



Mexico's Drug Wars: Implications and Perspectives from California and California's San Joaquin Valley

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Mexico's Drug Wars: Implications and Perspectives from California and California's San Joaquin Valley

Salvador Montana and H. Stephen Cooper

The escalating level of violence in Mexico due to the drug wars has led to deep concern among U.S. officials that the violence will soon “spill over” into the United States (U.S.). Although the violence from the warring drug cartels occurs in many regions of Mexico, some of the most brutal and gruesome violence has been witnessed along the approximately 2000 mile border that the U.S. shares with Mexico. Several cities on the Mexico side of the border, such as Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Juárez, and Tijuana, are experiencing violence on a scale and severity never before seen in modern times. Just prior to Barack Obama succeeding to the presidency, the Office of Homeland Security advised the incoming administration of its plan to implement a “surge” of civilian and perhaps military law enforcement along the border should the violence spill over and threaten U.S. residents, property, and interests (Archibold, 2009). U.S. officials are extremely concerned that the drug cartels could push Mexico's democracy into a rapid and sudden collapse and that its society will drift into complete lawlessness that could spill to the U.S. side of the border (U.S Joint Forces Command, 2008). Such an occurrence would represent a major security risk to the U.S.

California shares the U.S. – Mexico border with three other states-- Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. California's experience with the drug wars is mainly confined to the San Diego region and the principal city of Tijuana in the Mexican state of Baja California. Tijuana is a city of approximately 1.3 million people (TransBorder Institute, 2009) and it is similar to many Mexican border cities. Its economy and daily life are intertwined with its neighboring U.S. city, San Diego. Combined, the population of the San Diego-Tijuana metropolitan area is approximately 4.2 million people (TransBorder Institute, 2009). Long before the drug wars and their associated violence made

headlines, San Diego-Tijuana metropolitan region was designated a High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) in 1990 by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (National Drug Intelligence Center [NDIC], 2008a).

Events in Mexico are also being watched closely by California officials and residents, even in Fresno, California, where one of the authors resides. Fresno is located 320 miles north of the border and in one of the richest agricultural regions in the nation known as the San Joaquin Valley (SJV). The SJV is comprised of eight counties: Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare. The SJV is home to five of the ten most agriculturally productive counties in the U. S. (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2005) and seven of the top ten agricultural counties in California are in the SJV (California Department of Food and Agriculture, 2007). Fresno County is the richest and most productive agricultural county in U.S., with \$4.8 billion received from the production of more than 200 commercial crops.

The SJV is a region in sharp contrast to the rest of the Golden State. Unlike the coastal areas of the state, the SJV suffers from high unemployment, higher rates of poverty, and performs poorly along a number of environmental and socioeconomic indicators than the rest of the state (e.g., air quality). Often referred to as the “Appalachia of the West,” a recent Congressional report (CRS, 2005) identified the SJV as “one of the most economically depressed regions of the United States.” (p.i) It is the place where civil rights leader César Chávez led his now famous farmworker labor movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and where today many immigrants, both legal and illegal, arrive to work in the fields and in other low-skilled jobs. Given the Mexican drug cartel's escalation of violence along the bor-

Salvador Montana, PhD is an Assistant Professor at California State University, Fresno.

H. Stephen Cooper, PhD is an Assistant Professor at Stephen F. Austin State University.

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der and the SJV's long history with immigrants from Mexico, the authors set out to describe the drug trade and violence along the California-Mexico borders and its implications for California and the SJV.

Mexico's Drug War along California's Border

Drug smuggling by Mexican traffickers into California is not a new phenomenon and it can be traced back to the early 20th century, when smuggling into California included opium and marijuana, primarily from the mountains of Sinaloa (Katel, 2008). Overtime, Mexican drug traffickers became major suppliers of marijuana, heroin, and cocaine. Although the public has long known about the existence of drug smuggling across the California-Mexico border, the ill effects of the drug trade, such as corruption and violence, were largely tolerated or ignored by citizens on both sides of the border. As long as the clandestine drug trade did not interfere with border commerce, businesses, and the normal routine of residents along the border, drug traffickers were largely tolerated. For their part, drug traffickers avoided drawing attention to themselves through intimidation and violence for fear it would impede the business of drug trafficking into the U.S., where the demand for illegal drugs is high (Anderson, 2007).

