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## **Securitization of Narcotraffic in Mexico**

Sergio Arturo Chávez Rosales  
Master of Science in International Relations

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Ideas.chavez@gmail.com

Noragric  
Department of International Environment and Development Studies  
P.O. Box 5003  
N-1432 Ås  
Norway  
Tel.: +47 67 23 00 00  
Internet: <https://www.nmbu.no/om/fakulteter/samvit/institutter/noragric>

**Declaration**

I, Sergio Arturo Chávez Rosales, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

**Signature**.....

**Date**.....

## **Acknowledgement**

First of all, I would like to thank for the support of my supervisor Benedicte Bull. As well, I would like to thank the unconditional support of the family Pal Stolsmo especially Sarita and Arne Stolsmo, who council and support have meant a lot to me. If it were not for them I would have not been here. Additionally, I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me and keeping me motivated throughout the journey. Finally, I would like to thank CONACYT (National Council of Science and Technology) for giving me the economical means to continue my studies.

## **Abstract**

The war on drugs has been a major issue for Mexico. In this thesis we follow how narcotraffic became to be an extraordinary threat for Mexico. How some of the presidential administrations have shifted the discourse on drugs in different directions, which have resulted in a variety of outcomes. Mexico first began securitizing narcotraffic as a response to foreign policy, but at the same time distributed responsibilities to drug' consumer countries. Later on, the government of Mexico declared war against narcotraffic, which altered all the panorama of Mexico. Violence and human rights violations skyrocket in Mexico. On the other hand, the following administration is trying to desecuritize narcotraffic. Drastically removing the words war and narcotraffic from their speeches and instead try to use phrases such as Mexico in peace.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>CIDE</b>	Center of Research and Economic Teaching
<b>CISEN</b>	Center for Research and National Security
<b>INCD</b>	National Institute to Combat Drugs
<b>NAFTA</b>	North American Free Trade Agreement
<b>OEA</b>	Organization of American States
<b>PAN</b>	National Action Party
<b>PGR</b>	Attorney General of Mexico
<b>PRD</b>	Party of the Democratic Revolution
<b>PRI</b>	Institutional Revolutionary Party

# **Securitization of Narcotraffic in Mexico**

## **Introduction**

My inspiration for writing this thesis comes from my encounter with a society ruled by cartels. Growing up in Mexico close to the border, I didn't think much about how the cartels had influenced my life. When I experienced the life in Norway, I began realizing, how living in a country dominated by cartels influences your life. My home city was in the territory of los Zetas. I remember hearing the sounds of shootings in broad daylight and distinguish the sound of semi-automatic gun. As well, having seen in the news people hanged by their neck from the bridge over the main road where I drove everyday to get to the shopping mall. Schools and universities began having drills for how to act incase there was a shooting. There were always unwritten, continually changing rules about where to go and not go, and whom to greet and not. There was a complex social feedback; where you would communicate where the shooting where. Thus, if I were told that there was a shooting in certain street or area I would communicate it to my family and friends. All this was for keeping us out of the way of cartels. If being incautious, you could end up having yourself beaten or even killed.

Businesses from close friends were threatened and blackmailed if they were not to pay a fee to los Zetas. And I have seen some of my acquaintances being dragged into bad influences, and not know anything about them anymore. I recall talking with my friends at the university about what was going on between cartels as you talk of the last episode of a TV series. We heavily disliked los Zetas for being violent and interfering with the life of the people, and often we cheered for the old cartels that we believed that only did narcotraffic and did not inferred with the life of the population. I got to understand, that they leave the society full of insecurity of the kind where you never know where will strike next or who will be the next victim. We got to a point that the sound of artificial works created psychosis among the population. These were all daily experiences for me and I didn't give it much thought, but my unconsciousness did. I have felt being unable to trust the political state, the government being corrupted and the cartels using their resources to corrupt both the politician and the police force. This left the Mexican society and me with the feeling of injustice and hopelessness.



On the other hand, one could think that the streets would be flowing over of drugs and narcotics. But living in Mexico, I have hardly ever seen a trade and drug addicts as I have seen in Europe or United States.

In Mexico, the drug war has accounted for 164,345 deaths from 2007 to 2014. This War against narcotraffic waged in Mexico has taken more lives than the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan (Breslow 2015).

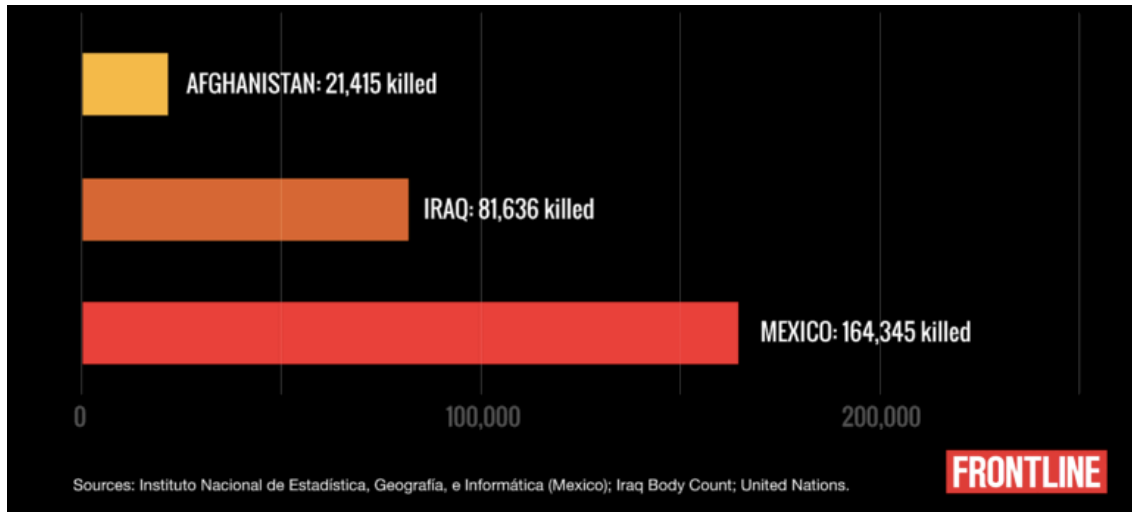


Figure 1 Killings in Mexico v. Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan & Iraq since 2007 (Breslow 2015)

On the other hand, the war in Iraq serve us as evidence of how can elites can use their position to fabricate evidence to create threats to carry out their own political agendas (Rampton & Stauber 2003).

We should not just take for granted how Narcotraffic became an extraordinary threat to Mexico. We have massive information and works regarding “the threat” of Narcotraffic. But few times we have ask ourselves how all began and concern into deeper aspects of such threats. Therefore, in this thesis we will challenge the way we think about narcotraffic and trail back how has narcotraffic been approached in the past. Specifically discern the discourses behind narcotraffic, how it developed and how it became number one security threat in Mexico.

Research question: How has narcotraffic being conceived of in the official Mexican discourse and to what extend has it been securitized?

## **Theoretical framework**

Before taking into a journey to securitization one must understand the concept of security. The field of security studies has been one of the most important subfields of international relations, a field that has been largely dominated by the western world especially by United States (Waever 1998 p.687-727). Security could be understood as the relief of threats that could affect the survival of an entity(Williams 2012). Security is a concept that has been studied for as long as human societies have existed. The concept has had different meanings through history and across people.

There are several theories that have endeavored to explain the concept of security and the human behavior towards “security”. Realism in particular has dominated the field for quite a long time. Edward Carr’s book *The Twenty Years ‘Crisis in 1939* is normally perceived to be the departure of classical realism. Classical realism argues that the desire for more power of the states comes from human nature and the state actions are selected rationally after a consideration of gains and losses. To a certain extent “Realism” have successfully explained the behavior of states in relation to security. Political Realism or Realpolitik can be traced back to Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and to Thucydides’ *Melian Dialogue* (Burchill et al. 2013). Both writings have been keystone contributions to international relations, particularly realism.

One of the most recent reinforcements of the theory was during 30s. After all the tragedy that happened during WWI, United Kingdom and United States created the League of Nations in an attempt to institutionalize peace in the international system. However, the League of Nations did not lasted so long. For some scholars, the expansion of the Axis powers during the 30s and the WWII reinforced the realist claims: that states are driven by interest and power; exempted from morality. In response to WWII, Butterfield wrote in 1949 “It is essential not to have faith in human nature. Such faith is a recent heresy and a very disastrous one” (Donnelly 2000).

For realism the concept of security is state centric; and the accumulation of power is the way to achieve security or to be relieved from threats that might affect the survival of the state. For example the accumulation of commodities such as money, weapons,

military and territory (Williams 2012). Thus, the accumulation of power is a zero-sum gain, where one states wins and the other loses.

### **Neorealism**

The fall of classical realism during the 70s was due to their methodological approach and strong critiques from liberal theories of economic interdependence (Elman & Jensen 2014). Nevertheless, a new type of realism resurged addressing new critiques. Kenneth Waltz (1979) with his “Theory of International Relations” developed a *strong* type of realism “*neorealism*”. Neorealism distanced itself from the claim from classical realism that human nature is “evil” and focused more on structural (dis)-order in the international system.

Kenneth Waltz divided the political structure in three different elements: *the ordering principle*, *the character of a unit* and *the distribution of capabilities*. The *ordering principle* denotes that in the hierarchy of the international system there is nothing above the states. Therefore, the international domain is anarchical and this anarchy is the reason for how states act (self-help). Second, the *character of a unit* indicates that states are units whether states vary in power, size and wealth. States have the similar functions and the differences between them are product of their diverse capabilities. Third, the *distribution of capabilities*: the power of the units defines the place of the unit in the international structure, in spite of tradition, for instance if they are democratic or authoritarian (Waltz 1979).

