

MEXICAN CRISIS: EXPLAINING THE CRISIS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE IN-COUNTRY VIOLENCE. THE CASE OF THE STATE VERACRUZ DE LA LLAVE.

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Abstract

In Mexico, the number of people that are on the move is growing, and it is a fact that it also has overcome border areas both in the south and in the north. This means that the needs for humanitarian aid are expanding and intensifying. It is well known that the situation because of the drug violence every day is getting worse. This affects the security and the economic growth of the country, especially when it comes to the young generations. Criminal organizations are fighting to fill the gaps that the largest cartels left. There is also an increase in urbanization, especially in the northern border cities and this contributed to the upsurge of the crime rates and threats the well-being and the security of local citizens. Many have been the efforts from the government in order to win this fight against drug cartels and the violence they spread but, however, there is a state, where there are two powerful organizations that were and still in a one-on-one battle and wish to control entirely the drug markets and the routes of trafficking, making this specific state the most dangerous of Mexico nowadays. The state of Veracruz Llave is without exaggerating the biggest and most dangerous drug market right now in Mexico, a circumstance that makes the state a battleground and the riskiest place in the country for someone to live in. The main aspects in which this paper focuses are the war on drugs in the Mexican country and its consequences among people, focusing on the most threatening state, the one of Veracruz and then, the challenges and solutions regarding those circumstances.

Keywords

Drug violence, organized crime, human rights abuse, war on drugs.

Introduction

Latin America and most of its countries, had been facing big humanitarian crisis over the past decades. They have been plagued mostly by violence caused by gangs and the situation has been intense for decades without any improvement or solution regarding the safety of the local habitants. Most of the regions in Latin America have been facing, without exaggeration, big surges of criminal activities that cause deaths, lead to the breakdowns of societies and at the same time they overcome the efforts of humanitarian groups and organizations that try to respond in each possible way. It is well known that Latin America is entangled in this multifaceted and complex situation of drugs and all its related challenges. Obviously, the fact that is the global crossroad not only for the production but also for the trafficking of drugs, has helped the prevalent influence of narcotics in the region over the decades. Cocaine, opiates, marijuana, and other substances of illicit character have been cultivated and transported in and from Latin America, which is their host region. We are talking about a drug situation with repercussions and impacts in the health and safety of the habitants and a bad influence on economies, security and its dynamics and politics.

Mexico is one of the countries that this humanitarian crisis has hit in an almost devastating way. Entire communities, mostly rural have been emptied by drug cartels, in their search to appropriate their lands and their natural resources. So many residents decided to flee from their villages, cities, and states because the Mexican military started its armed conflict against the violent organized criminal organizations. Thousands of Mexicans are displaced internally and are under need of documentation, livelihoods, shelter, and support, not only economical but also psychological. Nowadays, the Government of Mexico has arrested and killed the leaders of some of the most dangerous criminal organizations of the nation but, there is still no plan of contingency for those people that

are displaced forcibly, neither for the violence that occurs when the leadership of a criminal group is successfully arrested or killed, but there is a long way to go.

Veracruz de la Llave, where we find the port city Heroica Veracruz which is the most populous city of the state and at the same time the most dangerous, it is a state of the 31 states that the Mexican country has in total. It is located in the east central part of Mexico, and it is bounded by the Gulf of Mexico. Its state capital is Jalapa (Xalapa, in Spanish). The fact that the city of Heroica Veracruz is a famous and important port city, plays a major role to the fact that Veracruz state is a common route for drugs. It was first dominated by the Gulf Cartel and afterwards, by the Zetas that firstly it was the armed wing of the Gulf Cartel but once the split, the Zetas started to dominate completely. Despite the great culture and beautiful landscapes that Veracruz has and the normality that you can tell it has when you visit it as a tourist, the state is one of the most dangerous places to live in the whole country and the most dangerous place in the world to be a journalist. The hundreds of unsolved disappearances, frequent kidnappings, rampant extortions, and journalist getting killed almost every day, literally spread a climate of fear that dominates the entire state. Why is all this happening? There is not just one reason. It's part of the general atmosphere there, along with organized crime, drug violence and everything else that relates.