Efforts to eradicate the drug trade by both the United States and Mexican governments have been ongoing, but have met with limited success (Katel, 2008). For example, Operation Intercept in 1969 at the Points of Entry (POEs) along the U.S.-Mexico border and Operation Condor in 1970 in Sinaloa were successful in halting the growth and transportation of marijuana and poppy. However, these successes were short-lived as Mexican drug traffickers quickly adapted to new production methods and locations and to new modes of transportation, such as small aircraft flying mostly undetected across the border. Greater successes have been limited due to U.S. drug enforcement officials' suspicions and lack of trust with working with their Mexican counterparts. U.S. law en-

forcement officials believe corruptions among Mexican law enforcement and government officials have stifled their drug detection and eradication efforts. Robert Pennal, Special Agent Supervisor for the California Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement, stated (personal communication, December 19, 2008) that corrupt Mexican officials are often bought-off by Mexican drug traffickers to tip-off or provide intelligence to their benefactors about U.S. and Mexico joint drug-interdiction efforts. The 1984 the torture and murder of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent Enrique Camarena by Mexican marijuana barons highlighted the depth of Mexico's corruption and touched off U.S. outrage over his death and with Mexican officials who were complicit in allowing his murderers to escape (Katel, 2008).

Despite the U.S. accusations and exposure of repeated corruption, Mexican drug traffickers have maintained the upper-hand. Mexican drug traffickers were thrown another advantage when growing U.S. attention to South American drug trafficking organizations and their Caribbean smuggling routes into South Florida forced South American traffickers to move their smuggling routes through Mexico in 1989 for transshipment into the U.S. (Katel, 2008). South American traffickers were now increasingly dependent on their Mexican counterparts to move drugs into the U.S., and this was a major factor in the growth and dominance of the Mexican drug cartels, commonly known as the Gulf, Juarez, Sinaloa, and Tijuana drug cartels. Recent pressure by U.S. and Mexican law enforcement officials against Mexico's drug cartels is believed to have started violence and in-fighting among the cartels for control of drug smuggling routes, known as "plazas," and the enormous profits associated with the trade, which are estimated at upwards of \$23 billion (Katel, 2008; Lawson, 2008).

The current configuration of the Tijuana Drug Cartel operating along the California-Mexico border began with the Arellano Félix brothers-- Benjamin, Ramon, and Javier-- who came from

Sinaloa (Marosi, 2008a). By the 1990s, the Arellano Félix brothers were the dominant power smuggling narcotics through the Mexican cities of Tijuana, Tecate, and Mexicali along the California border. In 2002, Ramon was shot and killed by police in Mazatlan and later in the year his brother Benjamin was arrested and jailed. Javier managed to keep control of the cartel until 2006 when he was arrested on a boat off the coast of Baja California. After Javier's arrest, the cartel began to weaken, but control was assumed by the brother's nephew, Sanchez Arellano. Pressure against the remnants of the Tijuana cartel began in earnest in January 2007, when newly elected Mexican President Felipe de Jesus Calderón Hinojosa sent 3,500 federal troops and agents into Tijuana and ordered all 2,300 officers of the city police force to turn in their weapons (Marosi, 2008c). Police weapons were checked to determine if they were used in drug-related crimes. This and other subsequent actions were meant to purge the police force of corrupt or incompetent officers. Many Tijuana residents and officials concede that the police force has historic and strong ties to the Arellano Félix Cartel and often did or were complicit with their biddings.

