

State Incoordination and Political Assassinations in Mexico:

Why does the Mexican Government Fail to Protect
Mayors from Drug-Trafficking Organizations?

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State Incoordination and Political Assassinations in Mexico:

Why does the Mexican Government Fail to Protect Mayors from Drug-Trafficking Organizations?

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1. Abstract

Does state incoordination increase the number of political assassinations in new democracies? In this paper, I answer this question by observing the relationship between political assassinations by drug-trafficking organizations and the lack of party coordination across the state and federal levels of government in Mexico. Despite large bodies of research on political violence, few studies to date have examined this link (Rios, 2015; Duran-Martinez 2015). Specifically, using data compiled by Justice in Mexico, I expect to find that if the two levels of government are not ruled by the same political party between 2005 and 2017, this signals that Mexico's security institutions lack coordination, so the state's ability to protect mayors from assassinations will decline. This is because rule by a single party facilitates cooperation across all levels of government. Such cooperation is necessary to allocate resources properly while combating cartels and stifling their operations, including political assassinations. However, states whose political parties differ from the federal government's party affiliation are – for political reasons – less likely to witness coordination and therefore incapable of protecting mayors from being assassinated.

2. Introduction

Does state incoordination cause drug-related violence against mayors in Mexico?

According to a 2015 special issue in *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (Volume 59, Issue 8), cartel violence in Mexico has two primary causal explanations: democratization and the “Kingpin Strategy.” This article will focus on the first explanation by empirically testing the claim that Mexico’s “democratization” weakens the country’s security institutions because competing parties are unwilling to cooperate across different levels of government, ultimately creating conditions lacking “coordination” (Rios 2015) and favoring “fragmentation” (Duran-Martinez 2015). Observing the relationship between state incoordination and mayoral assassinations is important because it involves “interpersonal violence,” which according to Heinle et al. (2017), “is outside the normal range of acceptable human conduct and experience” (p. 8). Additionally, this study is warranted because it demonstrates how political science can cast light on a predominantly sociological and criminological phenomenon: drug violence in Mexico. Although it appears logical to label violence provoked by drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs) as solely criminal, this study focuses on two strictly political elements: democratization and political assassinations by criminal organizations. Thus, if the findings of this study are significant, then they set the foundation for another political science research question in the future: at what point does DTO-related violence become political?

I argue that assassinations of Mexican politicians are more prevalent in states wherein different political parties control the varying levels of government. If the state and federal governments are not controlled by the same ruling party, that signals that the Mexico's security institutions lack coordination, so the state's ability to protect mayors from DTOs will decline. Thus, the independent variable is *state incoordination* and the dependent variable is *mayors assassinated*. The main assumption here is that rule by a single party facilitates cooperation across all levels of government. Such cooperation is necessary to allocate resources properly while combating cartels and stifling their operations (including political assassinations). However, states with different political parties across the multiple levels of government are – for political reasons – less likely to cooperate and therefore more incapable of upholding the law, combating drug cartels, preventing drug overdoses (Rios 2015), and stifling violent crimes against politicians. Thus, as Mexico democratizes and its electoral institution strengthens, diverse parties will win elections yet fail to uphold the law due to political differences and uncooperative arrangements in other institutions.

At the state-year unit of analysis, this paper will employ a time-series cross-sectional study to test the following hypothesis from 2010 to 2017: the less coordination between multiple levels of government, the more political assassinations will occur within the respective states. Specifically, in addition to the univariate and bivariate analyses, this paper employs a multivariate OLS regression to test the association between state incoordination and mayoral assassinations. If evidence supports my hypothesis I expect to find that political assassinations are more likely to occur within states with interrupted

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one-party rule. Even if the same party controls the federal government, the fact that the state level “democratized” leaves no incentive to cooperate if all parties involved hold opposing political beliefs. Alternatively, if evidence weakens my hypothesis, I expect to find that political assassinations are more prevalent in coordinated states rather than uncoordinated. I may also find that political assassinations occur irrespective of state incoordination. Ultimately, if the null hypothesis is accepted, it raises the question of how robust previous studies are, particularly the ones linking Mexican democratization to DTO-related violence.