Thus, neorealism leaves behind the claim from classical realism that the source of conflict is human nature. Instead, it suggests that anarchy in the international arena is the source of conflict. (Waltz 1959). “States are free to do any fool thing they care to, but they are likely to be rewarded for behavior that is responsive to structural pressures and punished for behavior that is not” (Waltz 1979). In addition, Waltz observed the repetition of events through history, despite different internal politics. Thus, must the international system (anarchical) be the element that shapes the behavior of states.

It was not until the fall of the Soviet Union in the end of the 80’s, when realists lost the explanatory hegemony in the field of security studies. One of triggers was when the intelligence community failed to predict the fall of the Soviet Union. Despite the fact,

that United States had an immense military apparatus. Some scholars argue that they failed to predict the fall of the Soviet Union due to their positivist approach to security. Security specialists focused in knowing the quantity and quality of the Soviet Union military complex. After failing to understand how the Soviet Union fell with such military power, the term security began being debated by questions of philosophy of knowledge. For instance, security began to be challenged with epistemological, ontological and methodological questions: epistemology concerning questions of “how we know what we know?” ontology regarding “what things are made of?” and methodology “how should we study it?” (Wiener 2003 p.252-75; Williams 2012)

### **Constructivism**

Under these circumstances other theoretical approaches emerged; one of these approaches was *constructivism* (Onuf 1989). In 1989 Nicholas Onuf introduced the term *constructivism* in his book called “World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in International Relations”. Constructivism is a theory that argues that the world is socially constructed through agents and structures; and that it entails that norms and identities are the core of the dynamics of world politics. Constructivists criticize neorealist for several reasons, among them are: putting the state as the dominant actor in the system, treating world politics exogenous of identities and defining security in *self-interest* terms among other critiques (Wendt 1992 p.391-425).

Nicholas Onuf divided these *norms* (rules) into three sets of *rules*: *directive-rules*, *instruction-rules* and *commitment rules*. *Directive-rules* being the rules related to law. This rules being the laws we find in legal documents, if violated it will have legal consequences. *Instruction-rules* are those that in order to get a satisfactory result we need to follow the rules; however, these rules are not enforceable. *Commitment-rules* are the result of mutually preferred outcomes. (Onuf 2014)

“Instruction-rules look and work like assertive speech acts (statements in the form, I hereby assert...); directive-rules look and work like directive speech acts (I hereby request...); commitment-rules look and work like commissive speech acts (I hereby promise...). Three kinds of rules perform different functions for agents and structures by virtue of each kind’s distinctive properties.” (Onuf 2014)

Constructivists tend to avoid creating definitions of security; they rather focus on diverse security perspectives and how these perspectives emerge (Williams 2012). Thus, for constructivist security is specific to the circumstantial social construction.

Consequently, security is in a constant reciprocal status of negotiation and contestation. This negotiation is performed through a reciprocal communication from political leaders to domestic audiences. While contestation referring to the way in which different actors try to influence different values on how “we” ought to think (Williams 2012). On the other hand, realists see this status of negotiation/contestation as a non-reciprocal top down communication (political elites/public) where the public has little influence or no influence on political elites. Nevertheless, the role civil society organizations with states have added up to the constructivist’s reciprocal argument (Williams 2012). For instance, national and international NGOs have played a more important role in influencing foreign policy, internal politics and advocating for *securitizing* topics for example, human rights and environmental change.

On the other hand, identities are important for constructivism. Alexander Wendt’s developed the notion of “structure of identity and interests” in his paper “Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics”. Arguing that self-help does not depart from anarchy; it is rather identity that plays an important role in how states act (self-help). Actors act towards objects according to the significance that these objects have for them. For instance, United States acts differently towards Colombia than Venezuela. Assuming that United States and Venezuela decide that they are not enemies, the attitude among them would shift. “It is *collective meaning* that constitute the structure which organizes our actions.”(Wendt 1992 p.391-425) Thus, actors obtain identities in relation to the *collective meaning* they belong. United States for instance in relation to Colombia is an ally yet in relation to Cuba is an imperialist.

Constructivists have challenged several realist assumptions and how these assumptions helped creating the same reality. Ken Booth argues that realists successfully described the reality during the Cold War due to their help constructing or feeding the same reality. Another concern is in how they approach security. The state is secure to the extent to which the state is powerful. Thus, if states’ constant interest is to maximize power, then they construct progress in self-interest terms (Booth 2005). They create

security in “self-interest terms” where the referent entity to protect is the state, consequently “the other” becomes a potential threat (Wendt 1992 p.391-425). In addition, this statist security’ view deliberately creates inequality by having “the other” as inferior and as threat to “us” the state. This can increase chauvinism and xenophobia across the population (Booth 2005).

Narcotraffic has been mainly being addressed through realist assumptions, for instance defining security in self-interest terms and helping building the same reality they describe. That is why I identify a need to revise narcotraffic leaving behind the traditional way that has been analyzed. Therefore, in this thesis we identify a need to approach narcotraffic differently. Thus, the Copenhagen School may give us the framework to understand: what were the circumstances and who were the actors behind defining narcotraffic as a *threat*.

### **Copenhagen School**

This thesis will take as a starting point the “Copenhagen School” of constructivist thought. There are three main principles that the Copenhagen School uses to approach security: the first, introduced by Buzan (1983), expanded security studies into more sectors than only military. Buzan expanded the study of security into four more sectors: environment, economic, social and political. Second, they observed security dynamics of regions, thus creating a regional approach to security studies. The third and the principle that this thesis will follow is “securitization studies” introduced by Wæver (1989). Consist in the analysis of how security issues or *threats* are constructed through speeches (Charrett 2009). Henceforth, this thesis will follow the study course of the securitization studies from the Copenhagen School to study the war against narcotraffic.

### **Securitization**

The concept of securitization was introduced by Ole Wæver (1989) with his paper “Security the Speech Act: Analyzing the Politics of Word”. However, it was until 1998 when Ole Wæver together with Barry Buzan and Jaap De Wilde further developed the theory with their book “Security: A New Framework of Analysis”. Securitization emerged to challenge how “security threats” are socially constructed. The purpose of securitization studies is thus to understand why and how something became “securitized” and what powers structures are behind it.

For Buzan et al. (1998) the concept of security is not in constant objective state, it is rather conceived through linguistic constructions of “threats”. These linguistic constructions are “Speech acts”. Speech acts are the first steps toward a securitization. Nevertheless, there are several elements to consider before something is successfully securitized: such as the political/historical setting, along with the power structures behind the actor. Securitization is thus successful when a “threat” becomes socially accepted and the “threat” becomes an issue of higher priority.

Buzan and Wæver define it as: “Securitization is the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat, which demands urgent and immediate attention, as well as the use of extraordinary measures to counter this threat” (Buzan et al. 1998)

We humans create threats from our biological need to survive. We have been able to evolve and survive in a rapidly changing environment due to direct and indirect experiences. Fears are thus created through direct and indirect negative stimuli. This allows us to identify, learn and avoid potential harms (Olsson & Phelps 2007 p.1095-1102). Direct experiences imply that we learn to fear a specific thing through negative stimulus. On the other hand, indirect fears are socially transmitted, this allow us to learn through the experiences of other individuals (Olsson & Phelps 2007 p.1095-1102). However, for modern human is easier to create fears or create threats through our more complex social, economic and political structures. These power structures give certain individuals or entities the power to construct “legitimate fears”. Unfortunately, some elites use this power to create fears and threats in order to follow their own political agenda. A clear example of this would be the United States war in Iraq. How Bush administration created evidence and manipulated its own intelligence institutions to create a “threat” in order to justify a war (Rampton & Stauber 2003). In order to avoid similar cases, we need to be critical and analytical towards any attempt to securitize.

In order to analyze the securitization process of narcotraffic it is essential to examine the following questions: what is securitized (what has become a security threat)? For whom is a security threat? Who securitizes? How it became securitized (through speeches, discourses)? And under what circumstances became securitized? (Buzan et al. 1998 ; Wæver 1993)

These securitization processes are observed through the analysis of discourses. These discourses are the way we talk and understand an aspect about of the world (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002). These discourses are culturally and historically specific and to study them we need to engage with their circumstantial political setting. To such a degree to be able to identify the facilitating conditions for a securitization to take place (Williams 2012). Nevertheless, the dilemma here is to analyze the securitization processes avoiding replicating dominant discourses.

Dominant discourses being the result of discourse struggles that seek the hegemony of meanings. These hegemonies are inflicted by the power structures behind the actors or elites, which could be an individual such as the president or an entity such as a political party (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002). Thus, anything can become a “threat” when elites proclaim it to be.

Securitization processes are too complex to be singular to “speech acts”. The “speech acts” can often be too narrow to include institutional and material processes embodied in a securitization process. Additionally, securitization theory focuses in dominant speeches mostly of political leaders. Thus, centering into the speeches of those actors that are institutionally legitimate. This can have left aside important actors that might have played an important role in the discourse. Nonetheless, we will be able to identify trends and important shifts of the discourse that lead us to the causes of why and how it became to be an extraordinary threat (McDonald 2008 p.563-587; Williams 2003 p.511-531).

## **Methodology**

Discourse analysis on of how *elites* use Narcotraffic in their discourses. The term *elites* here refers to actors with political power such as the presidents of Mexico, their security advisors or actors whom have influenced the securitization of illicit narcotraffic.