In May 2007, President Calderón met with U.S. President George Bush at Mérida, Yucatan, to lay out the foundation for the Mérida Initiative. The Mérida Initiative is the successor to the Plan Columbia established to eradicate drugs and drug smuggling routes from South and Central American and the Caribbean (Katel, 2008). In 2008, the U.S. allocated \$400,000,000 through the Mérida Initiative to Mexico to help break-up its drug cartels and trade. The Mérida Initiative reflected a sense of urgency and concern that the Mexican drug traffickers would soon grow in dominance and further weaken Mexico's political and social institutions. The Mérida Initiative now helps to support President Calderón's assault on the Mexican drug cartels as seen in Tijuana by arresting cartel leadership and eradicating corruption in Mexico's law enforcement and government institu-

tions. The government's strategy is to break the cartels into smaller and more manageable pieces. However, critics of the strategy believe this approach has triggered and escalated the violence by destabilizing the drug cartels resulting in wars among the splintered factions for control and leadership (Lawson, 2008). Others also blame the lack of U.S. controls on the illegal export to Mexico of high-powered automatic weapons that end up in the hands of the drug cartels (Anderson, 2007). Many believe the violence will not decrease until a new equilibrium among drug traffickers is achieved. This appears to be the case in Tijuana.

Sanchez Arellano cartel's chief rival in the Tijuana region is Teodoro Garcia Simental, known as "El Teo." He is a former and ruthless Arellano Félix cartel lieutenant who early in 2008 broke away from Sanchez Arellano (Marosi, 2008d). El Teo is thought to be behind the recent rash of kidnappings in the Tijuana area. Kidnappings fell into vogue because President Calderón's pressure on the cartels destabilized them to a point where drug profits were down and sizable money from opportunistic crimes, such as abduction and ransom, could be obtained quickly and easily (R. Pennal, personal communication, December 19, 2008). Sanchez Arellano demanded that El Teo stop the practice of abduction because it was drawing too much attention from law enforcement on both sides of the border. In 2008, the FBI estimated there were 26 abductions of U.S. citizens and legal residents in the areas of Tijuana, Rosarito Beach, and Ensenada (Berestein & Dibble, 2008). In April, 2008, members of the Sanchez Arellano and El Teo factions "shot it out" in spectacular fashion on an expressway in eastern Tijuana, leaving 15 dead and El Teo fleeing to Sinaloa (Marosi, 2008a). After the April shootout, Tijuana was relatively calm until late summer.

El Teo returned to Tijuana with a vengeance in late August 2008 and since then Tijuana and the surrounding region has been turned into a killing

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field (Marosi, 2008d). It is believed that Teo aligned himself with Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, head of the Sinaloa cartel. El Chapo made international headlines and further exposed Mexican corruption when in 2001 he bribed his way out of Mexico’s highest security prison, Puente Grande (Lawson, 2008). Many believe the Sanchez Arellano and El Teo feud is behind many of the estimated 450 gruesome homicides in Tijuana in 2008. These days, it is not uncommon to discover bodies mutilated, dismembered, burned, or beheaded with messages and warnings. Most of these involve cartel members, including law enforcement officials working for one side or the other. Some murders involve officers who refused to do the cartel’s bidding. Tijuana residents now find themselves in the crossfire as hit men fire indiscriminately at their targets in restaurants, nightclubs, cafes and other public places. Women and children are no longer off limits, as demonstrated by the shooting of Tijuana’s Deputy Police Chief Margarito Saldana Rivera, his wife, and two daughters (Marosi, 2008d).

The economic impact of the cartel war in the border region along California and Baja California is still unclear. Mexican and American government and economic development officials portray the border region’s economy as holding steady with slight growth in investment and employment in the maquiladora sector, a downturn in real estate similar to the U.S., and tourism stable in popular areas such as Rosarito Beach and Ensenada (Berestein & Dibble, 2008). But many are deeply concerned that if the violence isn’t curtailed, investment in the maquiladora sector will drop because of security cost increases, companies sensing no end in sight to the violence, and drug culture and crime permeating everyday life of residents and workers. Especially worrisome is the potential kidnapping of CEO’s and other top executives living or doing business in the region. The San Diego area, a major supplier of ancillary services, such as office supplies, legal services, and technical expertise, would suffer as well.

