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MORI GRANT REPORT

“Drug Violence: Shared fear, deepen divisions “

Research Outline

The present research calls attention to the increasing involvement of the Mexican government in the drug trafficking issue. Government’s direct confrontation of drug cartels has resulted in a boost and expansion of drug violence, as well as an increase of local drug markets. This research aims to understand how people living in a drug violence hot spot, in central Mexico, cope with major signs of violence in their living environment, as well as their strategies to keep their normal conduct of life. In the various rounds of fieldwork from 2013-2017, the following ironical developments have been found. Drug violence has been sustained regardless of residents’ protective actions. These actions establish differences among the various groups of people living in the community: imposing divisions and barriers, creating stereotypes, and restricting mobility. These responses do not necessarily decrease the likelihood of becoming a victim, but they do increase residents’ levels of fear, leading them to strengthen protective actions. Drug violence affects all groups in different ways, making their already sharp inequalities even more pronounced. Drug violence presence allows residents to reinforce and justify their isolation from other groups. No matter how scary and extreme drug violence impact might be, it does not consume residents’ daily concerns. Drug violence presence is just one among many other worries, more familiar and likely to happen, that dissipate its significance in residents’ daily lives. Drug violence leads residents to focus more in their immediate problems, but at the same time it diminishes their importance. Despite the many worries majority of residents have and how difficult their life might be, at least they haven’t been victims yet. Majority of residents feel thankful and better off than others who have been victims.

1. Background

In order to face the high levels of violence, in 2006 the Federal Mexican Government decided to mobilize the police, military and navy in the fight against the drug trafficking groups.

Military operations have been taking place along the Mexican territory. The policy has not been able to reduce the violence, instead it increased and spread the confrontations and executions. As a result around 60,000 murders related to the organized crime have occurred, the victims include criminals, security corps and civilians. Due to the widespread violence 230,000 people have changed their place of residence.

Morelos, where the community of Tejalpa is located has become one of the main venues of drug related violence. In the meantime, its status has changed from a place where the drugs used to pass through to a place for destination and consumption of drugs. This is a consequence of the detentions and confiscations in the Mexican territory that have made it difficult to reach the market in the United States. As a result, besides the high levels of violence, the rise of drugs consumption has become a serious problem. In order to keep their profits the drug drug-trafficking gangs are seeking for new markets and in the process they rely on different illicit activities like kidnapping, extortion, robbery and looting. The current situation is the excuse for a strong presence of the army and police in the streets who also have been accused of arbitrary arrests, cruel treatment and torture.

The population of Tejalpa is exposed to direct and indirect forms of violence. The former through the media that persists reporting about murders and executions, the later through the abuse of power from the army and the police, the arrest and murders of some neighbors who turned out being part of drug trafficking gangs or where innocent victims. With some exceptions, the violence is still limited to some areas of the community and takes place at certain times of the day, mainly after 10 pm. The daily life of people have been disrupted specially with the presence of fear, but somehow they continue with their daily activities like going to work or to school.

2. Research Project

The findings are the result of three rounds of fieldwork in the community of Tejalpa, Morelos in Mexico during August 2014, August 2015, and February 2016. The present research tries to understand why despite some people in the community or their family members have been victims of drug related violence, victims and not victims have knowledge or information about the presence of drug violence from casual talks, mass media reports, statistics and they have fear of becoming a victim of drug related violence people stay on living in the community. In order to make their lives in a community affected by drug related violence

more bearable people create a protection strategy, but these taken measures have been leading to an increasing violence. What is absent is not the knowledge about violence taking place, it is the absence of meaningful evidence alerting them about the risk to become a victim.

Thus victims and not victims tend to see the violent crime as a “**rare event**“ meaning something unusual and random rather than a consequence of an action. Victims consider

it unlikely to happen again and non-victims make it explainable in a way that makes them feel less vulnerable to become a victim. Some of the observed changes are:

- **Slight changes in daily routine** (Locked in after 10 pm, mainly indoor activities, limited interaction with immediate neighbors) that reduce their feeling of vulnerability but prevent them from having a social life and using public spaces).
- **Reinforce spatial limits** (limited mobility in the community) and **reinforce negative stereotypes and stigmatization of certain groups.**
- **Implementation of security measures** like walls, grills, electronic security systems but its use is not that spread yet. Also its implementation doesn't differ from victims of no victims.

