



Reducing the influence of drug cartels in Latin-America



UNODC

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Issue: Reducing the influence of drug cartels in Latin-America

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Introduction

This paper aims to shed light on the challenges presented by drug cartels in Latin America. The Latin American region has become a highlighted region due to socio factors and political instability as powerful criminal organizations take advantage of the global demand for illegal drugs. The goal of this research is to provide an understanding by exploring the origins, various causes and current situation surrounding drug cartels.

The significant involvement of Latin America in the drug trade during the mid 20th century can be attributed to a combination of dynamics and economic inequalities. As a result influential cartels such as Mexico's Guadalajara Cartel and others in Colombia emerged, shaping the course of the drug market. As these influential cartels emerged, smaller cartels started emerging resulting in a viciously competitive illegal market.

Agreements such as the 1988 Vienna Convention on Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and the adoption of the Inter American Convention Against Terrorism in 2001. These events represent turning points in addressing the challenges posed by drug cartels on a scale.

In today's world countries affected by drug cartels along with law enforcement agencies and international organizations are grappling with the impact caused by these organizations. The influence of drug cartels is characterized by violence, corruption and a complex web of socio factors.

Definition of Key Terms

Caracazo:

Mass protests and violence against government economic policies in Venezuela in 1989.

Cali and Medellin Cartels:

Two major drug cartels operated in Colombia. The Medellin Cartel was led by Pablo Escobar.

Coca Production:

Production of cocaine obtained from the coca plant growing in the Andes Mountains.

Droga:

Meaning "drug" in Spanish, the term is frequently used in spoken languages in Latin America.

Extradition:

The process of extraditing a person from one country to another, usually on criminal charges.

Favela:

A term in Brazil that generally refers to poor neighborhoods on the city periphery.

Mara Salvatrucha (AD-13):

A gang originating in Latin America and often associated with criminal organizations.

Migrant smuggling:

It refers to the links between cross-border illegal migration and drug trafficking.

Parallel State Structures:

Creating alternative systems of governance and authority against the state in regions controlled by drug cartels.

Paramilitary Groups:

Armed organizations that wage armed struggle against the government and are often linked to drug cartels.

Plan Colombia:

It is a program supported by the United States; It aimed to reduce drug production and strengthen security forces in Colombia.

Transnational Crime:

It refers to crimes that cross borders between countries where drug cartels operate.

General Overview

Latin America, a region known for its diversity and complex geopolitical dynamics has always been a point for drug cartel activities. Throughout history various factors such as inequality, political instability and the increasing global demand for drugs have contributed to the emergence of these organizations. Notable examples include the Guadalajara Cartel in Mexico and their counterparts in Colombia, which have significantly affected the region's narrative. Not only did the emergence of drug cartels significantly affect communities residing in Latin America, but it heightened stereotypes towards locals.

Over time numerous events have influenced the trajectory of drug cartels in Latin America. One significant event was the adoption of treaties like the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Vienna Convention). These international agreements represent efforts to combat the growing influence exerted by drug cartels. Additionally, conventions like the Inter American Convention Against Terrorism enacted in 2001 have shed light on how transnational crimes are interconnected and influenced responses to this pressing issue. This convention further proved that terrorism and illegal drug trade are interlinked. Currently, Latin America is still facing the challenges presented by drug cartels. Government and society are both affected by the drug trade. These organizations have an impact on aspects of society causing a mixture of violence, corruption and economic inequalities.

Furthermore socioeconomic factors also contribute to sustaining drug cartels' power within Latin America's landscape. Various factors, such as poverty, income inequality and limited access to education contribute to the vulnerability of communities. These conditions create a breeding ground for recruitment and the perpetuation of activities. Joaquín Archivaldo Guzmán, also known as El Chapo, highlighted the way that drugs ruin human lives in the sense that poverty pushes individuals into the drug trade. It is evident that poverty and poor living conditions contribute to people joining the drug trade and gangs to provide for themselves or their families. Therefore it can be said that poverty and lack of education are leading causes in the imminent growth of drug cartels.

Impacts on a Global Scale

The issue of drug cartels in Latin America transcends borders. The effects of drug cartels on a global scale can cause a range of social, economic, security and political problems.

