

Cartel-Related Violence in Mexico as Narco-Terrorism or Criminal Insurgency: A Literature Review

by David Teiner

Abstract

The inability of the Mexican state to effectively fight against organized crime and to counter the territorial control of entire regions by criminal cartels has led many studies on organized crime in Mexico to new approaches, with many describing the acts of publicly displayed violence by Mexican cartels as Narco-Terrorism. Concerning the enhanced military capacity of many cartels and their territorial control, some scholars have also claimed that Mexico is experiencing a Criminal Insurgency, while others have criticized this classification for its impreciseness and for the consequences that come with it. Much of this debate continues to focus on the extent to which Mexican cartels are profit-driven and nonpolitical, or whether they have become politicized over time. Some studies avoid this controversy by seeing (Narco-)Terrorism as a tactic used by cartels to intimidate politicians and civil society, to demonstrate strength, and to claim territorial control.

Keywords: Mexico, Narco-Terrorism, Criminal Insurgency, Organized Crime, War on Drugs, Cartels, CDS, CJNG

Introduction

After abolishing the one-party state of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) and pushing forward the process of democratization in 2000, Mexico experienced an unforeseeable rise of organized crime that resulted in unseen levels of horrific violence against civil society and the state and between the criminal cartels fighting for dominance to control drug trafficking routes.[1] Several historical developments and geographical prerequisites also led to the surge in criminality that Mexico is experiencing at present. Firstly, Mexico's geographical location predestines the country as a drug-trafficking route, since nearly every legal or illegal transfer of goods from South America to the United States (USA) goes through Mexico.[2] During the Nixon-initiated *War on Drugs*, the United States managed to block the Caribbean smuggling routes that were frequently used by Colombian drug trafficking organizations (DTO) in the 1980s, which led to the relocation of their trafficking routes through Mexico and then resulted in the tremendous growth of Mexican DTOs.[3] Secondly, also geographically determined, Mexico is split by two massive mountain ranges that reach from the country's north to its south and make it difficult to implement policies and enforce the rule of law in many rural areas.[4] This has contributed to inefficient public services, widespread poverty, drug abuse, and social and political exclusion in these areas.[5] As people in these regions felt abandoned and saw impunity for crimes due to non-existing or corrupt law enforcement agencies, it is not surprising that such regions as Michoacán are some of the areas that are most affected by criminal cartels today.[6]

Cartels already existed before Mexico transitioned to a multi-party system. The PRI-government, military, and law enforcement were undoubtedly pervaded by corruption, which led to illicit arrangements between state officials and mainly the Sinaloa cartel, but also to a relatively peaceful coexistence between organized crime syndicates and the government.[7] These arrangements were dissolved as the PRI was removed from government in 2000.[8] Since then, criminal cartels have competed for domination of smuggling routes through Mexico, but also diversified their criminal activities to arms trading, human trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion.[9] As organized crime got out of control and increased steadily, the then newly elected President Felipe Calderón declared in 2006 that his government would fight the cartels with military force.[10] During his eight-year presidency, the cartels resisted this military approach with success. The battle led to circa 83,000 casualties between 2006 and 2012.[11] As the violence increased even further after Calderón's military approach, most

studies on the topic, as well as most Mexican journalists, concluded that these offensives led to more violence as the cartels extended their military capacities during this period and committed even more acts of exaggerated brutality in public spaces.[12] As the cartels are still thriving, the death toll does as well, and 2019 sets a depressing record for the highest homicide rates in Mexico in the 21st century.[13] Some of the biggest cartels in existence at present are the *Sinaloa Cartel*, the *Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación* (CJNG), the *Cártel de Santa Rosa Lima* (CSRL), the *Juarez Cartel*, the *Gulf Cartel*, the *Los Zetas*, the *Los Caballeros Templarios Cartel* and the *Beltran-Leyva Organization*. [14]

Cartel-Related Violence as Narco-Terrorism

Since cartel-related violence in Mexico skyrocketed in the 2000s and 2010s, and the number of casualties rose tremendously, most cartels have become increasingly brutal, and many journalists, politicians, and researchers have described the cartels' use of publicly performed excessive violence as terrorism. This has given rise to an ongoing debate about the applicability of the concept of terrorism to Mexican cartels. One of the most recent examples of how this controversy has had an impact on politics was an announcement made by US president Donald Trump, describing Mexican cartels as terrorist groups.[15] Escalante Gonzalbo discussed in detail in his article "Narco-terrorismo: la fábrica de la opinión pública"[16] the strategies behind the use of the term narco-terrorism by politicians, and how the term has helped the USA in particular in recent decades to create an abstract image of an enemy that facilitates military interventions.

The General Debate on Narco-Terrorism

The original term *Narco-Terrorism* was coined in 1983 by former Peruvian president Belaunde Terry, who used it to refer to orchestrated attacks by organized crime groups (OCG) on anti-narcotics law enforcement agents in his country.[17] Since then, the term has been used to describe FARC-EP's terrorist attacks in Colombia and has become part of broader academic debates in which the term has also included other terrorist organizations and even governments participating in drug trafficking to reach political goals.[18] Combs & Slann defined Narco-Terrorism in their encyclopedia of terrorism as an "alliance between drug producers and an insurgent group carrying out terrorist attacks".[19] Another definition focusing on DTOs and their violent behavior describes Narco-Terrorism as the "use of terror tactics by the narco-traffickers and drug lords to protect their illegal business".[20] Other definitions have highlighted the involvement of terrorist organizations and insurgent groups in drug trafficking for financial survival and the funding of terrorist attacks.[21] Some authors have chosen comparative approaches to point out similarities between DTOs and terrorist organizations. Lee controversially concluded that both types of organizations only differ in their motives, which are political for terrorist organizations and profit-orientated for DTOs.[22] The dual use of the term Narco-Terrorism to describe both the drug traffickers' use of terrorist tactics on the one hand and the involvement of terrorist or insurgent groups in drug trafficking to fund their attacks on the other hand has caused a high level of confusion that was concisely summarized by Schmid: "The vague narco-terrorism formula with its implicit call to fuse the 'war on drugs' and the 'war on terror' might offer a misleading intellectual roadmap to address the problem of terrorism".[23] Miller and Damask further criticized Narco-Terrorism as a "political myth based on a stereotypic view of the Andean drug trade, peasant insurgency and the relationships between them".[24] Criticizing the consequences of attributing Narco-Terrorism on DTOs or terrorist groups, Gomis argued that "this simplistic label often overestimates the importance of the drug trade in funding terrorism, and the use of terrorist tactics by drug traffickers".[25] In summary, the general debate on Narco-Terrorism has produced two different types of the phenomenon: criminal organizations using terrorist tactics to secure or expand their illicit business and insurgent organizations, terrorist groups, or governments involved in drug trafficking to achieve their political goals. Both types of Narco-Terrorism can be applied to many organizations that are not limited to specific countries or regions.

To provide an overview of possible connections between organized crime and terrorism and to take a broader

perspective on the topic, Makarenko[26] presented a plausible illustration of the *Crime-Terror Continuum*. She identified seven forms that a criminal or terrorist organization can take between the ends of organized crime and terrorism. Most of the forms in this continuum can be connected to the debate on Narco-Terrorism. The definitions of Narco-Terrorism presented above show that the general debate has covered most of the continuum. The involvement of terrorist groups in “criminal activities for operational purposes”[27] has been examined, but the “use of terror tactics for operational purposes”[28] by OCGs. Phillips[29] also pointed out the general differences between criminal organizations and (violent) political organizations. To analyze motivations and external influences on both types of organizations, he distinguished between *incentives* and *market*. [30] While political organizations offer their members *purposive incentives*, criminal organizations offer *material incentives*. [31] The *market* that influences both types of organizations is the *illicit goods market* for criminal organizations while for political organizations that *market* consists of *ideas and public opinion*. [32] Both discussions about *incentives* and *markets* for both types of organizations can often be found in the debates on Narco-Terrorism, which are outlined hereafter.

