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Final Project
The Impact of Drug Cartels on
Border Security and Migration

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Mexican drug cartels have had a complicated history with the United states that has profound impacts on border security and migration. It is through the combination of several disciplines like history, political science, anthropology and more that we may begin to piece together realistic solutions to the problems caused by these organizations. Throughout this paper we will delve into the perspectives of the three disciplines mentioned and present our informed opinion on the subject.

Historian Perspective: Devon Nolan

To start off I will discuss the historian's objective as well as how they address world issues. The first thing historians do is collect primary sources. It is crucial that these sources are reliable and so they must be primary meaning directly from a person who witnessed events first hand. These sources can include personal diary entries, government documents, newspaper articles in some cases, and more. Without reliable sources historians risk diluting their arguments with false information. Next, historians use these sources to identify patterns. These patterns can reveal a lot about how the world works as patterns tend to repeat even if the events of these patterns took place long ago. In many cases these patterns are used to solve current world issues and throughout this section of our paper I will go into detail about how we can use the patterns I have found in regards to Mexican cartel activity to inform our decision making in the future. After this data is compiled, Historians present it through teaching and or writing and present insightful conclusions into the past to help present day problems.

Next I will go into detail about the history of Mexican cartels. While the large-scale cartel activity we know of can be traced to the 1960's and 1970's, I believe that by

looking further back in time, we identify more valuable patterns that are more relevant than you might think. In my eyes Mexican drug cartels spawned out of response to United States drug policy over 100 years ago. The first glimpse of this activity can be found as a response to the Harrison's Narcotics Act of 1914, in which the United States restricted opium import (Grillo, Pg.254). Before this act "There was no regulation on the use of cocaine and opioids, resulting in widespread marketing and prescribing for many ailments". (Jones, et al) because of this, opioid use was widespread in the United States and this act, while implementing crucial regulation to a dangerous and addictive substance, only increased demand. As a result this presented an opportunity for Mexican farmers near the border to meet the demand through illegal import and it became very lucrative.

The next time period that had a significant impact on the illegal drug trade was the prohibition era of the 1920's and 1930's. During this time period the United states largely banned the consumption of alcohol and this presented a similar opportunity to the Harrisons Narcotics Act. While prohibition in America took place over a relatively short period of time, it had lasting impacts on the illegal drug trade of Mexico. Many smugglers took advantage of this time period with the very high demand for alcohol in the United States and after prohibition ended, many switched over to exporting opium and heroin (Grillo, Pg. 254).

Next we move on to the late 1930's to the early 1940's where the entire world was in the midst of the largest conflict the human race had ever seen, World War II. This conflict yet again presented an opportunity for cartels. During this time period Sinaloan opium production rose steadily. "Many allege that the United States

government directly aided this growth by purchasing opium to make morphine for its troops who were bleeding from German and Japanese shells" (Grillo, Pg. 255). This was because the standard supply of opium to the United States primarily came from Turkey, and German naval vessels disrupted this supply. As a result the United States shifted their imports from Turkey to Mexico. While this may have been a necessity during the war, and I have no criticisms of the United States actions regarding this, it still impacted the Illegal drug trade regardless.

The next major development in cartel activity came into play during the 1960's and 1970's. During this time a cultural revolution was taking place with the advent of the hippie generation. Young men and women around the county showed a dramatic increase in drug use and more specifically marijuana. As a result, Sinaloan smugglers could not meet the demand and so many farmers spread further South along the Sierra Madre. This increase in land use allowed cartels to increase their export with higher yield and this created the infrastructure for more growth in the future. In my opinion this is the most important development in cartel activity and it resulted in Mexican cartels shifting from narrow paths of export to national organizations. In the past the largest smuggling groups were based out of Columbia where "unlike Mexico, traffickers and policy makers maintained fairly independent spheres" (Smith, Pg.126), meaning that their reach didn't stretch past their immediate area. Without the hippie generation, the demand for drugs would not be high enough for this major shift to take place. Shifts of power to cities like "Guadalajara would eventually become the epicenters of Mexican drug-related violence"(Medal et al,Pg.196).

