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## Narco Culture in Mexico : The Normalization of Violence and Erosion of Social Norms

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**John Cabot University**

Department of Political Science

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science  
Minor in Communications

Narco Culture in Mexico: The Normalization of Violence and Erosion of Social  
Norms

Alberto Fiscal Noriega

First Reader  
Federigo Argentieri

Second Reader  
Camil Roman

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the widespread impact of "narco culture" in Mexican society, a cultural phenomenon that has developed as a result of the country's extensive history of involvement in drug trafficking. The term "narco culture" came about as a result of the normalization and glorification of drug trafficking and the violence associated with it in Mexico. Inclusions encompass music, fashion, language, and societal attitudes. The objective of this study is to ascertain the underlying causes and identify the factors that have contributed to the prevalence of the drug trade in Mexico. What sort of incentives might stimulate an individual to partake in the unlawful drug trade? Values, beliefs, and lifestyle associated with narcotics in order to comprehend the issue at its core.

The heart of the thesis is an intricate examination of the psyches of individuals involved in the drug trade, focusing on their rationalization of extreme violence. This segment illuminates the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions that mold the attitudes and actions of narcos. It underscores violence's role not only as a byproduct of the drug trade but also as a way to explore violence as a communicative tool within the subculture.

## **Dedication**

to N.S

I would not have made it this far without you, rest well my friend.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>DTO:</b>	Drug Trafficking Organizations
<b>DFS:</b>	Dirección Federal de Seguridad (Federal Security Directorate)
<b>AMLO:</b>	Andrés Manuel López Obrador
<b>CJNG:</b>	The Jalisco New Generation Cartel
<b>Z's:</b>	Los Zetas
<b>PAN:</b>	National Action Party

## **Introduction**

This thesis delves into the multifaceted and frequently misunderstood realm of "narco culture" within contemporary Mexican society. The term "narco culture" has evolved to represent a diverse array of cultural expressions and social norms that stem from Mexico's complex and long-standing history with the drug trade. Deeply rooted in the annals of the nation's narcotics history, narco culture has burgeoned into a formidable cultural entity, exerting its influence across various domains such as music, fashion, language, and societal perspectives.

The prevalence of narco-culture in Mexico necessitates an in-depth examination of the relationship between illicit activities, cultural dynamics, and societal frameworks. This study aims to provide a thorough comprehension of the organizational framework of this subculture. My objective is to analyze the fundamental causes behind the extensive prevalence of narco-culture in Mexican society, a culture that has outgrown its origins in the drug trade and has now become a vital aspect of everyday life.

Political forces and the drug trade are investigated in this thesis in terms of their origins, expansion, and reciprocal relationship. Along with documenting the development of the drug trade, this study sheds light on how Mexico's social and cultural environment has influenced and been influenced by it. The study further explores the complex network of values, attitudes, and lifestyles that make up the drug trade's social attraction in greater detail. This examination is crucial for understanding the normalization of violence in Mexican society, an issue that has significant implications for social unity and governmental policy. Through this investigation, the

study sheds light on the intricacies of a society that is often subjected to simplistic analysis, thus revealing the complex underpinnings that underpin public sentiments and perceptions concerning the drug trade.

This thesis primarily focuses on conducting a thorough analysis of the psychological aspects that influence those engaged in the drug trade. This study examines the cognitive processes by which these individuals rationalize and excuse acts of extreme violence. It recognizes violence not just as a consequence of drug-related behaviors but also as an essential means of communication within this particular subculture. This analysis provides a thorough understanding of the narcopsyche through an examination of the sociocultural and psychological factors that shape their outlook and conduct. By conducting an analysis of these facets, the thesis aims to contribute to the collective comprehension of narcoculture, its impact on Mexican society, and the broader ramifications for intervention and policy strategies.

## **Chapter 1: What are the root causes of the drug trade in Mexico, and what factors contributed to its prevalence?**

Opium production in Mexico commenced in the early 20th century, marking the beginning of the country's drug trade. According to Murphy and Rossi (2020), opium cultivation modestly started in the states of Sinaloa and Sonora in the late 19th century, during this incipient stage. However, a substantial expansion of the industry occurred during the 1920s, which was characterized by the implementation of extensive cultivation methods in these areas. During this era, Chinese merchants established an extensive network of opium dens throughout the nation, which was instrumental in their ability to regulate the opium trade.

The Mexican government initially adopted a tolerant approach towards the production and sale of opium, primarily motivated by the acknowledged therapeutic advantages of opium in pain relief and the treatment of diverse ailments (Campbell, 2014). Opium was not only commercially available but also widely acknowledged and regarded as a valid substance with medicinal applications in urban areas. During this period, the foundation was established for a multifaceted and far-reaching illicit drug trade, which had a profound impact on the social, economic, and political fabric of Mexico throughout the years that followed.

The Mexican government began to recognize societal issues associated with opium consumption as the 1920s progressed. The acknowledgment of this resulted in substantial policy intervention in 1928, when the Federal Law on Narcotics Control was implemented. With the intent of regulating the manufacturing, distribution, and consumption of opium in Mexico, this

legislation was enacted. Although the law did allow for the production of opium, it imposed stringent regulations to curb its misuse and the associated social problems.

Opium production in Mexico not only continued, but also expanded, in spite of these regulatory efforts. Mexican opium production had risen to prominence on a global scale by the 1930s. As the American healthcare system became more dependent on prescription medications for the management of pain, there was a significant surge in the need for opiates. Jonathan P. Caulkins et al. (2015) note that during this time period, U.S. physicians prescribed opiate prescriptions at a significant increase, motivated by a growing awareness of the efficacy of these medications in managing pain. The United States' demand for opium stimulated its production despite the Mexican government's efforts to regulate the industry, as it generated a profitable market for the drug.

A period of profound cultural transformation occurred in the United States during the 1960s, especially among the younger generation, who were more accepting and accepting of the use of illegal drugs. The aforementioned cultural transformation led to a heightened desire for substances such as cocaine and marijuana. Mexican drug cartels played a pivotal role in satisfying this need by capitalizing on their affiliations with cocaine traffickers in Colombia to extend their sphere of influence throughout Mexico and the United States.

The influence, affluence, and scope of these Mexican cartels have expanded at an exponential rate over time. Their activities have progressed into intricate networks that interconnect lawful and unlawful undertakings, thereby enabling the laundering of considerable profits derived from the illicit trade of drugs. In addition to their illicit drug operations, these cartels have expanded their criminal activities to encompass human trafficking, extortion, arms

smuggling, and kidnapping. This expansion signifies a profound shift in the societal fabric of contemporary Mexican society, where the influence of narco culture is increasingly pervasive.