Narco-Terrorism in Mexico

Despite the wide-ranging criticism and lack of clarity concerning how Narco-Terrorism should be defined and used in academia, many studies have employed the term to describe the violent behavior of criminal cartels in Mexico and their public displays of excessive brutality. As the Mexican cartels gained strength, some researchers were unsatisfied by just classifying them as purely criminal organizations, as these concepts did not seem to suit these groups anymore while the usual countermeasures had also been proven ineffective.

One of the earliest studies that put Mexican cartels in the context of the debate about Narco-Terrorism was conducted by Knowles. He argued that Mexican cartels serve as the prime example of contemporary Narco-Terrorism, a term he defined as the “organized employment of violence against the local populace, the security forces and government to intimidate anyone contemplating resistance to drug trafficking”. [33] During the same year, Longmire and Longmire suggested a classification of cartels as terrorist organizations on the ground that “tactics, strategy, organization, and even (to a limited extent) the goals of the Mexican drug cartels are perfectly consistent with those of recognized terrorist organizations”. [34] This view was shared by other studies that argued that the developments in Mexico had led to a struggle for territorial control between cartels and the state and between individual cartels, “resulting in an unprecedented escalation of drug-related violence that qualifies as narcoterrorism”. [35] While Haupt arrived at similar conclusions about the classification of Mexican cartels he emphasizes one key similarity between cartels and terrorist organizations: both “oppose nation-state sovereignty” [36]. He also identified one important difference, namely that “profit is the driving force behind a DTO, whereas terrorist organizations have political or ideological motivations”. [37]

Political Motivation and Violent Communication

The key difference regarding the motivations of DTOs and terrorist organizations pervades nearly every in-depth comparison. While some argue that it precludes classifying the cartels’ excessive use of violence as part of public displays as (Narco-)Terrorism, others point out that there are forms of terrorism that are neither politically nor ideologically driven and that some cartels have become to a certain extent politicized. Most of the later discussion concerning whether the cartels’ violence qualifies as (Narco-) Terrorism or not revolves around this academic debate.

Academics such as Williams[38], Shirk and Wallman[39], and Beittel[40] focused on the lack of ideology or political goals of cartels, which they saw as a criterion that excluded cartel-violence from being classified as (Narco-)Terrorism. The line of argumentation that terrorism is not necessarily based on political or ideological motives was summarized by Meschoulam[41], who draws on the extensive review on definitions of terrorism by Schmid and Jongman[42]. He argues that prior studies have shown that “motivation is mentioned in ap-

proximately 65% of definitions”[43] of terrorism and that many researchers have broadened their definitions of terrorism and added economic incentives to the types of motivations thereof. Meschoulam notes that the “line between economics and politics becomes blurred”[44] in the Mexican context and classifies cartel-related violence as “quasi-terrorist acts”.[45]

Some researchers have acknowledged an existing lack of clear political or ideological goals held by the cartels but have also argued that their public display of violence is like that of terrorist organizations. Phillips and Ríos[46] published a study focusing on these so-called *Narco-Messages*, as part of which they also outlined a new theoretical framework to explain the professionalized violent communication of Mexican cartels. In this context, Garcia-Cervantes[47] presented an approach of using participatory visual methods to analyze forms of cartel-related violent communications carried out by Mexican cartels. Although she advocated the collection of data on violence as part of her approach, Garcia-Cervantes recognized that this approach could endanger participants.[48] Campbell argues that what he considers to be *Narco-Propaganda*, is the “quasi-ideological expression of criminal organizations”[49] and that Mexican cartels “should therefore be treated analytically as political entities and their narco-propaganda as powerful new form of political discourse”.[50] This also makes it possible to classify their publicly communicated violence as terrorism. As a form of signature or to disseminate a message, most Mexican cartels leave different symbols next to their victims or prepare them in a specific way to communicate publicly through these.[51] These messages serve to intimidate rival cartels, politicians, law enforcement agencies, and Mexican civilians as well as to indicate territorial control over a certain area.[52] Regarding the rapidly increasing brutality of narco-messages through violence, the media plays an important role, as it gives “more airtime to stories about exceptional brutality”.[53] Since such messages can in most cases be assigned to a specific cartel, many studies discussed the symbolic character of the cartels’ violence.[54] Etter and Lehmutz also referred to the public and symbolic character of Mexican cartel-related violence to argue that it is justified to classify it as a form of terrorism.[55]

An argument against the classification of cartel-related violence as terrorism was presented by Kan, who uses the common counterargument of the cartels lacking a necessary ideology while also arguing that “less than ten percent of the deaths in Mexico have been agents of the state”[56] and that the “majority of violence is generated between and within cartels”.[57] Kan concludes that the number of state-related victims would be significantly higher if an insurgency by cartels against the Mexican state were to take place.[58] Like Kan, Lessing chose an empirical approach, whereby he created categories to classify the violence of DTOs in Colombia (1986–93), Brazil (2007–11), and Mexico (2008–11).[59] His findings showed that statistically “terror tactics [...] were indeed far more prominent in Colombia than Mexico or Brazil”.[60]

Terrorism as a Tactic

One line of research focuses solely upon the violent behavior of Mexican cartels without directly classifying them as terrorist organizations, nor labeling their members as terrorists in a traditional sense. The focus of these studies is on the use of tactics and whether they fulfill the criteria to be classified as being of a terrorist nature. Curran[61] uses a definition of terrorism which includes nonpolitical terrorism and argues that “the fact cartels systematically employ violence for the express purpose of intimidating or coercing particular segments of the Mexican population provides strong evidence that these organizations are, in fact, engaging in terrorism”.[62] Mullins and Wither point in a similar direction as they claim that “organized crime groups also utilize tactics of terrorism when it suits their purposes”.[63] According to Shaw and Mahadevan[64], the use of excessive violence and symbolic killings can also be a strategy used by the cartels to gain control over towns and villages in Mexico. To achieve their goal of gaining and holding territorial control, Mexican cartels have “developed an extensive in-house terrorism capacity”.[65] Furthermore, Duran-Martinez has shown that cartel-related “violence becomes visible and frequent when trafficking organizations compete and the state security apparatus is fragmented”.[66]

Phillips[67] claims that there have been prior cases where criminal organizations have adopted terrorist tactics, meaning that the phenomenon is not entirely new, but that “the violence in Mexico is relatively unique

for its scale”.[68] In his study, Phillips describes “bombings, violent communication, and attacks against politicians”[69] as terrorist tactics that have not only been adopted by Mexican cartels, but also by criminal organizations in Brazil, Colombia, Italy, and Russia. Martin conducted similar research in his comparative analysis on criminal dissident terrorism, which included Abu Sayyaf, the Tamil Tigers, as well as Italian organized crime, the Russian mafia, and many others, whereby just Mexican and Colombian DTOs’ uses of violence were classified as Narco-Terrorism.[70] Campbell and Hansen described three dimensions of Narco-Terrorism. They identify its use in a “struggle for regional political control”[71], as a “practice ordered by cartel leaders”[72] to avoid “spontaneous violence by foot soldiers”[73] and as an “expansion strategy from solely drug trafficking to other kinds of organized crime”.[74] Salt further states that “cartels can be said to have a dual nature”[75], as “sometimes they act like terrorists in terms of their operational and tactical level behavior, and the rest of the time they act as businessmen”.[76] He concludes that the “lines between terrorism and crime become blurred in practice”.[77]