## **Data collection**

In context, I will analyze the speeches from each President from 1988 to April 2016. Thus, engaging and dissecting old and new hegemonic security discourses that securitize Narcotraffic. There were over 10,000 presidential speeches in these



administrations. Therefore I only considered the speeches that had the word “narcotraffic”, which resulted to be 487 speeches. The only speech was analyzed whether had or not the word narcotraffic was the first address to the nation of each president of these administrations. The fact that I filtered the speeches by narcotraffic could have left aside important speeches that for instance talked about them as criminal organizations. However, there was great amounts of information in relation to speeches, therefore I decided to focus only in the word *narcotraffic*. For instance, narcotraffic is a criminal organization, but not all criminal organizations do narcotraffic.

The speeches were gathered from the official website of the presidency of Mexico, which certifies *authenticity* and *credibility* to the documents.

Ernesto Zedillo 1994-2000 ([http://zedillo.presidencia.gob.mx/pages/f\\_ind\\_disc.html](http://zedillo.presidencia.gob.mx/pages/f_ind_disc.html))

Vicente Fox 2000-2006 (<http://fox.presidencia.gob.mx/actividades/discursos/>)

Felipe Calderon 2006-2012 (<http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/prensa/discursos/>)

Peña Nieto: 2012-2018 (<http://www.gob.mx/presidencia/archivo/prensa>)

All the presidencies had online database in exception of the administration of Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). Therefore, in this administration I relied mostly in secondary sources such as: press and scholar articles; in exception of the speeches found in YouTube. Resulting in 27 speeches from the administration of Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) 84 speeches, Vicente Fox (2000-2006) 163 speeches, Felipe Calderon (2006-2012) 191 speeches and Peña Nieto (2012-2018) with 22 speeches. The speeches were skimmed in order to be able to process all the speeches. There were three elements that were overviewed for accelerating the process time of each speech: First, in order to filter irrelevant information from the text, once in the speech I searched for keywords in the text such as: narcotraffic, security, drugs and war. For example, if the president were in an inauguration of a dam, I would go directly where he talks about narcotraffic and ignore other topics that are not relevant for this thesis. Nonetheless, there were speeches, which I analyzed with more detail because they shifted their previous line of discourse on narcotraffic. Second, I identified the location and who was the audience for example, press, the Mexican population, United States officials, and congress among others. Third, I took into account the time for the circumstantial historical setting.

### **Securitizing criteria**

Find the hegemonic discourses concerning Narcotraffic of these five administrations (1988-2014) through the literature review of the speeches of the presidents of Mexico.

1. Circumstantial political setting
2. Critically access the power of the securitizing actor
3. Who is the audience?
4. Have extraordinary measures been taken?

The bias of the author in this case mine will affect how I approach the securitizing discourse. It will be a challenge to disengage myself from the drug war discourse that I have been exposed in Mexico, such experiences as written in the introduction affect the way I consume the speeches. Nonetheless, this can be overcome by self-reflection and disengaging from the discourse to a feasible extent.

### **A historical introduction: The war on drugs.**

The war on drugs in Mexico is the result of diverse external factors and internal facilitating conditions. We will begin explaining the external factors or point of departure of the “war on drugs”. Subsequently, we will explain the internal facilitating circumstances that left the perfect conditions for drug cartels to develop.

Despite, the focus here is in Mexico therefore we will approach United States and Colombia only to mention key historical events that had influenced the discourse on drugs.

The first time the term “drug war” was used was by the president Richard Nixon in the United States. Nixon escalated “drug” as “public enemy number one” and labeled it “war on Drugs” in 1971. Since then, some investigations have found that the war on drugs has cost over \$1 trillion dollars. And just in 2014 in the United States there has been 620,000 people arrested for possessing a marijuana (O'Connell 2015). This policy has contributed to United States having the largest prison population in the world. Nevertheless, this discourse has been exported to other Latin American countries particularly Colombia and Mexico.

In Colombia the cartels grew intensively during the decade of 80s. This was due to the increasing demand of cocaine-based drugs in the United States such as cocaine powder and crack. During the 80's cocaine became very easy accessible for the American population. Later on, due to the massive demand from United States of these drugs; the cartels developed into large and complex multinational organizations.

One of the most known organizations was the “Cartel de Medellín” led by Pablo Escobar. The Medellin Cartel controlled around 80% of the World Cocaine traffic (Wile 2014). This business took Pablo Escobar to have an estimated fortune of \$25 billion dollars. He appeared 7 consecutive years at the billionaire’s list of Forbes (1987). In relation to Pablo Escobar Forbes wrote the following:

“[...] from a lowly position as smuggler, enforcer and bodyguard, Escobar worked his way to the top, first by saving enough money to invest in his own cocaine business. By 1978, Escobar was moving about 35 kilos of coke a month out of Medellin. He took over a Medellin newspaper, became influential in politics, and successfully ran for public office. He built houses for the poor, soccer fields, and a zoo for the public. Eventually, he was indicted on charges of cocaine marketing, money laundering, and contract killing. In 1987, Escobar controlled an estimated 40% of the Medellin drug cartel's business, and had accumulated at least \$3 billion over the years, Forbes reported. Escobar remained on the Forbes Billionaires List for seven years, appearing for the final time in the July 1993 Billionaires issue. Five months later he was killed.”(Forbes 1987)

Following the death of Pablo Escobar, the brothers Rodriguez Orijuela from the Cali Cartel were captured in 1995. Thus, the "great leaders" era of the Colombian drug cartels came to an end. Following that period the criminal organizations transformed into smaller cartels. Without having such strong hierarchical leadership as before, they became weaker and fragmented.

On the other hand, in Mexico cartels learnt and took advantage of this. The Mexican drug cartel bosses acknowledge that keeping a high profile was a problem. Therefore,

they tried to maintain themselves low profile to keep the attention far from themselves. Additionally, the fragmentation and weakening of the Colombian cartels left a supply gap, which soon after was covered by the Mexican cartels. One of these drug lords was Amado Carrillo Fuentes know as “el Señor de los Cielos” (Lord of the Skies). He was called like this, because its massive fleet of airplanes that transported drugs. In fact, Amado Carrillo and Pablo Escobar made a society in 1988. This was convenient for Pablo Escobar since United States began locking the route of the Caribe, which Pablo Escobar used to transport its cocaine shipments (see figure 2).



Figure 2 "Drug Routes Colombia US" (DEA 2005)

On the other hand, Amado Carrillo controlled a big share of the border between Mexico and United States. As well he had a fleet of over 700 planes to transport drugs. Amado Carrillo led a federation of cartels: in the north of Cartel de Sinaloa and the Cartel de Juarez, Cartel Milenio in the west coast of the center of Mexico and Cartel Oaxaca in the south.

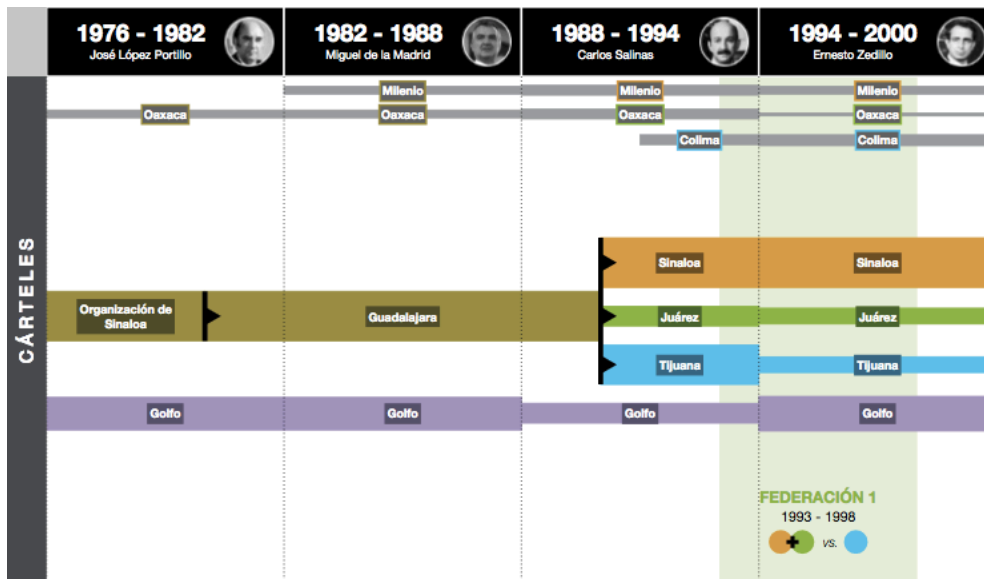


Figure 3 "40 years of organized crime"(Moreno 2016)

However, the federation broke with Amado Carrillo’s death. He died in a Mexican hospital in the middle of plastic surgery operation where he was going to change his appearance. His death is still very controversial; in 2014 there was a request to the Attorney General of Mexico (PGR) to release the evidence of the death of Amado Carrillo. The request included the result of the histopathological studies performed in Amado Carrillo, as well as the results of the DNA tests. However, the PGR responded, “After making an exhaustive and thorough search of the application... no record was located with respect to the required information.” (Sanchez 2014)

It is thought that before the 90’s Mexico had unofficial agreements and control over the drug cartels. These unofficial agreements (pacts) were about route access, and through paying a fee to the Mexican Government and leaving out the Mexican citizens (González 2010). This system is thought to begin changing during the decade of the 80’s. The assassination of a DEA agent Enrique Camarena in 1985 intensified the pressure from United States to Mexico for persecuting narco-traffickers (DEA 1987). This crime was perpetrated by the biggest and most powerful organization at the time: the Guadalajara Cartel. The event sparked great public attention and government persecution had to start immediately. This unleashed one of the biggest DEA investigations called “Operacion Leyenda”. Which resulted in the capture of the three leaders of the Guadalajara Cartel: Rafael Caro Quintero, Ernesto Fonseca and Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo. This resulted in the fragmentation of the Cartel in at least three

regional groups: Cartel de Sinaloa, Cartel de Tijuana and Cartel de Juarez (Moreno 2016). The following image shows the fragmentation of the cartels from 1976 to 1994.

