Already in 2002 Chabat declared that Mexico's institutions had "very little margin for manoeuvre in the war on drugs" (135). Chabat questioned the possibility of strengthening the counter-narcotics strategy by denouncing the dangerousness of declaring "total war on drugs" against criminal organisations when not being institutionally and militarily ready to respond to the criminal groups' reactions as it was "reasonable to expect higher levels of violence" (2002:145). Thus, even before the beginning of the WOD there was a vivid concern that the Mexican government was not ready. Nonetheless, in 2006, the newly elected Mexican president has openly declared the war against drugs and organised crime. Felipe Calderón was contested from the first moment and was accused of stealing the presidency from another candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Surprisingly, the opposition barricaded inside the Congress and refused to accept the ceremonial instalment of the new president (Tuckman, 2006). Such behaviour was justified by the fact that Calderón won the elections by a margin of solely 0.56% (Miyar, 2016:215). Aguilera argues that the counter-narcotics strategy intended "to legitimise an administration questioned from the beginning" (2013:29) rather than diminishing the influence of criminal groups. The WOD was not a prominent objective of Felipe Calderón's political campaign. In fact, only after being elected, Calderón shifted his political agenda and neglected his electoral promises, such as reducing unemployment and reviving the

internal market and instead focused on the WOD by deploying troops in urban areas (Murataya et al., 2013:350). If the WOD seemed unexpected for the domestic public, the violent response from the criminal groups was foreseen by many experts (Murataya et al., 2013:351).

The public declaration of the WOD had a strong impact on the society as a whole. It is difficult to imagine that such a violent strategy as the WOD would have been capable to not affect the Mexican population. The initial approach was convincing the nation that the fight was going to be rapid, but the total participation of the community was vital. The term “war” was used “to describe a battle that could be decisively won with the support, participation, and sacrifices of the Mexican people” in combination with a massive implementation of technology and intelligence (Regidor cited in Sanchez, 2013:476). The constructed political discourses managed to depict cartels and their illicit activities, more specifically drug-trafficking, as a threat whereas before these were considered solely a social disturbance. The constructivist approach is more evident when considering the information provided by Latinobarometro (2016). Its data shows that the Mexican population, in 2006, was not worried about drug trafficking, and elements such as public security, poverty and corruption were more salient. Moreover, during the last decade, drug-trafficking continued being considered a minor issue (as can be observed in Appendix A). Nevertheless the violent strategy was adopted, and a decade later the country is still involved in the WOD.

The following section aims to provide an exhaustive overview of the consequences of the abovementioned strategy. The chapter will focus mainly on the impact of the WOD on organised crime (known informally as cartels), criminal groups’ response and where the cartels currently are. However, the state and the cartels are not two separated entities: they coexist within a society which was directly involved, often caught between the two fires, and suffered casualties and losses. Therefore, the section will provide an explanation for the socio-economic and territorial impact of the WOD and how the country is responding after a decade of an on-going conflict. The situation is complex as it involved every social level, from the rural mountainous areas of the Northern state of Sinaloa to the urban rich areas of Mexico City. Therefore, for a better comprehension regarding the multiple effects of the WOD, the chapter will present a detailed timeline and multiple info-graphic representations.

6.1 The War on Drugs and diversification

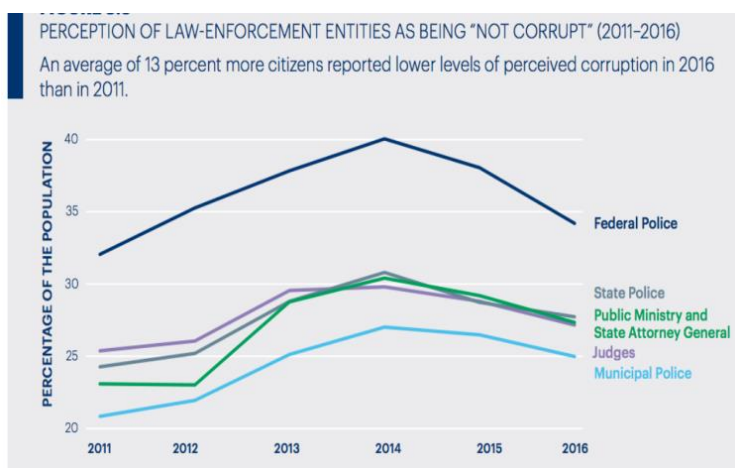
The election of a member of the opposition party in the 2000s, Vicente Fox (PAN), started a democratisation process within the country which was a menace for the *pax mafiosa* between the

state and organised crime. Miyar considers that, in 2000, officially started the decentralisation of the political power. The democratisation process had slowly led to the loss of power that the central government had over the cartels which destabilised the apparent peaceful environment (2016:215). It is argued that the rising level of insecurity and instability within Mexico might be connected to the fact that “the informal arrangements established between the organised crime groups and the government” were dismantled after seven decades of cohabitation (Chabat, 2015:104). In short, with the appearance of a new political actor the organised crime lost their institutional point of reference. Therefore when Calderón barely won the elections in 2006 Mexico was already in a destabilising situation. The country was experiencing a democratisation process which led to a decentralisation of institutional power and the political insecurity was appealing for the criminal groups as they were able to operate outside the control of the state. Considering the political situation at the time and the low popular support, the presidency decided to unite the country against a common enemy in order to obtain legitimacy which confirms that the WOD policy had indeed a domestic rationale.

Despite the new political arrangement Mexico was forced to face the phantoms of the past. During the 70 years of PRI-ruling, corruption was “a key factor which facilitated a relatively peaceful, non-violent period of drug trafficking operations in Mexico” (Morris, 2013:196). As Lupsha argues, the Mexican justice system was for a long time a legal extension of the organised crime and had an intermediary function between cartels and the government (cited in Morris, 2013:205). It is indeed almost impossible for organised crime to operate without corrupting the legal institutions. Drug cartels are generally interested in maximising their profits in the quickest manner possible, but they need protection from the public officers which is generally obtained through corruption (Beittel, 2013:6). Calderón’s administration discovered soon enough that corruption was well-rooted in the political establishment and such led to various anticorruption campaigns. One of the most important operations during the early stages of the WOD was “Operation Cleanup” (2008) which aimed at eliminating corrupt officials. The operation had some positive outcomes and in fact it led to the arrest of “deputy attorney general in charge of fighting drug trafficking” and “the head of Interpol Mexico” among other high located figures (Medel and Thoumi, 2014:15). Also, during the abovementioned operation, it was discovered that the Special Investigations Unit on Organised Crime was infiltrated by members of the Beltran Leyva cartel which had the function of deviating the research towards other criminal groups (Williams, 2009:330). This operation did not end the endemic corruption typical of the Mexican system, but it did indeed emphasize the complexity of the problem considering the fact that people in charge of

combating illicit activities were vulnerable and corruptible in the first place. Moreover, from the 25 high located figures arrested, only 13 were formally incriminated and their detention was under 5 years of prison (Proceso, 2013). Such blunt sentences are a representation of the weakness of the Mexican judicial system and Chabat’s warning should be recalled as the scholar considered Mexico as institutionally not prepared for the WOD.