The Concept of a Criminal Insurgency

Throughout the debate concerning how to categorize Mexican cartels regarding their territorial control, their professional armament, and their evolving public use of violence in large quantities, the term *Criminal Insurgency* has become increasingly popular in the academic field. While other slightly different conceptions of this phenomenon, such as *Commercial Insurgency*[78] and *Narco-Insurgency*[79] have also been acknowledged, Criminal Insurgency remained the most referred to, and vividly discussed, conceptual framework in debates on Mexican cartels. Most of the works that have endorsed this term and sharpened the concept behind it have been published by Bunker and Sullivan. Academics like Correa-Cabrera[80] and investigative journalists like Hernández[81], Osoro[82], or Grillo[83] provided extensive and deep insights into Mexican cartels’ strategies and dynamics of violence and thereby helped to further improve the concept. This debate, too, did not take place exclusively between academics. In 2010, the then-US Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, described the situation in Mexico with regard to organized crime as “what we would consider an insurgency”.[84] Felipe Calderón, with his military approach against the cartels, thought similarly to Clinton. However, his successor, Enrique Peña Nieto, (EPN) deviated from this strategy. EPN also opposed negotiating with cartel leaders but wanted to strengthen the police forces to counter the cartels through law enforcement.[85] The approaches of both presidents have been extensively reviewed in Fazio’s “Estado de emergencia: De la guerra de Calderón a la guerra de Peña Nieto”.[86] Both approaches to Nieto’s successor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) deviated even further from the military approach.[87] He promised social change that would curb organized crime in Mexico. AMLO’s approach refuses to treat the situation in Mexico as an insurgency or view cartels as terrorist organizations. However, it has also become the subject of considerable criticism.[88] Although most of the scientific publications on criminal insurgency are focused on Mexico, the concept has also been applied in other cases, such as the Brazilian *Comando Vermelho*[89] or conflicts in the Niger Delta, which were referred to as *Petro-Insurgency*.[90]

Outline and Context of the Concept

The initial publication that proposed the term *Criminal Insurgency* as a conceptual framework was put together by Sullivan and Elkus.[91] They built their argument upon Metz’s[92] work, who argued that 21st-century insurgent movements do not necessarily need political reasons to exist nor make ideological demands, but will try to weaken the state they operate in and “provide utilitarian social goods, form narratives of power and rebellion and act as ‘post-modern social bandits’ to gain support and legitimacy within their own organizations and the geographic areas they control”.[93]

As Bunker[94] puts it, the controversy surrounding the existence or nonexistence Criminal Insurgencies in both the Mexican and/or other contexts can be split into modernist and postmodernist academic factions. From a modernist perspective, OCGs cannot be motivated by political or ideological goals. They compete with

other OCGs for dominance in illicit markets and do not target nation-states.[95] As these groups should not be considered as insurgent movements or terrorist organizations, they are best combatted by law enforcement, rather than by military means.[96] From a postmodernist point of view, OCGs can directly target the state, challenge it effectively and create “areas of impunity”[97] to freely engage in illicit trade or in influencing and extorting civil society.[98] The question of whether these groups are formally politicized or not is answered by their *de facto* politicization, as they oppose state sovereignty by creating areas in which they can withdraw from legal prosecution and in this regard become similar to localized warlords.[99] Proponents of Criminal Insurgency include military responses in their sets of recommendations.[100]

Sullivan[101] also presented a framework to differentiate between levels of *criminal insurgencies*. He defines *local insurgencies* as being the *first level*, whereby a criminal group tries to create areas of impunity to maximize its profit. The *second level* is characterised by the term *battle for the parallel state*, whereby criminal groups fight for control over specific areas. The *third level* is defined by the term *combating the state*, whereby criminal groups directly target state officials to intimidate them and/or retaliate for offensives made against them. The fourth and last level of a Criminal Insurgency is reached when *the state implodes*, which means that the state is incapable of responding to the criminality and violence conducted by criminal groups.[102] The possibility of this last scenario was particularly discussed by Grayson[103] and Morton.[104]

The participating violent non-state actors in a Criminal Insurgency can in most cases be described as criminal gangs or cartels. Bunker and Sullivan[105] introduced a new typology for criminal cartels that includes three different phases a cartel can be in. A *1st Phase Cartel* is defined as an *aggressive competitor*, one which takes criminal activities to a professional level with high scales of profit that are in many cases derived from drug trafficking. The model is exemplified by Pablo Escobar’s *Medellín* cartel. A *2nd Phase Cartel* is described as being a *subtle co-opter*, one that seeks invisibility for its more advanced criminal activities; it also works in a network-based rather than in a hierarchical manner. Its structure partially stems from historical experiences, whereby the hierarchically structured *Medellín* cartel directly attacked the Colombian state and fell apart after the hunt and death of Pablo Escobar. The clustered leadership of this type of cartel makes countermeasures against it complicated. Examples for this type of cartel are the Colombian *Cali* cartel and many of the Mexican drug cartels. A *3rd Phase Cartel* is characterised as being a *Criminal State Successor*. It successfully challenges the state for territorial control and poses a threat to its sovereignty. Such a cartel has not developed yet, but Bunker[106] argues that hybrid forms of the 2nd and 3rd phases can be found in the Mexican Criminal Insurgency.

Although the term *Criminal Insurgency* is one of the most commonly used phrases in the debate about Mexican cartels and their struggle for territorial control accompanied by rapidly increasing violence, similar terms have also gained attention. The popularity of the term *Criminal Insurgency* may derive from its elaborated and broad conceptual basis, whereas studies that introduced and employed other terms focused on one or more specific factors related to Mexican politics, the cartels, or the dynamics of violence. For instance, in the case of *Narco-Insurgency*, Brands[107] and Yeh[108] focused on the topic of widespread corruption in Mexico, which continues to result in recurring failures in fighting the cartels. The expression *Commercial Insurgency* was coined by Metz, who described it as a “quasi-political distortion of materialism”[109], which is dedicated to the acquisition of wealth and often determined by geography. Palma[110] adopted this concept and declared the profit-motivated nature of Mexican cartels to be one of the most important factors while the cartels’ establishment of transnational networks and the expansion of their military capacities enables them to continue with their criminal activities, even though the Mexican state responds with counter-insurgency measures. Fitzpatrick[111] applied the concept *Commercial Insurgency* to the Los Zetas cartel and proved it to be a reliable tool for the analysis of Mexican cartels. However, he also pointed out that a counter-insurgency framework based on the concept still needs to be developed.

Those criticizing the application of the concept of Criminal Insurgency to the Mexican case argue whether the cartels and the country meet the elaborated characteristics of an insurgency.[112] Corcoran also claimed that “traditional insurgency depends on a coherent alternative to the government”[113], thus presenting another key difference, namely that cartels “spend more time alienating hearts and minds than winning them”.[114]

Shirk[115] referred to the key difference that Mexican cartels are not politically motivated and therefore should not be considered insurgent movements, nor terrorists. Shirk and Wallman concluded that a “distortion of definitions and typologies leads to imprecise analysis, inaccurate conclusions, and potentially harmful policies”.[116]

Mexican Cartels as Political Entities

As shown in the previous debate about Narco-Terrorism, political motivation plays a crucial role in the classification of Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. The same applies to designating Mexican cartels as insurgent movements and to describing Mexico’s condition as a Criminal Insurgency, due to the traditional conceptions of insurgencies and insurgent movements as ones whose central motives are political or ideological.[117] The debate on Criminal Insurgency in Mexico is therefore also dominated by discussions about the politicization of the cartels and the necessity and the general importance of political motives and ideologies for insurgent movements. Various studies conducted research on the interdependent relationship between Mexican politics and the dynamics of cartel-related violence.[118] Barnes has focused specifically on the relationship between politics and criminal violence, arguing that the study of violence of criminal organizations should be more integrated into research on political violence since the criminal organizations to which Barnes referred in his study openly compete with the state they operate in, which “heightened levels of violence in many contexts and allowed these organizations to gather significant political authority”.[119]