Next we move on to American anti drug operations for which there were many. The first one I would like to cover was put into place by Richard Nixon in 1969 and was titled Operation Intercept. This operation was in response to a major increase of illegal drug imports into the United States and it required border agents to thoroughly check every vehicle and pedestrian entering the country. "The operation yielded relatively little in terms of seizures of contraband" (Hudak, Pg.48) and only really prevented legally entering people from getting to their American jobs. Operation Intercept was canceled after 17 days after a large number of complaints (Grillo, Pg.256).

The final anti drug operation I would like to cover was titled Operation Condor Which took place from 1976 to 1978. In this operation the American government provided Mexico with "39 bell helicopters, 22 small aircraft, and an executive jet-forming one of the largest police fleets in Latin America"(Grillo, Pg.256). This operation was also a failure and resulted in several human rights violations on the part of the Mexican government. With these aircrafts, police stormed Sinaloan villages and either arrested or shot dead many alleged traffickers. The other impact of this operation was the aforementioned relocation from rural areas to more urban cities like Gudaljara. This had major impacts on cartel activity as these urban settings gave them access to the more profitable market of cocaine.

To finish off the historian section of this paper I would like to cover a concept dubbed the balloon effect. This effect states that "when you pressure one part of the balloon, the air simply moves to another part" (Grillo, Pg.257). The balloon effect can be observed with all of the examples provided. Regardless of the intent, many of the

policies we implement have had disastrous impacts on illegal drug activity and it is the historian's job to point out these effects in order to make a better future.

Anthropologist Perspective: Armando

The anthropologist view on the topic I started off with had mostly to do with the first hand witnesses and news reports in the area majority of it coming from northern Mexico where we looked into the resourcefulness of the cartels and also the resourcefulness of the border patrol in order to come to a conclusion through anthropological means about why the people in the area were in this issue and possible ways to solve it through ethical means. We also came to various conclusions based on reports from anthropologists about their one-on-one interviews and ethnographies conducted even on some of the members of the crime syndicates. When discussing with my group members and the specialty they chose for this project, I connected the dots on how the history of the country and the rise of organized crime in Mexico due to the drug demand in the 60 and 70s came to be because of the actions of the people so both things already went hand in hand when doing this.

When the people were interviewed, many of them had very conflicted opinions about the cartel due to the fact that they do provide resources that maybe the Mexican government has been negligent on or unable to provide, this causes support to be more complicated not only due to the fact that plenty of the organized crime groups have corrupted the very same federal government but also because it has become a culture that people cherish and carry with them as symbols of strength and sometimes even

mixes in with patriotism. Majority of the people in these areas also lack a proper system of education which was another problem that we realize due to the ethnographies conducted on the progressive students who look into the problems of their very own society just like the rest of the world and provide proper feedback to conduct more on the resourcefulness now having the population not only by their side but also due to the fear that is instilled where nobody wants to speak up or attempt anything against these groups as they hold so much power and even on occasion out man and outgun their very own government, yet allow it to run without fully overthrowing it as their work is specialized and specific to an underground market where there is little interest in politics and this shifts the people to think the same, that what helps them isn't what is decided federally but what is happening around them regionally which shows corruption in state governments and little effort to keep these agendas completely hidden from the public instead operating like terrorist groups in the middle east with their own set of complicated ideas to which they pursue this path of making their views imposed on everyone else through violent means.

Political Science Perspective: Sebastian Diaz-Tafel

When analyzing the effects drug cartels and their violent nature have had on border security and immigration it is important to view the issue through the lens of political science. Political science is important in understanding this issue by giving key insights into how governance, sovereignty, corruption, and policy effectiveness affect it. This section will not only define these terms and their impacts but will focus on specific case studies and examples, showing how political science applies to migration and cartel violence. Political science is important in understanding this issue as it helps to understand government responses, international relationships, impacts of policies, as well as the balance between national security and human rights.

To begin, it is important to understand the relationship between sovereignty and border security. Sovereignty involves a state's abilities to govern itself and manage its borders and security, this idea has been important in the United States border policies especially during the Trump administration. During his campaign and while he was in office Trump promised to build a physical wall between the United States and Mexico. He emphasized how this project would be the solution to illegal immigration and drug trafficking across the border. Instead, Keck and Clau-Losada (2021) describe the wall as a "powerful symbol of authoritarian neoliberalism," showing how the wall was more of a political tool than an actual solution. The construction of this border wall also placed a huge strain on diplomatic relations between the United States and Mexico as well as environmental concerns and negatively impacting communities around the border. Keck & Clua-Losada (2021) explain, "The border wall, as an unfinished project, expands,

deepens, and reinforces notions of political and economic disciplining of border populations". While it was supposed to limit illegal immigration and drug trafficking its effects were limited as it did not address the root causes of migration like poverty and violence. Instead, Keck and Clau Losado (2021) argue "the wall's primary function was political, designed to bolster Trump's populist image among his supporters".