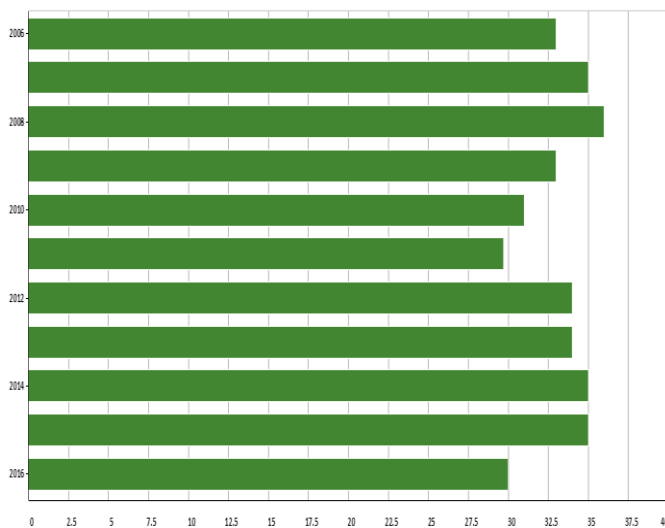
Quantifying quantitatively the amount of corruption is certainly difficult, but for the Mexican case is near to impossible. The most important economic organisation, the World Bank, despite having a “corruption” variable, does not have any data to provide for Mexico. For this reason it is difficult to argue whether Calderón’s anti-corruption campaign was a success, but fortunately the Mexico Peace Index and Transparency International provide some data regarding population’s perception about corruption which slightly helps to understand the current situation. As it can be observed both sources present an improvement regarding the overall perception (Figure 1 and 2) which might represent a general diminution of corruption, but it has to be mentioned that perceptions cannot be accounted as a definitive claim. Also it should be taken into consideration that the majority of the Mexican population has conflicted sentiments regarding corruption. As Nieto explained it: “on one hand, some people accept it as a measure to speed up administrative, legal or economic procedures, or to avoid the costs of the law. On the other hand, others refuse it as they recognise corruption’s perverse effects on the whole society” (2014:109). Therefore the overall perception regarding corruption has to be handled carefully considering that people do not dismiss it completely.



The horizontal axis represents the 2011-2016 timeframe, whilst the vertical axis represents the percentage of the population that took the survey. As it can be observed, since 2014 there is a decrement in the percentage of people that consider the different law-enforcement bodies as “corrupt”.

Figure 1. Perception of Law-Enforcement Entities as being “not corrupt” 2011-2016

Source: Mexico Peace Index, 2017



The horizontal axis represents the values of the Corruption Perception Index developed by Transparency International where 0=very corrupt and 100=very clean, whilst the vertical axis represents the 2006-2016 timeframe. Mexico's best result was in 2008 where the country was given 36 points. However, the latest available results of 2016 present a deterioration of the results as the country scores only 30 points.

Figure 2. Corruption Perception Index Mexico 2006-2016

Source: Transparency International (2016)

Attempts to diminish corruption will

however not stop lucrative illicit businesses and in fact, the traditional rule of *plata o plomo* (accepting money or being killed) is still operative at all levels of the political and entrepreneurial structure (Gomora et al., 2015). Alongside the anti-corruption operations, Calderón's government focused also on destroying the drug chain, which was the official reason of the WOD in the first place. The immediate consequence of the WOD was the fact that cartels diversified the types of drugs produced. Currently, all the main drug cartels are poly-drug which further increases the level of their revenues (Medel and Thoumi, 2014:12). Moreover, the Mexican drug cartels specialised in producing and supplying also "heroin, methamphetamines, and marijuana" (Sanchez, 2013:474) as can be observed in Figure 4. Figure 4 needs further development as it represents graphically the drug diversification that the organised crime experienced since 2006. It is clear that one can seize only the same amount or less of the total production of a specific good. In fact, it can be observed that during the first years of the WOD, marijuana and cocaine were the principal types of drugs. However, since 2011 other two types, methamphetamine and heroin, gained importance with a relative diminution of marijuana and cocaine production. Moreover, the cartels have developed "potent synthetic opioid, fentanyl, which can be up to 50 times stronger than heroin" and it is easy to produce (Beittel, 2017:9). The attractiveness of synthetic drugs is the simplicity of producing them as there is no need for physical fields to cultivate the primary element. One needs just a small laboratory to "cook" the narcotic and therefore there is a cut in the expenses for logistics, transportation and bribing as the laboratories are located along the border (Medel and Thoumi, 2014:13) which implies more economic revenues for the criminal groups. It is argued that the counter-narcotic efforts promoted by the WOD combined with other elements such as the

legalisation of marijuana in some U.S. states, the easiness of methamphetamine production, and the competition for the cocaine route are the major factors that lead to the diversification of the drug production (CNN, 2017; OAS, 2015; Lakhani and Tirado, 2016; *Sin Embargo*, 2016). Despite authorities' efforts to diminish the level of drug production, by dismantling methamphetamine laboratories and igniting poppy fields, the quantity of drugs produced is still higher than the seized quantity (Beittel, 2017:9) as can be observed in Figure 3 and 4.

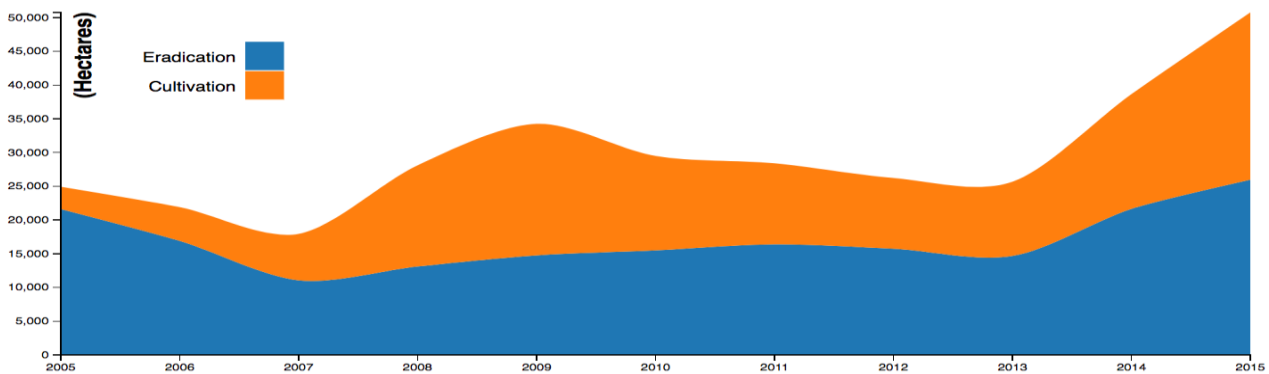


Figure 3. Total cultivation of poppy field and police eradication in Mexico (hectares) 2005-2015

Source: UNODC (2016). Graphic created by the author. The horizontal axis represents the 2005-2015 timeframe, whilst the vertical axis represents the total hectares of poppy plants cultivated in the country (the total amount is given by the combination of the orange and blue colour). The blue colour represents the amount of hectares that the police managed to eradicate from the total cultivated fields, while the orange colour represents the amount of hectares that were not affected by the police's eradication and effectively produced opiates. It can be observed that the country is experiencing a crescendo level of poppy cultivation, despite the massive efforts to eradicate them.

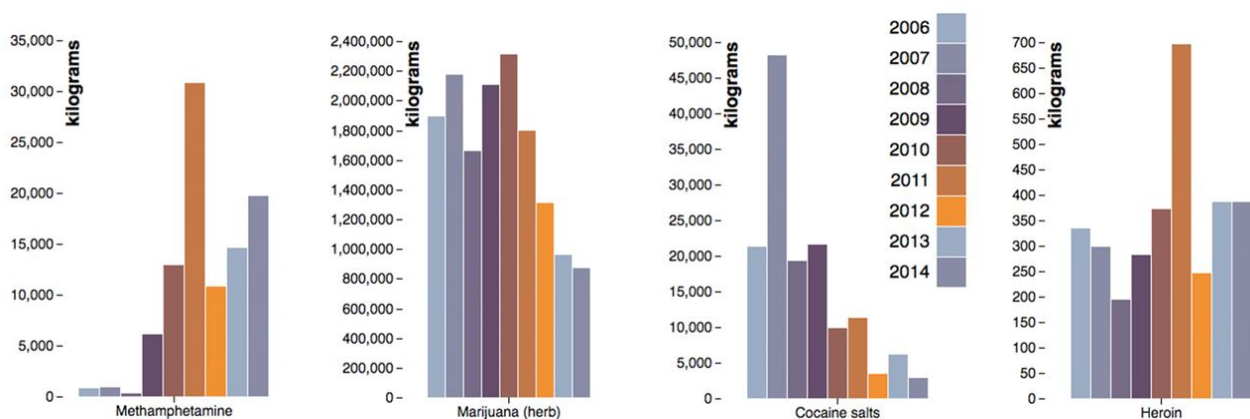


Figure 4. Drug confiscated in Mexico 2006-2014 (kilograms)

Source: UNODC (2015). Graphic created by the author.

