



UN Office on Drugs and Crime

Chairs:  
Jorge Perez  
Derek Velez

## Letter from the Chairs

Dear Delegates:

My name is Jorge Perez and I'm looking forward to chairing the UNODC committee this year! I'm from Puerto Rico and I'm currently a sophomore here at MIT. I am currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in computer science and molecular biology and I aspire to attend med school after graduating from MIT. I've been doing Model UN ever since my freshman year of high school and decided that I wanted to continue it in college. I was a chair twice back in Puerto Rico during my MUN career and I also chaired last year's MITMUNC conference so I'm excited to get to have this experience again.

I chose to be a chair for the UNODC committee mainly because of my Hispanic origins. I've lived in Puerto Rico for all of my life and have personally seen the negative effects that drugs have had in Latin American nations and, due to this, I realized how certain sections of the Latin American economy are in dire need of assistance. Therefore, we chose two topics for committee that are both currently relevant and are in need of being solved in an efficient manner. I hope this background guide properly helps you in fostering an interest for the topic and starting your research on the topics.

My name is Derek Velez and I am excited to be chairing the UNODC committee! I am also from Puerto Rico but have lived in Miami, Florida for 12 years and am currently a sophomore at MIT. I am pursuing a degree in computer science and engineering with a minor in atmospheric sciences. I joined Model UN senior year of high school and attended a couple conferences. I highly enjoyed attending the conferences and decided this year to join MITMUNC. I have never chaired a conference and look forward to having this amazing experience.

Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns. We look forward to hearing your solutions and inputs for the imminent issues we will be discussing!

Please send your position paper (one page per topic) to [mitmunc-unodc@mit.edu](mailto:mitmunc-unodc@mit.edu)

Sincerely,

Jorge Perez and Derek Velez

# Topic 1: Drug Trafficking and Cartels in Mexico

## Brief History of Drug Related Violence in Mexico

The introduction of Mexico into the drug trafficking economy occurred shortly after the end of World War II. While the levels of drug consumption are relatively low in the nation, there was a large increase in the amount of drugs sold and exported in an attempt to increase people's financial stability and the economy of Mexico itself. Nonetheless, the emergence of a drug empire could not have occurred without the help of other nations. In this case, the United States was one of the biggest factors that contributed to the economic success of drug trafficking in Mexico. By the 1970s, the high drug demand emanating from the United States was one of the factors that allowed Mexico's drug economy to reach a peak. Furthermore, Mexico's location was another factor that facilitated the trafficking of illicit drugs. Since Mexico connects the United States with the rest of Latin and South America, cartels and drug lords from the areas would make deals with the Mexican cartels to get shipments across the US-Mexican border. For example, Pablo Escobar, one of Colombia's most notorious drug lords, constantly relied on Mexican cartels to transport shipments of Cocaine to the United States. As a result, these factors, alongside others that will be mentioned later in this background guide, led to the rise and success of an illicit business that not only increased crime rates in the nation but was also harmful for the people participating in it.

## Factors that Lead to the Growth of Drug Cartels

Ever since the 1940s, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was one of the most prevalent political parties in Mexico. In fact, the PRI controlled the Mexican government for a span of more than 20 years. During the 1970s, they reached a peak in power where most, if not all, of the governmental positions were filled by members of the PRI. It was during this time that drug cartels profited the most from Mexico's political system. By the 1970s, drug trafficking was a very lucrative industry in Mexico, worth hundreds of millions of dollars. For this reason, most drug cartels and drug lords were very wealthy and had sufficient funds to sustain a luxurious lifestyle. Nonetheless, this also meant that they had enough money to buy their protection from the Mexican government itself. Since the government was basically composed of a single political party, it was easy for drug lords to pay off high ranking officials from the party and make any of their problems go away. Furthermore, these bribes were enough to buy people diplomatic immunity, which is one of the reasons the drug industry rapidly grew during this time period.

The 2000 presidential elections saw the induction of Vicente Fox into office, a member of the National Action Party (PAN), thus ending the PRI's control of the government. Consequently, the drug cartels found themselves in a situation where they needed to find new ways to assure their protection and safety. For this reason, they resorted to using violence against the government in an attempt to establish their dominance over the Mexican nation and scare the government into cooperating with them. Unfortunately, this evidently resulted in increased crime levels in Mexico and, consequently, an increased death toll in the general population.

Finally, the United State's lack of success in reducing the demand of illicit drugs in the country has propelled drug trafficking profits each year. While the United States is involved in multiple operations against drug cartels, their failure to focus on their own internal problems has only strengthened cartel operations. In fact, sales in illicit substances to Americans increased by 50% from 2010 to 2016, resulting in \$150 billion dollars in sales in 2016. Therefore, the combination of internal and international factors all contribute to the strength of the drug cartels and need to be resolved in an efficient manner before it becomes too late.