A general view

The Mexican nation is now dominated by many powerful criminal organizations that are in a constantly one-on-one battle to control the drug trafficking routes and the drug market. The Mexican government also has hit a great success by arresting and incusing killing some cartel leaders. But this has led the other smaller criminal gangs to an extent that they have been forced to operate just as subsidiaries of the main and powerful cartels. In this way, the territory that is under their control is expanding, which means that at the same time what is also expanding is their business opportunities. The two main powerful organizations named 'Los Zetas' and the Sinaloa cartel, that had as a leader the famous drug trafficker Joaquin Guzman Loera, commonly now as El Chapo, luckily do not operate anymore as their leaders had been arrested. Of course, this gives the opportunity to the other criminal organizations to expand their operations as it was mentioned before, and they see those gaps that those two powerful cartels left behind as their time to become the leaders of the Mexican drug market. They inspire to be present almost everywhere in Mexico and continue the drug war that Los Zetas and Joaquin Guzman started and costed almost 35.000 to 40.000 lives. In general, the country has been plagued by violence because of the gangs and drug cartels. The deadliest year of the Mexican nation was 2018: we are talking about a record of 33,000 homicides. Hundreds of Mexicans are living in such inhuman conditions especially in those warzones where the levels of every day violence displace each day, even more and more people and make them reach for their own safety.

In the year 2011, in the Gulf coast seaport of Heroica Veracruz, 35 tortured and bound bodies were found. The local authorities presumed that the killers of those bodies were aligned with the Sinaloa cartel and the victims were linked apparently to Los Zetas, who took the control of this important seaport during the year 2010. This was the worst of the acts of the cartel of Sinaloa, along with a clash that took place after that, where more than two dozen people of the Zetas, were killed upon their try to pervade the territory of the Sinaloa cartel, in the state of Nayarit, in the Pacific Coast. But the state of Veracruz has been plagued by bloodshed on its streets, shootings, and massacre at many family's gatherings. During the year 2019, Mexico's National Public Safety Secretariat registered a total of 682 homicides from the month of January through March. It also registered 122 kidnappings in total, at the same time. This is why the year 2019 was the bloodiest in the history of Veracruz Massacre. It is without doubt, one of the most important areas of the country when it comes to importing and exporting goods but at the same time, the battleground for this bloody war between the drug cartels. Another terrifying event that was officially registered through the year of 2019, is the homicide of 13 people that were killed at a family party. Among the dead, there was a 1-year-old baby boy who was shot multiple times. His father also died, and his mother was harmed and hospitalized with other three victims. The local authorities said that the Jalisco New Generation Carte, also known by its Spanish acronym CJNG, was involved in the act of massacre which was basically the act of revenge. It was actually an act of common nature for the drug cartels but many times the criminal organizations do not harm children. The terrible killing of the 1-year-old-boy who was shoot multiple times according to local witnesses, it was the characteristic that put this act in the most terrifying ones and established the year of 2019 as the bloodiest. This act took place in the city of Minatitlan, in the southern part of the state. A few days later, a drive-by shooting happened in Mixtla de Altamirano, which is a town that is about 165 miles northwest of Minatitlan. The victims that were killed were three, Mayor Maricale Vallejo Orea, her husband, and their driver. It was clear that the year 2019 was the bloodiest year of the state which was entirely plagued by a wave of violence. There was an increase of 10% compared to last year's violence (2018) that took place in the state.

In the city of The Hague, Netherlands, in October 2022, the headquarters of the International Criminal Court (ICC), presented a public version of a report name 'Hasta encontrarlos: enforced disappearances by security forces in Veracruz constitute crimes against humanity'. This report was elaborated by the International Federation for Human Rights and in general, it gives an account of the context of criminality, violence and corruption that prevailed in the State of Veracruz, during the time of December of 2010-October 2016. It also mentions that the state, contains the two largest clandestine graves in Latin America, with over a total of 600 bodies.

This is a short story of the state of Veracruz, that gives light to the questions like how have violence and crime evolved in Veracruz, or why has this specific state become a reference point for homicides and disappearances during the last years. However, organized crime has been present in the state for at least 40 years, starting at the early years of the decade of 1980. The highland regions were mainly used for the cultivation of marijuana while at the same time the highway network and the port facilitated the transportation of narcotics and of its chemical precursors, as well as the transportation of oil theft and human trafficking. In the past, when we talked about criminal organizations and organized crime, it meant crime in the service of local bosses who were typically the leaders of unions or politicians or other type of leaders. Since the year 2000, crime and illicit activity started to increase in such an aggressive way and the reason for that was linked to the impunity which was almost always prevailed and still is nowadays. Crimes are no longer investigated the way they should be and that, led violence to become a tool for holding power and at the same time extend this power across more and more regions.

Presently, the port of the city of Heroica Veracruz, the port of Coatzacoalcos, and the regions of Sierra Totonaca and Cordoba, are the centers for organized crime and the control comes from regional criminal groups. It can't be said that there are no more cartels such as The Zetas or the Cartel of Sinaloa or even if they are not at this level, that they are also not going to be. It is worth of mentioning that the south part of the state of Veracruz, currently is under the control of groups that are considered substitutes of The Zetas, and this part is the most important plaza. A cocktail of criminal groups that have leaders that don't have clear affiliations or haven't fix them yet and are franchises, is the true general caption of the current situation that prevails in the state.