Transporting the illegal goods is dangerous and costly for the organised crime considering that agents on both sides of the border have to be corrupted and not always the operations are successful. For this reason, criminal groups are always inventing new and safe methods for moving goods along the border. One particular group, the Sinaloa cartel, is specialised in moving drugs and people under the U.S. border through tunnels. Tunnels are very difficult to identify because the entries and the exits are inside private buildings and overall 224 tunnels have been found since 2006 (*BBC*, 2016). Not only the number of tunnels incremented since the beginning of the WOD, but also their level of sophistication. As a matter of fact, in 2016, an 800-meter tunnel was found between the cities of Tijuana and San Diego which had a lift, rails, electric and ventilation systems (*BBC*, 2016). It could be argued that creating a tunnel is costly and maybe attacking the finances rather than the criminal groups *per se* will be more beneficial in weakening the drug chain. In fact, in 2011, Felipe Calderón publicly announced that organised criminal groups should be deprived of their material and economic resources in order to be defeated and it was the first time that the Mexican president distanced himself from the over-militarised approach proposed in the beginning of his administration (*The Los Angeles Times*, 2011).

The determination of destroying the drug market led to another consequence as it pushed criminal organisations to search for means of income outside the drug chain. The anti-drug campaigns urged cartels to find less profitable, but safer criminal activities (Chabat, 2015:107). More specifically, criminal groups have diversified their illicit activities in “kidnapping, assassination for hire, auto theft, controlling prostitution, extortion, money-laundering, software piracy, resource theft, and human smuggling” (Beittel, 2017:25). The diversification of criminal activities can be observed in Appendix B. Within the diversified illicit activities, migrants are considered a lucrative resource as they provide a rapid income. The criminal group Los Zetas is infamously known for kidnapping migrants and the family (usually relatives in the U.S.) is obliged to pay for their rescue (Zepeda Martinez, 2015:315). For a Central American migrant (from countries such as Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala) the organised crime demands 20,000 dollars, whilst for a Mexican person the price is 10,000 dollars (ANSA, 2017). For a kilogram of cocaine the profit might be between 10,000 and 20,000 dollars (Woody, 2016), but considering that the WOD was focused (at least initially) on destroying the cocaine trade, the dangerousness of the market and the fact that profits have to be shared between many logistic groups, the activity of kidnapping defenceless migrants is far more attractive. In fact, in 2017, Mexico experienced six abductions per day. The planning is simpler compared to drug trafficking because kidnapped people are generally kept in houses located along the smuggling route: the organisational network is

therefore limited to a restrained geographical area (Andrade, 2017). Any delay in the payments increases the probability of victims being tortured, raped and finally killed. Moreover, once the migrants are freed, they are obliged to smuggle drugs into the U.S. which diminishes the costs and risks for the criminal groups, but is hazardous for the migrants (Univision, 2012). The discovery in Tamaulipas, in 2010, of 72 mutilated bodies of Central American migrants shocked the public and ignited a debate regarding the state's incapacity of protecting a weak category as the migrants (Zepeda Martinez, 2015:315). It is considered that the mass killing was a direct message for the historical Mexican smugglers, the so-called *coyotes*, in order to inform them that if they wanted to continue their human smuggling business they should pay a fee to Los Zetas (Zepeda Martinez, 2015:315). The discovery also accentuated once again that the areas where the bodies were found are not controlled by the state. According to an Amnesty International report, in the 2006-2016 timeframe, nationwide "29,917 people (22,414 men and 7,503 women) were reported as missing by the government "either kidnapped by criminal groups or forcibly removed by the militaries" (2017).

Another field of diversification is stealing natural gas from natural gas fields located mostly in the northern parts of Mexico. *Pemex* (state-owned oil company) declared that narco-groups managed to steal around 40% of the total annual production of gas through self-constructed pipelines with a loss in 2016 (latest available data) of 1.6 billion dollars (Webber, 2017). The worrisome aspect is that the population is also involved in this activity, mostly unsuspected children and women who are used as spies or human shields during attacks from governmental forces (Webber, 2017). Poverty, inequality and economic instability are certainly some major push factors which invite people to join organised crime as unskilled labourers or (in some extreme cases) killers (Correa-Cabrera, 2014:427). Moreno (cited in Correa-Cabrera) argues that poverty and weak socioeconomic conditions are the reason behind the easiness of recruiting members (2014:427). The IEP declares that in 2016 "the estimated economic impact of organised crime was 17 billion pesos¹, but this is probably a very conservative estimate" (MPI, 2017:73). The economy of illicit activities is certainly difficult to calculate due to the secrecy and illegality of the black market. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) confirms that annually a flow of 19-29 billion dollars leave the U.S. to enter Mexico illegally and 41% of it is drug-trafficking revenues. Also, Mexican organised crime has the capacity of "washing" annually between 8 and 25 billion dollars which are introduced within the legal Mexican banking system (SHCP, 2012:18). Ellingwood and Wilkinson, two journalists from *The Los Angeles Times*, confirm that drug money is introduced in Mexico's legal

¹ 950 million dollars

economy and more specifically “in gleaming high-rises in beach resorts such as Cancun, in bustling casinos in Monterrey, in skyscrapers and restaurants in Mexico City...into the construction sector, the night-life industry, even political campaigns” (2011). In 2012 Mexico’s tax authorities have declared that the country had around 10 billion dollars which were impossible to verify legally and therefore were considered revenues from illegal activities, which fuels corruption within the country (SHCP, 2012:17). Despite the counter-narcotic and anti-corruption campaigns, the Mexican organised crime not only economically survived the shock but also managed to diversify its illicit activities which led to major profits.

6.2 The War on Drugs and fragmentation

The kingpin strategy-consisting of beheading the cartels-adopted during the WOD led to a territorial and structural fragmentation of organised crime. Fragmentation, in turn, led to an augmentation in the level of violence. When the WOD was declared in 2006, Mexico had four dominant narco-groups: the Tijuana/Arellano Felix Organization (AFO), the Sinaloa Cartel, the Juárez/Vicente Carrillo Fuentes Organization (CFO), and the Gulf Cartel (Beittel, 2013:9). Later those groups became eight major organisations: Sinaloa, Gulf Cartel, Los Zetas, Los Caballeros Templarios, Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion, Juárez Cartel, Beltrán Leyva Organisation, and La Familia Michoacana. Maps number 1 and 2 offer a visual comparison in order to better understand how the cartels’ territorial presence changed during the past decade.



Map 1. Cartels presence 2007

Source: Stratfor (2008)



Map 2. Cartels presence 2015

Source: DEA (2015)

The new groups such as Los Zetas or La Familia were already operating within the Mexican territory but as a part of the four main groups. For example, Los Zetas were engaged as mercenaries by the Gulf cartel which wanted to spare their own members. Los Zetas had to protect “high-ranking members, escort valuable shipments of contraband and carry out assassinations of rivals or government officials” (Stratfor, 2008). Mercenaries are loyal to their commanders in charge and in fact, when the founder of the Gulf cartel was arrested and extradited to the U.S. in 2007, Los Zetas separated themselves from the group and started attacking their former employer’s illicit activities and territories (Beittel, 2013:10). Los Zetas were hired by the Gulf cartel due to their militaristic capabilities. In fact the group is formed by former members of the Mexican Army which deserted for better gains (Chabat, 2015:104). One might think that only the leaders of such a group have military background, but when considering that in 2008 the Mexican Secretary of National Defence declared that “one out of every three drug traffickers has a military background” and that by the same year 20,000 people deserted from the Mexican Army, it is understandable how the entirety of Los Zetas has a militaristic stamp (Williams, 2009:328).