3. A Review of the Literature

In 2015, the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* published a special issue dedicated to understanding drug violence in Mexico. While some authors question whether political science is useful in making sense of the “Mexican War on Drugs,” others argue yes because drug violence is explained by factors such as democratization and the forced removal (via extrajudicial executions or arrests) of cartel bosses by the military (Rios 2015; Duran-Martinez 2015; Osorio 2015; & Calderon et al. 2015). Moreover, Duran-Martinez, Kalyvas (2015), and Lessing (2015) allude to the cartel targeting of politicians, journalists, and activists, yet none of them conduct an empirical analysis of political assassinations by cartels. This review summarizes three lines of research: democratization, the “Kingpin Strategy,” and political assassinations. Despite their different designations, all three groups are interconnected. It is also necessary to clarify that political science deserves a part in this debate because “in almost every explanatory model, the role of government –

its structure and its actions, whether colluding with or combatting organized crime – is key to understanding shifts in trafficking activities and patterns of violence” (Shirk and Wallman, 2015).

3.1 The Democratization Argument

Although the present study does not argue that democratization is directly responsible for the political assassinations that occur throughout Mexico, this line of research helps make the connection between state incoordination and the rise of political assassinations of mayors. The democratization argument posits that, because the electoral institutions are strengthening, and because the PRI’s authoritarian grip is loosening, state officials are less likely to cooperate with one another across multiple levels of government. Rios (2015) and Duran-Martinez (2015) both champion the democratization argument, although both of them also use different concepts to refer to the same idea – that democracy in Mexico created the conditions necessary for the different levels of government to not cooperate with each other.

While Rios studies whether the lack of “coordination” across multiple levels of government is associated with cocaine deaths and overdoses throughout Mexico, Duran-Martinez observes how “the cohesion of the state security apparatus, and the competition in the illegal market determines traffickers’ incentives to employ violence” (p. 1377). The concepts of government “coordination” and “fragmentation” are essentially antonyms of one another. Rios measures coordination with a dummy variable (0 if parties across multiple levels of government are different and 1 if the parties are the same) whereas

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Duran-Martinez measures fragmentation by the lack of cohesion of the “security apparatus.” More specifically, “as the security apparatus fragments, coordination and successful enforcement become more difficult, and protection becomes less reliable. Fragmentation can make enforcement less effective because it complicates coordination even when enforcement actions proliferate” (Duran-Martinez 2015; pp. 1382-1383). Nevertheless, Rios and Duran-Martinez both assume that democratization in Mexico has caused the conditions necessary for little to no cooperation across multiple levels of government since a single party (the PRI) no longer controls them. For conceptual clarity, this analysis will not use democratization or fragmentation as the main explanatory variable, but rather state incoordination.

The democratization argument undermines the face and content validity of my central explanatory variable, which is state incoordination. For instance, depending on the definition, a variable of democracy can only measure the minimalist aspects of electoral politics such as “contestation” and “inclusion” (Dahl, 1971; Clark et al., 2013). Applying a democracy measurement to this analysis will not answer the question of how Mexico can provide security now that it has democratized. Instead, *state incoordination* serves as a better alternative to the democratization argument because the latter is too broad to make sense of the micro-dynamics of political assassinations by cartels in Mexico. Moreover, Rios uses a dummy variable for coordination that is coded as 1 if one particular political party holds the mayoral, gubernatorial, and national levels, and 0 if an opposing party (or two) controls one or two levels of government. Unfortunately, this method obscures the variation that exists; if a researcher were to assume that political

assassinations mainly occur within PAN-controlled states, a dummy variable would prevent us from making this observation.¹ *State incoordination* – not state fragmentation or democratization – serves as a clearer concept.²

Rios explains that democratization in Mexico has undermined the “Pax Mafiosa,” a pact between the authoritarian PRI government and the cartels that permitted the latter to continue their drug-trafficking operations as long as violence was controlled and drugs were not sold throughout the country (p. 1436). As different parties compete to win elections, however, the PRI’s control of cartel operations is weakened since parties (particularly the PAN) are unwilling to maintain the old order.³ For example, Shirk and Wallman (2015) maintain that the “PAN and PRD politicians... came to power untainted by such [Pax Mafiosa] ties and were therefore less likely to offer protection to criminal organizations and more likely to try to enforce the law” (p. 1360). On the other hand, Duran-Martinez explains that “if the [black] market is competitive and disputes emerge, criminals are likely to deploy violence, but they simultaneously decide... whether that violence should be publicly exposed or should rather be kept hidden” (p. 1383). This decision is dependent on the level of state “fragmentation,” which according to Duran-

¹ PAN is the acronym for Mexico’s main conservative party, National Action Party.