### **Drugs Trafficked**

The Mexican cartels have a large focus on the traffic of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, fentanyl, and marijuana. With the recent trend of marijuana legalization in some states in the United States, the government has lowered their surveillance of the trafficking efforts related to marijuana. Instead, officials are focusing on stopping the transportation of harder drugs that have more extreme psychedelic effects. Nonetheless, these drugs tend to be highly profitable due to the riskier nature of their traffic, which is why the cartels increase their security for procedures relating to these riskier drugs. Fentanyl, for example, has an effect that is ten times more powerful than heroin. Furthermore, a lot of these drugs actually are produced in Mexico and later transported to the United States. Therefore, this committee should focus on ways to deal with the production of illicit drugs in Mexico, rather than just focusing on preventing their transportation.

### **Drug Smuggling**

After a large amount of drugs are ready for shipment, the Mexican drug cartels have multiple methods they use to transport the drugs across the United States-Mexican border. The main way that they go about smuggling drugs is by entering through ports of entry. These ports are monitored by the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP), which makes it difficult for the trafficking to occur. Nonetheless, the drug cartels continue to find innovative ways to get around the system and transport their drugs without the CBP noticing. For example, some Mexicans use underground tunnels to avoid inspection by the CBP. Another method they constantly use is hiding the drugs in unsuspecting vehicles, such as buses and cars, so that even if the CBP inspected the vehicle they would not find any trace of drugs in them. The cartels have gone so far as to even begin taking advantage of recent technological discoveries to modernize their shipment methods. Remarkably, one way in which they have done this is through their use of drones. By simply attaching a shipment to a motorized drone, the cartels can fly the shipment over the border in an unsuspecting vesicle that the CBP has no way of stopping easily. Therefore, with the cartels constantly finding innovative ways to smuggle their products, the committee will also focus on ways to deal with the issues surrounding these innovations.



## Major and Notable Drug Cartels

**Sinaloa Cartel** → Considered to be the most prevalent and biggest drug organization in Mexico. They have alliances with a lot of other cartels, which is one of the ways they stay relevant in the entire nation. Recently, their leader, Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, was found and taken to the United States where he is currently serving a life sentence. Nonetheless, the cartel continues to expand and grow even without their leader.

**Beltran Leyva** → Even though the four brothers that began this cartel are all dead or in prison, the Beltran Leyva Cartel continues to function and gather profits from their illicit drug transportation. Much like the Sinaloa Cartel, they have alliances and constantly work with other cartels to maintain a high profile and remain relevant.

**Gulf Cartel** → This Cartel formed in the 1920s where it was one of the most relevant and largest cartels in that time. However, in the year 2010, they had a falling out with the Los Zetas Cartel through a series of very violent and crime based fights that took Mexico by storm. Now, this cartel just consists of small membered gangs.

**Jalisco New Generation** → Before 2010, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel was part of the Sinaloa Cartel. After they disbanded from them, however, they made a reputation for themselves of being the most dangerous cartel of the nation. Not only are they the most dangerous, they are also the fastest growing cartel in Mexico.

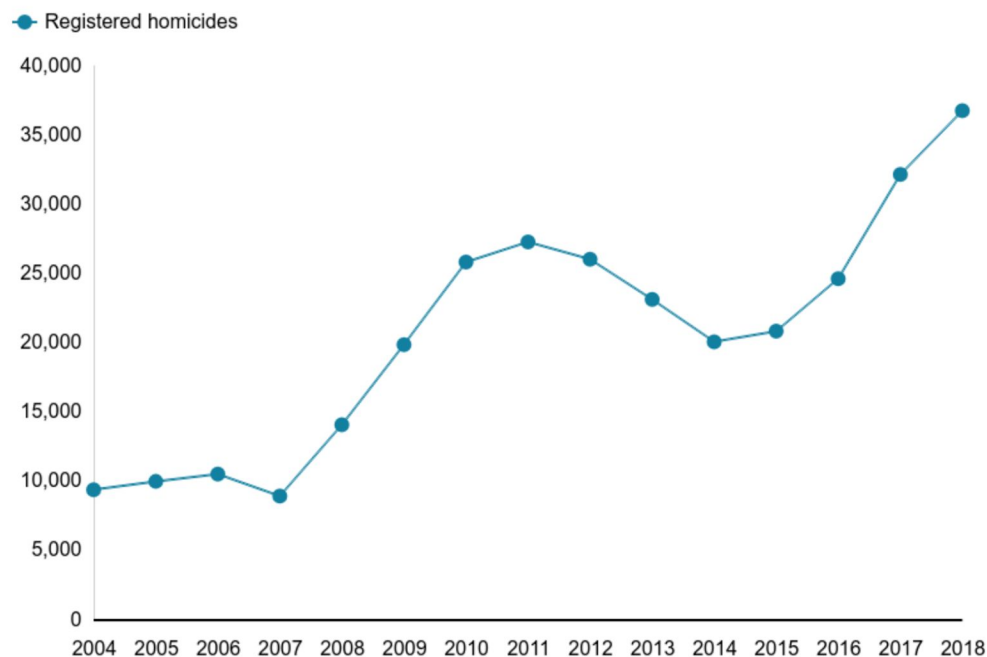
**Los Zetas Cartel** → This Cartel differs from the common Mexican cartel because they do not rely on drug trafficking for the majority of their profits. Instead, they use violence as their main way of acquiring profits and having an impact on the Mexican nation and economy.