Despite claims to the contrary, tourism in Rosarito Beach and Ensenada appears to be affected by the violence “spilling over the hill” from Tijuana (Marosi, 2008b). Once a bustling tourist destination for U.S. residents, retirees, and college students, Rosarito Beach is experiencing an economic downturn in tourism and real estate. Hotels and beach clubs now attract a fraction of guests seen in the past and dozens of “curio shops” and restaurants have closed for lack of business. Real estate sales to U.S. residents close to retirement have dropped off due to safety concerns. So far, only a few of the approximate 14,000 member American expatriate community appears affected by the violence, but they are increasingly concerned about the close proximity of the violence once confined to Tijuana.

Mexican Drug Trafficking in California

The California side of the border has yet to experience widespread and blatant violence such as that perpetuated by drug lords on the Mexican side of the border. The California Border Alliance Group, (CBAG), a coalition of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, reports on crime related to Mexican drug trafficking activities along the 145 mile portion of the California-Mexico border. U.S. law enforcement officials report that kidnappings, shootings, and other violence in the U.S. have occurred, but generally with persons who participate or associate with drug groups in Mexico (NDIC, 2008a). Chula Vista and other areas close to the border are increasingly experiencing drug-related homicides, strikingly similar to those committed in the Tijuana region. The San Diego Division of the FBI reports an increase in drug-related kidnapping, up 25% from 2006 to 2007. There may actually be an even higher percent increase of drug-related kidnappings because victims’ families are unwilling or afraid to report the crime to law enforcement for fear that the victim will be killed.

The NDIC (2008a) reports that the cultural connections among the large population in the

California-Mexico border region have enabled Mexican drug traffickers or Drug Trade Organizations (DTOs) to exploit familial ties and extensive contacts on both sides of the border to assist in drug trafficking. The Arellano Félix Organization and the Sinaloa Cartel are the principal transporters and distributors of illegal drugs operating in the region. The high volume and daily movement of individuals and goods across the California-Mexico border provide numerous opportunities for drug traffickers to conceal smuggling activities with legitimate commerce. Mexican DTOs typically smuggle at or between the six POEs in the region: Andrade, Calexico East, Calexico West, Otay Mesa, San Ysidro, and Tecate. In 2006, the Otay Mesa POE in San Diego was the busiest commercial border crossing between California and Mexico. It handled more than 1.4 million trucks and \$28.6 billion worth of goods crossing the California-Mexico border (NDIC, 2008a). Mexican DTOs smuggle their goods across the border using private and commercial vehicles, buses, rail, and package delivery services. Once in California, drugs typically are transported overland to other parts of the state and the U.S. along Interstates 5, 8, 15, and 805.

The number and use of subterranean tunnels from Mexico to the U.S. are both increasing. Between 2005 and 2007, twenty-one subterranean tunnels were discovered along the California-Mexico border (NDIC, 2008a). Subterranean tunnels are difficult to detect, making it hard for law enforcement and military personnel to apprehend drug traffickers and their goods. These subterranean tunnels pose a security threat to the U.S. by providing a route for clandestine transport of weapons, human trafficking, or smuggling terrorists into the country. Mexican DTOs also use commercial and private aircraft to smuggle. Maritime routes include off loading from larger ships located offshore using commercial and recreational watercraft, smuggling drugs into the area by blending in with legitimate commercial and recreational traffic.

The production of illegal drugs dominated by Mexican DTOs is well established in the CBAG region (NDIC, 2008a). Large-scale, high-potency marijuana is grown on public lands and private ranches throughout the area. The number of plants eradicated from outdoor sites in San Diego County alone increased over 31% from 2006 to 2007. Mexican DTOs have also historically controlled many of California's superlabs and major methamphetamine production facilities. In recent years large-scale methamphetamine production operations have been occurring in Mexico, but strong restrictions put forth by the Calderón administration on imports and manufacturing of precursor chemicals used in methamphetamine production, such as ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, has shifted production to the U.S. (R. Pennal, personal communication, December 19, 2008).