² This analysis adopts Rios’ concept of coordination but also includes the concept of “incoordination” to refer to institutional arrangements in which the same political party does not control the different levels of government (state and federal).

³ The Pax Mafiosa is what Snyder and Duran-Martinez (2009) would label as a “state-sponsored protection racket.” Protection rackets are “informal institutions through which public officials refrain from enforcing the law, or alternatively, enforce it selectively against the rivals of criminal organization, in exchange for a share of the profits generated by the organization” (p. 254). This exemplifies that coordination not only facilitates the enforcement of the law (like protecting mayors), but also undermines it if such coordination is used to form corrupt and illicit pacts with DTOs.

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Martinez – and not unlike Rios’ argument – is a result of democratization in Mexico. If the state is unified and not fragmented, then criminals have the incentive to hide their violence in order to avoid a harsh response from the state. This also exemplifies how collecting data of “hidden” violence is a difficult process, which may have implications for this study.

To test whether the control of different levels of government by opposing parties is associated with drug sales and overdoses, Rios employs “a binomial regression model... a Cox proportional hazards regression... and a logit that uses matched samples” (p. 1440). In addition to measuring her dependent variable by the number of drug-induced deaths and hospitalizations, Rios tracks the cocaine market by using data from Sistema Nacional de Informacion en Salud de la Secretaria de Salud Federal (SINAIS) and Instituto Nacional de Estadistica y Geografia (INEGI). Alternatively, Duran-Martinez’s analysis is qualitative since she relies on Mexican and Colombian case studies that provide “causal connections to better specify theories that could then be quantitatively tested” (p. 1385). Despite their differing methodologies, Rios finds that uncoordinated municipalities are 31 percent more likely to host a cocaine market, and Duran-Martinez concludes that cartels are more likely to target state officials during periods of state fragmentation and high competition with other cartels.

Although the arguments raised by Rios and Duran-Martinez generate interesting conversations within the debate, they also have some logical and normative limitations. Logically, arguing that democratization causes political assassinations in Mexico is akin to the claim that the United States is unable to provide adequate security to its own victims

of gang violence because America is too democratic. In other words, if an increase of violent crime emerged in the U.S., not many experts would associate it to America's level of democracy, but rather to indicators, such as corruption, poverty, or even gun laws. Moreover, the democratization argument may lead some to assume that authoritarianism is the only way to prevent violence throughout the nation. This assumption is dangerous because the public and politicians alike may support the normative claim that authoritarianism *should* be restored to end violence by cartels – as evidenced by the Pax Mafiosa agreement. This is simply not the case because an institutional reform that enables cooperation across multiple levels of government can potentially serve as a better remedy than restoring Mexico's historically oppressive and corrupt state of affairs. In addition, using democratization as the main concept to explain drug violence in Mexico opens the door to other normative debates, ultimately subjecting democracy to be seen through a substantive lens rather than a minimalist lens (i.e. "*should* Mexico be considered a democracy if it cannot keep its citizens secure?"). Nonetheless, the democratization argument helps make the connection between state incoordination and political assassinations.

3.2 The "Kingpin Strategy" Argument

Democratization paved the way for the presidential election of a PAN candidate in 2000. However, widespread cartel violence was not an issue until 2006 when then-President Calderon officially declared war against all drug trade organizations (DTOs) in Mexico. Thus, another line of research argues that the increase in police and military

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operations targeting cartel leaders is associated with more violence among cartels. In fact, “this model is clearly related to the democratization account, as the implementation of a militarized anti-trafficking policy is unlikely to have come about if the open up of the political system, culminating in the ascent of a non-PRI president, had not occurred” (Shirk 2015, p. 1362). Osorio (2015) and Calderon et al. (2015) are among the researchers who attempt to address the relationship between the Kingpin Strategy and drug violence within the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. More specifically, Osorio and Calderon et al. seek to explain why some Mexican regions experience higher levels of criminal violence as opposed to other regions.