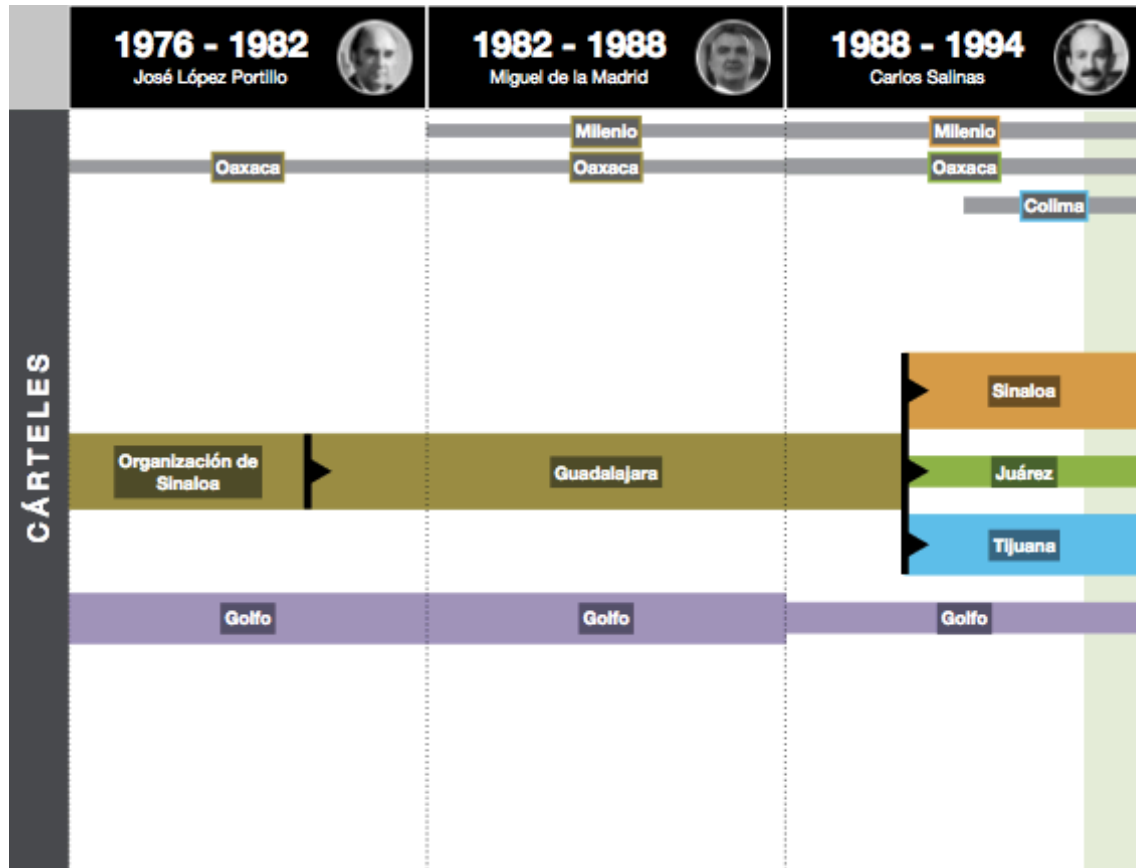


Figure 4: “Four Decades of Organized Crime” (Moreno 2016)

There were internal facilitating conditions for drug cartels to grow are: first of all institutional weaknesses, economic liberalization, democratization, and decentralization of the state. The economic liberalization was sought and achieved by ex-president Carlos Salinas de Gortari. During his term Mexico signed NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) together with United States and Canada. Before NAFTA Mexico had a very protective economy, by then the government controlled exchange rates and had restrictive policies with foreign direct investment. Nevertheless, NAFTA meant major interconnectedness and that led to more dependency from United States the greatest buyer and investor. This gave a great deal of leverage power to the United States. Thus, significantly aligning Mexico’s interest with those of the United States. For instance, it gave United States more tools for exporting its discourse of “war on drugs” to Mexico.

The second transformation is the democratization of Mexico during the period of Ernesto Zedillo from 1994 until 2000. The PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) had governed for 72 years the presidency of Mexico. Mario Vargas Llosa called “the perfect dictatorship”. “Mexico has all the characteristics of a dictatorship, the permanency of a party that is immovable...”(Vargas Llosa 1990) He called it like this, because of the permanency of a single party (PRI) for 72 years. During these years all the candidates running for presidency were chosen by the president in turn. They called this “dedazo” (hand-picked). For these periods the president (the executive branch) had immense power over the judicial and legislative branch. However, this changed during the democratization period, which settled with the presidential elections in 2000. For first time in 72 years another party won the presidential elections. Vicente Fox from the National Action Party (PAN) won the presidential elections in 2000. The point here is that the democratization brought decentralization. For instance, the communication among the executive branch, legislative and judicial branch did not run as smooth as before. More importantly the communication between the federal and state level was the most affected. For example, if a state belonged to a different party, the communication among them would be less efficient.

By the mid 1990's the institutional weaknesses and corruption of the Mexican state was clearly visible. The President at the time; Ernesto Zedillo tried to grow the fight against drugs. In December of 1996, he appointed the General Gutierrez Rebollo director of the National Institute to Combat Drugs (INCD). "The general had among its merits the arrest of Hector Palma Salazar "El Güero", one of the leaders of the Cartel of Sinaloa, and other former members of the Cartel of Juarez " (Aristegui, 2013), but the military leader lasted less than two months in office. In February 6 of 1997 Guterrez was arrested and charged by military authorities and the Federal Attorney for protecting the head of the Cartel of Juarez: Amado Carrillo Fuentes, known as "El señor de los cielos"(Lord of the Skies). A relevant part of the story is that Gutierrez (director of INCD) always declared himself not guilty of charges, and recently, before his death he talked with the journalist Carmen Aristegui about how he was arrested because he was in fact investigating possible ties between the family of the former president Zedillo and the drug cartel of Colima.

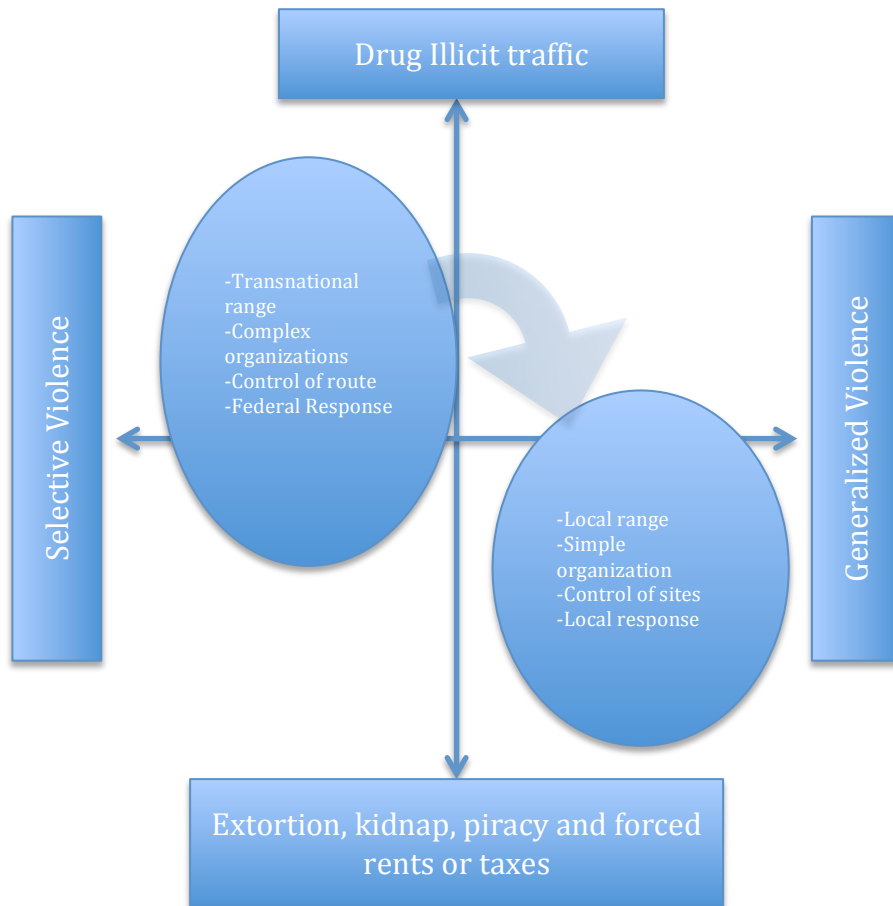
In fact, drug related violence was not generalized like it is today. By then the drug cartels only did narcotraffic, which means that they only produced, transported, and sold illegal drugs. Creating also certain economic benefit to their base regions, and this is expressed the positive popularity of the “old Cartels” like the Cartel of Sinaloa.

This *modus operandi* transformed during the presidential mandates from 1994 until 2006 when the Drug Cartels in Mexico grew and propagated. Drug Cartels took advantage of weak institutions and created complex networks through the Municipal, State and even Federal institutions. The Mexico’s decentralized political structure is important to understand some institutional weaknesses. Mexico is a federation; it has three different level of administration: Federal, State and Municipalities. Each level had its own police units administrated separately and isolated from each other. Hence the drug cartels are transnational organization with more budget and power than several municipalities and even states (Insulza 2013). They managed to control most of the municipal and state police to serve as an intelligence apparatus to specially track movements of rival cartels, federal and military movements.