This phenomenon can be analogized to a single black droplet of paint being introduced into a cup of water. Initially, the water retains its clarity, with the black paint having minimal impact. However, as the cup is stirred, the paint disperses, progressively darkening the water until it is completely transformed. In a similar fashion, narco-culture, which was once an isolated and distinct aspect of Mexican society, has undergone a gradual assimilation into the country's cultural and social fabric, resulting in significant transformations to its nature.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Colombian drug cartels maintained control over the majority of primary cocaine smuggling routes into the United States. The principal channels through which these cartels conducted business were strategic locations such as the Caribbean Sea and Florida. The strategic geographical features of these regions were pivotal in facilitating a consistent and comparatively unimpeded supply of cocaine into the United States market throughout this period (Bagley, 1988).

Midway through the 1980s, however, a transformation occurred in the drug trafficking landscape. Increased law enforcement efforts in Florida and the Caribbean, which posed a threat to Colombian cartels' established routes, were largely responsible for this change. In response to escalating pressure from anti-narcotics initiatives in the United States, drug trafficking organizations endeavored to retain their lucrative trade through alternative means. This adaptation led to a strategic realignment of their operations, with Mexico emerging as the new focal point for their smuggling activities (Hyland, 2011).

There are multiple factors that have contributed to the transition to Mexico. The shared border between Mexico and the United States offered a vast and porous entry point for smuggling drugs, presenting new opportunities for the cartels to exploit. Furthermore, the Colombian cartels were able to utilize the pre-existing infrastructure of smaller drug trafficking organizations in Mexico as a basis to streamline their operations. As time progressed, this transition had a profound effect on the regional drug trafficking dynamics, culminating in the ascent to prominence of Mexican cartels as major players in the international drug trade.

Amid their ruthless strategies and cocaine trade dominance, Colombian drug cartels, most notably the Medellin and Cali cartels, rose to international notoriety in the 1980s and 1990s. The emergence of the Guadalajara cartel in Mexico brought about a substantial transformation in the power structure of the drug trafficking industry. This cartel, under the direction of Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, emerged as a formidable entity, coordinating the monthly transportation of numerous tons of cocaine to the United States, with the assistance of notable members Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo and Rafael Caro Quintero.

A highly distinctive feature of the Guadalajara Cartel's operations was a financial arrangement that elevated the influence of Mexican DTOs in the drug trade. Rather than merely accepting monetary compensation for their smuggling services, they successfully staked a significant fifty percent ownership interest in the cocaine they were conveying from Colombia. The cartels found this novel strategy to be extraordinarily profitable, as they could now engage in the sale of cocaine as opposed to merely transporting it. Estimates suggest that the cartel's revenue might have reached a staggering \$5 billion annually (Sánchez, 2020).

The protection the "Dirección Federal de Seguridad" (DFS) intelligence agency, specifically under the leadership of Miguel Nazar Haro, provided to the Guadalajara cartel contributed significantly to its growth and success, in addition to the competence of its leaders. Several DFS personnel engaged in direct criminal activity, such as drug trafficking and homicide, which facilitated the cartel's operations and bolstered its sphere of influence; this symbiotic yet illicit relationship between the two organizations was evident. During this time, the narcotics trade underwent a substantial transformation, as Mexican cartels such as Guadalajara emerged as formidable competitors in a sphere dominated by Colombian organizations. The intricate dynamics that persistently define drug trafficking in the region were established by the alliances and tactics fostered by these nascent Mexican cartels.

Rafael Caro Quintero was convicted in 1985 of the abhorrent crimes of abduction, torture, and homicide in which Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, an American DEA agent, was involved (Romero, 2022; Rekhter, n.d.). Agent Camarena, working undercover, had infiltrated the cartel, which led to the belief within the cartel's hierarchy that he was instrumental in leaking information to the DEA. The cartel's operations suffered a significant setback in November 1984 when law enforcement set fire to the fields of Rancho Búfalo, a 2,500-acre marijuana plantation situated in Chihuahua, Mexico, in connection with this suspicion. The cartel (Teague, 2019) suffered a substantial financial setback with the destruction of more than 10,000 tons of marijuana, which had an estimated value of \$160 million.

According to reports, the catastrophic defeat suffered at Rancho Búfalo served as the catalyst for Caro Quintero to strategize a vengeful campaign against the DEA, with a particular focus on Camarena. Camarena was apprehended by the cartel, whereupon he was mercilessly tortured and questioned in an effort to elicit vital information pertaining to the strategies

employed by law enforcement against the cartel. Their interrogation also sought to uncover any intelligence Camarena might have had regarding the involvement of Mexican politicians in the drug trade, a sensitive aspect that could have far-reaching implications for the cartel's operations and its intricate connections with political entities.

Caro Quintero and other prominent members of the Guadalajara Cartel orchestrated Camarena's abduction as retaliatory measures. To obtain information pertaining to Mexican politicians implicated in drug trafficking and disclosing details regarding DEA operations, Camarena was subjected to arduous interrogation and torture. Numerous severe injuries were sustained during the thirty-plus-hour torture session, including fractures of the skull, jaw, nose, cheekbones, windpipe, and ribs. To extend Camarena's ordeal's duration of suffering, a physician was summoned to administer medications that maintained his consciousness and life throughout. Additionally, segments of the interrogation were documented. (Stevenson, 2022). Camarena's head was struck in the final blow by a metal object that was presumably a piece of rebar. Following the unfortunate occurrences of around one month later, on March 5, 1985, the remains of Camarena and an additional victim, Alfredo Zavala, were fortuitously deposited in a roadside ditch in the adjacent state of Michoacán (Reuters, 2016; Figueroa, 2016).

The kidnapping, torture and assassination of Agent Camarena in 1985 precipitated significant diplomatic and law enforcement response from the United States, profoundly impacting U.S.-Mexico relations. The widespread public indignation and substantial pressure exerted by the United States government on the Mexican authorities to apprehend all significant individuals involved in the crime were in response to this high-profile homicide. Ultimately, a number of high-ranking Guadalajara Cartel members were brought to their demise as a result of the exhaustive four-year manhunt sparked by this pressure (Heath, 2020; Grant, 2012). The

political repercussions of the U.S. government's level of engagement were substantial, including the temporary closure of several ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border. This action underscored the severity with which the U.S. government viewed the situation and its determination to ensure accountability for the murder of Agent Camarena (Malone, 1989).

Under the direction of DEA agent Hector Berrellez, Operation Leyenda was initiated as a comprehensive inquiry with the objective of apprehending the individuals accountable for the demise of Camarena. The operation was designated with the name "Leyenda" (Legend) in remembrance of Camarena's enduring influence and steadfast dedication to the fight against drug trafficking. Operation Leyenda was primarily intended to dismantle the Guadalajara Cartel. The operation necessitated substantial cooperation among various United States entities, such as the DEA, FBI, and CIA, in addition to Mexican law enforcement. Investigators utilized a range of techniques to apprehend significant cartel figures, including intelligence gathering, raids, and arrests (DEA, n.d.).