As also shown in the debate on *narco-terrorism*, most Mexican cartels employ terrorist tactics to evoke fear among their rivals, civil society, and Mexican politicians. In the context of the politicization of cartels, violent communication becomes particularly relevant if the disseminated messages follow an ideology. The cartel *Los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán* (Knights Templar) is arguably the most politicized cartel in Mexico. Its propaganda contains large amounts of evangelical messages and political motives.[120] The Knights Templar’s ideology has been described as *Narco-Evangelicalism*[121], which can be seen as a spiritual movement with political motivations[122]. However, its members have also been described as *pseudo-Christian cultists* who declared the former leader of the *La Familia Michoacán Cartel Nazario Moreno González* their saint.[123]

For Sullivan[124], communication via excessive violence is only one part of the propaganda efforts employed by Mexican cartels, especially the Knights Templar. In addition, roadblocks (*narcobloqueos*), public banners (*narcomantas*), graffiti (*narcopintas*), demonstrations (*manifestacions*) and communiqués (*narcomensajes*) are professionally used to show strength and claim territorial control.[125] The Knights Templar Cartel has also been discussed in the context of *social banditry*, whereby “criminals portray themselves as heroically fighting against an unjust system”.[126] The cartel continuously tries to create and manipulate narratives about it, the state and other cartels, to legitimize criminal and violent behavior and enhance political and social control.[127]

Following Grynkewich[128], who argued that several insurgent movements provide social services to enhance support and sympathy for the group and to take away legitimacy from the state the group operates in, Flanigan[129] showed – in comparison to Middle Eastern terrorist organizations – that some cartels like the Knights Templar provide social services as a strategy to gain acceptance and create loyalty in their local communities. In a subsequent study, Flanigan[130] covered the full scope of the Knights Templar’s provision of social services and their involvement in territorial governance. While most cartels provide very limited and short-term support for civil society (giveaways of toys, food or clothes), the Knights Templar engage more extensively in the provision of social services, such as offering low-interest loans and running several rehabilitation centers for drug addicts.[131]

If the lack of politicization is one of the few things that excludes cartels from being classified as insurgent movements, the involvement of the Knights Templar in administrative or governmental activities becomes increasingly significant, since the group challenges the state, not only militarily, but also in terms of legitimacy when replacing governmental functions.[132] For instance, it was proven that the cartel regulates the price of agricultural products, gives out licenses for foresting activities, grants permits for festivals and other events,

and also established a parallel justice system with its own criminal investigations, prosecution, jurisdiction and execution of judgments.[133] Chard claims that political motivations do not only take place on a level of strategic considerations but that some of the formerly strong cartels are “now split by policy”.[134] A study that partially conducted research on cartel-governance in Mexico also found that cartels behave in a more friendly manner towards citizens the more their territorial control is secured.[135] As well as the Knights Templar Cartel, the Sinaloa Cartel is also working on its public perception by building schools, hospitals, and other forms of infrastructure in its territories. This is making the cartel quite popular so that many young people want to become part of the cartel.[136]

In addition to the provision of social services, the development of a so-called *Narcocultura*, which is described as a popular Mexican cultural movement that has been “built upon the aesthetics, personalities, and history of the drug war”[137], is partially responsible for the popularity of some cartels, their leaders and crimes they commit. Some academics claim that the popularity of cartel leaders can partially be traced back to popular Mexican rebels, such as *Emiliano Zapata Salazar*, one of the leaders of the Mexican revolution - the person after whom the so-called *Zapatista* movement was named, which fought the Mexican state in the 1990s and which still makes political demands.[138] The glorification of cartel leaders in films and music and the popularity of spiritual figures like *Santa Muerte* and Jesús Malverde, a drug trafficker’s saint, are also key factors for the establishment of a *Narcocultura*. [139] Along with aspects of *social banditry*, the promotion of spiritual figures that are connected with drug trafficking or death and a popular culture that glorifies drug cartels and their leaders are among the sophisticated strategies used by Mexican cartels to gain support from civil society to boost their political power and legitimacy.[140]

The Future of the Narco-Terrorism Debate and the Concept of Criminal Insurgency

The future developments of Mexico’s cartels and the dynamics of their violence against one other, the state and civil society, remain very uncertain and hard to predict. The conceptual debates about Narco-Terrorism and Criminal Insurgency and future developments of the Mexican cartels are mutually dependent. If the cartels intensify their engagement in shaping Mexican politics, targeting politicians and state institutions, and replacing functions of the state to gain support and legitimacy among civil society, the future of Mexico will be more defined by insurgency than by organized crime. If the cartels step back from engaging in these fields, advocates of traditional law enforcement will argue that cartels are best fought with measures from the toolkit of countering organized crime. Mexico’s future will depend on the success or failure of the state’s responses to the cartels and if the government chooses approaches from counterinsurgency or counterterrorism or if it will rely on recommendations that support strengthening Mexican law enforcement over military approaches. Both sides have influential advocates and opponents in politics and science.

Recent developments indicate that Mexican civilians actively participate in fighting the cartels for various reasons. The rise and establishment of private militias (*policia popular*) in Mexico to fight the cartels and their partial success show the important role that civil society can play in fighting organized crime.[141] Regional ethnic autonomy institutions also challenged the cartels and tried to protect areas that were highly affected by organized crime.[142] However, the Mexican government has yet to develop a coherent response to these militias and decide if or how these groups should be addressed in its strategy to counter the cartels.[143]

Future developments in Mexico are also dependent on the dynamics of conflicts between cartels. Most of the cartels have diversified the fields of their criminal activity from solely drug trafficking to other forms of profitable illicit businesses.[144] One of the most recent shifts in the *modus operandi* of the cartels has been toward a major engagement in fuel-theft.[145] This shift has led to changes in inter-cartel conflicts since it has partially relocated from the United States-Mexico border to the center of the country, where mainly two cartels – the CSRL and the CJNG – fight for dominance in this field.[146] After succeeding the Sinaloa cartel as the strongest cartel with the highest military capacity, the CJNG will continue to play a key role in the future of debates concerning whether concepts from terrorism, insurgency, or conflict studies apply to Mexican cartels.[147]

These debates, in part, will partially be shaped by the future behavior of the CJNG and other strong cartels, especially and if they become as politicized as the Knights Templar and continue to utilize terrorist tactics to violently communicate with chosen audiences.

Conclusion

The objective of this Literature Review was to give a comprehensive overview of the research that has been conducted on classifying Mexican cartel-related violence as Narco-Terrorism. Several studies suggest that Mexico is currently experiencing a Criminal Insurgency. This literature review aimed to present the arguments of both advocates and critics of the concepts of Narco-Terrorism and Criminal Insurgency.

It has been shown that the original debate on Narco-Terrorism arose in South America and led to some confusion due to its ambiguity. *Narco-Terrorism* was used to characterize DTOs' use of terrorist tactics to protect their illicit businesses on the one hand, but also to describe terrorist groups that participated in drug trafficking to fund terrorist attacks or to ensure their financial survival. Therefore, some criticized the term *Narco-Terrorism* for merging the *War on Drugs* and the *War on Terror*, something that could lead to misguided conclusions as to how to respond to both DTOs and terrorist groups appropriately. The debate on Narco-Terrorism relocated to Mexico in approximately 2008 when some authors began to claim that the strategies, tactics, and organizational structures of some Mexican cartels were nearly identical to those of some terrorist organizations. However, in the ensuing debate about Narco-Terrorism in Mexico, many researchers argued that the cartels were lacking any form of ideology or political motivation, thus excluding them from being considered terrorists.