Mexican DTOs also use the CBAG region as a consolidation point for currency smuggling (NDIC, 2008a). Drug money is consolidated at stash sites in the region and smuggled back to Mexico in bulk. Once in Mexico, the funds are often deposited into Mexican banks or a "casas de cambio" and then sent back and deposited in U.S. financial institutions through electronic wires or courier services. Once in the United States, the funds appear as legitimate proceeds from Mexican financial institutions.

Mexican Drug Trafficking in the San Joaquin Valley

Similar to the CBAG, the SJV was designated an HIDTA in 1999 (NDIC, 2008b). Referred to as the Central Valley California (CVC) HIDTA, the coalition of law enforcement agencies monitors crimes and activities related to drug trafficking from Sacramento County in the north to Kern County in the south. Mexican and Asian DTOs are the primary drug traffickers in the SJV region; however, Mexican DTOs control most illegal drug production, smuggling, and distribution (NDIC, 2008b). Mexican DTOs routinely transport large quantities of methamphetamine, co-

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caine, marijuana, and heroin from areas in Mexico in private and commercial vehicles. Large quantities of these drugs remain in the area for local distribution; however, transshipment of drugs occurs from SJV to every region of the country. Similar to the CBAG region in the south, multigenerational family networks located in the SJV and Mexico facilitate production, transportation, and distribution of illegal drugs. Additionally, a large immigrant worker population in the SJV employed by agricultural industry provides a community in which Mexican DTOs can operate with some anonymity (NDIC, 2008a). In addition to the movement of drugs through the region, the SJV is an area of significant methamphetamine and marijuana production controlled by Mexican DTOs.

Indications are that large-scale methamphetamine production is increasing in the SJV. As mentioned earlier, restrictions in Mexico on precursor chemicals used in methamphetamine production have increased production in the SJV. Recent evidence from seized methamphetamine laboratories reveals large illegal acquisition of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine used in methamphetamine production through "smurfing" (R. Pennal, personal communication, December 19, 2008). "Smurfing" is a method used by methamphetamine traffickers to acquire large quantities of precursor chemicals. Individuals working for traffickers purchase the chemicals in quantities at or below legal limits from multiple retail locations, such as local pharmacies. These individuals often recruit several friends or associates in smurfing operations to increase the speed and quantity of chemicals acquired. For example, an October 2007 investigation by the Fresno Methamphetamine Task Force (FMTF) revealed that a couple conducted daily smurfing operations by recruiting homeless individuals to ride along in their car, transporting them to several stores to purchase pseudoephedrine. In exchange, the couple paid each person approximately \$30 and sometimes gave them alcohol (NDIC, 2008b). Evidence seized from the couple's vehicle included packages of pseudoephedrine,

pharmacy listings torn from an area telephone directory, and several cellular telephones. The FMTF reports that pseudoephedrine evidence discovered at superlabs and dumpsites in the SJV can be traced to smurfing operations based in southern California, particularly San Diego County.

Of major concern to the agriculture industry and communities in the SJV is the toxic waste left behind in methamphetamine production (Souza, 2005). Methamphetamine production often occurs in very rural areas, which are abundant in SJV, including farms, ranches, dairies, citrus groves, and other rural property. Hazardous waste from production sites is dumped onto agricultural properties or into streams and irrigation canals that water crops and livestock. It is estimated that for every pound of methamphetamine produced five to six pounds of toxic waste byproduct is created causing major concern about its long-term environmental impact. One grower's production of oranges was halted and subsequently destroyed because of methamphetamine lab-related contamination (Souza, 2005). The CVC HIDTA reports 102 labs and 319 dumpsites were discovered in the two-year period 2006 and 2007 (NDIC, 2008b). The California Department of Toxic Substances Control reported methamphetamine laboratory cleanup costs in the SJV reached \$384,302, accounting for approximately 45% of the \$845,340 spent by the state to remediate methamphetamine laboratories and dumpsites in 2007 (NDIC, 2008b).