Rafael Caro Quintero and Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo were apprehended in connection with the April 1985 homicide of Camarena. Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo abruptly withdrew from public consciousness and assumed a more concealed position in the aftermath of these prominent apprehensions. In light of increased law enforcement scrutiny and efforts to disrupt the cartel's operations, a calculated and strategic reaction was implemented (Watkins, 2018; Rigby, 2018). The Camarena case not only prompted substantial operational modifications within the Guadalajara Cartel but also acted as a turning point in the wider war on drugs, irrevocably transforming the bilateral stance of the United States and Mexico concerning drug trafficking and associated violence. Operation Leyenda marked a shift in U.S. policy towards a more aggressive and direct intervention in foreign nations to combat drug trafficking.

Subsequent to Félix Gallardo's apprehension in 1989, the cartel underwent a division into numerous subsidiary entities, culminating in the formation of the Sinaloa, Tijuana, and Juarez cartels (Rios, 2014). Under the leadership of Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán, the Sinaloa cartel rose rapidly to become the most powerful in Mexico, eventually controlling up to fifty percent of the country's drug trade (Dudley, 2014). In addition to utilizing violence to intimidate rivals and maintain control over its territory, the cartel's strength stemmed from its ability to oversee the entire drug supply chain, from cultivation to distribution. The emergence of the Sinaloa cartel as the preeminent entity in the Mexican drug trade marked the beginning of the 2000s as the prominence of Mexican drug cartels began to increase. According to Sanchez (2020), the Sinaloa cartel's triumph can be ascribed to its adeptness in forging alliances with other Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and its strategic dominance over vital routes utilized for drug transportation to the United States.

DTOs have amassed considerable financial gains, which they employ strategically to infiltrate the political, law enforcement, and judicial systems of the nation. In addition to financial impropriety, this corruption encompasses acts of coercion and violence. The frequency with which journalists and public servants were assassinated served as a stark indication of their ability and readiness to stifle dissent (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) ruled Mexico for a period of seven decades, a period that paralleled the expansion and consolidation of drug cartels. Subsidiary networks of corruption were established by drug traffickers through the PRI's centralized political structure, which enabled them to secure distribution rights, market access, and legal immunity. A complex and mutually beneficial relationship existed between the state and DTOs during this time period; both benefited from the actions and influence of the other.

In contrast, the political environment underwent a significant transformation in 2000 with the victory of National Action Party (PAN) President Vicente Fox, which put an end to the PRI's seventy-year-long political hegemony. The political transition caused a disturbance in the longstanding agreements between the cartels and the government. The cartels escalated their violence in an effort to regain political sway and adjust to the altered political climate. The escalated violence served as a conspicuous manifestation of the cartels' unwavering resolve to preserve their authority and dominion, notwithstanding the political transformations occurring at the state level (Carlos, 2014).

It was believed that Fox's election as the first opposition candidate in decades constituted a denunciation of their corrupt and ineffectual administration. Fox ran on a platform of implementing much-needed reforms, including increased government and law enforcement transparency and accountability. Although certain advancements were achieved during his presidency, these sectors also witnessed controversies, including censure over his management of drug-related violence and allegations of human rights transgressions associated with military patrols.

The utilization of military patrols has been linked to a multitude of human rights transgressions, including extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, and torture, according to Amnesty International (2000). A critique of the utilization of military patrols contends that their inexperience and lack of specialized knowledge render them incapable of efficiently performing law enforcement responsibilities; in fact, they may exacerbate the violence problem. As the influence of drug cartels expanded, they acquired the ability to bribe government officials and exert greater control over the government. This corruption is deeply ingrained in Mexican society and will be difficult to eradicate (Méndez-Lemus et al., 2016).

Criminal activities escalated substantially in Mexico, particularly in the domains of organized crime and drug trafficking. The increase in activity could be ascribed, at least in part, to the decline of centralized governmental authority and the simultaneous emergence of drug cartels, particularly in the western and northern regions of Mexico (Cooper, 2018). It is important to acknowledge that the challenges faced by Fox's administration were not solely the result of a fragmented government. Furthermore, their entrenchment in the enduring political and economic structures facilitated an atmosphere that was ripe for the expansion of organized criminal enterprises (Ucko et al., 2023). Although Fox's administration attempted to tackle the issue of organized crime, its endeavors were largely insufficient in the face of such a formidable and intricate obstacle (Rios, 2015).

The Sinaloa cartel's ability to coerce local authorities and law enforcement agencies, in addition to its superior finances, resources, weapons, and technology, contributed to its victory in the power struggle. Corruption and collusion among government officials and drug cartels have emerged as significant catalysts for the proliferation of organized crime and drug trafficking in Mexico. Payan (2013) elucidates the vulnerabilities of the economy and government that have been exploited by drug cartels, with some authorized officials cooperating with the cartels. The proliferation of illicit substances may also be ascribed to political and law enforcement corruption. Subsequent to 2010, virtually all high-ranking law enforcement officials have faced allegations of complicity in organized crime endeavors, while it has been discovered that cartels finance the campaigns of politicians (Borell et al., 2022).

During the Calderón administration (2006-2012), the government made a concentrated effort to eliminate drug cartels that had been operating with impunity for years. Regrettably, this precipitated a sequence of violent confrontations between the government and drug cartels,

which escalated the conflict and caused substantial casualties. According to academic scholar Luis Astorga, the government's strategy of directly targeting drug cartels caused the fragmentation of the drug trade, resulting in the emergence of smaller, more localized groups competing for control over specific territories. The fragmentation posed a growing challenge for the government in its efforts to combat the drug trade, as it necessitated concurrent engagement with multiple groups. Throughout the Calderón administration, the government and drug cartels frequently employed extreme and violent strategies. To target drug cartels, the government implemented numerous strategies, including the deployment of the military and the use of drones. However, these tactics often resulted in collateral damage, with innocent civilians caught in the crossfire.

President Felipe Calderón promptly commenced a vigorous opposition to drug cartels in Mexico following his inauguration. A substantial paradigm shift occurred in the government's strategy towards countering organized crime with the implementation of this initiative. A considerable quantity of military personnel was utilized by Calderón during his six-year presidency, frequently occupying positions that were conventionally occupied by local police forces, which he considered to be tainted by corruption. Tens of thousands of troops were deployed throughout the nation as a result of this strategy (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). Significant accomplishments were attained by the Mexican military in conjunction with the United States. These include the apprehension or eradication of twenty-five out of thirty-seven of the most sought-after drug lords in Mexico. A trademark of the Calderón administration (Calderón et al., 2015) was this aggressive, militarized approach to drug enforcement.

Notwithstanding these accomplishments, Calderón's tactics, most notably the "decapitation" strategy designed to eradicate drug cartel leadership, were criticized for

unintentionally giving rise to a multitude of smaller, more violent criminal organizations. This fragmentation of cartels led to increased violence and instability within the criminal underworld. Critics also questioned the preparedness of the Mexican military to take on policing roles traditionally outside their purview (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019).