The real problem is that Veracruz is a state that is safety is based on narcopolitics. Everything depends on narcotrafficking: all the political power, the elected positions, the decisions, the politics, they are all negotiated. Between the governorships of Fidel Herrera (from 2004 to 2010) and Javier Duarte (from 2010 to 2016), in September 2011, was when the drug war began. The 35 bodies that were found tortured in Boca del Rio was the point of start of this war. Disappearances, murders, assassinations and mostly assassinations of journalists reached levels of crisis over the following years. It is a fact that since the end of the government of Duarte's, neither the human rights situation nor the security strategy has changed. The governance of Duarte was characterized by a decrease in robberies, but an increase in high impact crimes, such as kidnappings, extorsions and murders. Organized groups of criminals shifted to other type of crimes to maintain their balance and structure. The Jalisco New Generation Cartel has franchises in almost all the state of Veracruz, and they rent them to regional criminals, some of which include people from groups that belong to other groups that are opposed to the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, for example, groups that inspire to be the next Zetas. Now, in the city of Veracruz, there are no franchises, there are only the real leaders of the New Generation Cartel. This state it might be the most economically important, and there have been really few arrests. What became clear because of the arrests of police officials, regarding the situation and regarding the situation of violence in the state in general, is the fact that there has been a brutal collaboration between top-level authorities and criminal groups, something that was caused not only from the state government but also from previous federal administrations. Criminal collusion has been linked to people that are tasked with security in the state, from municipal authorities to the Marines. All these security authorities, committed disappearances in a systematic way, and called them 'limpias' which means social cleansing and during those, many people and mostly young ones, were disappeared or killed as they were presumed to be parts of criminal organizations. Those type of practices were not obviously part of a strategy that had as a purpose the reduction of crime, but simply were a tactic to end with those type of rival groups under the cover of official activity. The proof that the police leadership was involved were photos and videos that were published not only in national but also in international media. A case that was the Pandora's Box for disappearances in Veracruz, was the disappearance of five young people that were from Playa Vicente. There was captured in a video the moment was this group of five was detained. This case led to the arrest of a total of 21 people, where seven of them were police and eight civilians who claimed to be members of the Cartel New Generation Jalisco. But corruption is not only related to drugs and criminal organizations that spread violence. It is also related to other types of crimes and abuse, like those crimes that were realized during the governance of Fidel Herrera first and of Javier Duarte afterwards, that show very clear that violence has many forms, and it can be easily covered by the people that are supposed to protect society and not to harm it. If a person that holds power and abuses of the trust that society

shows him, then this person is capable of anything, and drug trafficking is considered just an easy way to earn money.

Challenges and solutions

The safeguard of human rights is one of the biggest challenges globally and maybe the most difficult challenges in Mexico. Violence continues to take place in the country, and this means that the need to continue addressing the need of the affected people is growing. Safeguarding human rights in Mexico, hasn't stop being an ongoing challenge as the country hasn't stop facing multiple human rights issues across many and different areas. Some other key aspects for the safeguard of human rights in Mexico could be the improvement of the current legal framework in order to be more comprehensive when it comes to the protection of human rights. Fortunately, there is the Mexican Constitution and various treaties of international character and conventions that serve as a strong foundation for protecting human rights. The National Human Rights Commission is also an agency that is responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights in the country. It is true that it has been doing a great job when it comes to human rights abuses, investigations, and recommendation of issues. Also, the General Law of Disappearances that passed in 2017, tries hard to address the forced disappearances that most of the times happen as part of the war between cartels. Mexico needs also to work on its freedom of expression rights, defend and protect them as the environment when it comes to drugs is dangerous for journalists and it is well known that the attacks on media are very common. Civil society organizations, international entities and human rights defenders play a crucial role when Mexico tries to monitor and advocates for the protection of its human rights. The work and collaboration among all of them can help the government to remain accountable for the violations of human rights. Also, Mexico hasn't stop making little steps regarding its efforts to improve accountability and training of security forces.