Mexican DTOs cultivate marijuana in remote areas of public land, including federally designated wilderness areas and national forests in the adjacent Sierra Nevada Mountain Range. In 2007, the Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program (DCE/SP) reported the eradication of 776,218 marijuana plants, accounting for 16% of all marijuana plants seized in California (NDIC, 2008b). Most (85%) of the plants seized by DCE/SP were eradicated from grow sites located in Tulare (330,986), Fresno (184,063), and Kern

(147,584) Counties. A July, 2008, seizure of 78,524 marijuana plants in Tulare County covering 15 acres and an estimated worth of \$314 million was the largest ever recorded for that county (Sheehan, 2008). Damage to the mountainside and the landscape, as well as toxic waste from chemical fertilizers, are often byproducts of marijuana production. Of concern to law enforcement is the presence of armed guards at cultivation sites who originate or are recruited from Mexico. Some of these armed guards are forced into service to pay off debts owed to drug or human traffickers. Reports of dangerous confrontations between law enforcement and armed guards, including shootings, have increased since 2003.

The San Joaquin Valley Economy, Immigration, and Organized Crime from Mexico

The economic core of California is agriculture. The California Department of Food and Agriculture (2007) reports that California was first in the nation in cash farm receipts in 2006. In 2006, the state's 76,000 farms and ranches received \$31.4 billion for their output. The SJV plays a major role in the state agribusiness success and is located in the central interior of the state encompassing 27,493 square miles representing 17% of the land area of California. Despite its vibrant agricultural sector, the SJV has historically lagged behind the rest of the state in key economic indicators such as personal income. In year 2000, U.S. census data indicated that per capita income in the SJV was 32% less than the per capita income in California as a whole, averaging \$15,541 compared to \$22,711 for the state (Diringer, Curtis, Paul & Deveau, 2004). The economic performance of the region is often blamed on the region's overdependence on agribusiness. Jobs in the SJV agricultural sector attracts low-skilled and poorly educated farm labors to the region, which in turn holds down wages in other low-skill job sectors, such as construction, manufacturing, and retail sales (CRS, 2005). The results of more recent efforts to diver-

sify the region's economy to knowledge and technology industries are still many years away.

The source of farm labor in the SJV and elsewhere has historically been Mexico. The National Agricultural Workers Survey (2005) found that for fiscal year 2001-2002, 75% of hired farmworkers in this country were born in Mexico, versus 23% that were U.S. born. Fifty-three percent (53%) of the hired farm labor force lacked authorization to work in the U.S. Forty-two percent (42%) of farm labors were classified as migrants, meaning they traveled at least 75 miles in the previous year to find a farm job. Of these migrants, 35% traveled back and forth from a foreign country, primarily Mexico. Despite what appears to be a large, unauthorized Mexican farm labor force in the U.S., most illegal immigrants are not farmworkers, as more illegal workers are employed in construction, textile manufacturing, animal processing, restaurant and hotel services, and private household services (Johnson, 2006). After several years of tolling the fields, many farmworkers move on to less strenuous and better paying jobs or return to Mexico. This pattern puts agribusiness center stage in the policy debate over legal and illegal immigration to the U.S., as it tries to ensure U.S. immigration policy does not interfere with the arrival of new immigrants needed for its labor force. However, little is known about the intersection of current U.S. immigration policy, Mexican drug trafficking, and immigration from Mexico.

Since the events of 9/11 in New York, immigration policy and national security are closely interlinked. The 2005 Secure Border Initiative (SBI) by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) expanded and concentrated U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) resources along the U.S. Border with Mexico (Immigration Policy Center, 2008a). Two significant features of the SBI are noteworthy. The first is the Secure Fence Act of 2006, which directed the DHS to build 850 miles of fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border. This will fortify about a third of the 2000

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mile border between California and Texas. The second is the significant increase in Border Patrol agents now patrolling the border region. The number of Border Patrol agents grew to 14,923 in FY 2007; an increase of 276 % since FY 1993, with most of these agents deployed along the U.S. southern border (Immigration Policy Center, 2008a). The annual budget of the U.S. Border Patrol was \$1.6 billion in fiscal year 2006; an increase of 332% since 1993. Whether SBI and the increased security and border enforcement are having the intended effect of decreasing immigration is unclear. Some maintain that illegal immigration patterns are merely shifting and not slowing, however making it riskier and more costly for Mexican nationals to cross illegally.