More than 120,000 homicides were documented during the presidency of Felipe Calderón, an almost twofold increase compared to the previous administration. A considerable proportion of these homicides, approximately one-third to one-half, were cartel-related, according to estimates (Beckstead, 2023). This reflects the violent and intense nature of the drug war at the time.

Drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) have traditionally employed acts of violence as a means to establish dominance and control over the territories they operate in Mexico. Prominent scholar Edgardo Buscaglia has emphasized the strategic utilization of violence by these cartels as a means to intimidate adversaries and establish their dominance in particular geographical areas. Cartels employ this type of aggression not only against rival groups but also against civilians, in an effort to establish dominance by instilling fear and coercion (Grayson, 2013).

The rise in criminal activities such as homicides, kidnappings, and robberies reached alarming levels, especially in the northern and western regions of Mexico. These areas, significantly impacted by cartel activities, became hotbeds of violence and lawlessness. In an effort to combat this increase in criminal activity, the Mexican government dispatched military forces to these areas. Nevertheless, this military intervention incited discord and was tarnished with allegations of transgressions against human rights (Paley, 2017). Despite the government's use of military force to stop the cartels, they continued their operations, frequently doing so

covertly in urban areas. In these areas, they either circumvented or outright compromised law enforcement and military efforts, maintaining their grip on illegal operations. The persistent strength of the cartels, despite government intervention, highlighted the complexities and challenges in dismantling these deeply entrenched criminal networks (A.B.C. News, 2014).

The situation was further aggravated by the presence of corruption in both political and law enforcement spheres. Governmental and economic vulnerabilities were exploited by cartels, which frequently coerced or conspired with officials to facilitate their operations. Since 2010, high-ranking law enforcement officials have been confronted with allegations of involvement in organized crime operations. Additionally, evidence has surfaced suggesting that cartels provide financial support to political campaigns, underscoring the profound difficulties that Mexico faces in its fight against drug-related crime.

Mexico's approach to combating drug cartels underwent a transformation during the presidency of Enrique Peña Nieto, the successor of Enrique Calderón (2012- 2018). In contrast to Calderón, Peña Nieto's initial priority was the mitigation of violence within the business and civilian sectors, rather than the targeting of cartel leadership. In spite of this strategy, Peña's administration continued to employ federal police forces and the military extensively in its efforts to combat the cartels. An important development that transpired under his administration was the formation of the Gendarmerie, a novel nationwide police force comprised of tens of thousands of personnel from the federal, naval, and military branches. Its primary objective was to combat organized crime (Stewart, 2013; Center, 2013).

In the initial years of Peña Nieto's administration, homicides decreased. Nevertheless, this trajectory changed in 2015, and by the time he departed from office, Mexico had encountered its

most alarming homicide rates in contemporary times. Experts attribute this increase in violence to the ongoing effects of the "kingpin strategy," territorial disputes, and the ensuing fragmentation of drug cartels (Rico, 2016; Asoni, 2019).

Peña Nieto's endeavors to dismantle the deeply ingrained power structures of the cartels proved largely fruitless, notwithstanding the formation of the Gendarmerie. Several high-profile cases during this time period served to illustrate the pervasiveness of the issue by bringing attention to allegations of corruption in the government and law enforcement. The ill-fated whereabouts of 43 students in Iguala in 2014, an incident associated with police and government corruption, served as an illustration of the difficulties encountered throughout Peña Nieto's presidency (Lara, 2020).

Substantial allegations of corruption have tarnished the presidency of Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico. One of the most notable is the allegation that he accepted a bribe worth \$100 million from the Sinaloa cartel's then-leader, Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán. The revelation of this assertion occurred throughout El Chapo's legal proceedings in the United States, wherein a former associate contended that the considerable amount was remunerated to Peña Nieto in exchange for safeguarding the cartel's operations (The Guardian, 2019). Peña Nieto has consistently denied these allegations.

If verified, this scenario exemplifies a pervasive concern within Mexican politics concerning the ambiguity that exists between governmental power and criminal organizations such as DTOs. The purported bribe offered to Peña Nieto represents a potential perpetuation of a historical pattern in Mexico, wherein even the most esteemed political positions are susceptible to the corrupting impact of drug trafficking. This highlights the complex difficulties inherent in

mitigating the impact and magnitude of the nation's primary drug cartels. This ongoing challenge of corruption in Mexico highlights the complexities faced in combating the power and reach of major drug cartels within the country.

Since his inauguration in 2018, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, widely known as AMLO, has embarked on a transformative approach to combat the nation's enduring struggle against drug cartels. In contrast to his predecessors' conventional militarized strategies, AMLO has advocated for a philosophy centered around "Abrazos, no balazos" (hugs, not bullets), which seeks to confront the socioeconomic foundations that support organized crime. By fostering community development initiatives and creating employment opportunities, this policy seeks to alleviate the elements that have historically influenced individuals to engage in criminal behavior (Bonner, 2023). Furthermore, the administration led by AMLO has initiated a comprehensive campaign against corruption, focusing on the financial foundations of cartels, advocating for forward-thinking policies including the abolition of all illicit drug offenses, and suggesting amnesty for cartel members involved in minor activities. These measures are designed to weaken the structural foundations of drug trafficking organizations by alleviating the circumstances that facilitate their growth and influence (France 24, 2022; Agren, 2022).

Notwithstanding these methodologies, AMLO's tactics have been criticized for their similarities to those of previous administrations, particularly with regard to their reliance on military forces to ensure internal security. Some people believe that the creation of a military-led National Guard to increase security is a continuation of militarized policies. Furthermore, it is evident from the consistently high homicide rates that the dangers presented by violent drug cartels and organized crime remain a significant obstacle in Mexico during AMLO's tenure (O'Neil, 2019; Tuckman, 2019).

Given this context, the administration led by AMLO has consistently pursued reforms to Mexico's drug policy, with a specific focus on eliminating the underlying factors that contribute to drug addiction and the subsequent outbreaks of violence. The alarming number of homicides linked to organized crime and drug trafficking that the National Human Rights Commission of Mexico documented in 2020, however, is proof that drug-related violence continues to be a significant barrier in the country.

Addressing crime rates through social programs and reducing drug demand have been top priorities for the AMLO administration. According to Flores and Vásquez (2021), the administration has prioritized addressing the underlying factors that contribute to drug trafficking, including poverty and inequality. One of López Obrador's principal strategies, the National Plan for Peace and Security, endeavors to diminish criminal activities and violence through the resolution of social concerns, the provision of educational and occupational prospects, and the alleviation of poverty and inequality. In an additional effort to mitigate drug demand, fiscal support for rehabilitation centers and treatment programs has been augmented by the government (Flores & Vásquez, 2021).

Despite the government's efforts to reduce drug trafficking in Mexico, drug cartels remain a significant challenge. Decades of operation in Mexico have allowed these cartels to amass vast networks and affiliations with law enforcement and local politicians (Flores & Vásquez, 2021). Opposition and violence have ensued in opposition to the government's efforts to dismantle drug cartels and reduce drug trafficking.