The need to have ideological reasons or a political motive to commit terrorist attacks then became the main subject of the discussion about Narco-Terrorism. Some stated that only 65% of definitions of terrorism even include what motivates terrorist groups, while other proponents of Narco-Terrorism argued that the publicly displayed violence of Mexican cartels serves them as Narco-Propaganda and that they should, therefore, be treated as political entities. Critics responded to the aforesaid arguments by stating that the main targets of Mexican cartels have so far not been civilians or state officials, but members of rival cartels. They argued that not all terrorist groups violently compete with one another and that confrontation with other terrorist groups is never their main goal. Since the theoretical debates about Narco-Terrorism in Mexico did not leave much space to argue, many studies described public cartel-related violence as terrorist tactics employed by cartels and avoided classifying cartels as terrorist organizations. In this context, some argued that some OCGs, like the Italian or Russian Mafia, also employed terrorist tactics, but were not classified as terrorist groups.

The concept of the existence of a state of *Criminal Insurgency* in Mexico divided those analyzing the cartels into two main factions, which Bunker called *modernists* and *postmodernists*. While modernists argue that OCGs do not develop political goals nor challenge the state directly and are best met by law enforcement, the post-modernist view is built upon the assumption that 21st-century insurgent movements do not necessarily need political motivation. From this perspective, many cartels are *de facto* politicized, because they oppose the sovereignty of the state, thus becoming threats to national security that must be dealt with by military force. When proponents of the existence of a *Criminal Insurgency* in Mexico elaborated the concept, they presented three levels thereof, namely a state of *local insurgency*, a *battle for the parallel state*, and a final stage where *the state implodes*. In addition, they presented ideal types of three different generations of cartels. A first-generation cartel was given the description *aggressive competitor* and was exemplified by the *Medellín Cartel*. A second-generation cartel is a *subtle co-opter* that has learned from the decline of the Medellín Cartel, as illustrated by the *Cali Cartel*. A third-generation cartel is a *criminal state successor*, a type of cartel that is at present merely fictional but that has partially developed in Mexico. Critics of the concept of *Criminal Insurgency* claimed that for a state of insurgency to exist, movements or organizations must offer a coherent alternative to the government, which Mexican cartels do not. They also argued that, in contrast to many known insurgent movements, Mexican cartels do not try to win the hearts and minds of civil society.

The debate about Criminal Insurgency then went in a similar direction as the one on Narco-Terrorism. This led to many studies analyzing the goal and impact of Narco-Messages as well as to studies on the politicization of some cartels. Studies on cartel banners, graffiti, demonstrations, communiqués, and the preparation of victims bearing a cartel's signature argued that such Narco-Messages are intended to show the strength of a certain cartel or to claim territorial control. Studies on the politicization of Mexican cartels have concluded that the Knights Templar Cartel is one of the most politicized, spreading evangelical messages and openly communicating its political goals and perceptions of justice. Some even described the cartel as a spiritual or occult movement with political motivations. Some cartels sophisticatedly try to manipulate narratives about themselves by using spiritual figures of a Mexican Narcocultura-background. They also offer social services like low-interest loans to portray themselves as social bandits to gain legitimacy and greater support from civil society. The cartels' usurpation of some traditional state functions indicates that they partially seek to replace the state in their territories. This could strengthen those who argue in favor of the existence of politicized Mexican cartels and therefore a Criminal Insurgency, trying to provide an alternative to the Mexican state.

The future of both the Narco-Terrorism and Criminal Insurgency debates will partially depend on the future behavior of the Mexican state as well as the one of certain cartels. For instance, the Mexican government needs to decide how it is going to handle the development of civil militias fighting the cartels. These vigilante groups may represent a chance to effectively counter the cartels but they lack legitimacy. If one cartel becomes more powerful than the others and develops political motivations, the advocates of the existence of a Criminal Insurgency in Mexico will become stronger in the academic debate. The CJNG cartel, with its strong military capabilities, is currently one of the best candidates to become the dominant cartel in Mexico. Since academic debates on the topic have partially shaped actual responses to Mexican cartels in the past, researchers should be aware of the potential influence their studies can have. What makes the debates on Narco-Terrorism and Criminal Insurgency special is the multidisciplinary nature of the various perspectives.[148] The possibility that contributions can come from Terrorism Studies, Insurgency Studies, Peace and Conflict Studies, and Criminology is theoretically fruitful for finding more adequate solutions to the crisis presented by the presence and power of organized crime groups in Mexico.

About the Author: David Teiner is a student of Political Science and Sociology at Trier University. He is currently working on his master's thesis, which is designed to make use of various insights from comparative rebel governance studies for the analysis of Islamic State governance in Iraq and Syria. He plans to further specialize in the fields of rebel governance, terrorism, and organized crime.

Notes

[1] Salvador M. Aranda (2013), "Stories of Drug Trafficking in Rural Mexico: Territories, Drugs and Cartels in Michoacán", *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 94:2013, p. 63; Rodolfo Sarsfield (2015), "Politische Korruption in Mexiko"; in: Barbara Schröter (Ed.), *Das politische System Mexikos*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 539–557.

[2] Kevin-Chris Gründel & Jochen Kleinschmidt (2015), "Organisierte Kriminalität, Drogenhandel und Gewaltkonflikte", in: Barbara Schröter (Ed.), *Das politische System Mexikos*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS, p. 525.

[3] Grayson, George W. (2010), *La Familia Drug Cartel: Implications for U.S.-Mexican Security*, Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11895>

[4] Kevin-Chris Gründel & Jochen Kleinschmidt (2015), *op.cit.*, p. 524.

[5] Salvador M. Aranda (2013), *op.cit.*, p. 63.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Stuart S. Yeh (2012), "Is an International Treaty Needed to Fight Corruption and the Narco-Insurgency in Mexico?", *International Criminal Justice Review*, 22:3, p. 236.

- [8] Salvador M. Aranda (2013), op.cit., p. 44.
- [9] Kevin-Chris Gründel & Jochen Kleinschmidt (2015), op.cit., p. 523.
- [10] Laura H. Atuesta & Yocelyn S. Pérez-Dávila (2017), “Fragmentation and Cooperation: The Evolution of Organized Crime in Mexico”, *Trends in Organized Crime*, 21:3, p. 236.
- [11] Kevin-Chris Gründel & Jochen Kleinschmidt (2015), op.cit., p. 523.
- [12] Laura H. Atuesta; Yocelyn S. Pérez-Dávila (2017), op.cit., p. 236; Juan Carlos Ramírez-Pimienta (2013), “De torturaciones, balas y explosiones: Narcocultura, movimiento e hiperrealismo en el sexenio de Felipe Calderón”, *A Contracorriente: Revista de Historia Social y Literatura en América Latina*, 10:3, pp. 302–334; Jesús Pérez Caballero (2014), “El elemento político en los crímenes contra la humanidad la expansión de la figura al crimen organizado transnacional y el caso de las organizaciones de narcotraficantes mexicanas en el sexenio 2006–2012”, Doctoral Thesis, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia. URL: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/tesis?codigo=44256>; Jesús Pérez Caballero (2017), Luis Astorga, ¿Qué querían que hiciera? Inseguridad y delincuencia organizada en el gobierno de Felipe Calderón”, *Foro Internacional*, 57: 3; Anabel Hernández (2013), *México en llamas: El legado de Calderón*, Barcelona: Grijalbo.
- [13] Anthony Esposito (2020), “Murders in Mexico Hit Record as Lopez Obrador Seeks Justice System Reform”, *Reuters* (January 21, 2020). URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-violence-murders/murders-in-mexico-hit-record-as-lopez-obrador-seeks-justice-system-reform-idUSKBN1ZK07C>
- [14] Brianna Lee, Danielle Renwick & Rocio C. Labrador (2019), “Mexico’s Drug War”, *Council on Foreign Relations* (last updated on October 22, 2019). URL: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/mexicos-drug-war>
- [15] Christopher Mele, Kirk Semple (2019), “Trump Says He Will Delay Terrorist Designation for Mexican Cartels”, *The New York Times* (December 6, 2019). URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/06/us/trump-drug-cartels-terrorists.html>
- [16] Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo (2012), “Narco-terrorismo: la fábrica de la opinión pública”, *Revista de historia internacional*, 13:50, pp. 57–74.
- [17] Jonas Hartelius (2008), “Narcoterrorism”, *EastWest Institute & Swedish Carnegie Institute*, Policy Paper 03/2009. URL: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/90550/2008-02-20_Narcoterrorism.pdf
- [18] Rachel Ehrenfeld (1990), *Narcoterrorism*, New York: Basic Books.
- [19] Cindy C. Combs & Martin Slann (2007), *Encyclopedia of Terrorism (Revised Edition)*, New York: Facts on File, p. 191.
- [20] Loretta Napoleoni (2003), *Modern Jihad: Tracing the Dollars Behind the Terror Networks*, London: Pluto Press, p. 229.
- [21] Daniel Boyce (1987), “Narco-Terrorism”, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 56:11, p. 24. URL: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=107705>
- [22] Gregory D. Lee (2004), *Global Drug Enforcement: Practical Investigative Techniques*, Boca Raton: CRC Press.
- [23] Alex P. Schmid (2005), “Links between Terrorism and Drug Trafficking: A Case of ‘Narco-Terrorism’?” International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism, and Security, Madrid, March 8–11, 2005, p. 11. URL: <http://turkishpolicy.com/images/stories/2004-02-globalsecurity/TPQ2004-2-schmid.pdf>
- [24] Abraham Miller & Nicholas A. Damask (1996), “The Dual Myths of ‘Narco-Terrorism’: How Myths Drive Policy”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 8:1, p. 114.
- [25] Benoît Gomis (2015), “Demystifying ‘Narcoterrorism’”, *GDPO & Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe*, Policy Brief 9, p. 1. URL: <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/media/Demistifying-Narcoterrorism.pdf>
- [26] Tamara Makarenko (2004), “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism”, *Global Crime*, 6:1, pp. 129–145.
- [27] Ibid., p. 131.
- [28] Ibid.
- [29] Brian J. Phillips (2015), “How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence? The Case of Drug Trafficking Organizations in Mexico”, *The Journal of Politics*, 77:2, pp. 327–328.
- [30] Ibid.
- [31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Gordon J. Knowles (2008), "Threat Analysis: Organized Crime and Narco-Terrorism in Northern Mexico", *Military Review*, 2008: January–February, p. 79.