Relying on the Organized Criminal Violence Event Data (OCVED), Osorio designs a formal model that suggests “that law enforcement disrupts the relative military balance among DTOs by weakening a criminal organization and indirectly improving the position of its rivals” (p. 1404). As a result, violence increases among cartels because the stronger DTOs exploit the power of the state to succeed in “turf wars” against their weaker opponents. Conversely, Calderon et al. – using government data and death certificates published by SINAIS – come up with four causal mechanisms explaining how violence increases as a result of police and military operations, although one of them speaks to this study directly: “A final way through which leadership captures might translate into more violence is when DTOs decide to attack the state, perhaps as a warning signal to the government about their capacity for resistance or in the hope that their attacks will be attributed to a rival organization” (p. 1461). If this is the case, then political assassinations by cartels are no different than the “terrorism as provocation” strategy found in other

political science research. As Lake (2002) argues, a popular terrorist tactic is “to provoke a response from the [state] that, through its disproportionate and indiscriminate nature, punishes the broad population of which the terrorists are part” (p. 19). But unlike cartels who use the power of the state against their adversaries, the provocation strategy empowers terrorists because it enables them to gain the support of moderates that have become radicalized after experiencing violence from the state. If my analysis finds a strong link between state incoordination and political assassinations, then the “provocation” strategy by cartels would be another fruitful area of research for those studying the dynamics of the Kingpin Strategy.

Finally, Osorio finds that violence among criminal groups triggers additional violence in neighboring municipalities. And aside from also finding evidence of a “spillover effect,” Calderon et al. find “strong evidence indicating that captures of capos have strong ‘hydra’ effects in the locality where these take place, presumably increasing both intra- and inter-cartel fighting as well as violence within the population not directly involved in trafficking” (“capos” refer to high-profile and powerful cartel leaders; p. 1481). However, data limitations prevent Osorio and Calderon et al. from statistically corroborating the claim that the Kingpin Strategy causes the cartels to challenge the state. In addition, the enforcement of the law, although significant according to Osorio and Calderon et al.’s standards, cannot explain drug violence alone. According to Rios (2012), “competition is inherently unstable for illegal industries because these industries lack formal mechanisms and systematic rules to deal with disputes and disagreements between organizations” (p. 142). While the Kingpin Strategy will serve as one of the central control

variables for this study, the data that Osorio and Calderon et al. use leave out many cases of political assassinations in Mexico.⁴ I hope that Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* dataset will resolve this issue.

3.3 *The Logic of Political Assassinations*

What is the logic behind political assassinations by cartels in Mexico? As Calderon et al. suggest, cartels may be employing violence against the state to provoke a violent and weakening response towards their adversaries. This strategy allows certain groups to use the power of the state to their own advantage, thereby reducing the costs associated with attacking their competitors on their own. However, different cartels challenge the state for different reasons. For example, some DTOs could be challenging the state due to resentment about the fact that the Mexican government no longer honors the illicit Pax Mafiosa. Understanding the logic of cartel violence against politicians helps us answer the question: at what point does cartel violence against the state become political as opposed to merely criminal?

In seeking to explain why Mexican cartels challenge the state if they are not seeking to replace it, Lessing (2015) qualitatively claims that cartels rely on two particular strategies to achieve their political ambitions: violent lobbying and violent corruption. While the first concept refers to the cartel strategy of using violence to influence policy

⁴ By political assassinations, I am referring to any type of elected official who represents a political office in Mexico, or any individual who is central to the smooth operation of a healthy and functioning democracy (such as journalists). However, due to time constraints and the limitation of data, this analysis will only test the association between state incoordination and mayors.

outcomes from the top, the second refers to their ability of using violence to coerce enforcers of the law – particularly police officers and judges – into accepting bribes (i.e. *plata o plomo*, or “a bribe or a bullet”). Lessing perfectly summarizes the importance of this distinction as follows:

Cartel-state conflict... is a war of constraint: belligerents aim “merely” to coerce opponents into changing their behavior (i.e., their policies, when fighting states). The distinction is meant to characterize, not define: just as insurgents could fight wars of constraint but rarely do, drug cartels could seek to seize formal state power, but have not. Distinguishing conflicts based on this aspect of how they are fought can, I claim, help us theorize about why (p. 1492).