Although the precise consequences of the policies implemented by the López Obrador administration on drug trafficking in Mexico are still indeterminate, certain scholars contend that

the government's prioritization of social concerns and efforts to curtail drug demand constitute a constructive stride in the right direction (Flores & Vásquez, 2021). has reported that López Obrador's administration's policies have led to a decrease in the number of homicides in the country, which may be an indication that the government's approach is effective.

An academic perspective that stands out amidst the intricate discourse surrounding drug policy advocates for the simultaneous legalization and regulation of substances. This methodology is founded on the belief that existing approaches have been largely ineffective, specifically the criminalization of drug use and trafficking. Instead, they have exacerbated issues such as increased violence and corruption.

The premise underlying this viewpoint is that the authority of drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) could be substantially weakened through the legalization and regulation of drugs. It will be possible to reduce the profits that these criminal organizations generate from drug trafficking by eradicating the black market. Advocates of this perspective contend that regulatory measures would enable enhanced oversight of pharmaceutical quality, potentially resulting in safer usage, and could yield substantial tax revenues under effective management. Furthermore, an argument can be made in favor of legalization: it may redirect attention from punitive strategies to health-promoting approaches, thereby framing drug addiction as a matter of public health as opposed to a criminal concern (Ritter, n.d.).

However, the concept of drug legalization is not without its detractors. Opponents argue that legalization could lead to increased drug use, potentially wreaking havoc on families and communities and exacerbating public health crises. DTOs have the potential to adapt to new situations or broaden their activities to include additional illicit activities (Peircan, 2019). Hence,

a nuanced examination is required despite the fact that the legalization and regulation of drugs could provide a viable alternative strategy for combating drug trafficking and the violence that accompanies it. Legalization and regulation of drugs could therefore provide a viable alternative strategy for combating drug trafficking and the accompanying violence; however, this necessitates a nuanced examination.

## **Chapter 2: Normalization of Violence and Erosion of Social Norms**

The drug trade has developed into a formidable industry with its own set of standards, values, and symbols over the course of several decades. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the social dynamics inherent in narco culture, with a specific emphasis on two pivotal elements: the factors that entice individuals to participate in the drug trade and the motivations that drive certain individuals to become complicit in it. The prevalence of violence in the drug trade of Mexico is a complex matter that is profoundly influenced by a range of sociological and anthropological factors. Financial incentives play a significant role in motivating individuals to participate in this illicit yet lucrative enterprise, particularly in areas where legitimate economic opportunities are limited. The profitable nature of this facet of the drug trade incites territorial disputes and fierce competition among various cartels and individual traffickers, thereby heightening the degree of violence. The allure of substantial financial gain in an environment with limited legal opportunities leads to a vicious cycle of aggression and conflict among those involved in the narcotics trade (Puyana et al, 2017).

Nevertheless, the extent of violence involved in the drug trade transcends mere economic profit. Significantly intertwined with broader social and political narratives, it functions as a mechanism to navigate social inequalities and political instability as well as a reaction to them. In order to establish dominance and exert influence over flawed systems and corrupt political frameworks, participants frequently resort to violence. The perpetual cycle of conflict between state authorities and cartels is perpetuated through the strategic use of violence, which undermines governmental authority and influences political decision-making.

Understanding the wider ramifications of drug-related violence necessitates an examination of how local communities, particularly those residing along the US-Mexico border, perceive the issue. The inhabitants of these localities frequently perceive the violence as a matter primarily concerning Mexico, which influences their cultural and social perspectives regarding the drug trade. The close proximity to such acts of violence influences the shared awareness and sense of self within these communities, emphasizing the profound consequences of the ongoing drug war and the profound way in which the lived experiences of these individuals are profoundly impacted by the conflict (Shirk, 2015).

Often referred to as "Narco Cultura," the glamorization of narco-culture infuses societal strata with a complex mixture of admiration, fear, and revulsion. Narcoculture, which originates from the practices and way of life of individuals involved in drug trafficking, has inexplicably permeated mainstream culture, creating the illusion of luxury and allure despite the overt violence and socioeconomic harm it inflicts. Significantly, this culture encourages a type of "reversed" social mobility. This implies that individuals hailing from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds have the potential to advance in status by engaging in the illicit drug trade. This depiction engenders a captivating illusion of power, esteem, and affluence that are effortlessly attained, which is especially alluring to individuals ensnared in poverty and systemic neglect. Narcotic culture's appeal is additionally heightened in various media platforms, including music, film, and others, where the lifestyles of drug lords are frequently portrayed in a glamorous and idealized manner. These types of depictions serve to distort the truth regarding the nature of drug trafficking, thereby ingraining a fallacious narrative regarding its actual repercussions and effects.

A set of societal values revolving around fearlessness, strategic brutality, the pursuit of power, and financial gain is ingrained in narcoculture. The aforementioned culture is strongly ingratiated via 'narcocorridos,' a genre of Mexican ballads that describes the exploits and lives of drug lords in vivid detail. Ballads of this genre, which are characterized by their rhythmic narrative structure, often glorify the exploits of narco-traffickers, portraying them as cunning and victorious in conflicts against competing cartels and authorities. This particular style of musical narratives significantly influences societal perspectives and attitudes through the process of legitimizing and, at times, even exalting unlawful and violent behavior.

Narcocorridos have their origins in traditional corridos, which have historically centered on historical figures, political occurrences, and momentous figures in the annals of Mexican history. With the expansion of narcoculture, corridos emerged. This development spawned the narcocorrido genre and reflected the shifting social fold. Drug lords are often portrayed in these songs as contemporary Robin Hoods or defiant anti-heroes who triumph over systemic and societal obstacles. The cultural influence and extensive appeal of narcocorridos serve as evidence that narco values have become deeply ingrained in the social and cultural tapestry of areas severely impacted by drug trafficking (Edberg, 2004).

In recent years, narcocorridos have gained significant popularity, which has coincided with the rise in drug-related violence in Mexico. Ballads such as the one mentioned function as a form of cultural expression that mirrors the socio-economic conditions prevalent in Mexico. In this country, drug traffickers are frequently regarded as prosperous individuals who offer prospects to communities that are otherwise impoverished and marginalized (Ramírez-Pimienta, 2011). As a result of normalizing and glorifying criminal lifestyles and violence, this glorification of narcos has also been criticized.

Beyond music, narcocorridos play an important cultural role in Mexico. They have a significant impact on attitudes, language, fashion, and youth in particular. The genre has evolved into a potent vehicle for the construction and dissemination of narratives concerning survival, resistance, identity, and resistance (Wald, 2001). In regions most impacted by narcoviolence, narcocorridos have been subject to censorship and prohibitions, despite their widespread appeal. Simonett (2021) highlights the inherent conflict between the freedom of expression espoused by these songs and the risk that they contribute to the perpetuation of a violent and impermissive society.