[34] Sylvia M. Longmire & John P. Longmire (2008), "Redefining Terrorism: Why Mexican Drug Trafficking is More than Just Organized Crime", *Journal of Strategic Security*, 1:1, p. 35.

[35] Fernando C. Pacheco (2009), "Narcoterrorism: How has Narcoterrorism Settled in Mexico?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32:12, p. 1021.

[36] David A. Haupt (2009), "Narco-Terrorism: An Increasing Threat to US National Security", Master's Thesis, Joint Forces Staff College, Joint Advanced Warfighting School, p. 31. URL: <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA530126>

[37] Ibid.

[38] Phil Williams (2012), "The Terrorism Debate Over Mexican Drug Trafficking Violence, Terrorism and Political Violence", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24:2, pp. 259–278.

[39] David A. Shirk & Joel Wallman (2015), "Understanding Mexico's Drug Violence", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59:8, pp. 1348–1376.

[40] June S. Beittel (2019), "Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations", *CRS Report*, R41576 Version: 40. URL: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/details?prodcode=R41576>

[41] Mauricio Meschoulam (2019), *Organized Crime, Fear and Peacebuilding in Mexico*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 38.

[42] Alex P. Schmid, Albert J. Jongman et al (1988), *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature*. Amsterdam: North-Holland Publ. Company.

[43] Mauricio Meschoulam (2019), op.cit., p. 38.

[44] Ibid., p. 39.

[45] Ibid., p. 40.

[46] Brian J. Phillips & Viridiana Ríos (2020), "Narco-Messages: Competition and Public Communication by Criminal Groups", *Latin American Politics and Society*, 62:1, pp. 1–24.

[47] Natalia Garcia-Cervantes (2019), "Using Participatory Visual Methods in the Study of Violence Perceptions and Urban Space in Mexico", *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 13, pp. 1–15.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Howard Campbell (2014), "Narco-Propaganda in the Mexican "Drug War": An Anthropological Perspective", *Latin American Perspectives*, 41:2, p. 60.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Pablo Piccato (2019), "Written in Black and Red: Murder as a Communicative Act in Mexico", in: Pablo Policzer (ed.), *The Politics of Violence in Latin America*, Calgary: University of Calgary Press, pp. 89–112.

[52] Carlos Martin (2012), "Categorization of Narcomessages in Mexico: An Appraisal of the Attempts to Influence Public Perception and Policy Actions", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 35:1, pp. 76–93; Viridiana Ríos & Johanna Rivera (2018), "Media Effects on Public Displays of Brutality: The Case of Mexico's Drug War", *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 7:1, p. 201.

[53] Viridiana Ríos; Johanna Rivera (2018), op.cit., p. 201.

[54] George W. Grayson (2010), *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?*, New York: Routledge; Samuel Logan (2011), "Preface: Los Zetas and a New Barbarism", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 22:5, pp. 718–727; Tony M. Kail (2015), *Narco-Cults: Understanding the Use of Afro-Caribbean and Mexican Religious Cultures in the Drug Wars*, Boca Raton: CRC Press.

[55] Gregg W. Etter & Erica L. Lehmann (2013), "The Mexican Drug Wars: Organized Crime, Narco-Terrorism, Insurgency or Asymmetric Warfare?" *Journal of Gang Research*, 20:4, p. 21.

[56] Paul R. Kan (2011), "What We're Getting Wrong About Mexico", *Parameters*, 41:2, p. 39.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

- [59] Benjamin Lessing (2015), "Logics of Violence in Criminal War", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59:8, pp. 1486–1516.
- [60] *Ibid.*, p. 1490.
- [61] Christopher J. Curran (2015), "Spillover: Evolving Threats and Converging Legal Authorities in the Fight Against Mexican Drug Cartels", *Harvard National Security Journal*, 6, pp. 344–382.
- [62] *Ibid.*, p. 362.
- [63] Sam Mullins & James K. Wither (2016): "Terrorism and Organized Crime", *Connections*, 15:3, 65–82.
- [64] Mark Shaw & Prem Mahadevan (2018), "When Terrorism and Organized Crime Meet", *Policy Perspectives*, 6/7, pp. 1–4.
- [65] Alex P. Schmid (2018), "Revisiting the Relationship between International Terrorism and Transnational Organised Crime 22 Years Later", *ICCT*, Research Paper 9, pp. 15–16. URL: <https://icct.nl/publication/revisiting-the-relationship-between-international-terrorism-and-transnational-organised-crime-22-years-later/>
- [66] Angelica Duran-Martinez (2015), "To Kill and Tell? State Power, Criminal Competition and Drug Violence", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59:8, p. 1377.
- [67] Brian J. Phillips (2018), "Terrorist Tactics by Criminal Organizations: The Mexican Case in Context", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 12:1, pp. 46–63.
- [68] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- [69] *Ibid.*
- [70] Gus Martin (2010), *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, p. 319.
- [71] Howard Campbell & Tobin Hansen (2014), "Is Narco-Violence in Mexico Terrorism?", *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 33:2, p. 158.
- [72] *Ibid.*
- [73] *Ibid.*
- [74] *Ibid.*
- [75] Alexander Salt (2017), "Blurred Lines: Mexican Cartels and the Narco-Terrorism Debate", *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, 18:1, p. 186.
- [76] *Ibid.*
- [77] *Ibid.*
- [78] Derek R. Fitzpatrick (2017), "Greed and Grievance and Drug Cartels: Mexico's Commercial Insurgency", Master's Thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College. URL: <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/AD1038984>; Oscar Palma (2015), "Transnational Networks of Insurgency and Crime: Explaining the Spread of Commercial Insurgencies Beyond State Borders." *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 26:3, pp. 476–496.
- [79] Hal Brands (2009), *Mexico's Narco-Insurgency and U.S. Counterdrug Policy*, Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute. URL: <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/mexicos-narco-insurgency-and-u-s-counterdrug-policy/>
- [80] Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera (2017), *Los Zetas Inc.: Criminal Corporations, Energy, and Civil War in Mexico*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- [81] Anabel Hernández (2013), op.cit.; Anabel Hernández (2018), *A Massacre in Mexico: The True Story Behind the Missing Forty-Three Students*, London: Verso.
- [82] Diego Osorno (2009), *El Cártel de Sinaloa*, Barcelona: Grijalbo; Diego Osoro (2012), *La Guerra de los Zetas*, Barcelona: Grijalbo.
- [83] Ioan Grillo (2011), *El Narco: Inside Mexico's Criminal Insurgency*, London: Bloomsbury; Ioan Grillo (2017), *El Narco: The Bloody Rise of Mexican Drug Cartels*, London: Bloomsbury.
- [84] Paul Richter & Ken Dilanian (2010), "Clinton Says Mexico Drug Wars Starting to Look Like Insurgency", *Los Angeles Times* (September 9, 2010). URL: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2010-sep-09-la-fg-mexico-insurgency-20100909-story.html>
- [85] Vanda Felbab-Brown (2013), "Peña Nieto's Piñata: The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexico's New Security Policy against Organized Crime", *Brookings: Latin America Initiative*. URL: [https://www.brookings.edu/research/pena-nietos-pinata-the-promise-and-pit-](https://www.brookings.edu/research/pena-nietos-pinata-the-promise-and-pit/)