The drug war is often perceived from two different perspectives: The first is Government’s pronouncement of the legitimate use of power against the Drug Cartels, and the already going on war within the different drug cartels of Mexico for controlling routes and supply to the largest drug consumer in the world US.

El *Cartel del Golfo* in 1999 created a special unit called *Los Zetas* for protection and to fight its rival cartels. Los Zetas were formed by previous militaries, some coming from the Elite Special Forces from the Mexican military. Los Zetas thus began doing operations for Cartel del Golfo. Nevertheless, in 2010 they broke with Cartel del Golfo and declared war against them. Los Zetas altered the *modus operandi* and diversified its income, as in Figure 1 “Organized crime evolution in Mexico 2006-2011”. This diversification consisted on forcing civilians to pay taxes, kidnaping, extortion and piracy (Valdés 2013). Paying taxes consisted in paying rents to the Drug Cartels as security insurances. This was done to citizens with middle and especially high income; and commercials, such as restaurants, bars and stores.





**Figure 5 “Organized crime evolution in Mexico 2006-2011”**  
(Valdés 2013 p. 482 )

Thus, Eleven days after being elected president of Mexico, Felipe Calderón began the war against drug cartels. The war started with “Operativo Conjunto Michoacán”(Joint Operation in Michoacan), a joint operation of the Navy (SEMAR), Military (SEDENA), the Federal Police (SSP) and the Office of the General Prosecutor (PGR). In this operation, each organization fed the operation with infantry, aircraft, armored vehicles, control tolls and intelligence units to the State of Michoacán. Since the State of Michoacán one of the 31 States of Mexico in 2006 represented 25% of the deaths related to organized crime (Dominguez 2014).

### **The evolution of the discourse on narcotraffic**

As mentioned before the “war on drugs” began in Nixon’s administration. In 2013 the Nixon Library and the National Archive released the last 340 hours of tape recordings from Richard Nixon in the Oval Office White House. These release means also a clarification to the reason of the “War on Drugs” initiated by Richard Nixon in 1971.

Additionally, it reinforces the claim that *Elites* use securitization to achieve their own political agenda. In the tapes released show the racism of Richard Nixon against, Jews, homosexuals, communist, left wingers and African Americans. The following text is a transcript from the released tapes of the conversations<sup>1</sup> between Nixon, Haldeman and Ehrlichman in the Oval office:

”You see, homosexuality, dope, immorality in general: These are the enemies of strong societies. That's why the Communists and the left-wingers are pushing the stuff, they're trying to destroy us.” (Nixon 1971b)

The political setting of the decades of the 60's and 70's were characterized by a multitude of civil rights protests: farm workers, black and anti-war civil rights protesters. Becoming a hassle for Nixon's administration to pursue and continue with their war policy. In fact, in a recent interview John Ehrlichman, Nixon's White House Domestic Affairs Advisor stated that: “The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.”(Baum 2016).

This a clear example of how the construction of a threat, in this case drugs began as a political tool against anti-war protesters. Thus, the speech act of Richard Nixon “war on drugs” as well as “US public enemy number one” gave legitimacy to the government to take extraordinary measures against drugs a politically constructed “threat”.

This discourse on drugs intensified when Mexico aligned its interest with those of United States. This happened during Mexico's wave of transformation began by Carlos Salinas.

### **Carlos Salinas de Gortari (liberalization)**

Carlos Salinas de Gortari arrived to power amid diplomatic tensions between Mexico-United States. The previous presidential term had several frictions with United States.

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<sup>1</sup> ”The President and his advisors were discussing a recent episode of "All in the Family," a television

The president Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) expressed his discontent of the American interventionist policy of any kind in Central America and stressed the importance of sovereignty (de la Madrid 2010 ; Thomas 1984). The death of the DEA officer Enrique Camarena severed much more the tensions between United States and Mexico. In order to pressure Mexico to develop a much more radical policy against drug cartels; United States closed its borders and made stricter checkouts for all the people crossing to United States. However, these actions added tension to Mexico/United States relations.

Nevertheless, the presidency of de la Madrid came to an end in 1988. Carlos Salinas de Gortari became president the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1988. Salinas had received higher education in United States. Salinas obtained two master degrees and a doctoral degree in Political Economy and Government at Harvard (Rohter 1987). He was strongly influenced by neoliberal ideas. Salinas was seen as a modernist, he was seen as the president who would take Mexico from developing to developed country. He pursued the privatization of state-owned companies, resulting in the privatization of 1150 companies representing around 90% of the companies that the state own. As well he sought the liberalization of the Mexican economy, which had been very protective. Salinas thus, signed in 1992 the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)<sup>2</sup>. United States applauded all these transformations and by then Mexico was seen as an example of a modern developing economy. However, all these actions made Mexico's economy more reliant of United States; giving thus more leverage power to United States.

Salinas's first speech as President of Mexico directed to the Mexican population, this speech was screened live in television. Most of the part of his speech he talks about Mexico transformation into a new more open economy. Salinas includes two paragraphs where he talks about narcotraffic:

“Narcotraffic has become a serious risk to the security of the nation and the health of Mexicans, their fight is already reason of state; I'll create in the Attorney General's Office dedicated to its unique combat, with more staff and

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<sup>2</sup> NAFTA was signed in 1992 but the treaty would become active until the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1994.

more training; We will raise the penalties for trafficking, and pursue with redoubled energy to its promoters, whoever they are. [...]"

"[...] We seek a new balance with the United States of America, scope of opportunities and delicate differences; We will attend the acute bilateral problems emerged from debt and trade, the battle giving no quarter to narcotraffic and relentless protection of human and labor rights of our migrant workers."

In his speech, Salinas first attempt is to securitize "narcotraffic" as an issue for the nation as for the Mexican people. On the second paragraph, which is long after the other, he mentions narcotraffic as a problem that would stabilize the bilateral relations with United States. Making emphasis that he would battle narcotraffic without clemency or mercy (giving no quarter).

Just 10 days after being elected, Salinas assured to the *House of Representatives' visiting committee* from United States; that Mexico will increase its efforts in the war on drugs, claiming that "will make life miserable for drug traffickers" (Rohter 1988). Giving a promising message to United States.

Furthermore, Salinas kept Mexico's non-intervention policy. For instance, rejected the idea of American troops in Mexican soil. Salinas clearly stated "We will cooperate, but the responsibility for the fight in our country is exclusively our, so therefore, there will be no joint operation force in our soil" (Reuter & Ronfeldt 1992 p.89-153).

On the other hand, United States had in its hands several economic reliefs that could help Mexico fix its debt issues. United States used all the tools in his reach to influence Mexico's security and economic policy. The 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1989, the New York Times published a note saying that Mexico is ready to begin talks with IMF (International Monetary Fund) on new loans and debt reduction. However, in the same publication they said that negotiations might be difficult. "Analysts think the negotiations will be difficult, even with strong candidates like Mexico, because the lending banks have differing concerns and will clash over new loans and the approach to debt reduction." (Fuerbringer 1989)

The following day the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1989 Mexico captured Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo. The most wanted narco-trafficker in Mexico and also accused to have being involved in the killing of the DEA agent Camarena.

“At the moment, in the face of complaints of Mexican inaction, the United States Congress is considering whether to certify that Mexico has "cooperated fully" with the United States in efforts to stamp out the international drug trade. This week Mr. Alvarez del Castillo is scheduled to leave for the United States, where he will meet with Attorney General Dick Thornburgh and members of Congress.” (Rother 1989)

This message shows how the previous government did not fully cooperated with United States; and how the government of Salinas began pursuing a closer relationship with United States.

One day after the capture of the drug lord, the IMF agreed in lending \$3.6 billion dollars. “To qualify for I.M.F. support, Mexico agreed to some modifications in the management of its economy. These were not disclosed.” (Kilborn 1989) This is evidence of how United States used IMF and World Bank to align Mexico’s interest to those of United States. For instance, reduce protectionism, open its economy and fully engage in the drug war.

Few days after IMF agreed to lend money to Mexico, the president Salinas fully endorsed the fight against drugs during an interparliamentary meeting between United States and Mexico. Salinas stated:

“The fight against drugs is a high priority in my government for three fundamental reasons: because it constitutes an assault on the health of Mexico’s citizens, because it promises to affect Mexican national security, and finally, because the community of nations must stand together on this issue.”(Friman & Andreas 1999)

In the past, any action towards drugs was to help the American war on drugs. However, Salinas appropriated the fight against drugs as national security issue. Subsequently, creating the Center for Investigation and National Security (CISEN), the National Institute to Combat Drugs (INCD) and several other adjuncts. Another important fact is that Salinas increased the role of the military in anti drug operations. All these actions helped Mexico to promote further economic ties with United States. For instance,

forming the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). During this stage Mexico was seen as a modern state and Salinas as the reformist.

It could be perceived from his speeches that Salinas' strategy against narcotraffic began as a tool to get closer to United States, in order to be able to get the tools and resources to achieve its economic reforms. However, after seeing the dimensions of the *war* against narcotraffic Salinas begins asking for more action internationally.