The dangerousness of Los Zetas is that the group has perfect knowledge of the capabilities and counter-narcotic strategies of the Mexican Army. One aspect that has to be clarified is that before the arrival of Los Zetas, all the other criminal groups had equal powers and were not militarised. They were certainly violent and obsessed with profits, but the unwritten law of respecting the territorial presence of other groups was valid. However, when the government adopted a kingpin strategy which aimed at beheading the cartels, Los Zetas exploited the opportunity. The group disrespected the old established rules between cartels which included the respect for routes and the drug chain and was the first Mexican criminal group that deliberately used violence in order to obtain and control new territories. This behaviour is diverse from the usual criminal behaviour which is focused essentially on maintaining the existing illicit activities mostly operating anonymously (Chabat, 2015:104). Zetas’ power was driven from the fact they “had much more expertise in violence than either rival traffickers or the police” (Williams, 2009:328) and had more resources (including stolen armament) which permitted them to directly attack other cartels (Chabat, 2015:106). Considering that Los Zetas members were once part of the Mexican establishment, the group was never involved in the secretive *pax mafiosa* between the state and the criminal groups. As it was mentioned through the research, the agreement was created in order to maintain the level of violence at low levels. It is clear that, if Los Zetas were external to the agreement, the state had no leverage on the group and was unable to control its level of violence. Los Zetas raise to power is the most relevant example of the consequences of the territorial

fragmentation. Weakening the cartels permitted the existent criminal groups to search for new territories. This territorial fight had, of course, led to an augmentation in violence.

If the territorial fragmentation might seem an obvious consequence such cannot be argued regarding the structural fragmentation. Historically cartels were formed by blood-tied family members and for a long period of time this structure represented the power of organised crime. However, with the new race for territory the old framework became a weakness. This is related with the fact that the fight between cartels entered in a new phase where the violence became personal as each group had to vindicate the death of a member which was also a relative. Also the state decided to exploit this weakness which led to an open and public war. In 2012, Los Zetas killed the son of a PRI leader because the nephew of one of the leaders was killed by the Mexican forces which led to an eye for an eye approach (Animal Político, 2017). Subsequently, organised crime decided to change its structure by splitting in smaller units. The new structure is perfectly explained by Medel and Thoumi:

“Currently, all of Mexico’s thriving drug gangs rely on business management tactics, necessary to overcome the pressure exerted by Mexican authorities. Family-style gangs’ centralised decision making made them vulnerable when authorities, or rival drug gang members, killed or captured a group’s kingpin because often no one was capable of stepping up and replacing him. The business management style is more likely to create decentralised administration and decision-making boards in which each member has well-determined territories and the full group meets only to make the biggest decisions. That style has shielded them from catastrophe when top leaders are killed or captured and allowed them to maintain consistent and stable control over large portions of territory suitable for production and smuggling routes” (2014:15)

The new administration (in charge since 2012) continued Calderón’s strategy, but the new president is officially not following a kingpin approach anymore. The decision is due to the fact that the high level of violence within the country is considered being a consequence of the abovementioned strategy. In fact, a vacant spot in a cartel fuels a race for leadership power between the members of the same organisation or external criminal groups (Chabat, 2015:105). The National Development Plan approved in 2013 shifted the focus from the organised crime being a national

security threat towards human security (Mexico Government, 2013). Albeit being previously nominated, human security was never considered as a main objective to be achieved by the Mexican state (Luna, 2016). More specifically, the new path to be pursued is creating a new police force called National Gendarmerie whose members (40.000) will be deployed in rural areas in order to maintain the control of the inner and most inaccessible mountainous zones in the country (Medel and Thoumi, 2014:18). The main goal of the new administration is “to diminish the extent and character of the DTOs’ activity from a national-security threat to a law-and-order problem and...to transfer responsibility for addressing this challenge from military forces back to the police” (Beittel, 2017:28). Moreover, the inflammatory counter-narcotic rhetoric disappeared from the political discourses. In fact, the expression “war on drugs” is not used anymore in public speeches (Lozano-Vazquez, 2015:51). It could be argued that the political establishment aims at shifting the attention of the public opinion from the violent conflict towards other events in order to, in the end, desecuritize the issue.

However, despite the official discourse, since the beginning of the WOD 63% of the drug leaders have been either captured or killed by the armed forces (25 people during the Calderón presidency and 75 during the current Peña Nieto’s office) (Garzón Vergara, 2015:119). Those numbers emphasize two important aspects. Firstly, the WOD strategy indeed led to a fragmentation of the cartels considering the number of drug-leaders eliminated during the current administration. And secondly, despite the official discourse, the kingpin strategy is still utilised. Furthermore, up to today, none of the drug leaders arrested has been “effectively prosecuted in Mexico” and are currently expecting their extradition to the U.S. (Beittel, 2013:3). It can be argued that such an approach undermines the decision-making power and sovereignty that Mexico has regarding the prosecution of narco-traffickers.

It seems that, as for the two other types of WOD operations analysed in the previous sub-chapter, also the kingpin strategy failed to weaken cartels. A relevant reason for the fact that organised crime manages to maintain its dominant position is related to the easiness of buying weapons and armament. The ungoverned areas with the U.S. border are perfect for the illegal passage of weapons (legally bought in the southern states of the U.S.), whilst the southern porous border permits the smuggling of weapons stolen from Central American troops (Beckhusen, 2012; Williams, 2009:329). Since 2006, the Mexican militaries have sized massive arsenals that represent the power and dangerousness of the organised crime. It is imperative to mention at least some of the weaponry that was confiscated since 2006: anti-tank rockets, rocket launchers, grenade launchers,

fragmentation grenades, AK-47 rifles and dynamite which represent both organised crime's economic wealth and ability for self-defence (Beckhusen, 2012; Williams, 2009:329). The arsenals found represent the heavy militarisation of the narco-groups. The militarisation should not necessarily be seen as the incipit of an insurgency, but rather it identifies with the activity of "acquiring much more sophisticated military equipment and using military-style execution techniques" (Correa-Cabrera, 2014:430).

The Northern border is of paramount importance not only for the fact that it permits smuggling weaponry, but also for its role in drug trafficking. The U.S.-Mexico border is generally depicted as extremely violent and cities such as Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Juarez, and Tijuana are infamously known for the number of drug-related murders. The reason for the high level of violence is a combination of presence of cartels (and affiliates) and the fact that those cities are located on the cocaine route. Generally, cocaine shipments are cut in smaller pieces when the drug arrives at the Southern border; then travels north and at the Northern border is reunited in massive blocs in order to be transferred to the U.S. (OAS, 2015). The cities along the border have the perfect geographical location for the last step in the cocaine's transfer and the presence of cocaine (therefore profit) attracts small and big criminal groups who want to have control over the market and such results in increased levels of violence. If the border region was historically controlled by the Sinaloa cartel, today the area is contended between several groups and such is a consequence of the territorial fragmentation of the organised crime.