Next, it is important to understand the relationship between corruption and governance. Corruption weakens governments and allows organized crime like cartels to grow in power. One example of this is the connection between the Sinaloa cartel and different Mexican political figures. Beith (2011) described how the cartel's influence was able to undermine political institutions and create a "mutually beneficial relationship" which protected the cartel from the law. This corruption damaged efforts to push back on organized crime and made citizens less trusting of their government's efforts. One example of this is how allegations of the Mexican government protecting the Sinaloa cartel during Felipe Calderon's presidency damaged the credibility of Mexico's war on drugs. Beith (2021) explains that "such collusion perpetuates cycles of violence, as cartels leverage political connections to expand their operations without fear of reprisal" This shows the importance of government intervention and how corruption within governments can contribute to the growth of organized crime.

Another important idea to consider when analyzing this issue is the relationship between public trust and the effectiveness of policies. The trust that citizens have in their government is crucial for policies to be effective, especially those dealing with organized crime. Romero et al. (2015) argued that "citizens' perceptions of government effectiveness directly influence public support for anti-crime initiatives". The Mexican

publics lack of trust in their government due to corruption and increasing violence has made them less cooperative in supporting anti cartel efforts. Many people in Mexico see the Mexican governments war on drugs as ineffective and self serving as well. Romero et al. discovered that many people affected by organized crime were even less trusting of the governments claims saying "The government isn't fighting for us—they're fighting for themselves" (Romero et al., 2015). This lack of trust creates a cycle where ineffective policies create even less trust, which leads to even less effective policies.

Lastly, it is important to analyze some policies and their effectiveness to understand how to address this issue moving forward. The first policy that is important to analyze is the Merida Initiative. This initiative was launched in 2008 as a bilateral effort between the United States and Mexico to fight against cartels. It worked to provide Mexican law enforcement with better funding and training to fight against these drug organizations. While it has been effective its impact has been limited due to corruption. Beith (2011) criticizes this policy for not addressing some of the root causes that allow cartels to grow pointing out that "without tackling corruption, any external funding is likely to be misused or ineffective".

Another important policy to understand is the Remain in Mexico program during the Trump administration. This program focused more on keeping immigrants out of the United States while they were seeking asylum, placing them in dangerous positions. Policies like this and the border wall created this idea of "By framing migration as a threat, these policies reinforced a narrative of exclusion rather than cooperation" (Keck & Clua-Losada, 2021). These policies showed how important it is to find an approach to solving this issue that not only prioritizes security but human rights as well.

It is also important to consider how the history of immigration policies has effected current border security concerns. Throughout history Mexican immigrants have been considered to be less desirable than other groups creating more strain on international relationships between the United States and Mexico. With Ramirez (2018) explaining "The making of Mexican illegality is not natural; it is the result of historical legal precedents and policies that have insisted on Mexican exclusion" This idea is still present in current political conversations showing the need to address these historical issues to help create policies that are fair.

Ultimately, the political science perspective shows the importance of battling corruption, the importance of international cooperation, and balancing security and human rights. Understanding how sovereignty, corruption, governance, and human rights with specific case studies, helps to understand the importance of creating policies that address root causes rather than simply serving as political tools.

In conclusion, it is the combination of these disciplines that ushers in the changes that make our world a better place. From the historian's perspective, it is clear that we need to implement drug policy much more cautiously than we have been as we have directly aided the formation of these Mexican drug organizations. From the political science perspective, it is clear that to address this issue policies must work to target the root causes of migration and the importance of finding policies that balance both security and human rights. In conclusion as of the anthropologist perspective we must address the concerns of the people and the consequences they face and the trials they overcome every single day through hearing their personal stories and looking into their

culture and their backgrounds if not then the problem cannot be solved and over time

could have a bad effect on the people and even worsen and grow.

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