Corruption and criminal complicity have been undermining the legitimacy of not only the Mexican government and its 31 states in general but mostly of the regional government of the state of Veracruz. The state governors have become the authorities of the country that are considered as disreputable. Many have been those ones that have come under investigation and research for related acts of corruption. Particularly in Veracruz, there is a strong alliance between criminal groups and the high levels of local political power. Javier Duarte is a clear example of a governor that has been accused of many types of crimes: buying homes using public funds, money laundering and killing children. The ex-governor is known for total corruption that described the public health system during his governance, as he approved the use of fake medication to treat kids with cancer. The proofs of this barbaric act are the results of laboratory tests that show clear that a medication that was administered to children in chemotherapy at public hospitals, was a distilled water and not the necessary drug at all for the treatment. Antonio Nemi, the health secretary during Duarte's governance, reported also the purchase of thousand fake HIV tests. They were bought between 50.000 and 70.000 and they all gave out negative test results. Without doubt, the corruption that describes the state of Veracruz, reached its top during the governance of Duarte. Of course, before him, the state was being run by other governors that kept up with the corruption system, like for example Fidel Herrera that approved the provision of faked drugs which had no active ingredient and they were sent to the State Cancer Center of Xalapa, which is responsible for treating mostly teens and very young children. Those are cases that show that this is a corruption that reaches a level of audacity. The impunity that describes those cases have generated a level of absurdity and audacity that Mexico had never seen before. This was an excess that pushed Mexicans to a boiling point, especially after Duarte, where governance became the synonymous with corruption. It can't be clearer the fact that when the authorities that are responsible for the safeness of the state and its habitants, are found involved to such stories that are the example of human rights abuse, there can be no trust to the government and at the same time the legitimacy of the government is of course completely undermined. Those were only a few examples of why the habitants in Veracruz decide to leave their state and homes, why there is no trust at all to the public health system, and as all this was not enough, drug war and violence makes them walk in the streets with fear and it obligates them to get used to live under fear even in their own houses. What the state of Veracruz provides is a glimpse into the criminal corruption that the nominal democracy of Mexico is trying to hide. In Veracruz, as it became clear above, there is an alliance between corruption, criminal organizations, and the local political power, and this has been guaranteeing impunity.

This epidemic of violence, killings, and disappearances in the state at least it gave birth to a robust movement of the civil society of the state. This movement is not only an intent to end up with the drug war but also an intent to show the frustration of the society regarding the corruption and abuse during the governance of Duarte. It is a movement that began from some activists that made an important effort to change the narrative that surrounds the victims and to create an environment of empathy. They have been trying to help the victims not to feel shame and

had been helping to the creation of a stronger civic movement. This led to more honest descriptions from the part of the victims and helped the realized that victims can be people from all social societies as the violence started to touch people from all social classes. But there are voices in the society that demand a stronger response from the government.

Now, regarding Veracruz to break impunity, the criminal collusion of the state, to also break this cycle of violence and to restore confidence as the guarantor of rights and basic order in the state, should be considered at on the most important challenges that the authorities of the state should have in mind.

The Veracruz state government needs to follow specific steps to successfully reach those important points of purpose. First, it needs to admit and accept to investigate the involvement of the state in crimes against humanity, such as assassinations and forced disappearances. Second, provide to different types of civil society actors the right to pair with the judicial authorities of the state regarding the initiative of investigations into serious crimes and disappearances. Therefore, support the establishment of an effective witness protection program. Also, transparently, and fairly initiate the removal of criminally and corrupt complicit officials from different state institutions, especially the State Police, as well as the high-level officials that are accused of collusion with organized crime groups and any type of involvement in serious crimes. It is important also the introduction of effective financial and oversight mechanisms and this particularly could begin with the voluntary disclosure of the use of public funds. It also important to demonstrate commitment when it comes to freedom of speech and strengthen the existing mechanisms of protection for human rights activists and journalists. The improvement of the coordination of the state government with the federal government in security improvements, anti-organized crime operations and strategies, support for victims and programs regarding crime prevention is also a necessary step. Last but not least, support the police reform by improving the living standards of police officer's and restore the dignity to their service conditions, implement measures for the prevention to the participation of state forces in crimes such as forced disappearances and in general in any crime against humanity by installing tracking GPS devices in patrol cars and also cameras in police stations and storing freedom of information by strengthening the protection mechanism for human rights defenders and journalists with the introduction of sanctions of administrative character against officials that are non-compliant.

The raise of awareness and the promotion of respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law, are the main goals that should be putted seriously in priority for creating a respectful environment of human life and dignity. International norms and standards need also a reinforcement regarding the protection of international human rights. The maintain of the humanitarian dialogue with the police and the armed forces to promote the protection of the rights and dignity of those people thar are affected by the armed conflicts while creating an environment more respectful and face the need to implement and design better medium and long term strategies that would be able to deal more effectively with hundreds of people that are obligated to abandon their homes or they are obligated to live under danger, should always be a priority. Mexico's journey to protect fully human rights and uphold them is marked by setbacks, progress and efforts that are ongoing, especially in the case of the state of Veracruz. It is of great importance the continued collaboration and vigilance the insurance of human rights so people to be respected, fulfilled, and protected and of course to feel that they truly are.

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