Additionally, former Mexican president Vicente Fox supported a ban on narcocorridos. This position exemplifies a more extensive apprehension regarding the cultural ramifications and possibility that these songs will idealize unlawful behavior. This viewpoint, however, is not universally held. A counterpoint has been presented by Jorge Castaneda, a former foreign secretary of Mexico. Narcocorridos, according to him, serve as a mechanism through which Mexican society contemplates and analyzes its actualities. According to Castaneda, the genre of drug-related violence is an effect rather than a cause of such violence. This implies that the violence itself motivates the composition of such songs (Graham, 2023). The discourse surrounding narcocorridos pertains to more extensive societal inquiries concerning the capacity of media and art to mirror and potentially impact social concerns, specifically as they relate to organized crime and drug violence.

Narco culture and values also provide a pseudo-ethos of resistance, through illicit and violent means, against established socio-political structures that have historically marginalized certain populations. The drug lord, frequently originating from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, paradoxically becomes an emblematic figure of resistance against systemic

socioeconomic subjugation while simultaneously sustaining violence and social unrest. Individuals, particularly youth, might perceive engagement in narco activities as an act of rebellion or a means of regaining control and agency within environments that have perennially disenfranchised them.

The drug trade significantly influences the formation of identities and the structure of communities, especially in contexts where narcos are prevalent. The influence of the drug trade on local economies and social structures is particularly evident in contexts where narco values have become deeply ingrained. This exemplifies a multifaceted interplay in which moral and ethical limits are obscured. The internalization of narcotic values and the violence that accompanies them within communities causes a profound transformation of social norms and value systems, as these elements become ingrained in the cultural and moral fabric of society. An investigation into the narcos' mentality and way of life unveils an intricate array of incentives, anxieties, aspirations, and tensions that dictate their behaviors and perspectives. Subsequent to the outward appearance, a narco's existence is frequently characterized by the juxtaposition of abject violence and excessive wealth. However, this superficial aspect belies an intricate psychological and socio-cultural terrain that guides them along the illicit drug trade.

The psychological and behavioral profiles of individuals engaged in narco activities often mirror those found in legitimate entrepreneurial endeavors. These individuals exhibit a strong sense of ambition, a willingness to take risks, and a knack for strategic planning. Key to their survival and success in such a high-stakes environment are traits like trustworthiness and loyalty, which are as valued as they are rare. These individuals must constantly balance the need to instill fear and command respect to maintain their influence and control within their networks. Maintaining this intricate balance is critical not only for their ascent within the hierarchical

framework of the narcotics industry but also for their ongoing survival. Pleading for strength and composure is not merely an individual characteristic in this context; it is an essential survival mechanism. It aids them in coping with the persistent dangers posed by both external forces and members of their own ranks, where betrayal is prevalent.

The stark contrast between excess and the constant threat of danger characterizes a narco's private world. Their homes are often bastions of luxury, decked with high-end furnishings, exotic animals, and lavish facilities, all encased within heavily fortified and vigilantly guarded premises. Constantly cognizant of the dangers inherent in their profession—including violence, betrayal, and the potential for an abrupt fall from power—this splendor coexists with this awareness. Fear and paranoia are constant companions in this tense domestic environment, which is the result of this dichotomy. Narcos, despite their frequently formidable and impregnable personas, are motivated by an intricate web of vulnerabilities and ruthlessness. Beyond mere personal ambition, their quest for power, respect, and wealth can be interpreted as motivated by more profound needs for security, validation, and recognition within a socioeconomic system that frequently marginalizes particular groups. In addition to their illicit pursuits, criminals have a fundamental human obligation to safeguard and provide for their families, to spare them the hardships they may have encountered themselves, and to establish a lasting legacy that surpasses their own existence. This combination of individual aspirations and familial responsibilities exemplifies the complex and diverse aspects of their existence, wherein wealth and peril coexist with ambitions and susceptibilities.

This intricate psychological landscape is not just a result of their actions but also shapes their decisions and experiences within the drug trade. Exploring the psychological and emotional dimensions of narcos is crucial for a nuanced understanding of their behavior and motivations.

The objective of this investigation is not to romanticize or rationalize the frequently difficult truths surrounding drug trafficking; rather, it seeks to acquire understanding of the human factors that propel individuals into this perilous domain. Narcos, similar to the general populace, contend with vulnerabilities, fears, aspirations, and desires that are distorted and amplified by the extraordinary nature of their endeavors. Constant threats of violence, betrayal, and legal repercussions vie with the allure of wealth and power in a way that forces them to live in a state of constant negotiation (Vigil, 2016; Garcia, 2006). Understanding narcos from a holistic perspective is critical for developing effective strategies to address the drug trade. This requires recognizing both the destructive consequences of the perpetrators' actions and their inherent humanity. Such an approach is essential for formulating interventions and policies that not only aim to curb drug trafficking but also offer viable alternatives and support for individuals who might be drawn into its orbit (O'Connor et al, 2014; Mckenzie, 2018).

Mexican society has been subjected to an incessant deluge of brutal imagery and narratives due to the extensive violence coverage in the news, general media, and television. This has prompted inquiries into the capacity of a society to adjust and react in a milieu where violence has become the standard rather than the exception. Desensitization is the process by which repeated exposure to a stimulus diminishes an individual's emotional reactivity to it. The pervasive exposure to violent imagery through news outlets and television programming has contributed to a general desensitization to violence in the context of Mexican society. This phenomenon is of specific concern due to its potential to modify individuals' cognitive processing of violent events, which may result in a reduced capacity for empathy and an elevated susceptibility to shock or distress.

The frequent portrayal of violent acts in the media leads to their normalization within society. Such normalization has the potential to modify societal perceptions, rendering acts of extreme violence ordinary or anticipated. Extended exposure to violent content, even via media outlets, may result in adverse consequences for one's mental well-being. Elevated levels of anxiety, stress, and a feeling of helplessness or hopelessness may manifest as symptoms. Continuous exposure to violence can influence individuals' worldviews, fostering a more cynical and distrustful outlook towards society and governance. Younger generations growing up in this environment may develop skewed perceptions of violence and conflict resolution, impacting their social development and future behaviors.

### **Chapter 3: Violence as a Means of Communication**

This chapter examines the intricate mentality of narcos and the ways in which they rationalize acts of extreme violence that occur within the drug trade. Furthermore, it investigates the manner in which violence functions as a means of communication within this particular subculture. Gaining insight into the mentality of individuals engaged in the narco trade is essential in order to comprehend the intricate intricacies of drug trafficking and the repercussions it has on Mexican society. Violence functions not only as a consequence of their endeavors but also as an essential mode of communication within the narcoculture. A pattern of mimetic violence is widely observed within the narco subculture. This entails factions or individuals imitating the aggressive behaviors exhibited by their adversaries or forebears. Such imitation often escalates the levels of violence, as each act becomes a benchmark for the next (Sánchez, 2020). By means of strategic use, extreme acts of violence communicate strength, dominance, and determination, both to adversaries and within their own organizations. Narcotics employ violence as a means of communicating their power and ruthlessness, thereby solidifying their position and instilling fear in others (Michaelsen et al., 2020).