## Mexico's War on Drugs and Humanitarian Issues

The Mexican government began responding to the illegal trafficking of drugs by using violence against the drug cartels associated with these illicit activities. The Mexican War on Drugs officially began in 2006 and it has had drastic effects on the nation's humanitarian situation. During Felipe Calderon's presidency, Mexico and the United States pursued this war on drugs by identifying key kingpins and proceeding to kill them. In the span of only six years, 120,000 people died in the hands of the Mexican government. Unfortunately, Mexico's homicide rate continues to increase since the drug cartels tend to respond to governmental sponsored violence with increasing their reliance on violence. This increase in homicide rates drastically worsens civilian safety since civilians are usually targeted by the drug cartels whenever they want to use violence. Therefore, this committee will need to discuss efficient methods to proceed with the Mexican war on drugs while reducing the drastic and dire humanitarian situation present in the country.

### Homicides in Mexico

Yearly breakdown



Source: National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Inegi)



### Guiding Questions

1. What position does your country have on the drug trafficking issues Mexico is facing?
2. How should the Mexican government manage the corruption within its own government?
3. How can we minimize the growth of Mexican cartels?

4. Should the international community become involved with the Mexican War on Drugs?
5. What does your country believe should be done in relation to the major drug cartels present in Mexico?
6. How can the international community reduce the smuggling of illicit substances through country borders?
7. What does your country believe should be done to reduce the amount of civilian casualties resulting from the current War on Drugs?

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## Topic 2: Drug Trafficking and Cartels in Colombia

### Brief History of Drug Related Violence in Colombia

While Colombia was no stranger to drugs and drug trafficking at the time, its role in the drug market rapidly grew starting in 1975 after Mexico launched major interdiction efforts. Soon after, up to seven-tenths of the marijuana being imported into the United States came from Colombia. This led to the rise of major drug cartels, which used the wealth they accumulated through marijuana to diversify to cocaine, which was processed by the cartels after buying coca leaves from farmers in Peru and Bolivia. Cocaine allowed these cartels to further amass money and power. Guerilla groups formed and began partaking in criminal activities to finance themselves. Kidnappings became the prior way of doing this. These kidnappings led to widespread violence after one of the groups kidnapped the daughter of a major drug lord. Violence further ensued as the United States pressured Colombia to extradite major cartel dealers for trial, which led to the death of hundreds of civilians, government officials, and police officers at the hands of the cartel leaders. After the major cartels of the time disbanded, new cartels and guerilla groups rose to continue the drug trade. This continued the violence in the country into the 21st century. Recently, however, guerilla groups have commenced to negotiate with the government or been eliminated which has led to new forms of

drug trafficking. In recent times, respectable businessmen are running multi-million dollar drug trafficking schemes in the facades of their legal enterprise.

### **Factors that Lead to the Growth and Decline of Drug Cartels**

Colombia sits at the northwestern edge of the South American continent, bordering five countries and two oceans. This allows the country to be the gateway of the continent, having access to transport goods, and drugs, easily through land, air, and sea. This allowed Colombia to rapidly become a major exporter of marijuana to the United States after Mexico began interdiction efforts in 1975, which led to the formation of drug cartels of which two became very powerful and notorious: the Medellín Cartel, which Pablo Escobar led, and the Cali Cartel. The wealth gained from marijuana allowed the cartels to diversify to cocaine, which primarily came from farmers growing the coca plant in Peru and Bolivia at the time. This diversification proved lucrative for the cartels, who further acquired wealth and power. Violence and corruption also followed.