Kalyvas (2015) endorses this distinction when he suggests that the behavior of DTOs sometimes resembles the actions of terrorists (refer also to Lake, 2002). However, in explaining how the civil war literature could help researchers make sense of drug violence in Mexico, he asserts that some DTOs also attack the state for geographical control.

Even if cartels fight for territory, this particular fact raises confusion as to whether it is appropriate to classify DTOs as “insurgents.” Such confusion comes as no surprise since some insurgencies rely on the trade of illicit drugs in order to fund their initiatives (i.e. the Taliban). While Lessing argues through his case studies that cartels fight each other for territory, Kalyvas argues that “the relationship between criminal organizations to territory is ambiguous” (p. 1532). Kalyvas agrees with Lessing in that cartels attack the

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state in order to influence the outcome of policies. However, he also asserts that “criminal groups cannot be wholly indifferent to territorial control since they need trafficking routes to move their product to the markets” (Kalyvas 2015, p. 1532; Grayson and Logan 2012). According to this logic, cartels coerce police officers into looking the other way along trafficking routes, and they murder other state officials who do not accept their bribes, including politicians. Despite the qualitative and theoretical nature of Lessing’s and Kalyvas’ contributions, both studies ultimately help us understand why cartels assassinate politicians. Kalyvas also suggests that data should be “fine-grained” in order to capture the “microdynamics” of drug violence. Although the Memoria dataset fulfils this criterion because it observes assassinations of mayors at the municipal level, this study observes states as the level of analysis due to data limitations.

As evidenced in this review, all three lines of research – the democratization argument, the Kingpin Strategy argument, and the logic of political assassinations argument – are interconnected. For conceptual clarity, this analysis will replace the democratization argument with state incoordination. The Kingpin Strategy also raises a potential control hypothesis: the police and military interventions are linked to more political assassinations across states in Mexico. Furthermore, the logic of violence literature helps us theorize why DTOs target politicians. Collectively, these areas of research are essential to study the link between state incoordination and political assassinations throughout Mexico.

4. Methods, Data, and Hypotheses

This paper attempts to employ a time-series cross-sectional analysis to test whether the lack of coordination between the state and federal levels of government is associated with the assassination of mayors within Mexican states between 2010 and 2017. The data for my dependent variable, *mayoral assassinations*, derives from Justice in Mexico's *Memoria* dataset (Heinle et al. 2017). It tracks the assassinations of 154 mayors, ex-mayors, and mayoral candidates from 2005 to 2017.⁵ The data is broken down to the municipal and state levels; however, due to data limitations at the municipal level for my other variables, I recoded the dependent variable to capture assassinations of mayors at the state unit of analysis as follows: for Mexico's 32 states from 2010 to 2017 (including Mexico City, formerly known as Mexico D.F.), the cases of assassinated mayors are identified by 0 or a number greater than 0 for each state. Although some states experienced only one assassination, others experienced up to three or four assassinations in some years. Thus, the dependent variable is interval and comprises the first half of my primary testable hypothesis.

The independent variable is categorical and it strives to capture the different types of coordination and incoordination between the 32 states and federal government from 2010 to 2017. Taking the name of *state incoordination*, the values for this variable range from 1 to 7 depending on which political party is in control at the state and federal levels

⁵ This analysis uses the terms "mayors" and "politicians" interchangeably.

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in each case. These values are coded as: 1 if PAN is the state party and PAN is the federal party; 2 if PRI is the state party and PAN is the federal party; 3 if PRD (Party of Democratic Revolution) is the state part and PAN is the federal party; 4 if PRI is the state party and PRI is the federal party; 5 if PAN is the state party and PRI is the federal party; 6 if PRD is the state party and PRI is the federal party; and finally, 7, if PVEM (Ecologist Green Party of Mexico) is the state party and PRI is the federal party. These values will capture whether a particular arrangement of coordination or incoordination is associated with the assassination of mayors across time and space. For instance, we would be able to assert whether having the PAN or the PRI at the federal level of government really makes a difference in regards to the assassinations that occur across multiple states from 2010 to 2017.