“The success of the effort of our institutions in combating drug trafficking, even at the expense of the lives of many of its members, not shown, merely, of pride and satisfaction. I say this as a sign of anxiety and concern. Seeing the dimensions of the battle against drugs must honestly ask ourselves: are we winning or losing the war? I think, globally, we lose and this is unacceptable. More cooperation, more efficiency in each territory but, above all, more firmly - I'm sure-, put an end to this terrible scourge of modern times.” (Carlos Salinas in October 1989 at joint session of the United States congress)

It is important to point out that when Salinas talk to United States congress always uses the term “*war* against drugs”. Meanwhile, when his audience is Mexico, he tags it as “fight against narcotraffic”. Giving a stronger connotation when his audience is United States. For instance, this could be understood as that the “war against narcotraffic” is an international phenomenon; thus, Mexico would not take full ownership of the problem. It would rather share responsibility of this phenomenon. He successfully captured in 1993 one of the leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel “El Chapo Guzman”. Which later would run away in the presidential term of Vicente Fox (2000-2006), and would be captured later by Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018).

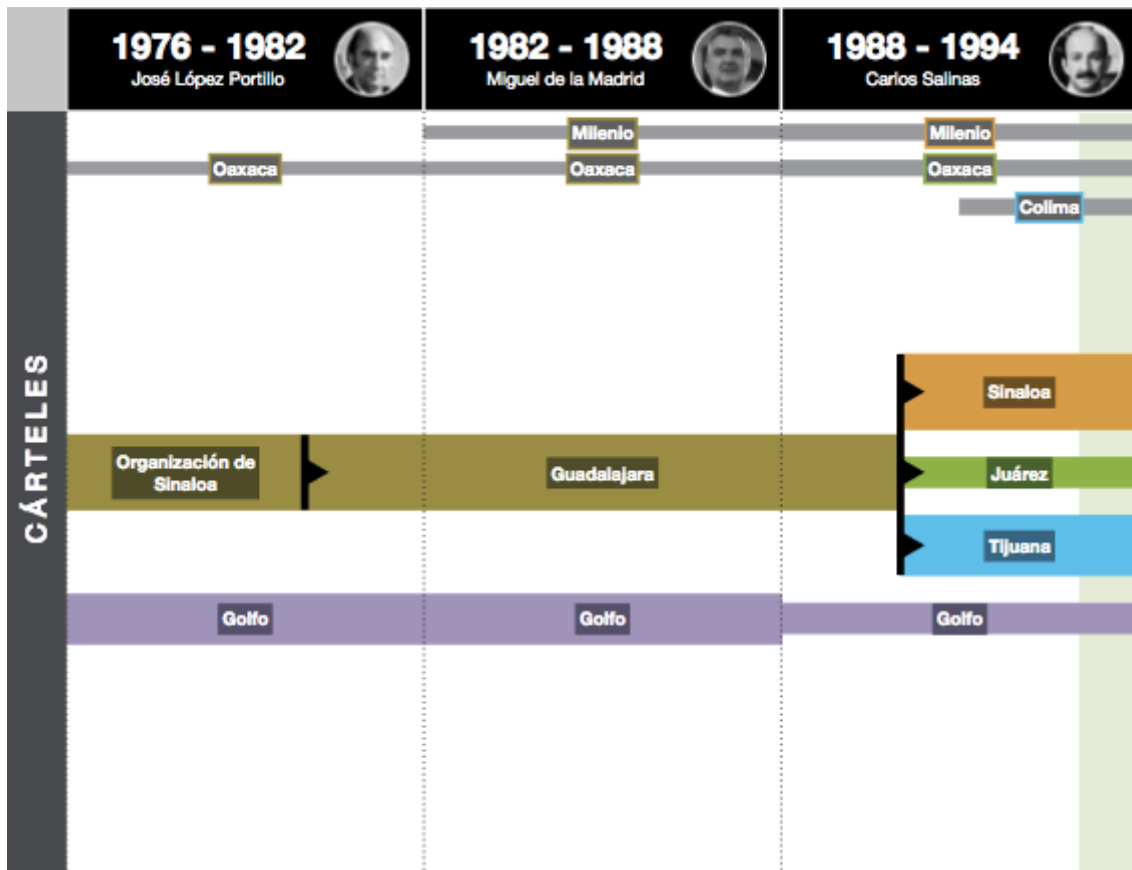


Figure 6 "Four decades of Organized Crime"(Moreno 2016)

During Salinas’ presidential term, the cartel of Guadalajara broke into three different organizations, as the *figure 3* shows. One of the arguments is that this rupture is the result of capturing the leader of the Guadalajara cartel.

Additionally, everything began changing during his last year in office. His speeches towards narcotraffic were reduced drastically in 1994. The year 1994 was full of complex political and economical crises. The 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1994 NAFTA went into effect. At the same time the Zapatista Army of National Liberation went public against neoliberal agenda of NAFTA. The same year the presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio and the president of the PRI José Francisco Ruíz Massieu were assassinated. Creating political instability and financial volatility. Draining the federal reserves from 24 to 6 million dollars until Ernesto Zedillo took office.

**Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) (Democratization)**

When Ernesto Zedillo took office there was political and economic instability. Zapatistas were on the rise in the southwest states and federal reserves were draining. Yet, 20 days after being elected the Central Bank of Mexico released confidential

information to entrepreneurs; that the Government of Mexico would depreciate the Mexican peso 15%. Resulting in a massive flight of capitals. The crisis worsened and affected other Latin American countries; they called it *Tequila effect*.

The presidential term of Ernesto Zedillo is seen as the final step to democratization. Zedillo's presidential was full of institutional reforms. The government began decentralizing in two directions. The Executive branch began providing more autonomy towards the Judicial and the Legislative branches. As well, the Federal Government began providing with more autonomy the State and Municipal level.

In his first speech as president of Mexico, Zedillo mentions

“Narcotrafic impunity is intolerable. Narcotrafic is the biggest threat to national security, the most serious risk to health and social bloodier source of violence. Today, more than ever, Mexico must be a country of laws, that is the cry of everyone everywhere and that task will demand effort, discipline, determination and perseverance. Solutions, we know, will take time. So we must start working on them now.” (Ernesto Zedillo, 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1994, first message as president of Mexico to the nation)

Zedillo here pronounces narcotrafic as “the biggest threat to national security”. However, he changes the discourse through his mandate. Afterwards, all his speeches in relation narcotrafic, he always adds the importance of the role of other countries to fight it.

“The global dimension of drug trafficking requires full recognition of the responsibility of each country in the criminal chain, either as a producer, transit port, consumer or money laundering center. The global dimension of drug trafficking also imposes the need for an effective fight each nation, but also demand the more serious and stronger cooperation of the international community effort.”(Zedillo, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1995, International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking at the official residency of the president)



Nevertheless, his discourse began shifting direction. Zedillo began giving much more emphasis in countries that are consumers. Specially when talking to countries to Latin American countries.

“[...] we are also well aware that we face serious challenges, such as representing drug trafficking and money laundering. In this sense, Mexico is a victim of a global problem that is today the most serious threat to the safety and health of nations. Mexico largely suffers from this problem because of its proximity to a major drug market.” (Zedillo, 14<sup>th</sup> of February 1996, Ceremony for receiving the key of the city of Panama)

In 1998 he began doing stronger declarations towards drug consumption in United States. Thus, Zedillo a large part of his discourse on drugs fundamentally relies in distributing the responsibility of the fight against drugs to consumer countries. Establishing that countries that are producers and routes suffer most from the war on drugs. Meanwhile consumer countries (developed) acted as judges for blaming other less developed countries for the war on drugs.

### **Vicente Fox (2000-2006)**

The year 2000 marks the transition of Mexico to a democracy. The presidential candidate from the National Action Party (PAN) Vicente Fox won the elections in 2000 after 70 years of domination of the same party PRI. The population had a great deal of hope in the new party and the new president.

In relation to narcotraffic, Vicente Fox was very brief in his comments about narcotraffic in his first speech. This is the only sentence in his first speech as president of Mexico “We are going to reduce the spaces to narcotraffic.” In his speech he securitized other topics such as water and forest. “In my government the water and forest will be considered topics of national security”

In another speech continued leveled the priority of other crimes such as assaulting and robbery to organized crime. Arguing that such crimes affect more the Mexican society than Organized Crime:

“Our actions will not be only focused exclusively in the fight of organized crime... we will also confront crimes that directly affect and hurt the citizens:

the assault on public roads, the express kidnapping, robbery housing, car theft.”(Vicente Fox, Culiacan, Sinaloa, 24th of January 2001, Report of Results of the Ongoing Campaign Against Crime and Narcotrafic)

However, later on Vicente Fox changed his definition of national security.

Inside the National System of Public Security he defines National Security as four points: narcotrafic, organized crime, international criminal gangs and terrorism.<sup>3</sup>

Terrorism was added after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 in United States altered the entire panorama. United States reinforced its border with Mexico due to fear that terrorist would cross that way. United States distanced itself from the migratory reform that the Government of Mexico was pursuing. Furthermore, Mexico did not support United States war of Iraq, halting bilateral relations; despite the great relationship that Bush and Vicente Fox had.

The difference on the discourse of drugs from previous administrations is that Vicente Fox considered Mexico as a consumer market. Insisting in keeping drugs away from the Mexican population, particularly the youth; Vicente Fox spoke of fighting “narcomenudeo” (local drug dealing).

The following excerpts were taken from Vicente Fox’s presidential discourse for the celebration of the United Nation’s “International day against drug use and illegal trafficking” on the 25th of June of 2004. Just two years before the war on drugs was declared:

“We, the members of the international community have committed to implement prevention and information strategies about the risks of the use of prohibited substances and the consequences of illicit trafficking”.