Mexico fell into another spiral of violence in 2016 with the homicide rate increasing by 18% (2017:2) according to the annual report for peace provided by the IEP. The new rise in violence is connected with the extradition to the U.S. of the head of the Sinaloa cartel and several groups are aiming for their territories which host the famous tunnels (Animal Politico, 2017). According to *The Guardian*, 2.186 murders were committed in the sole month of May surpassing the 2011 crime level (which is considered the deadliest year since the beginning of the WOD). Moreover, Mexico registered, in the first five months of 2017, an augmentation of 30% of drug-related crimes compared to the same period of 2016 (*The Guardian*, 2017). Some scholars, such as Beittel, consider that in some cities the violence has reached a war-level dimension (2017:1). In the short run the cartel will be probably weakened considering that is attacked both by the state and other groups. However, considering the peculiarities of the group, the Sinaloa cartel will be able to resist. The decentralised structure will protect the majority of the cells while some of them will suffer attacks considering that there is minimum communication between them (Beittel, 2013:10). The

decentralised structure is highly functioning considering that the Sinaloa cartel is the only organised crime group that has affiliates in all continents (except Antarctica) and covers illicit operations in more than 50 countries (Beittel, 2013:12).

The elimination of the head of the cartels led to a territorial and structural fragmentation of the cartels which consequently increased the level of violence within the country. Moreover, as Beittel argues, the change in display of violence such as car bombs, decapitations, torture, mass killing go far beyond the typical violence of the drug trade and it is more and more debated if the Mexican organised crime “may be acting more like domestic terrorists” (2011:1). The method of leaving leaderless the groups retaliated against the state as the remaining members started a race for power and territory. The four dominant groups are now divided in eight smaller units which increase the level of insecurity. After a decade of on-going conflict, the WOD strategy in Mexico has produced a massive increment in violence. The WOD policy covers a plethora of operations, from ignition of the coca plantations to intelligence training to the newest drone control and aimed strike (Martin and McCulloch, 2014:108). However, with the development of new technologies and globalisation, the aggressive counter-narcotics approach has little effect on stopping the supply of drugs (Martin and McCulloch, 2014:109).

6.3 The War on Drugs, cartels and civilians

The U.N. defines an organised criminal group as a “structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences ..., in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit“ (2003). The definition clearly states that organised crime will act solely in order to gain profits which imply that criminal groups have limited interest in publicly displaying their position and the intrinsic violence is circumscribed to the illicit business. In fact it is common knowledge that violent methods are used “to discipline employees, enforce transactions, limit the entry of competitors, and coerce” (Beittel, 2013:7) and it is rather unusual for there to be a public display of violence against civilians. However, the latest violent behaviour against civilians can be hardly explained with the U.N.’s definition.

The nexus between cartels, government and the Mexican population is not easy to decipher. With the new generation of organised crime, secrecy is not the main aspect of the drug chain anymore. In fact, the new kingpins who are younger (due to the past purges) often use public spaces such as social networks or media in order to menace their adversaries or to parade their wealth

respecting the secular tradition of *machismo* (Montalvo, 2016). Considering that many historical leaders have been eliminated during the WOD, the vacant spots are filled by inexperienced young people who are often reckless. When the illicit market was controlled by four main groups the members had to undergo an extensive preparation and the membership to a cartel was to be maintained secret, whilst now, with a lack of continuous leadership and fragmentation in smaller groups, the newest members are not heavily controlled as they were in the past (Balderas and Janowitz, 2016). The lust and the immediate enrichment of the younger members are seen as a rapid social climbing which has to be publicly displayed. From a sociological point of view, the abandonment of a secretive life has lured the younger generations into a *narco-culture* which glorifies death and violence and the consequences of such an unhealthy temptation might be disastrous (Rodriguez Navarro, 2017). Moreover, Rodriguez Navarro argues that not only boys aspire to be members of a cartel (which would signify respect and economic safety), but also among girls there is the tendency of desiring the role of a *jefe's* girlfriend which will represent an economic stability (2017). Rodriguez Navarro argues that, considering the level of unemployment among youngsters and the overall poverty, these goals are worrisome but not unexpected (2017). It is common for local musicians (popular in rural areas) to praise a cartel or another in their songs which reminds the antique tradition of an ode to the hero (Shelley, 2001:222; Stratfor, 2008).

It surely would be simpler if the theoretical *bad vs. good* concept could be applied to the Mexican reality, but the dimension of the problem and the multiplicity of the actors make for an intricate situation. However, one aspect is certain: the WOD negatively impacted the Mexican population. The wave of violence has indeed affected the civilian population which was spared before the WOD or at least that was the general perception. It seems that the public opinion considered violent events as less worrisome if the deaths were related to an inter-cartel fight. As a matter of fact, when in 2006 the Michoacan Cartel known as La Familia (the Family) presented itself in a night club throwing five human heads on the dance floor, the horrific event was perceived as an inter-cartel execution and the population did not feel directly threatened. In fact, the heads had a message which stated: "The Family does not kill for money. It does not kill women, it does not kill innocent people. Only die those who have to die. Everyone should know that, this is divine justice" ("*La familia no mata por paga. No mata mujeres, no mata inocentes, sólo muere quien debe morir, sépanlo toda la gente, esto es justicia divina*") (La Jornada, 2006). The murderous event was just the first of the many that followed, but did not gain the same relevance as another event, the Casino Royale execution.

In 2011, Los Zetas militarily attacked and set on fire a casino in Monterrey which left behind 52 casualties. This attack has awakened the national public opinion for several reasons. First of all, Monterrey is a rich industrial area extremely close to the U.S. border (which quite worried both the Mexican and U.S. establishments) that previously was sheltered from cartels' violence (BBC, 2011). Secondly, the people that died during the attack were part of the middle-upper class which destroyed the common idea that cartels' violence was secluded within poor rural areas and that the *Mexico bien* (wealthy Mexico) will not experience it. Thirdly, this event happened five years after the abovementioned event with La Familia and it represented the fact that the promises of a quick and resolute solution regarding the cartels were indeed just promises. And lastly, the attack was caused by the fact that the owner of the Casino refused to pay the protection fee to Los Zetas (BBC, 2012). The dominant cartel in Monterrey at the time was the Beltran Leyva Organisation (BLO), therefore there was no reason to pay a protection fee to another cartel. However, as it was mentioned before, Los Zetas had more capabilities and managed to eliminate the BLO cartel. Clearly the casino attack was to inform the city that there was a new cartel in charge (Dudley, 2012).

The public opinion was determined to have justice for the Monterrey attack and it was difficult for the government to dismiss it as an inter-cartel showdown and in two weeks the people responsible for the aggression were incarcerated (Sanchez, 2013:468). For the first time, a high-located politician, (at that time President Felipe Calderón), declared that Mexico was experiencing a new wave of violence perpetrated by terrorists with no limits (Sanchez, 2013:468). The terrorist rhetoric has since then diminished and also Calderón agreed that his response was more emotional than rational, but those heated comments have started a debate within the region which tries to understand if the conflict might have reached the dimensions of a real war (Sanchez, 2013:468). The attack was also publicly condemned by the Sinaloa cartel which declared that being a drug trafficker does not signify being a cold blooded murderer (Chabat, 2015:109). The distance taken emphasizes the fact that Los Zetas have the power to disrespect the unwritten rules of the organised crime. The Monterrey attack is the perfect example which explains how the fragmentation process led to a violent race for territory and the subsequent violence directly affected the population. Also, the population was attacked by new cartels that arrived in a specific area rather than by the historical cartels. Therefore, the behavioural change was due to the fact that the new incomers had no connection with the populace or the territory hence there was no need to create a bond with the local population. In fact, considering the race for territory, the situation is extremely dynamic and a

cartel does not control a specific territory for too long thus it has to obtain the maximum amount of profit in a limited period of time.