Now that the independent and dependent variables have been established, I will test the association between state incoordination and political assassinations with the following hypothesis:

- **Hypothesis 1:** *The less coordination between the state and federal levels of government, the more political assassinations will occur within the states.*

This is followed by a null hypothesis:

- **Hypothesis (H₀):** *There is no relationship between state incoordination and political assassinations throughout Mexican states.*

The assassinations of Mexican politicians are more prevalent in states wherein different political parties control different levels of government. If the state and federal governments are not controlled by the same ruling party, that signals that the Mexico's

institutions lack coordination, so the state's ability to protect mayors from assassinations by cartels will decline. This is because rule by a single party facilitates cooperation across the state and federal levels of government. Moreover, this cooperation allows for the smooth allocation of resources that are necessary for combatting cartels and stifling their operations. However, rule by different parties makes cooperation difficult, especially if political differences get in the way.

Unfortunately, state incoordination is not the only factor that explains political assassinations throughout Mexico. Other factors may also account for the assassination of mayors throughout as well. This analysis will employ seven control variables. The main limitation of all these variables, however, is that none of them are consistent in terms of providing data for every consecutive year from 2010 to 2017. Measures like education and population, for example, are recorded every five years when the Mexican government collects census information. This issue prevents me from properly computing statistics because a score must be recorded for every variable, otherwise SPSS will drop it from the analyses. Beginning in 2010, I resolve this issue by extending the data previously recorded into the variables with missing values. For instance, the "extreme poverty" variable only tracks data for 2010 and 2012 and so I copy the 2010 measure to 2011 and the 2012 measure to 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017. I do this for all variables with missing data in order to preserve my cases. It is also worth mentioning that this study begins the analyses at 2010 due to the aforementioned data limitations.

My first control variable is *DTO-related homicides*, which is compiled by Justice in Mexico (2017). For every state from 2007 to 2016, this variable captures the number of

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homicides related to drug trade organizations (DTOs) as documented by *Milenio*, a Mexico City-based newspaper. With this data, I will test my first control hypothesis:

- **Hypothesis 2:** *Politicians are more likely to be assassinated in states that witness higher levels of inter-cartel conflict.*

Even if cartels target politicians, they may be doing so to intimidate their opponents. In fact, one of Lessing's (2015) qualitative causal explanations fits perfectly here:

... violence against state actors serves as a signal not to the state but to members of the drug trade itself. To the extent that cartels kill cops, or attack army outposts, or machine gun public buildings, or assassinate mayors, so that other traffickers see that they are willing and able to do so, the motivating logic drives from turf war, not cartel-state conflict: the aim of such violence is ultimately to increase market share of territory, as opposed to changing state policy (p. 1505).

The *DTO-related homicides* variable serves as a valid measure for "turf wars" located in certain Mexican states wherein politicians may become a likely target for DTOs.

My second control variable, *police interventions*, is measured literally by the number of police interventions within each state in 2010, 2012, and 2014. Ever since President Felipe Calderon launched his war on drugs in 2006, drug cartels have been targeted not only by local officials but by the Mexican military and federal police as well. I was unable to find data on military interventions, but I did locate data on police

interventions provided by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI; 2011, 2013, 2015).

- **Hypothesis 3:** *Politicians are more likely to be assassinated within states that experience low to moderate numbers of police interventions relative to other states.*

Although there are some exceptions, the reasoning behind this claim is that DTOs are rational and would not commit acts of violence against politicians if police and federal forces maintain an active role within the state. However, the opposite can also be true:

- **Hypothesis 4:** *Politicians are more likely to be assassinated within states that experience moderate to high numbers of police interventions relative to other states.*

The same control variable of police interventions can also test this claim. It assumes that DTOs have no problem challenging the state directly if the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs. For example, some cartels in certain states may target politicians due to the former group's resentment of the latter group's betrayal of the Pax Mafiosa, the historical and illicit agreement between the cartels and the Mexican government (Rios, 2015; p. 1436). The agreement allowed cartels to operate throughout Mexico as long as the DTOs paid a fee to the state, drugs were not sold in Mexico, and violence was kept under control. However, former President Calderon's intervention in late 2006 disturbed the status quo, consequently causing cartels to fight each other and assassinate politicians at higher rates. Thus, some DTOs will not tolerate police interventions, especially if such interventions are bad for business and the cartels have the military capacity to do something about it. Furthermore, Lessing (2015) explains that "even successful defense is

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not as good as deterrence: better than holding what the police are trying to take would be making the police afraid to take it" (p. 1492-1493).