[falls-of-mexicos-new-security-policy-against-organized-crime/](#)

[86] Carlos Fazio (2016), *Estado de emergencia: De la guerra de Calderón a la guerra de Peña Nieto*, Barcelona: Grijalbo.

[87] Carlos Galina (2020), “Mexico’s Security Dilemma”, *Council on Foreign Relations*. URL: <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/mexico-security-dilemma>

[88] Alberto Najjar (2019), “Primer informe de gobierno de AMLO: la controvertida estrategia de seguridad de López Obrador que no ha servido de momento para frenar al narcotráfico”, *BBC News* (September 2, 2019). URL: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-49521069>; Shannon K. O’Neill (2019), “AMLO’s ‘Hugs Not Bullets’ is Failing Mexico”, *Council on Foreign Relations*. URL: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/amlos-hugs-not-bullets-failing-mexico-1>

[89] Claudio Ramos da Cruz & David H. Ucko (2018), “Beyond the Unidades de Policía Pacificadora: Countering Comando Vermelho’s Criminal Insurgency”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 29:1, pp. 38–67.

[90] Michael Watts (2007), “Petro-Insurgency or Criminal Syndicate? Conflict & Violence in the Niger Delta”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 43:114, pp. 637–660.

[91] John P. Sullivan & Adam Elkus (2008), “State of Siege: Mexico’s Criminal Insurgency”, *Small Wars Journal*, 2008:8. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/state-of-siege-mexicos-criminal-insurgency>

[92] Steven Metz (2007), *Rethinking Insurgency*, Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute. URL: <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/rethinking-insurgency/>

[93] John P. Sullivan (2012), “Criminal Insurgency: Narcocultura, Social Banditry, and Information Operations”, *Small Wars Journal* 2012:12. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/criminal-insurgency-narcocultura-social-banditry-and-information-operations>

[94] Robert J. Bunker (2013), “Introduction: The Mexican Cartels – Organized Crime vs. Criminal Insurgency”, *Trends in Organized Crime*, 16:2, pp. 129–137.

[95] Paul R. Kan & Phil Williams (2010), “Afterword: Criminal Violence in Mexico – A Dissenting Analysis”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21:1, pp. 218–231.

[96] Paul R. Kan (2012), *Cartels at War: Mexico’s Drug-Fueled Violence and the Threat to U.S. National Security*, Washington D.C.: Potomac Books.; Paul R. Kan; Phil Williams (2010), op.cit.

[97] Robert J. Bunker (2013), op.cit., p. 132.

[98] John P. Sullivan & Adam Elkus (2009), “Plazas for Profit: Mexico’s Criminal Insurgency”, *Small Wars Journal*, 2009:4. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/plazas-for-profit-mexicos-criminal-insurgency>

[99] John P. Sullivan & Robert J. Bunker (2017), “Mexican Cartel Strategic Note No. 21”, *Small Wars Journal*, 2017:5. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/mexican-cartel-strategic-note-no-21>

[100] Robert J. Bunker (2013), op.cit., p. 132; Robert J. Bunker & John P. Sullivan (2013), *Studies in Gangs and Cartels*, London: Routledge.

[101] John P. Sullivan (2012), “From Drug Wars to Criminal Insurgency: Mexican Cartels, Criminal Enclaves and Criminal Insurgency in Mexico and Central America: Implications for Global Security”, *FMSH*, Working Papers Series No. 9. URL: <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/FMSH-WP/halshs-00694083>

[102] Ibid.

[103] George W. Grayson (2010), op.cit.

[104] Adam D. Morton (2012), “The War on Drugs in Mexico: A Failed State?” *Third World Quarterly*, 33:9, pp. 1631–1645.

[105] Robert J. Bunker & John P. Sullivan (2010), “Cartel Evolution Revisited: Third Phase Cartel Potentials and Alternative Futures in Mexico”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21:1, pp. 30–54.

[106] Robert J. Bunker (2011), “*Criminal (Cartel & Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas: What You Need to Know, Not What You Want to Hear*”, Testimony before the House of Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere at the Hearing ‘Has Merida Evolved? Part One: The Evolution of Drug Cartels and the Threat to Mexico’s Governance’, September 13, 2011. URL: https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_fac_pub/155/

[107] Hal Brands (2009), op.cit.

[108] Stuart S. Yeh (2012), op.cit.