Research proposes

The research tries not to focus in the major events that are the most radical consequences of drug related violence: deaths, arrests and displaced people showed by the statistics. But it tries to understand how people can live with major signs of drug related violence in their living environment. The purpose is:

- To examine how the different social groups in the community experience violence
- To examine what are the protection measures of community members to reduce their vulnerability
- To examine the role of these protection measures in reducing (or increasing) community members' vulnerability

Significance of the research

Policy makers and community members are so worried about reducing the levels of crime that they do not realize the situation is getting worse not just because of the violence itself, but because the way they are constructing the problem and their own protection strategies that are helping to reproduce drug related violence. Their protection strategies are reducing the public spaces and their public life, but if this processes are deeply analyzed an strategy to combat this trend can be designed in order to help communities affected by drug related violence to retain their vitality.

Methodology

The nature of the research is descriptive as it heavily relies not on a statistical analysis but on the close readings of the many and lengthy interviews, as well as the data collected through participatory observations. Data was acquired from semi-structured, in depth interviews of 70 residents (18 victims) that were conducted. Each interview lasted from one to two hours. I met many residents more than ones for the purposes of confirming, correcting and refining the contents of recorded interviews. Local government officials, policemen provided additional information.

Fieldwork location and target informants

The fieldwork of this present research took place in the community of Tejalpa, Morelos during August and September 2016. Tejalpa is one of the 6 drug-violence hot spots in Morelos. The main informants were 70 community members (victims and no victims) 5 government officers, 2 policemen and 5 members of local organizations who provided important additional information.

FIELDWORK REPORT

Trying to understand residents behaviors better I dig into the historical background of Tejalpa. Found out that drug r violence is not the first disruption faced by residents. The previous disruptions started taking place mainly after 1963 when an industrial park was built in the middle od the community. Due to the new presence of industries and the massive migration they attracted, residents faced serious problems of pollution, overpopulation, unemployment,

increasing petty crimes and drug related violence. Residents have many experiences unrelating themselves to the cause of disruptions blaming them on the new comers who tend to be considered as inferior and violent. Residents locate the disruptions outside of what they construct as their own community considered better and safer. Their protection strategies to marginalize violence are:

- Spatial divisions
- Limited mobility
- Stereotypes and stigmatization of certain groups
- Building physical barriers

Then what I found Puzzling is that Victims of drug violence, the most likely of showing drastic changes in behavior, exhibit a behavior not that different from the past nor from resident who haven't been victims. These protection strategies instead of reducing the vulnerability lead to sustained violence.

When I say "behavior not that different from the past" I'm not trying to state that victims have not changed anything from their previous daily routine after the violent incident but that the measures residents have taken after the boost of violence are a reinforcement or extreme expressions of previous practices.

Perception of drug violence Drug violence is a rare but conceivable event

1. It is a **conceivable** event.

- 8 informants have been victims themselves or a first degree relative has been victim.
- 28 informants can point out at least 3 known persons who have been victims.
- The known violent events are commented and discussed among residents when they run into each other or gathered.

➤ *It is done in some secrecy (get closer to each other, talk in lower voice*

➤ *The main source of information of all informants are the comments from neighbors.*

2. It is **unlikely** to become a victim

- Residents agree in the presence of drug violence, but not in the probability to become a victim.

“The situation is difficult, there is another wave of murders in Morelos and in Tejalpa, but basically I don’t think they (drug dealers) will come directly for me” -M. 59 (Before becoming a victim of attempted extortion)-

- Even though some residents have been victims and everyone can point out someone they know who has been a victim, majority of residents haven’t been victims.
- Victims tend not to share their experience neither with the police nor with their neighbors.
- The known cases or the fact that residents don’t know about cases taking place in other areas in the community make residents think it is not very likely to become a victim.

3. It is **unpredictable** when you can become a victim

- Residents don’t know the probability of becoming a victim.
- Residents don’t know who can become a victim, neither when and where it can happen.

“Is a generalized problem that affects all of us. We can’t say that just the rich are kidnapped. They kidnapped the ones who have money and the ones who don’t at anytime.” -M 65 yrs (Non Victim)-

3. **Make the risk explainable, marginalizing it.**

- Residents try to make the violent event explainable in a way that makes them feel less likely to become a victim.

- No victims underestimate the possibilities of becoming one
- Violent events take place more in other areas in the community
- Violent events affect people with different characteristics to their own (drug dealers, rich, people who don't pay enough attention to their behavior).