Drug trafficking creates a large underground economy and generates a business volume worth billions of dollars worldwide. It can damage economic systems due to illegal drug trade, corruption, smuggling and other illegal activities. Drug addiction can disrupt the social structure of individuals and communities, crime rates may increase due to drug addiction and an unsafe environment may occur in the community. Drug cartels often try to gain control through the use of violence and force. This situation may trigger conflicts between bodies in power.

Cartels can conflict with state forces and pose a threat to governments. Drug cartels may aim to gain and maintain political power in the regions they control. Illegal financing and corruption can weaken state institutions and undermine democratic processes. Drug trafficking can also affect relations between countries. The consumption of drugs produced in one country in other countries reveals the need for international cooperation. This leads to poor diplomacy and in some cases war. Drug use, addiction and related health problems can threaten public health on a global scale. Problems such as deaths due to drug use and the spread of infectious diseases may arise. Because these drugs are illegal, substances unknown to the buyer may be added in order to make the producing costs cheaper. This poses a secret threat most people cannot report to authorities due to fear of being sentenced with drug use. Chemicals and agricultural practices used for drug production can cause environmental damage. In particular, effects such as cutting down forests and polluting water resources may be observed.

Timeline of Key Events

| Date | Event |
|-------|--|
| 1970s | Emergence of drug cartels in Colombia, which significantly shaped the global drug trade |
| 1980s | Heightened territorial disputes among drug cartels including the notorious Guadalajara Cartel. |

- 1986** The signing of the Vienna Convention (United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) a treaty aimed at combating global drug trafficking.
- 1990s** Escalation of drug related violence as cartels power attracting increased attention.
- 2001** Adoption of the Inter American Convention Against Terrorism highlighting the nexus between drug cartels and other forms of crime.
- 2010s** Notable protests across American countries denouncing the impact of drug violence and government responses.

Major Parties Involved

Mexico

Currently dealing with the challenges of violence and corruption that are closely associated with drug cartels. The reason for their involvement is directly related to security, governance and the socio economic well being of the nation.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

As a participant in efforts against drug trafficking the UNODC plays a crucial role in monitoring and combatting this issue. Their involvement stems from their mandate to address transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking.

Inter American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD)

CICAD operates under the Organization of American States (OAS) and focuses on addressing drug related matters within the Americas. Their involvement lies in fostering coordination and cooperation regarding drug control policies.

Possible Solutions

Consequences may vary depending on the regions in which drug cartels operate. Therefore international communities should cooperate in combating these problems and try to develop solutions at both national and global levels. These solutions may include measures such as

strengthening law enforcement, increasing border controls, and supporting education and rehabilitation programs.

Strengthening Regional Cooperation

Encouraging countries to reinforce partnerships in order to share resources and expertise for effectively combating drug cartels is a crucial step towards reducing the influence of drug cartels. As cartels use violence in order to stay in power, strengthened regional cooperation and communication will take away that power. As communities are better equipped to combat drug cartels, the influence of these cartels will be diminished. There should be more joint intelligence sharing between countries in order to deal with regional security threats. By creating a common information sharing platform, more effective cooperation can be achieved to monitor and prevent the activities of drug cartels. Training and capacity building programs should be organized among police, security forces and border control units between countries. In this way, a more effective fight against drug trafficking can be carried out. Countries can act together in the fight against drug trafficking by organizing joint operations within the framework of regional cooperation. Joint operations can be more effective in combating cross-border crime. Establishing legal harmonization and standards at the regional level allows the legal tools used in the fight against drug cartels to be used more effectively. Non-governmental organizations can play an important role in the fight against drug trafficking and addiction. Cooperation and communication between non-governmental organizations at the regional level should be strengthened. Border control and security are of critical importance in preventing drug trafficking. Technology and information sharing regarding border security between countries should be increased. By supporting regional development projects in the fight against drug trafficking, economic opportunities and employment can be created in regions where drug trafficking is widespread. All these measures can contribute to the creation of a more effective combat strategy against drug cartels through regional cooperation.