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<sup>3</sup> “The fourth subsystem it includes National Security: has to do with the fight of narcotrafic, organized crime, international criminal gangs and with the vigilance of our borders, vigilance that today is oriented, particularly, with the issue of terrorism” (Vicente Fox, 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2002, ceremony to inaugurate the Council of Citizen Participation)

“We need to raise the levels of education and awareness [of the youngest Mexican generation] so that they can cope with this reality [the use of drugs and its illicit trafficking], also already present in our society.”

“We fight without quarter<sup>4</sup> against the production and commercialization of drugs. Large drug lords have found in my government an enemy that prosecute and punishes them on a daily bases”.

“Our defense of the interests of the society in this war knows no limits other than the law.”

Although in that discourse the former president Fox used the word “fight” and “war” against drugs. He talked about the need to tackle illegal drug trafficking from many fronts, and he outlined: first the role of social values and education, as well as the joint measures between the government and the civil society to strengthen the prevention and treatment of drug use through National and local committees. Moreover, Vicente Fox mentioned just the role of the Mexican police (never military or naval) as part of the strategy; he only talked about confiscation of drugs and detention tasks mainly against retailers.

This speech followed the establishment of the Regional Central American United Nations Office on Drug and Crime in Mexico (Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004) with the specific mandate to: “[] help achieve security and justice for all by making the world safer from crime, drugs and terrorism” (UNODC 2010), and the goals of this UN office since then focused on technical assistant, monitoring and policy advising regarding the rule of law, drugs enforcement and international cooperation on penal justice related to illegal drug trafficking.

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<sup>4</sup> “Luchamos sin cuartel” (We fight without quarter) referring to fight without mercy, taking no prisoners or a fight to dead (Borja 1997).

Vicente Fox discourse on drugs it was not constant. First, he began securitizing environmental issues with water and forest. Later on, he raised again narcotraffic into another security top issue. Furthermore, he focused more into local drug dealers. It can be perceived that during his mandate in comparison with the previous presidents he had less pressure from the government of the United States to address narcotraffic. The American war in Iraq has a lot to do with this, due to a big part of the American apparatus was focused in the war in Iraq.

### **Felipe Calderón (War on drugs)**

The presidential campaign of Felipe Calderón was focused in creating jobs; in fact he called himself the President of Jobs. Felipe Calderón arrived to power amid political tensions. Felipe Calderón was elected just by a difference of 0,58 percent. There were several social protests claiming an electoral fraud that mobilized millions of people, especially in the center of Mexico. That crisis was noticeably on the day Felipe Calderón received the powers the 1st of December of 2006 from the former president Vicente Fox in the National Congress. The event was crowded with intense protests and riots in the congress and in the streets of Mexico City. Additionally, the adversary Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador did not recognized the results and called himself “the legitimate President”. Creating the possibility of a deep socio-political crisis.

During Felipe Calderón’ campaign he said that jobs and stability was the most important issues for Mexicans. Nevertheless, once elected, the day before getting into power he began building his discourse on narcotraffic. “Today, the first demand of our society and the first duty of government is that the security of families is guaranteed.” With this speech he shifted the emphasis of his government from employment to security.

“The Mexicans we can not and we must not allow de facto powers [narcotraffic] that every day attempt against society and challenge the authority of the state.

The problem of narcotraffic and organized crime has to be faced with energetic actions, an appropriate legislation and more and better coordination between the various bodies responsible for public security and national security.”

“It will be a great battle that will take years, it will take lot of efforts, financial resources and as I have said, probably the sacrifice of human lives of Mexicans, but it is a battle that we are determined to fight and we Mexicans will win and we must be united.”(Felipe Calderón, 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2006, Presentation of Security Cabinet)

In this speech he makes strong securitizing move, in which he prepares society to the war that state will engage against narcotraffic. Furthermore, he makes a strong emphasis on how these criminal organizations are challenging the authority of the state.

In his first speech to the nation as president of Mexico, Felipe Calderón did not mention a single time the words narcotraffic neither drugs; something the previous three presidents had done. Most part of his speech was about unity, in relation to the political tensions generated by the elections. Nonetheless, the first of the three priorities of his government had to do with the “...fight to regain public security and legality...” (Felipe Calderón, 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2006, Speech to the Nation as President of Mexico)

However, just ten days after taking office he launched “*Michoacán’s Joint Operation*”, which marked the beginning of his strategy. Two days later Felipe Calderón stated “But today I say that we must avoid at any cost that this threat [narcotraffic] to public security becomes a threat to national security, to the extend that it challenges the Mexican State.” Felipe Calderón makes a sharp distinction between national security issues and public security; something the previous president did not very well in his speeches. According to CISEN national security “...purpose is to maintain the integrity, stability and permanency of the Mexican state.” Meanwhile, public security is “safeguard the integrity and rights of individuals and to preserve freedom, order and public peace.” For instance, in this speech Felipe Calderón perceives narcotraffic as a matter of public security. *Michoacán’s Joint Operation* was launched in order to support the state of Michoacán, the state he was governor. “With this operation we are already providing support to state authorities to combat narcotraffic and crime and, above all, to regain the safety of the people of Michoacán.”

However, his speech shifted, narcotraffic passed from being a threat of some states to being a generalized threat for Mexico. Resulting as well, in shifting his discourse of narcotraffic being a threat from public security to a threat to national security.

Felipe Calderón began using the term *war* the three days after becoming president. On December 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Felipe Calderon used the term war against delinquency, in a forum for investment and cooperation. He used the term in order to bring certainty to investors that “Mexico will be a safe place to invest, to work and to live.” Nevertheless, the war that he thought would bring tranquility to investors did the opposite.

The war against narcotraffic is perceived to have started from the *Michoacán's Joint Operation*. There are two leading arguments of why the president Felipe Calderón declared war against Narcotraffic. The first, he born in Michoacán a state strongly affected by Narcotraffic saw the need of a more powerful and active confrontation to narcotraffic. The second is that Felipe Calderon engaged this war in order to legitimate its mandate and take command of the military. Since he won only by half a percentage point, and the other candidate did not recognized the results and tried to create an alternate government calling himself *legitimate president*.

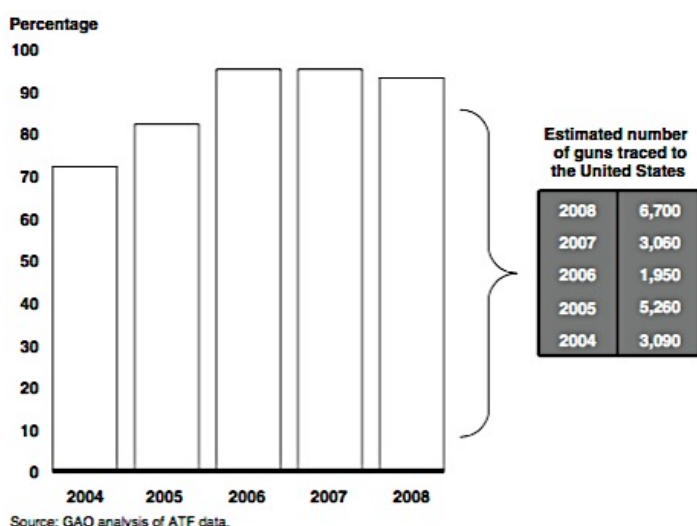
Thus, this extreme mobilization of the monopoly of the force from Calderón's government since 2006 until the end of his presidential period in 2012, was always justified through the discourse of the war on drugs, and the need to win the battle against the organized crime that breached the state's institutions.

What is relevant from this securitization strategy is that the United State's government always unconditionally supported the war on drugs' discourse. This discursive support was put into practice with the bilateral agreement “Iniciativa Merida” (Merida Initiative). This pact signed on 2008 was to promote cooperation for arms and equipment sales; as well as special training to support the *war* that the Mexican government was fighting against the drug cartels. Creating a joint responsibility on the situation of illegal drug trafficking towards the North American country.

With this pact, the U.S Congress approved a total budget of 2.3 billions of dollars of economic help, which by 2012; 1.2 billions were turned in on equipment (arms and helicopters) and training to the Mexican government (U.S Embassy in Mexico, 2015).

However, as Sonja Wolf from the Center of Research and Economic Teaching (CIDE) declared on an interview for the BBC (Nájjar 2015) if the Merida Pact is based on grounds of “joint responsibility” between countries, then the economic help is certainly reduced, and that means that Merida Initiative is a discursive and symbolic strategy only to support the idea of Mexico’s war on drugs.

Moreover, Mexican drug cartels were also buying arms and equipment from private distributors also in the United States. The Federal Assault Weapon Ban created in 1994 expired in 2004; allowing again citizens to be able to buy military, semi-automatic, military style weapons. Furthermore, according to a report made for US’ senate between 2004 and 2008 87% of the weapons decommissioned in Mexico have been traced to United States (see figure 4)(GAO 2009). Among these guns there is the gun FN Herstal known in Mexico as “mata policias” (police killer), since it can go through the bulletproof vest of the police.



**Figure 7 Percentages of Firearms Seized In Mexico and Traced in Fiscal Years 2004-2008 That Originated in the United States (GAO 2009)**

Escalating the conflict to an even more violent and aggressive one, up to the point where many international conflict resolution advisors; such as Professor Edgardo

Buscaglia declared that the Mexican situation during this period surpassed violence and deaths rates of countries on war such Afghanistan.

There were no legally established protocols of action from the federal forces until the end of the period. Thus, operations about how and in which cases the army and the navy were supposed to execute operations against cartels. In addition, these organizations lacked training in law and civil rights. Thus, many civilian deaths begin to occur caused by the crossfire and confusion; for instance, the tragic assassination of the 24 year old son's of the Mexican poet Sicilia outside of a bar. Among several cases were army and federal forces stopped civilians on checkpoints along Mexican territory and confused them with criminals that ended up in their disappearance. All of these human rights violations made the *war on drugs* a severe concern for civil society.