Guerilla groups formed and began partaking in criminal activities. Kidnappings, which became a large issue for the country, were the primary way these groups would finance themselves, with ransoms, and led to a violent backlash when the M-19 kidnapped the daughter of a major drug lord. Cocaine became an economic asset for the country, making trade balances positive and making more money than legal goods. Since cocaine was benefitting the Colombian populus and stimulating the economy, few had intentions of intervening until pressure from the United States to extradite some of the cartel leaders for trial led to a violent showdown with the Medellín Cartel, which killed hundreds of civilians, government officials, and police officers. Following the killing of Pablo Escobar and the arrests of the heads of the Cali Cartel, the Norte del Valle Cartel and guerilla groups rose to fill the void of power left by the disbanded Medellín and Cali cartels. The cultivation of coca leaves also shifted from Peru and Bolivia to Colombia. Guerilla groups dominated the areas that were being used to cultivate coca, leading to these groups competing over control of more areas and eventually also trafficking cocaine through neighboring countries. Eventually, however, the Norte del Valle Cartel dismantled and many guerilla groups were removed from their strongholds by the Colombian government, leading to a new era in Colombian crime.

Criminal-paramilitary hybrids, called BACRIM by the government, rose to fill in the void of power. Many of them were either absorbed into larger ones or dismantled by Colombian forces. BACRIM groups have been severely weakened by security forces over the years, though there are still a few active and powerful ones that continue criminal activities within the country. Furthermore, the winding down of war in the country, drug trafficking has been turned towards respectable businessmen in the country, who use their legal trades to continue the multi-million dollar drug trade.

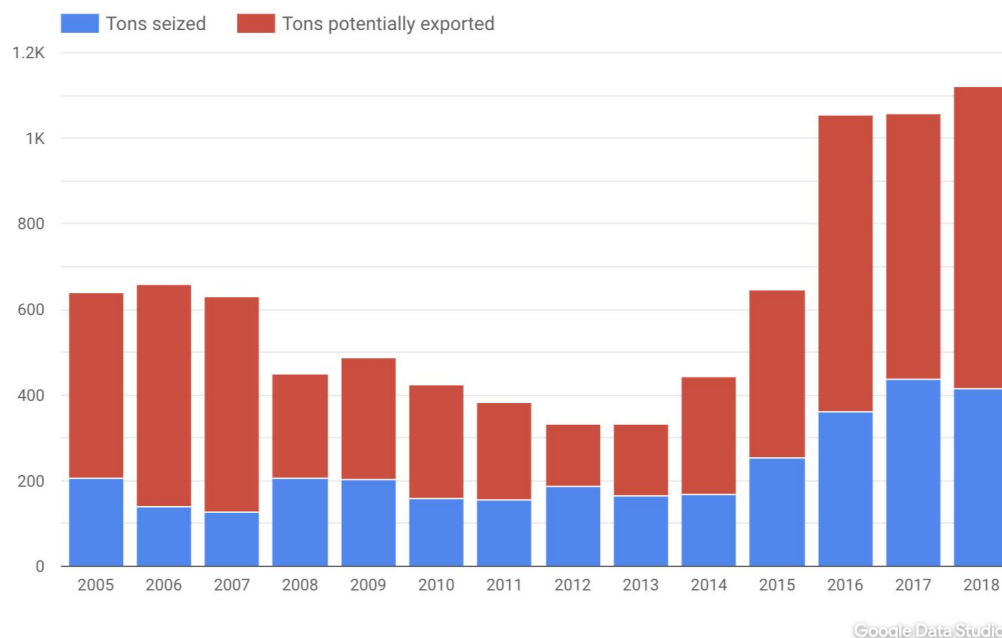
### **Drugs Trafficked**

While Colombia joined the drug trade through marijuana, its criminal groups mainly produce and export cocaine and heroin presently. In fact, about 70% of the cocaine consumed globally is produced in the country. In recent times, these drugs have gained popularity and have become even more lucrative. The market for cocaine is extensive, with major markets in the United States,



Australia, Europe, and, more recently, South America. Due to heightened measures of security and attempts to seize cocaine shipments in these countries, drug traffickers have to continuously devise clever ways to traffic drugs into the desired countries. Nonetheless, hundreds of tons of cocaine are seized yearly, with far more making it to the public. The risks involved in transporting it allow it to be so profitable. As most of the drugs exported still reach their destination, this committee should have a heavier focus on preventing the production of these drugs, rather than ways to seize them during transportation.