Before the Monterrey episode, despite the poor results of the WOD, “citizens’ support...has not been eroded” as people were still expecting the changes promised by the administration (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2011:15). However, when the level of fear became unbearable, the same people that supported the institutions reached criminal groups for protection. The anomalous societal change was due to the fact that the state was perceived as being unable to protect the population. Since the beginning of the WOD the government put in place new extraordinary measures which officially had the aim of increasing the level of security within the country. In 2006, a new law was approved which permitted the police to detain a person supposedly connected to the organised crime for 80 days without any official criminal charges (Sanchez, 2013:471). However, during the chaotic years of the WOD, the militaries and the police (which have the purpose to defend the citizens) abused of their legal power and the indiscriminate arrests diminished the overall level of trust between the population and legal institutions (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2011:48). Therefore, the population (mostly located in rural areas, afar from central governmental institutions) preferred the protection offered by criminal groups rather than accepting the state’s illegal behaviour. However, as it was mentioned before the situation is complex as is the human behaviour involved. If some people decided to enter within a “security corruption” dimension where the safety is provided by the criminal groups which create insecurity in the first place, other people were coerced into this new dimension. In fact, some municipalities that were obliged to pay a fee (*derecho de piso*) for their security decided to resist, by creating self-defence groups.

The Mexican National Commission for Human Rights declared that, since 2013, 46 civilian self-defence armed groups formed across the country (De Llano, 2013). The leaders of the groups, such as José Manuel Mireles are seen as local heroes, but they are considered a threat by the institutions (Garcia, 2017). Mireles led one of the most extensive and active groups which gathered 25,000 people in its fight against Los Caballeros Templarios Cartel in Michoacán (the region where the WOD started) and the group had a strong societal impact which induced the state to incarcerate its leader in order to debilitate the movement (Garcia, 2017). The self-defence groups tend to occupy state’s buildings (such as town halls or police departments) by using hand grenades or armed attacks and these actions eviscerate an already weak institutional presence. However, for the moment, the smaller self-defence groups and the Mexican state are allies. The central power needs the locals because they have a greater knowledge about the territory or the social structure and those

aspects are paramount when external militaries are sent to an unknown region (Chouza, 2013). Also, organised crime requests a combination of fear and respect from the community they are operating in and generally it is difficult to find someone willing to testify (Stratfor, 2008). However, within the self-defence groups this code of silence is absent. Rivera, a Mexican political analyst, considers that arming poor and angry civilians is a delicate matter. In fact, despite their noble intentions, their actions could lead to a civil war (self-defence groups vs. cartels) or the self-defence groups could, in the long run, substitute themselves to the defeated cartels (cited in Chouza, 2013). Nonetheless, it seems that the Mexican state prefers to postpone the moment when the security problem posed by armed civilians will be addressed.

Despite being fought both by the state and by the civilians, in some areas of the country, cartels became a “state within the state” or as Correa-Cabrera defines the situation “some organisations have become non- state actors competing with the state that not only engage in harsh and violent control and cleansing practices, but also overtake state functions in the areas of security and taxation” (2014:430). The consequences of this illegal replacement are disastrous for the population. In fact, those municipalities that experience massive organised crime presence have a lower economic ability. In 2016, the economic loss due to violence has the equivalent of 17.6% of the country’s GDP (MPI, 2017:2). Also, the same regions are subject to a negative migration rate which means that people emigrate and the region is not of any interest for new incomers. Ciudad Juarez is utilised as the perfect case study due to the presence of multiple criminal groups (violence) and its closeness to the U.S. border (territorial significance) and it is argued that “the epidemic of violence caused a circle of migration, economic decline, urban deterioration, and worsened security” (Atuesta Becerra, 2015:33).

The fragmentation of the organised crime and the instalment of criminal groups in new territories led to the forced displacement of civilians. It is considered that, since the beginning of the WOD, 115,000 people have been forcibly displaced due to drug-related violence (Sanchez, 2013:483). In 2014, the number of people fleeing from violent regions was four times higher than that “of people leaving non-violent municipalities with similar socio-economic conditions” (Albuja, 2014:28). An important aspect to be considered when analysing the forced migration in Mexico is that it is not officially or internationally acknowledged (IDMC, 2012; Global Initiative, 2014; Rios, 2016). The reason behind this decision is the fact that, officially, in Mexico there is no on-going conflict because one faction in the fight (organised crime) does not have a political or religious driven motif. And if there is no conflict, it is extremely difficult to gain the status of a forced

migrant. In fact, from the 203 Mexican asylum seekers which presented a request in the U.S. (in 2014) stating “violence” as the main reason for the demand only around 1 % has gained the status, and the justification for the rejections was the fact that indiscriminate violence cannot be considered a sufficient reason to apply for asylum if the country is not experiencing an officially recognised conflict (Albuja, 2014:30). The worrisome aspect is that often people are threatened by actions which go “from direct coercion and physical threats to the erosion of the general environment and quality of life”, but they do not have any legal or international protection (Albuja, 2014:30).

According to the Mexican Commission on Human Rights, solely in the Sinaloa state -since the beginning of the WOD- 27,000 people were forced to leave due to drug related violence and it is considered (despite having limited or insufficient data) that the total number of forced migrants in Mexico is between 160,000 and 1.6 million (Global Initiative, 2014). Appendix C offers a minuscule overview of the situation by presenting the total number of internal displaced people in solely one year (2014). However, according to UNHCR which is the international body regarding migrants and refugees, “there are no internally displaced people or refugees in Mexico” (Global Initiative, 2014). Such can be due to the fact that UNHCR retrieve the data and statistics from the national governments and as was briefly mentioned before, the Mexican government does not officially recognise this issue. However, “the United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights” has invited Mexico to immediately acknowledge the alarming numbers of the displaced people and to activate a national defence protocol (IDMC, 2012; Rios, 2016).

The WOD, if to disregard the constructivist rhetoric, was officially created to eliminate the threat posed by the drug-trafficking activity. The operations, in-depth presented through the chapter, had consequences which directly affected the Mexican population. The strong-hand approach has diminished the trust between the populace and the state. As a consequence, people either turned towards illicit actors for security or decided to create self-defence groups. The WOD is complex and the multiple events might create a chronological confusion. For this reason, before the conclusion, an exhaustive timeline aims to offer a quick sum up of the major events verified during the WOD. The timeline presents some of the most important drug-leaders eliminated during the WOD and specific events which emphasize the crescent intensity of violent acts.