The response to those civil deaths was the overall openness to the dialogue between members of the civil society and the President. They opened the "Dialogue for peace in Mexico" (Diálogo por la paz en México) in June of 2011. With the support of the most relevant Ministers to start investigations related to human rights violations.

On the "Dialogue for peace in Mexico" the president addressed to the public and said that all members of the Mexican State with their particular level of responsibility needed to apologize for not being able to protect the life of the victims. However, in his speeches we can perceive that he does not regret such actions: "[we are not sorry] to act against the criminals that are killing the victims" and "If I regret something it is not sending the federal forces to fight against criminals those whom no one would dare to fight because they were afraid, or they were bribed by them [...] what I do regret is not having sent them beforehand" (Calderón, 2011).

The response of the government to civil society was thus the overall openness to the dialogue. There were direct talks between members of the civil society and the President and the Secretary of Public Security as well as the Federal Attorney to start investigations related to human rights violation. However, despite the dialogue and the civil request to reframe the security strategy of the Mexican government, Felipe Calderón maintained its frontal war against drug cartels.



### **Peña Nieto (2012-2018) Desecuritization**

The government of Peña Nieto has the same modernization discourse, just as the government of Salinas had in 1988. Furthermore, the cabinet of Peña Nieto includes in his cabinet some people from the cabinet and circle of Salinas. The government began his presidential term with “Pact for Mexico” (Pacto por Mexico). The pact engaged the three leading parties in Mexico PRI, PAN and PRD together to achieve a series of reforms. The reforms achieved with this pact were: energetic reform, educative reform, and financial reform among others. The most contested and unpopular reform was the energetic reform, which brought back the participation of private investors into the oil sector. However, these series of reforms and specially the pact for Mexico got good criticism from international investors. Thus, the focus of Peña Nieto government moved away from security issues.

Nonetheless, Peña Nieto promoted two important reforms related to security: reform on the general law of victims and a single command police reform. The first added a law for repairing damage to victims. The second reform was related to the structure of the police in the three levels of government Federal, State and Municipal police. In the past each police acted independently from the other, making harder to coordinate the strategy in relation to narcotraffic. Nevertheless, with this reform the state police take total command of the municipal police, creating a sole state force.

In respect to narcotraffic, Peña Nieto changed the strategy against drugs. Peña Nieto tries to speak as little as possible of drugs. However, in the beginning of his administration he got interviewed and asked if he was going to continue the fight against narcotraffic; he responded, “There is no way we will give up the fight against drug trafficking, against drug production” (Peña Nieto, 10th of December 2012, interview with El Nuevo Herald).

Peña Nieto has distanced from the discourse of *war on drugs*. He has addressed as little as possible the term narcotraffic unless is to exalt his achievements, such as the capture of “El Chapo”. He has rather used this slogan “for a Mexico in Peace”. The few times Peña Nieto talks about narcotraffic are because he gets asked and he attributes it on geography.

“Perhaps because we are the country which a lot of drug trafficking and drug reaches the consumer market more important, which is North America, which now competes with other markets, such as Europe, Asia.

And Mexico, given this geographical condition, without doubt, the issue of insecurity, and especially criminal organizations linked to drug trafficking stigmatized much to our country.” (Peña Nieto, 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2015, Q&A World Economic Forum in Latin America)

While Peña Nieto does not speak much about narcotraffic members of his cabinet does it. Thus, it is important to mention the role of the security advisors, especially in this administration. The security advisor Osorio Chong has played a leading role in drafting and choosing carefully Peña Nieto’s security strategy.

“The levels of violence in parts of the country are related to the drug market and structural variables with poverty, marginalization, poor culture of legality, lack of coordination and institutional weakness.

Capture and abatement of great leaders of criminal organizations, provoked a fragmentation process groups now operate with a different logic. We moved from a vertical scheme leadership, to one horizontal, which makes them more violent and more dangerous. Murder, extortion, kidnapping and robbery, are some of the criminal behavior that most hurt society.

They increased resources for safety in more than twice and, unfortunately, also, increased crime.” (Osorio Chong, 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2012, Second Extraordinary session from the National Public Security Council)

Osorio Chong has a very clear understanding of the fragmentation process of the cartels.

He implied that the policy of the previous president did not work, and harmed the image of Mexico in the exterior; damaging foreign direct investment and tourism one of the most important incomes of Mexico. He has not mention the term war on drugs in any of

his discourses. He only talked about war on drugs to argument that such strategy did not work.

Peña Nieto has distanced himself from the discourse on drugs that the previous president pursued. During the UNGASS<sup>5</sup> on World Drug Problem, Peña Nieto stated, “The system essentially based on prohibitionism initiated in the 70s named war against drugs, has failed to inhibit the production, trafficking, and consumption of drugs in the world.” This is a clear statement that the government is trying to desecuritize drugs. In fact, the following day the president of Mexico sent a package of reforms to the parliament in order to desecuritize drugs. This contained several proposals: increase the portion of marihuana that a person can carry up to 28 grams. Additionally, all people that were arrested for having up to 28 grams must be released. Furthermore, that marihuana or any chemical component contained in marihuana could be used for medical purposes. These are still being debated on the parliament; some congressmen argue that passing from 2 to 12 cigarettes of marihuana is way too much (Resendiz 2016).

## **Findings and Conclusion**

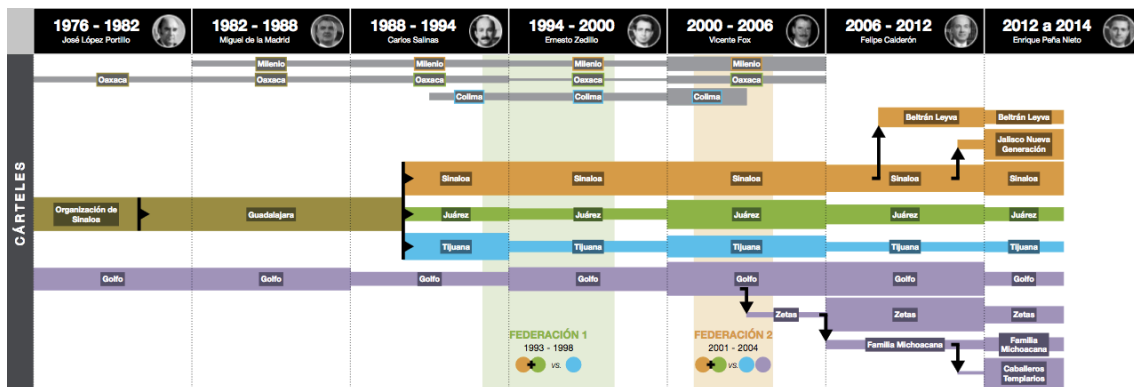
As I mentioned before, I argue that the war on drugs in Mexico is the result of external influences and then facilitating conditions. The discourse on drugs began in the United States as a strategy to villainize anti-war protesters. Later on, United States war on drugs was exported to Colombia and Mexico. Mexico took longer to fully adopt it. In the past Mexico’s interests were not aligned to United States. Mexico was a strong advocator of sovereignty and non-intervention. For instance, the same president of Mexico, who nationalized the oil industry in 1938, was besides Fidel Castro when they were celebrating the Cuban revolution. Additionally, Mexico was the only country in the American States Union (OEA) to reject the proposal of United States to expel Cuba from the OEA. Mexico as well supported Allende’s government in Chile. And when the United States backed military dictator Pinochet took over; the Mexican government broke relations with Chile. These are just examples of how Mexico’s interest were

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations General Assembly Special Session

rather different from what it is now. Nevertheless, the reform period of Carlos Salinas interlinked Mexico with United States to a larger extent; and more independence meant more leverage power. The internal facilitating conditions are also: first of all the institutional weakness of the Mexican state, democratization of the state, and more decentralization of the state

The security strategy against drugs pushed by United States has only increased the number of Narcotraffic organizations. Creating an environment for potential conflict among them. Dealing with the heads of the drug cartels has only created more drug cartels; Mexico passed from two cartels in 1988 to nine cartels in 2014 (see the image below).



Picture 1 "40 years of organized crime' expansion"(Moreno 2016)

Additionally, what has severed the conflict is the way it was talked about. When Felipe Calderon used language such as “In this war against narcotraffic there wont be truce nor quarter”. This was said in a speech in front and for the military with a very strong tone. This message facilitated the extrajudicial killings, for instance, every military became a judge, instead of bringing them to face judicial trials. Thus, the discourse on drugs helped construct the reality of the *war on drugs*.

Another problem is the way that previous government has seen security. For some presidential administrations the security’ discourse revolved around threats, rather than being human centered. For instance, the primary goal of the government is the elimination of the threat, despite some of these actions would affect society itself. The approach to security is human centered whereby “the objective of human security is to

guarantee a set of vital rights and freedoms to all people. Without unduly compromising their ability to pursue other goals.”(Alkire 2003 p.53) Challenging thus the state and military centric concept of security.

Nevertheless, the topic of narcotraffic is a complex one. There are pros and cons to different strategies towards narcotraffic. For instance, it is complex to know what to expect from the different policies towards drugs, or what would have happened if we had favored other strategies towards narcotraffic. However, to this point we have learned that a prohibitionist policy against drugs has implicated many costs. Mexico today is clearly distancing itself from this policy. It would be interesting how this will develop and how long will it take to desecuritize narcotraffic.

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Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelig universitet  
Noregs miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet  
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Postboks 5003  
NO-1432 Ås  
Norway