Significant roles are played by schismogenesis and mimetic violence in the narco subculture, specifically in the manner in which violence is employed as a means to communicate dominance, power, and hierarchy. A concept borrowed from the theory of René Girard, mimetic violence posits that aggression may have a contagious effect on individuals who imitate the aggressive conduct of others. This mimetic nature of violence in the context of the drug trade

frequently results in the replication and escalation of acts of aggression and brutality, as different factions vie for power or retaliate against perceived threats.

Greg Bateson coined the term "schismogenesis" to denote the process by which social groups differentiate, resulting in heightened levels of polarization and discord. This is evident in the narcotics industry, where cartels distinguish themselves from rivals and authorities frequently by committing increasingly violent acts. Establishing a reputation and a perceived hierarchy within the criminal underworld are additional motivations for this differentiation besides territorial control. As such, violence functions as a mode of communication. Both to rival organizations and to the communities in which these actors operate, it is utilized to convey transparent messages of authority and control. For example, public acts of brutality, such as the display of bodies, are not only about instilling fear but also about signaling unassailable power and a willingness to act without regard for legal or moral constraints.

The persistent aggression that characterizes the drug trade further solidifies the heinous nature of the ongoing conflict. When each act of violence provokes further aggression, a recurring cycle of retaliation and one-upmanship ensues; this cycle often spreads to the wider community, culminating in social and political turmoil. Therefore, as this recurring pattern of violence continues to persist, achieving peace and a resolution becomes increasingly challenging. The schismogenesis and emetic violence of the narco subculture exemplify how violence functions as a complex mechanism to communicate power, instill fear, and maintain the industry's intrinsic cycle of criminality.

Cartels frequently utilize propaganda methods, such as the hanging of narco-banners and the inscription of messages on the remains of their victims. Threats, taunts and to take

responsibility for violent acts may be included in these messages (Teiner, 2020). In addition to psychological warfare, violence is an element of a comprehensive strategy. Cartels employ violent strategies to establish dominance over populations and territories through the instillation of fear. To convey messages to adversaries, law enforcement, and the general public, excessive violence is employed. Such heinous and gruesome forms of communication contribute to the cartel's tarnished reputation (Guevara, 2013).

Moreover, acts of violence within the narco subculture may be perceived as performative, as they communicate with external and internal audiences. Performative violence functions not solely as a means of instilling fear, but also as a twisted manifestation of social status within the narcotics industry, frequently stemming from a more extensive contempt for governmental and law enforcement institutions.

DTOs employ a unique mode of communication known as narcomessaging, which functions as an instrument of propaganda and information warfare. This approach incorporates a range of communication channels, such as written correspondence, videos, and graffiti, which are employed by malicious organizations to spread their objectives, coerce opponents, and influence public sentiment and policy decisions (Atuesta, 2017). The development of narcomessaging has occurred in tandem with the evolution of organized crime. DTOs initially employed their victims as conduits through which to convey their messages. . As time has progressed, narcomessaging has developed further in complexity, adjusting to better suit the evolving strategies and requirements of criminal organizations (Atuesta, 2020).

Established in 1997, Los Zetas, a notorious Mexican criminal organization, functioned as the enforcement division of the Gulf Cartel, a formidable Mexican drug trafficking syndicate

(Kitroeff, 2023). Originating as a cohort of distinguished Mexican Special Forces personnel who voluntarily separated from the armed forces to join the Gulf Cartel, the Los Zetas were primarily responsible for bolstering the cartel's drug trafficking activities and ensuring their safety (Kitroeff, 2023). Former Mexican Army elite soldier Arturo Guzmán Decena served as their initial leader. Los Zetas developed into a ruthless and highly organized criminal organization over time. They undertook extortion, human trafficking, and other illicit enterprises in addition to drug trafficking, thereby establishing themselves as one of the most formidable criminal organizations in Mexico. Following Arturo Guzmán Decena's demise in 2002, Los Zetas was led by Heriberto Lazcano, also referred to as "El Lazca," who continued the organization's violent endeavors. The organization experienced internal power struggles and fragmentation in subsequent years (Plaza et al., 2023).

Los Zetas significantly contributed to the escalation of the nature and brutality of violence during this conflict. Contrary to the conventional cartel approach of establishing alliances, Los Zetas employed an unprecedented brand of cruelty and violence to instill fear in their adversaries, employing a method that bore more resemblance to psychological warfare. Their methods, which included public displays of corpses, torture of victims, and indiscriminate slaughter, represented a radical departure from the levels of violence that had been witnessed previously. As a more recent entrant in the drug war arena, the Zetas utilized extreme violence as a means to contend with well-established cartels. They established and maintained dominance over territories in the manner reminiscent of the military, as opposed to relying on conventional criminal networks. Despite a gradual decline in their military prowess, their inclination towards brutality endured.

The consequences of this strategic change implemented by the Zetas rippled throughout other cartels. As a result of rival organizations adopting the Zetas' extreme tactics, violence escalated throughout Mexico. This encompassed the utilization of egregious and torturous methods of execution, such as castration and flailing, in addition to the public exhibition of victims, which served to heighten the viciousness and visual spectacle of cartel violence (Glantz et al., 2022). Other criminal organizations' imitation of the Zetas' strategies contributed significantly to the increase in violence and the emergence of new, more heinous forms of cartel-related heinousness.

In August 2010, a tragic incident unfolded in the village of El Huizachal in the municipality of San Fernando, Tamaulipas, when 72 migrants, most hailing from Central and South America with hopes of reaching the United States, were brutally murdered. This massacre was perpetrated amidst a violent struggle between Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel over the control of human trafficking networks. Los Zetas abducted and brutally executed the victims from buses; some were even executed for declining to serve as drug mules. Subsequently, it came to light that local police had participated in these activities, serving as lookouts for Los Zetas while ignoring their presence. In April 2011, the discovery of mass graves containing the remains of 193 individuals near San Fernando precipitated an escalation in the violence. According to investigations, these victims, who were executed, were forcibly removed from public buses; the majority of them were Mexican nationals. This occurrence mirrored the heinousness of the 2010 massacre and served to underscore the indiscriminate character of narco-related violence.

On January 5, 2023, Mexican authorities apprehended Ovidio Guzman Lopez, the progeny of El Chapo, during a substantial law enforcement operation conducted in Culiacán. The arrest of Guzman Lopez, a prominent member of the Sinaloa cartel, provoked an immediate

surge of violent responses from cartel members, demonstrating their ability to respond swiftly and aggressively in retaliation (Nuño, 2023).