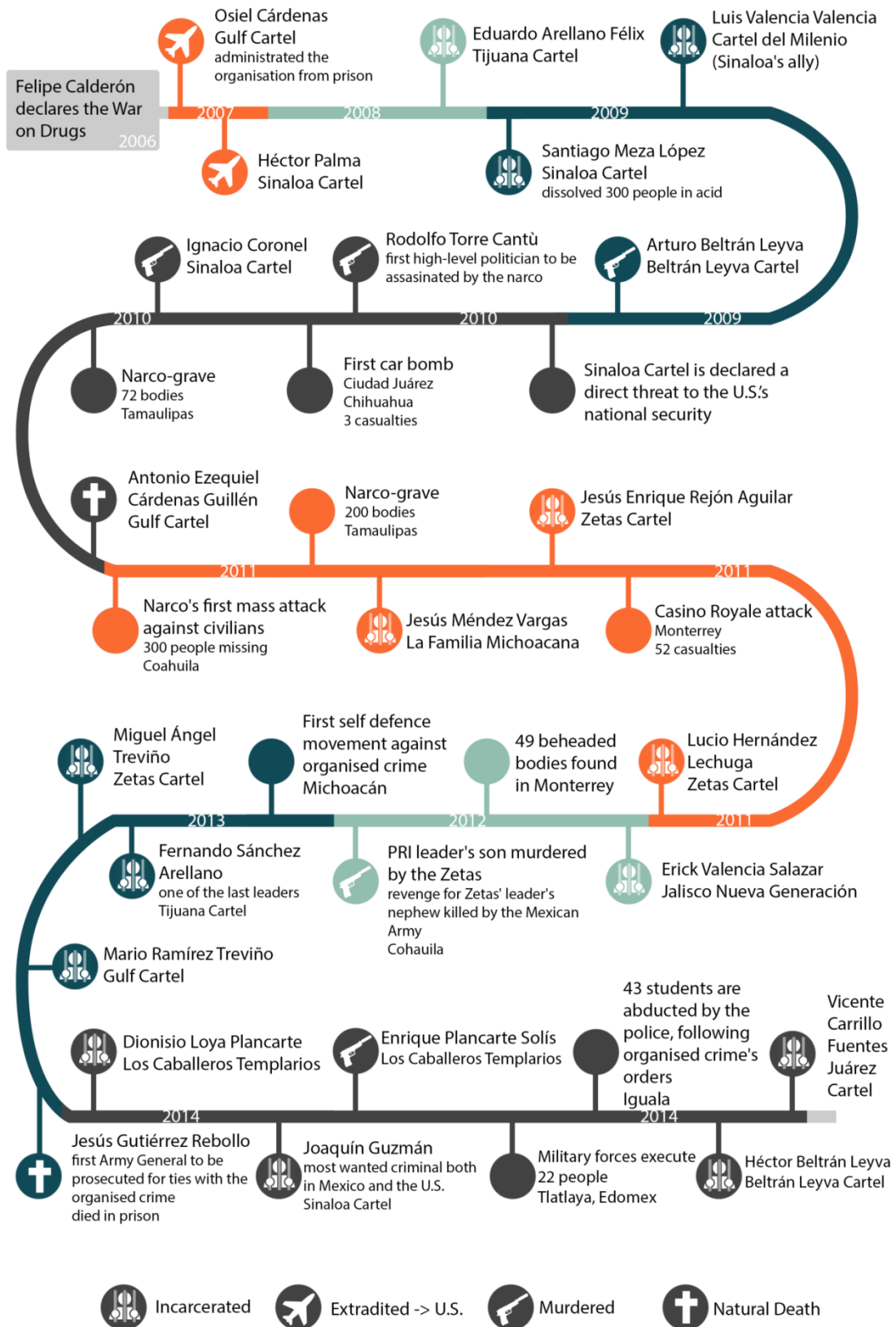


Diagram 1. Main events occurred during the WOD. Source: Animal Politico (Narcodata), 2017

Translation from Spanish and infographic created by the author.

7

Conclusion

In current times, the security agenda in Latin America has changed radically from what it was a few decades ago. If during the Cold War the communist ideology was considered the main threat, today the region confronts a plethora of menaces with organised crime and drug-trafficking having a major relevance. The research accompanied the reader through a journey where the WOD was the principal actor. As a matter of fact, the researcher decided to experiment a new approach. The typical analysis of the WOD policy is considering the U.S. as the main player while the other (important) subjects are relegated to a background figure. In this research, it was intended to certainly acknowledge the importance of the U.S. in the region, but the main focus of the analysis was designated to be on the actors that are directly involved within the WOD: the Mexican state, organised crime and the Mexican populace. One of the major intentions was to provide an explanation about how the WOD impacted the entirety of the society and to what extent all the subjects are connected between them. The research aimed to avoid depicting the population as victims that suffer in silence and instead attempted to present the different survival methods that the Mexican populace decided to follow. At the same time, the research intended to demystify the general idea that Mexico is governed by the organised crime. Until proven otherwise, Mexico is a democracy and the head of the state is legally elected. Certainly, due to its administrative system the central government is sometimes too central, which means that corrupt officers and the organised crime can act without punishment in remote and inaccessible areas of the country. As was argued throughout the research, Mexico has ungoverned spaces where criminal groups are in control, but the country as a whole cannot be considered a failed state. It cannot be ignored the fact that the Mexican establishment and criminal groups cohabited for decades and pretending to dismantle a strong and corrupt network within a few years is certainly appealing, but not feasible.

The research found that the WOD policy in Mexico had a constructivist meaning rather than being a real necessity. A weak presidency needed popular support which was obtained by

securitising a problem through the political and war rhetoric. As it was observed through the analysis drug trafficking was not considered a major problem by the majority of the Mexican population, contrary to more relevant issues such as corruption or poverty. Securitising the drug issues led to a hyper-militarisation of the counter-narcotic efforts and despite the latest attempts of taking the distances from the “war” rhetoric the country is still experiencing an on-going violent conflict.

The main question of this research was if the WOD has empowered drug cartels, rather than weakening them. The counter-narcotic and operations led to a diversification both regarding drugs and illicit activities in general. Categories that once were relatively protected, as the migrants, are considered a new source of income for the organised crime as they pose fewer risks when compared with the drug trade. The WOD focused its operations on reducing drug production and eliminating corruption rather than blocking the economic capabilities of the organised crime which continues being a wealthy enterprise. The kingpin strategy lacked an institutional support. Despite arresting 63% of the drug-leaders none of them were officially prosecuted in Mexico and are indeed waiting to be extradited to the U.S. for a trial. Moreover, the elimination of the leaders led to both a territorial and structural fragmentation of cartels which led to an augmentation in violence. The level of violence directly affected the population. The population was forced to internally migrate and those that were not able to move decided to either accept a situation of security-corruption where criminal groups request a fee for protection or to form armed self-defence groups. Considering the three situations that the population had to choose from it is clear that the level of security did not improve since the beginning of the WOD. It cannot be argued that the WOD invented violence, but it certainly raised the level and entity. Moreover it is presumed that 200,000 people died due to WOD-related violence (Lakhani, 2016). Williams argues that the increment in violence is due to “factional splits and the inability of leaders to maintain control” (2009:334). Through the research it becomes clear that organised crime can adapt to any hostile environment, but in order to do so some elements should be available: economic resources, violent means, corruptible legal actors, demand for illegal goods and ungoverned spaces. It is clear that organised crime does not necessarily need violence, but it can be used as a convincing instrument.

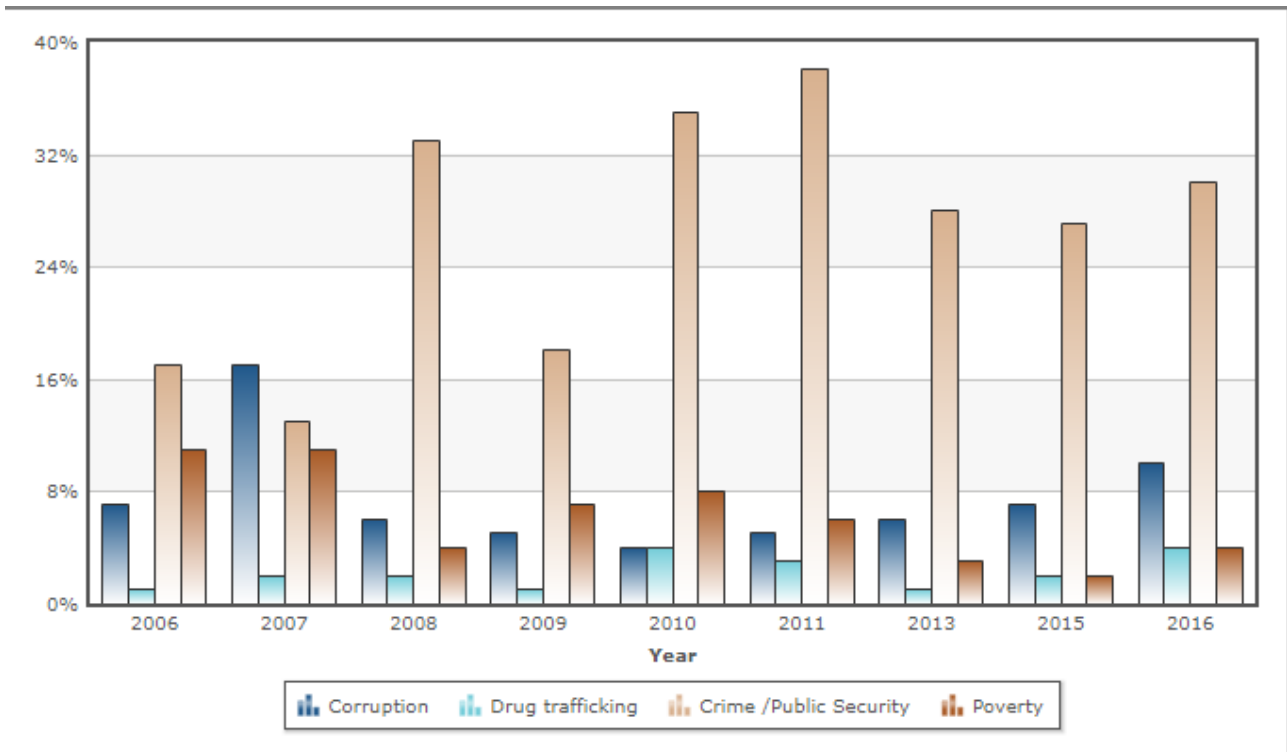
It is clear that the initial promises were politically constructed and strategically poorly understood and in the long term the situation violently escalated and there is little evidence that might suggest a weakening of the Mexican organised crime (Sanchez, 2013:473). To sum up, the level of violence is still high in Mexico, the country is experiencing a wave of internal displaced