"I'm aware of the risks when I go out, but I'm extremely careful, always paying attention. I have a simple life style and when going out I look to the sides checking if there unusual activity." -M. 49 (No victim)-

- Victims think it is less likely to become a victim again
 - The violent event was a matter of luck, you cannot be that unlucky twice.
 - The violent event was a consequence of an oversight, if they are more careful it might not happen again.

5. Awareness doesn't eliminate the surprise and impact of a violent event.

- Victims can lose their live or develop traumas and illnesses that might prevent them from living a "normal life".

"I'm all the time thinking about what to do if the policemen who attacked me get out from jail. You are left with a psychosis, you trust no one." -F 55 yrs. (Extorted victim by Federal police)-

- Residents need to be all the time alert and far more conscious about every action they perform.

"We have to pay attention to how we look, what we say, where we go. Better be quiet even with family and friends, they all talk. Criminals don't know you and can assume you have money". -F 30 y (No Victim)-

Why a violent event fails generating drastic changes in behavior?

1. Warning is delivered but not specifically enough:

- Residents are not sure about the probability, they don't know who can be affected, when and where.
- I might become a victim and then again I might not... such a mere possibility is not enough for residents to show drastic changes in behavior. 2. The Impact of a violent event is temporary and victims find it difficult to learn
- Victims try to forget about to keep their lives going on

“Honestly I don't think about it anymore, I think I was chosen at random “ -M 60
(Attempt of extortion, two months later)-

“I don't remember the exact day, but we can check the documents“ -F 55 yrs.
(Extorted victim by Federal police)-

- Victims can't point out clearly the reason or behaviors that make them more vulnerable than their neighbors with similar life styles, making it difficult to know what should be changed.
- When no victims were asked about known violent events they take time to answer, it is difficult for them to remember, they always say: around... certain N; when asked in different times they give different numbers or different dates.

3. Warning overload: dozens of issues to worry about which are consider more likely to happen. Mitigation measures can be expensive, time consuming and risky.

- Expensive (Moving out, security measures: bodyguards, cameras, locks, higher walls).
- Time consuming (Denouncing, organizing with neighbors, overthinking)
- Risky (Denouncing, sharing information with neighbors)

4. Wrong assumption: Income is a determinant factor

- Residents with lower income have implemented some security measures *“It is very difficult to start your life somewhere else. Where you don't have a place to live and*

work“-F 55 y.(Extorted victim by Federal police), high income group, migrant from Guerrero.

5. Wishful thinking: Residents ignore warnings of tragic effects or assume nothing will happen to them.

“We have to go out and do our activities. In the name of God nothing will happen to us. God makes me feel safe.” F 50y (No Victim)

6. Residents consider that their actions won't have any significant impact in the final outcome.

“What can we do? It doesn't change anything and it is very risky. If I identify the criminal: Should I run after him? Should I kill him? Should I denounce? Will he go to jail? because if not the criminal will look for revenge). I better do nothing and thank God nothing happen to me.” M. 59 y (No victim)

- Some residents think security measures are not useful since they cannot be at home all the time.
- Public safety is the State's responsibility, it's not residents job.

“No one does something because the State is the one in charge of law enforcement, not the citizens. What can we do? Run after them, catch them?” M.55 (No victim)

- Majority of residents don't trust police (they might be involved with the organize crime)
- Residents consider police as inefficient and incapable of protecting them.

7. Residents convince themselves that they are doing “something” to keep themselves safe.

Implemented measures	Informants
Do not go out after 10	61
Take specific routes	56
Limit who they talk to and what to share	61
Reinforce locks and windows	42
Built higher walls	25
Security Cameras	10
Body guards	2

à They don't go out after 10 pm—Many crimes take place during day time

à Some residents live in fortresses— They still have to go out

8. Drug Violence: A Positive Development?

- Drug violence allows them to reinforce and justify their isolation from other groups.
- Drug violence presence triggered the question: Should we stay on or move out?
- After rough calculations majority of residents decided to stay on, noticing the benefits of living in Tejalpa. They realize other towns face a similar/worse situation.
- Drug violence leads residents to focus more in their immediate problems, but at the same time it diminishes their importance.
- No matter how many worries they have and how difficult life might be, drug violence makes them feel thankful. At least they haven't been victims yet, they are better off than others.