- [109] Metz, Steven (1993), *The Future of Insurgency*, Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute. URL: <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/1644.pdf>
- [110] Oscar Palma (2015), “Transnational Networks of Insurgency and Crime: Explaining the Spread of Commercial Insurgencies Beyond State Borders”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 26:3, pp. 476–496.
- [111] Derek R. Fitzpatrick (2017), op.cit.
- [112] Esteban Arratia Sandoval (2015), “¿Insurgencia criminal? La cambiante naturaleza del crimen organizado transnacional en México y Centroamérica”, *Estudios de Seguridad y Defensa*, 2015:5, 39-82.
- [113] Patrick Corcoran (2013), “Knights Templar Test Narco-Insurgency Theory”, *InSight Crime, Analysis*, 13.10.2013. URL: <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/are-the-knights-templar-the-vanguard-of-a-narco-insurgency-in-mexico/>
- [114] Ibid.
- [115] David A. Shirk (2011), “The Drug War in Mexico: Confronting a Shared Threat”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council Special Report No. 60. URL: <https://www.cfr.org/report/drug-war-mexico>
- [116] David A. Shirk & Joel Wallman (2015), op.cit, p. 1369.
- [117] Steven Metz (2019), “Preface: Commercial (Criminal) and Spiritual Insurgencies Revisited”, in: Robert J. Bunker & Alma Keshavarz (Eds.), *Los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán: Imagery, Symbolism, and Narratives*. Bethesda: Small Wars Foundation, xiii–xv. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/los-caballeros-templarios-de-michoacan-imagery-symbolism-and-narratives>
- [118] Richard Snyder & Angelica Duran-Martinez (2009), “Does Illegality Breed Violence? Drug Trafficking and State-Sponsored Protection Rackets”, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, 39:4, pp. 253–273; Viridiana Ríos (2012), “How Government Structure Encourages Criminal Violence: The Causes of Mexico’s Drug War”, Doctoral Thesis, Harvard University. URL: http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/vrios/files/rios_phddissertation.pdf; Viridiana Ríos (2015), “How Government Coordination Controlled Organized Crime: The Case of Mexico’s Cocaine Markets”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59:8, pp. 1433–1455; Javier Osorio (2013), “Hobbes on Drugs: Understanding Drug Violence in Mexico”, Doctoral Thesis, University of Notre Dame. URL: <https://curate.nd.edu/show/08612n51n19>; Javier Osorio (2015), “The Contagion of Drug Violence: Spatiotemporal Dynamics of the Mexican War on Drugs”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59:8, pp. 1403–1432.
- [119] Nicholas Barnes (2017), “Criminal Politics: An Integrated Approach to the Study of Organized Crime, Politics, and Violence”, *Perspectives on Politics*, 15:4, 967–987.
- [120] Alma Keshavarz & Robert J. Bunker (2019), “Introduction: Los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán”, in: Robert J. Bunker & Alma Keshavarz (Eds.), *Los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán: Imagery, Symbolism, and Narratives*. Bethesda: Small Wars Foundation, 16–30. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/los-caballeros-templarios-de-michoacan-imagery-symbolism-and-narratives>
- [121] Andrew R. Chesnut (2019), “Saint Nazario and the Knights Templar: The Narco-Evangelicalism of a Mexican Drug Cartel”, in: Robert J. Bunker & Alma Keshavarz (Eds.): *Los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán: Imagery, Symbolism, and Narratives*. Bethesda: Small Wars Foundation, 78–81. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/los-caballeros-templarios-de-michoacan-imagery-symbolism-and-narratives>
- [122] John P. Sullivan & Robert J. Bunker (2011), “Rethinking Insurgency: Criminality, Spirituality, and Societal Warfare”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 22:5, pp. 742–763.
- [123] Pamela L. Bunker & Robert J. Bunker (2010), “The Spiritual Significance of ¿Plata O Plomo?”, *Small Wars Journal* 2010/5. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-spiritual-significance-of-%C2%BFplata-o-plomo>; Kate Kingsbury (2019), “The Knights Templar Narcotheology: Deciphering the Occult of a Narcocult”, in: Robert J. Bunker & Alma Keshavarz (Eds.), *Los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán: Imagery, Symbolism, and Narratives*. Bethesda: Small Wars Foundation, 89–94. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/los-caballeros-templarios-de-michoacan-imagery-symbolism-and-narratives>
- [124] John P. Sullivan (2019), “Postscript: Narcocultura, Insurgencies, and State Change”, in: Robert J. Bunker & Alma Keshavarz (Eds.): *Los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán: Imagery, Symbolism, and Narratives*. Bethesda: Small Wars Foundation, 117–122. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/los-caballeros-templarios-de-michoacan-imagery-symbolism-and-narratives>
- [125] Ibid.
- [126] Steven Metz (2019), op.cit., p. xiv.
- [127] John P. Sullivan (2019), “Los Caballeros Templarios: ‘Social Bandits’”, in: Robert J. Bunker & Alma Keshavarz (Eds.): *Los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán: Imagery, Symbolism, and Narratives*. Bethesda: Small Wars Foundation, 56–61. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/los-caballeros-templarios-de-michoacan-imagery-symbolism-and-narratives>

- [128] Alexis G. Grynkewich (2008), "Welfare as Warfare: How Violent Non-State Groups Use Social Services to Attack the State", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 31:4, pp. 350–370.
- [129] Shawn T. Flanigan (2013), "Terrorists Next Door? A Comparison of Mexican Drug Cartels and Middle Eastern Terrorist Organizations", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24:2 (Intersections of Crime and Terror), pp. 279–294.
- [130] Shawn T. Flanigan (2014), "Motivations and Implications of Community Service Provision by La Familia Michoacána/ Knights Templar and other Mexican Drug Cartels", *Journal of Strategic Security*, 7:3, pp. 63–83.
- [131] Ibid.; Justin Peele (2012), "La batalla por el corazón y la mente en México: Identificar las nuevas dinámicas en la insurgencia moderna", Master's Thesis, Universidad del Salvador. URL: https://racimo.usal.edu.ar/2718/1/P%C3%A1ginas_desde500005006-Castellano-La_batalla_por_el_coraz%C3%B3n_y_la_mente_en_M%C3%A9xico.pdf
- [132] Jerjes Aguirre & Hugo A. Herrera (2013), "Institutional Weakness and Organized Crime in Mexico: The Case of Michoacán", *Trends in Organized Crime*, 16, pp. 221–238.
- [133] Shawn T. Flanigan (2014), op.cit.; Robert Keene (2019), "Mexico's Knight Templar and Code of Conduct Implications"; in: Robert J. Bunker & Alma Keshavarz (Eds.), *Los Caballeros Templarios de Michoacán: Imagery, Symbolism, and Narratives*. Bethesda: Small Wars Foundation, 65–76. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/los-caballeros-templarios-de-michoacan-imagery-symbolism-and-narratives>
- [134] Dawn Chard (2016), "Mexican Drug Cartels and Terrorist Organizations, a New Alliance?" *Air War College & Air University*, Research Report, p. 13. URL: <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/AD1037689>
- [135] Beatriz Magaloni, Gustavo Robles, Aila M. Matanock, Alberto Diaz-Cayeros & Vidal Romero (2019), "Living in Fear: The Dynamics of Extortion in Mexico's Drug War", *Comparative Political Studies*, online first. URL: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0010414019879958>
- [136] Kirk J. Durbin (2013), "International Narco-Terrorism and Non-State Actors: The Drug Cartel Global Threat", *Global Security Studies*, 4:1, pp. 16–30.
- [137] Tony M. Kail (2015), op.cit.
- [138] Pamela L. Bunker, Lisa J. Campbell & Robert J. Bunker (2010), "Torture, Beheadings, and Narcocultos", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21:1, pp. 145–178.; Tony M. Kail (2015), op.cit.
- [139] Tony M. Kail (2015), op.cit.
- [140] John P. Sullivan (2019), op.cit.
- [141] Paul R. Kan (2019), *The Global Challenge of Militias and Paramilitary Violence*, London: Palgrave Pivot, p. 4.
- [142] Sandra Ley, Shannan Mattiace & Guillermo Trejo (2019), "Indigenous Resistance to Criminal Governance: Why Regional Ethnic Autonomy Institutions Protect Communities from Narco Rule in Mexico", *Latin American Research Review*, 54:1, pp. 181–200.
- [143] Vanda Felbab-Brown (2015), "The Rise of Militias in Mexico: Citizens' Security or Further Conflict Escalation", *PRISM*, 5:4, pp. 173–186.
- [144] Angelica Duran-Martinez (2018), *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops, and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- [145] James Korman (2019), "Drug Cartels, Oil Rents, and Homicide: The Case of Mexico", *Coalition for Peace & Ethics*, Research Paper. URL: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3490397
- [146] Carlos Navarro (2018), "As Fuel Theft Becomes More Lucrative, Cartels Fight for Territorial Control", *Latin American Database & Source Mex*, Research Paper. URL: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/6407/>; Nathan P. Jones & John P. Sullivan (2019), "Huachicoleros: Criminal Cartels, Fuel Theft, and Violence in Mexico", *Journal of Strategic Security*, 12:4, pp. 1–24.
- [147] Vanda Felbab-Brown (2019), "Mexico's Out-Of-Control Criminal Market", *Brookings Institute*, Foreign Policy at Brookings Report. URL: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/mexicos-out-of-control-criminal-market/>
- [148] Robert J. Bunker (2011), "The Mexican Cartel Debate: As Viewed Through Five Divergent Fields of Security Studies", *Small Wars Journal*, 2011:2. URL: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-mexican-cartel-debate>