One study (Cornelius & Lewis, 2007) found that in addition to riskier and sometimes deadly crossings in more remote border areas, more immigrants crossing the border now employ professional human smugglers known as "coyotes." Coyotes increasingly provide false or borrowed identification documents and pass immigrants through legal POE. As the demand for coyotes have increased, their fees have tripled or quadrupled. Many believe these coyotes or human smugglers are connected to the drug cartels operating in the areas because the cartels control all smuggling routes coming into the U.S. regardless of cargo (Anderson, 2007; Jost, 2005, R. Pennal, personal communication, December 19, 2008). Human traffickers and their drug trade associates have already corrupted and paid off some U.S. Border Patrol agents to allow vehicles carrying both human and drug traffic to enter the U.S. (Anderson, 2007). Human smugglers often transport immigrants in deadly conditions, such as overheated trailers pulled by commercial trucks, and enslave them until they pay off excessive coyote and transportation fees (Triplett, 2004).

Some suggest that unless the root causes of illegal immigration are addressed, current immigration policy is doomed despite the enormous financial investments by the U.S. along the border.

Current policy does not address the economic "pull" factor that attracts many Mexican immigrants to the U.S. In Mexico, it is next to impossible for poor, uneducated, and unskilled workers to provide for themselves and their families. The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has exacerbated the unfavorable economic condition of Mexico's poor, uneducated, and often indigenous population (Aurelia Lopez, 2007; Triplett, 2004). As a result of NAFTA, many subsistence producing farmers and workers in Mexico were displaced, because large U.S. corporations either exported cheaper agricultural goods, such as corn, or took over agricultural operations in Mexico. Mexico's manufacturing and other economic sectors have not been able to absorb these displaced farmers and workers. The economic pull to the U.S. means better opportunities for employment and higher wages. Minimum wage in the U.S. is about 10 times higher than in Mexico, and U.S. employers will readily hire them. Additionally, Mexico's financial institutions do not provide easy access to capital and credit, often needed to support small business or for large purchases. For some, emigration to the U.S. becomes a financial strategy to start a small business, such as a food truck or restaurants, or for home ownership (Johnson, 2006).

Ironically, some evidence suggests that U.S. immigration policy emphasizing increased border security and enforcement has had the unintended effect of illegal immigrants staying longer in the U.S. (Cornelius, 2007). The hazards associated with border crossing, increased chance of detection, and the high cost of passage all factor into immigrants' decision to remain longer in areas like the SJV. What is unclear is whether illegal immigrants who stay remain in low-skilled jobs, such as farm labor (Lopez, Oliphant & Tejada, 2007). Already some agricultural sectors have expressed fear of farm labor shortages that would jeopardize the timely harvest of certain crops. Agribusinesses are one of the major proponents

of national immigration reform that would allow for the steady flow of immigrants into the U.S. for farm labor (Martin, 2006). One wonders whether the lack of any national immigration reform that addresses labor needs along with current policies emphasizing security and enforcement may have played into the hands of organized crime in Mexico by allowing them to gain control of the flow of immigrant labor through human trafficking.

The Human Cost of Drug Trafficking in the San Joaquin Valley

Drug trafficking from Mexico may have several implications for California's SJV even though its southern fringe is located some 225 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border. In 2006, the population in the SJV reached 3.8 million residents, making it one of the fastest growing regions of the state (Bengiamin, Capitman, & Chang, 2008). Its projected growth rate between 2003 and 2010 is 14.3% compared to 10.6% for California and 6.2% for the U.S. Its population is younger than the rest of the state and Latinos comprise approximately 36% of the population. In addition to birth rates, population growth is driven by international immigration characterized by a relatively large number of poor, under-educated, unskilled workers drawn to the area by the availability of farm employment and other low-skilled jobs (CRS, 2005).