Initiatives for Economic and Social Development

We should consider strategies to tackle the underlying socio factors with a focus on reducing poverty, improving education and creating job opportunities. As these factors are leading causes for joining drug cartels or drug-affiliated activities, combating these issues is key to solve the problem of drug cartels. As reducing poverty is a complex task, some steps towards it would be to invest in education, promoting economic development and the creation of job opportunities, establishing

social safety nets such as healthcare, supporting agriculture, providing access to financial services such as microfinance, implementing effective and transparent governance and anti-corrupt establishments, and harnessing technology and innovation. These measures will help decrease the attractiveness of engaging in drug-affiliated activities. With these measures, resources and expertise can be leveraged to address global poverty challenges.

International Support and Collaboration

It is necessary to advocate for increased cooperation and support. Collaboration with international communities, multilateral organizations, NGOs and other countries will provide assistance to combating the influence of drug cartels. With the efforts of many interlinked forces, more problems can be addressed and effectively solved. As most drug cartels and criminal networks work on an international basis, diplomacy and cooperation if properly utilized are the biggest powers. This also includes providing assistance to law enforcement training and conducting operations to combat international criminal networks. Border security and control should be strengthened at the international level. Security measures should be increased to prevent smuggling in border areas through technological innovations and information sharing. Strengthening the international legal framework allows more effective legal measures to be taken against drug cartels. Cooperation between Interpol and other international legal organizations should be increased. Increasing asset tracking and financial examination capacity at the international level is important in detecting and freezing criminal proceeds. By organizing global anti-drug campaigns and raising public awareness, global solidarity can be created against drug cartels.

International support and cooperation is an issue that requires the joint efforts of all nations, not just one country, in the fight against drug trafficking. Coordinated and determined pursuit of these efforts could provide a more effective strategy for reducing the influence of drug cartels.

Reforms in Legal and Judicial Systems

The implementation of legal and judicial reforms is necessary to dismantle drug cartels. These reforms will aid in more effectively prosecuting drug cartels and dismantling them. More effective penal policies should be developed in the fight against drug trafficking. Penalty amounts and penalty periods should be adjusted according to the seriousness of the crime. Treatment-

oriented approaches should be taken. Instead of punishing addicts, an approach should be adopted that directs them to treatment and encourages rehabilitation programs. A system that combats drug trafficking needs to be established through legal reforms. Existing laws should be reviewed and adapted to changing conditions over time. Alternative punishment methods such as community service should be considered within the penal system, especially for low-risk crimes. This will increase the chance that offenders will be rehabilitated and will reduce the risk of repeated offenses. Campaigns should be organized to raise awareness and educate the society about the harms of drug trafficking. This should include young people, families and communities. Intelligence sharing and cooperation at national and international levels should be increased. This plays an important role in preventing cross-border drug trafficking. Financial monitoring and asset tracking systems should be developed in the fight against drug trafficking. It is important to detect and freeze the proceeds of crime. Necessary improvements should be made to speed up and operate legal processes effectively. Special drug courts can be established to alleviate the workload of the courts. Poverty-fighting social assistance programs can play a preventive role in combating drug trafficking. Reducing economic hardship can prevent delinquency.

These reforms may be among the steps to be taken to create a more effective and fair legal system in the fight against drug trafficking. However, it is important that these reforms fit the general needs and context of society.

Further Reading

For an understanding of the drug cartel issue in Latin America you may find the following resources valuable;

1. "Narcoland; The Mexican Drug Lords and Their Godfathers" by Anabel Hernández. This investigative work sheds light on the connections between drug cartels, political power and corruption in Mexico.
2. "El Narco; Inside Mexicos Criminal Insurgency" by Ioan Grillo. Offering an analysis Grillo explores the evolution of drug cartels in Mexico and their profound impact on society.
3. "The Failure of the War on Drugs" by Douglas Husak is an exploration that examines the global campaign against drugs offering a broader perspective on the challenges faced by affected regions.

4. McCoy, A. (1991). *The Politics of Heroin; CIA Involvement in the Global Drug Trade*. Lawrence Hill Books.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/45198510>

5. Beittel, J. S. (2013). *Mexico's Drug Trafficking Organizations; Origins and Extent of Escalating Violence*. Congressional Research Service.

<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R41576.pdf>