An endeavor was made to extradite Guzman Lopez to the United States, where he was confronted with a multitude of charges related to drug trafficking subsequent to his apprehension. However, the extradition procedure faced numerous challenges and was subject to significant setbacks, primarily attributable to the intricate legal intricacies and the tumultuous atmosphere sparked by his apprehension (Shirk et al., 2015). In a notable development in September 2023, Guzman Lopez was extradited to the United States and subsequently entered a plea of not guilty to the charges against him, marking a pivotal moment in his ongoing legal proceedings (Kitroeff, 2023; Plaza et al., 2023).

In Culiacán, the immediate aftermath of Guzman Lopez's arrest was characterized by anarchy and violence. Members of the Sinaloa cartel mobilized swiftly, deploying hit squads and erecting roadblocks. The city nearly degenerated into a war zone due to the widespread occurrence of armed confrontations between security forces and cartel members. Shootings ensued between cartel members and members of the military and police in an effort to impede law enforcement operations. In an effort to cause confusion and interfere with movement, roadblocks were constructed and vehicles were set on fire. Attacks on civilians and public infrastructure were documented, which served to intensify the prevailing sense of fear. The objectives of the cartel's activities were to sow fear and exhibit their authority. The disorder that ensued in Culiacán functioned as a poignant illustration of the cartel's sway and their readiness to employ drastic strategies. Criticism was directed at the Mexican government for its management of the situation. The authorities were compelled to temporarily retreat due to the intense

violence, which underscored the difficulties they encounter in upholding control and order in cartel-dominated regions.

The arrest of Ovidio Guzmán-López, however, had broader implications beyond the legal sphere. It incited a ferocious backlash from the Sinaloa cartel, characterized by a series of violent acts including homicides, vandalism, and armed confrontations with security forces. This response highlighted the cartel's readiness to directly challenge state authority and disrupt societal peace as a form of power assertion and retribution (Nuño, 2023; BBC, 2023). These occurrences highlight the strategic character of violence within the narcoculture, where cruelty is not merely a manifestation of rage but rather a deliberate means of communication. The implementation of severe acts of violence by the cartel, such as employing human bodies as macabre emblems, fulfills several objectives: it discourages dissent, discourages governmental bodies and rival factions from intervening, and strengthens their dominion over illicit enterprises and territories.

As an ominous practice, cartels have embraced the utilization of human bodies as symbols. This includes the public exhibition of mutilated bodies, beheadings, and hangings, frequently in highly visible locations. With the intention of instilling fear and astonishment in both the general public and particular entities, such as rival cartels or government bodies, these acts are executed. The obscene characteristics of cartel violence convey a disconcerting message to opposing factions and governmental authorities. This behaves as an indication of the cartels' readiness to disobey legal regulations and simultaneously contest the government's lawful application of force. This type of violence serves as a conspicuous indication to competing cartels of the repercussions that await them if they invade territories or disrupt operations. A deterrent effect is created by these heinous deeds against potential opponents of the cartels. The

apprehension evoked by public demonstrations of aggression deters potential informants and members of the public from cooperating with law enforcement organizations. It also creates an atmosphere where opposition within the ranks of the cartel itself is less likely due to fear of reprisal.

Narcos also employ targeted violence to convey specific messages to their adversaries; for instance, they may execute esteemed musicians as a symbolic act that betrays their adversaries' cultural allegiances or personal sentiments. Additional manifestations of this psychological warfare include the abduction and intimidation of the families of rival cartel members, with the intention of eroding the operational capabilities and morale of adversaries. These methodologies expose an intricate network of signals in which each violent act serves a communicative purpose, such as challenging adversaries, asserting dominance, or instilling fear. This dynamic often leads to cycles of retribution and escalation, contributing to the prolonged conflict and instability within regions affected by narcotrafficking (Diaz, 2023; Southern District of California, 2023; Plaza et al., 2023).

When employed with strategic accuracy, extreme violence proves to be a potent tool for solidifying and preserving control over criminal enterprises and regions. When governmental authority is compromised by corruption or is tenuous, drug cartels frequently establish a system of shadow governance. The effect of these cartels' usurpation of authority is a reign of terror, which they employ strategically to impose their own strict regulations and secure the unwavering compliance of the local populace. Encircled in this reality, communities are confronted with an unrelenting climate of apprehension and unpredictability. Progressively undermining the foundational principles of social cohesion and the established rule of law, this perpetual state of anxiety erodes the very essence of social unity and trust.

Furthermore, the constant and unrelenting exposure to heinous acts of brutality contributes to a gradual but concerning process of normalization within these societies. This process of normalization incites a psychological adaptation to the horrifying, as opposed to mere passivity; it results in a disconcerting loss of sensitivity among the general public. Consequently, these abhorrent and unimaginable acts of violence insidiously intertwine with the daily fabric of existence, transforming into an almost routine backdrop to the lives of those who reside in these regions. This shift in perception not only signifies a profound change in societal norms but also highlights the deep psychological scars inflicted upon communities caught in the crossfire of narco violence.

## Conclusion

In the course of this thesis, we have examined the intricate facets of narco culture and violence, as well as their far-reaching consequences for Mexican society and the world at large. Throughout our exploration, we have examined the intricate psychological aspects of those engaged in narco trafficking, the geopolitical consequences of the drug trade, and the sociocultural shifts that occur as a result of the perpetuation of narco culture. The violence that is intrinsic to the drug trade serves as a strategic instrument for communication and control, and not simply an unintended consequence of criminal behavior. This approach transcends mere physical aggression and infiltrates the social and psychological structure of communities. Narcos utilize violence as a mechanism of communication in order to establish their dominance, instill fear, and transfer power. Moreover, the exaltation of narco culture via media representations and narcocorridos contributes to a multifaceted social phenomenon in which violence and crime are not only accepted as normal but frequently exalted. This particular culture presents a distorted conception of success and social mobility, which is especially alluring in areas plagued by destitution and restricted prospects. Ovidio Guzman Lopez's case exemplifies the continuous conflict between formidable cartels and state forces. The ongoing dispute and the Sinaloa cartel's subsequent violent retaliation underscore the ongoing conflict and the cartels' willingness to challenge state power. This highlights the necessity of adopting a holistic strategy that not only tackles the legal and regulatory dimensions but also investigates the socioeconomic origins of the illicit drug market. In conclusion, the drug trade in Mexico and the associated narco culture present a complex challenge that intertwines socio-economic, psychological, and cultural factors.

It calls for multifaceted solutions that go beyond traditional law enforcement methods. Addressing the root causes, reforming socio-economic structures, and changing the narrative around narco culture are essential to breaking the cycle of violence and corruption that fuels this illicit trade. The journey towards a solution is intricate and demanding, requiring the collaborative efforts of governments, communities, and international partners. Only through a holistic approach can the pervasive influence of narco culture and the violence of the drug trade be effectively mitigated.

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