#### Cocaine seizures in Colombia

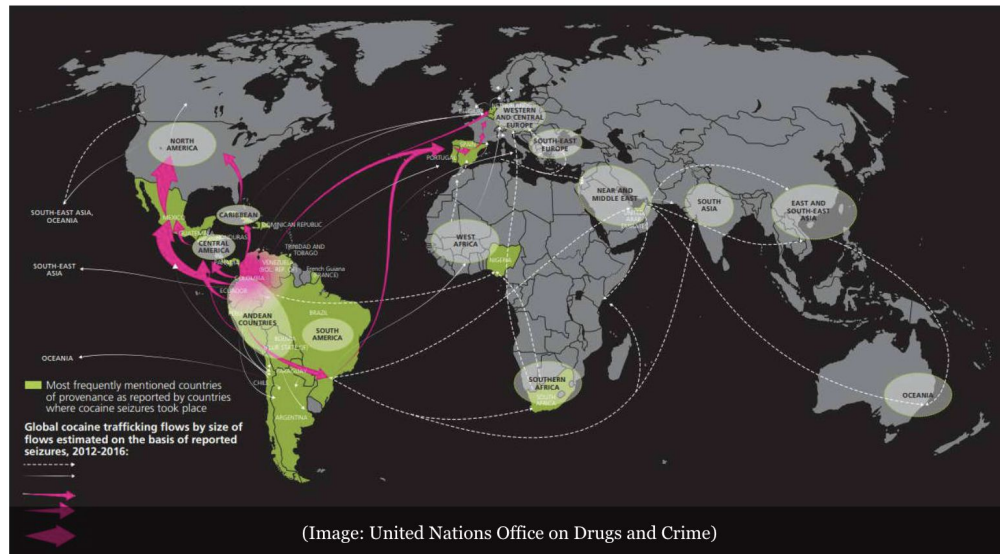


### Drug Smuggling

As previously mentioned, most drugs are transported through ports of entry of countries across the globe, which tend to be heavily monitored by government agencies and police. This causes trafficking to be risky and difficult, with millions worth of drugs being seized at these ports yearly. Nonetheless, smuggling still occurs and millions worth of drugs still reach the streets of countries. Drugs trafficked from Colombia tend to be on ships or submarines, often with the supervision of the Mexican drug cartels. In the cities with ports, local crime gangs form close ties with law enforcement and port authorities to ensure the drugs are exported. Also, in recent years, clandestine airstrips are being made in Venezuela and used to fly drugs to Central American and Caribbean countries. However, small amounts of drugs tend to be trafficked by air, as it is riskier, but tends to be done by drug mules with connections to Colombian organizations with criminal partner organizations in the destination country. Most drug busts of cocaine across the world have

been with drugs being transported by air or road, however, the largest drug busts are made in ports, signifying that large quantities of drugs are often trafficked through ships.

#### Main cocaine flows (2012-2016)



## Changing Drug Trade

As the civil war in Colombia comes to an end, drug lords are shifting from the flashy kingpins of the major cartels to anonymous businessmen who blend in as respectable members of the finance world. They are being deemed the “Invisibles” as rather than being overt and create violence, they are modest and wield an encrypted phone rather than a pistol. Nevertheless, a handful of notorious criminal organizations remain, though much weaker than ever. Among these are the Urabeños, who still conduct criminal activities throughout the country, the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the dissident former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) members, who are feared to form a new criminal network. Nonetheless, this committee must discuss how to better intervene in major drug schemes and ways to find the “Invisibles” and cease their drug trade.

## Colombia’s War on Drugs

Colombia has been battling with drugs for decades, having hunted for kingpins, spraying chemicals to kill coca plants, and received billions in aid from foreign countries, particularly the United States. The war has been a costly one, however. The hunt for kingpins resulted in thousands of lives as cartels responded with violence. Kidnappings were common across the country and many were corrupt and bribed. In 2017, the United Nations began a voluntary crop substitution program for farmers which allowed them the option to substitute the coca plants they were growing with a different crop. This has led to thousands of hectares of the plants to be removed by farmers, however, farmers can easily replace their new crop with coca once it has been cultivated and due to a lack of an extensive crop substitution program, results tend to be ephemeral. Therefore, a crucial

discussion for the committee will be how foreign countries can help better assist Colombia in implementing better program for farmers so that they stop cultivating coca, which tends to provide more money than other crops.

### Guiding Questions

1. What position does your country have on the drug trafficking issues Colombia is facing?
2. How should the Colombian government manage the corruption within its own government?
3. How can the “Invisibles” be found and stopped?
4. What does your country believe should be done in relation to the remaining criminal organizations and the “Invisibles”?
5. How can the international community reduce the smuggling of illicit substances through country borders?
6. What does your country believe should be done to help stop farmers from cultivating coca plants and better support them?

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