In 2007, 17.3% of the SJV population lived in federally determined poverty income levels compared to 12.4% for the rest of the state (Rondero Hernandez, Middleton, Fiorello & Cole, 2008). Tulare County had the highest rate of poverty at 23.7%. The recent U.S. recession and other factors recently pushed unemployment in some SJV counties into double digits. In December 2008, Fresno County was at 13.2%, Merced County at 15.3% and Tulare County at 14.3% (California Employment Development Department, 2009). The Brookings Institution (2008) identified the City of Fresno's west side as home to one of the highest concentrations of poverty in the U.S. Numerous reports have documented the many economic, so-

cial, and environmental challenges faced by the SJV. All of these socio-economic factors create conditions favorable to expanding the Mexican drug trade and its influence in the SJV region.

The socio-economic conditions in the SJV create desperate and despairing settings for many SJV residents who can barely forge an economic existence. It also creates the ripe conditions for persons to turn to illegal and underground methods to secure some level of economic security despite personal and familial risks. The fear is that as the nation's economic conditions worsen, more individuals will be recruited by drug traffickers and escalate the effects of the drug trade already experienced in the SJV. For example, high levels of violent personal and property crime in the SJV often are associated with the distribution and abuse of illegal drugs, especially methamphetamine. Although a small percentage of these crimes is committed by illegal immigrants, the vast majority of these crimes are committed by legal residents (Immigration Policy Center, 2008b). Local law enforcement agencies report that methamphetamine users commit a variety of property crimes to support their addiction, including identity theft, auto theft, shoplifting, and burglary, such as home break-ins (NDIC, 2008b). They also commit violent crimes, including armed robbery, assault, and homicide. These violent crimes are often perpetrated by members of local criminal groups and street gangs in order to secure or protect their drug trafficking distribution and operations (R. Pennal, personal communication, December 19, 2008). Unless a crime is particularly egregious, punishment for many of these crimes is often ineffective or avoided. Many local jails are often overcrowded, and corrections and judicial systems are pushed beyond their capacity allowing many "low risk individuals" to qualify for early release programs.

In addition to criminal activity associated with drug trafficking, many public agencies in the SVJ are responsible for responding to the human consequences associated with drug use, especially

methamphetamine. In California, methamphetamine ranks as the most commonly reported abused drug, surpassing alcohol and heroin. State data reflect that the percentage and numbers of clients admitted to publicly-funded treatment for a primary methamphetamine problem increased from 26.2 % or 46,198 clients to 35% or 58,039 from FY 2001-02 to FY 2004-05 (Hernandez & Noriega, 2008). In fiscal year 2007-08, 39.5% of total admissions ($N=27,429$) in the SJV for publicly funded drug treatment was for methamphetamine; following by 26% for marijuana and heroin combined (Hernandez, Middleton, Fiorello & Cole, 2008). At least 53% of those admitted for drug treatment during the same period were parents of minor children.

A four county review of methamphetamine use in Child Protective Services (CPS) cases involving Fresno, Kings, Madera, and Tulare found that in approximately 60% of the cases sampled, methamphetamine as a contributing factor for CPS and juvenile court involvement (Social Welfare Evaluation, Research, and Training Center, 2008). This same review also found the presence of poly-substance abuse, including marijuana and cocaine, in many of these cases. Families with parents who abuse substances are often affected by other complex and difficult problems such as unemployment, poverty, poor housing or homelessness, domestic violence, involvement with the criminal justice system, and mental health problems. All these factors work to put tremendous pressure and strain on public resources. Additionally, current social policies and practices are often ineffective in addressing the human suffering and consequences associated with substance abuse.

Conclusion

With the exception of substance-abuse treatment provided by social work practitioners, it may appear that Mexico's drug wars and trafficking are remote from areas of social work practice. This essay attempts to convey that events in Mexico are closer that we think, and that they shape and will

continue to shape the social and economic environment of individuals, families, and communities traditionally served by social work in the U.S. Southwest. Both authors teach and reside in communities with large Latino populations, and both our campuses serve significant numbers of students coming from these communities. Many of these students, their families, and communities are certainly touched by issues discussed here. Broader discussion with social work students will reaffirm that this area of California, and many others, are closely affected by events in Mexico, and they will educate others.

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