migrants related to organised crime violence, the Mexican economy is invaded by narcos' illicit revenues, the level of corruption (despite an improvement in the overall perception) is still elevated and the organised crime, not only fragmented itself in smaller units (but as dangerous and cruel as the traditional narco-groups), but also diversified their illicit business in ways which directly threaten civilians (such as kidnappings) and finally, the drug production continues to be elevated. It is certainly difficult to offer a definitive answer for the research question, but it can be argued, when considering the findings, that organised crime was not weakened by the WOD approach. It seems rather that the criminal groups are more powerful than a decade ago as they have diversified their illicit revenues and territorial presence. However, probably the most worrisome aspect is the formation of the narco-culture where young people aim to become members of a cartel. This emphasizes the social impact cartels had over the population during the past decade. It is certainly rather soon to have a precise outcome for the WOD policy, but if agreeing with Medel and Thoumi "one should expect further adaptations and survival of the illegal industry" (2014:19). The abovementioned affirmation is not driven by a pessimistic view, but rather is a realistic explanation for a phenomenon that Latin America has experienced several times over the course of the past decades.

The WOD strategy will never be the right answer considering the high demand of drugs and the high revenues from the illicit market. The WOD policy did not solve the organised crime problem and it is more arguable that the militarised approach "simply distracted from the necessary institutional change" (Sanchez, 2013:509). The future of the Mexican struggle against the organised crime is unclear and unknown. Certainly, the worst case scenario for a future Mexico and the Latin American region is having a weak and corrupt state which will prepare the path for a narco-state. The highly improbable scenario is not considered irrational by many political analysts. The hyper-militarisation of organised crime and the insurgency of armed self-defence groups might pose a risk towards Mexican institutions which could find themselves in a weak position in the years to come. In fact, alongside the traditional calls for legitimation and decriminalisation of narcotics, some isolated voices ask for another *pax mafiosa* in order to reduce the level of violence (Beittel, 2017:28). The analysis overall invited the reader to critically consider security menaces outside the traditional realist perspective and in an under-studied continent, Latin America. Finally, the research had the goal of analysing, from a security point of view, a region that generally is considered peaceful. It is certainly true that, globally, other realities are posing a major threat to the international security, but at the same time it cannot be disregarded that the Mexican cartels are a menace for both the state and human security.

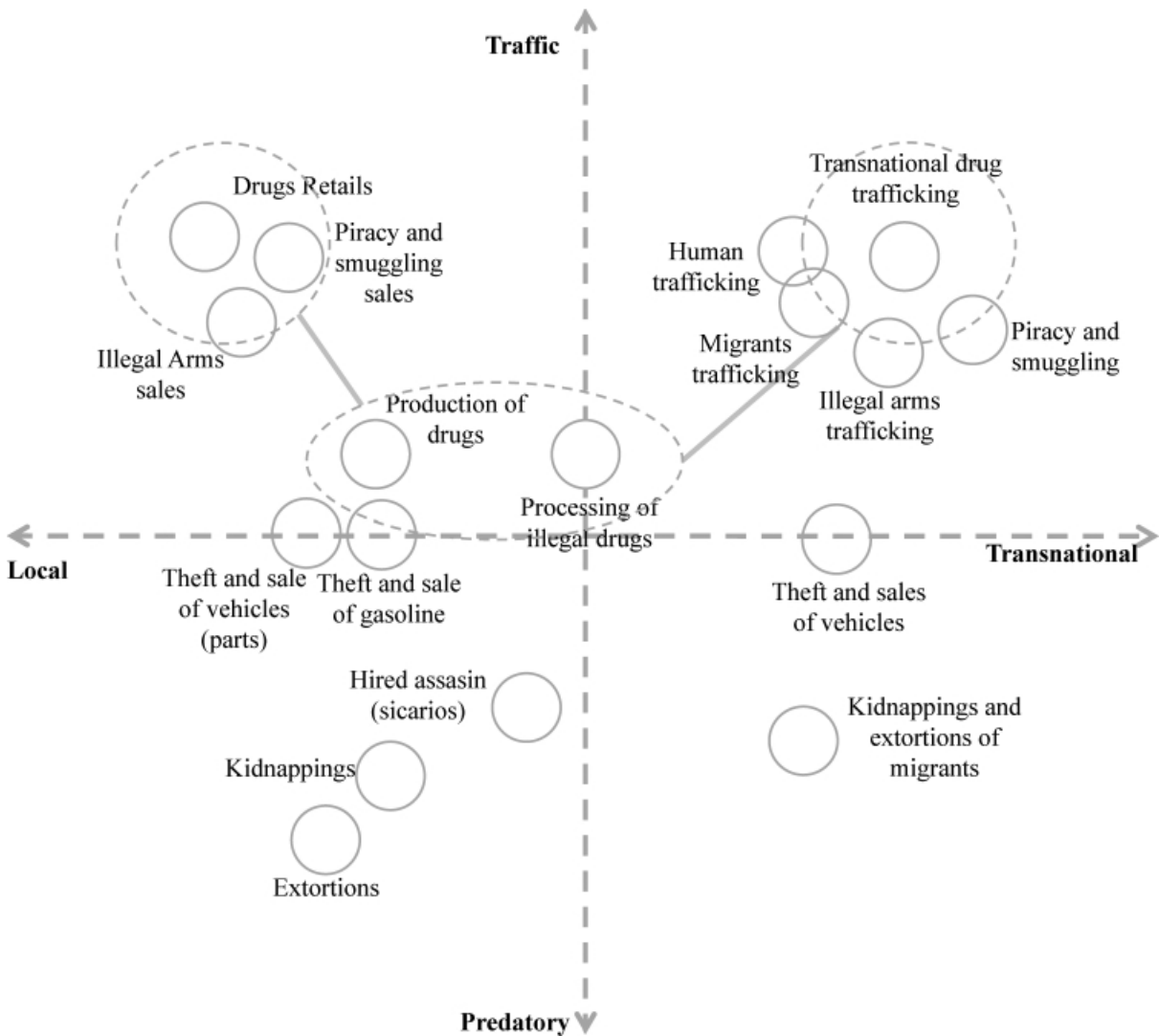
Appendix

Appendix A: The most important issue in the country.



Source: Latinobarometro, 2016. Graphic made by the author.

Appendix B: Diversification of organised crime's illicit activities in Mexico.



Source: Garzón Vergara, 2015:124

Appendix C: Internal Displaced People in Mexico.



Source: Global Initiative, 2014

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