The third control variable is *criminals convicted/sentenced*, which is measured by the "data provided by the same court on persons who have been issued their ruling in relation to acts constituting crimes" in each state from 2007 to 2012 (INEGI; 2012). Like the *police interventions* variable, *criminals convicted/sentenced* also paves the way for two testable control hypotheses related to the Mexican legal system:

- **Hypothesis 5:** *Politicians are more likely to be assassinated within states that witness higher numbers of convictions/sentences.*
- **Hypothesis 6:** *Politicians are more likely to be assassinated within states that witness lower numbers of convictions/sentences.*

While hypothesis 5 assumes that politicians are targeted by cartels for violating the terms of the Pax Mafiosa (police interventions lead to more arrests/convictions, and consequently, leads to more revenge inflicted upon elected officials), hypothesis 6 assumes that cartels have the incentive to target politicians wherever the judicial institutions are weak and is less costly to commit acts of murder. Thus, the strength of court system is measured by how many people are convicted between 2007 and 2012 in all Mexican states. If not many people are getting convicted within a state, this suggests that the state is incapable of enforcing the law against DTOs who murder politicians. The main limitation of this variable is the fact that we do not know exactly *why* people are convicted. Nevertheless, this variable is effective under the assumption that the majority

of people who are convicted of crimes during the “Mexican Drug War” period (2006 – present) are members of DTOs.

The fourth and fifth control variables capture two types of economic conditions within Mexican states: *income inequality* and *extreme poverty*. Income inequality is measured by the Gini coefficient between 0 and 1 (0 being more equal and 1 being more unequal). The Gini data from 2005 to 2010 derives from Rios’ (2015) replication data. Since Rios crafts her data at the municipal level, I averaged the Gini score of every municipality within each state to come up with a coefficient for all states between the aforementioned time periods. The Gini scores for 2012 and 2014 are borrowed from the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL; 2015) and the INEGI website (2017) respectively. Unfortunately, I was unable to find the Gini score for each state for the years of 2011, 2013, and 2015 to 2017. On the other hand, the poverty control variable is measured by the percent of the population living in extreme poverty. This variable is also provided by CONEVAL (2012; 2013) but only tracks the level of poverty for 2010 and 2012, which is why it is limited.

The *income inequality* and *extreme poverty* variables will test to following two hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 7:** *Politicians are more likely to be assassinated within more economically unequal states.*
- **Hypothesis 8:** *Politicians are more likely to be assassinated within extremely impoverished states.*

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In hypothesis 7, the main assumption is that power and influence is at play when cartels target politicians. This is because politicians are perceived to belong to the elite group that create the unequal economic conditions in the first place. Thus, the cartel targeting of politicians not only becomes more likely, but is also endorsed by members of the population who are not affiliated with DTOs. This is especially true if DTOs are able to provide better services than the state and local governments are able/willing to provide. The assassination of politicians becomes the “demand,” and cartels will gladly provide the “supply” but for the right price. This reasoning also explains hypothesis 8; citizens who are not involved in organized crime activity may also blame officials (local and national) for creating the conditions of extreme poverty. Both hypotheses 7 and 8 combined are consistent with Kalyvas’ argument that “as more poor countries develop, urbanize, and democratize, the risk of large-scale organized crime may substitute for the risk of civil war risk” (2015; p. 1525). Although Mexico is developing and urbanizing at a significant rate, not all states are developing and modernizing equally, and extreme poverty is still a significant issue in some regions. Thus, hypotheses 7 and 8 will test whether income inequality and impoverishment are associated with the assassination of mayors.

The sixth and seventh (and final) control variables are *education* and *population*. Although these measures were recorded during Mexico’s previous three censuses, I found the two variables through different sources. The control variable derives from CONEVAL’s social gap index (2015) whereas the population variable derives from INEGI (2016). Moreover, education is measured by the percent of the population ages 15 and up who

are illiterate while the population is measured by the number of people living in each state. Thus, the following two hypotheses emerge:

- **Hypothesis 9:** *Politicians are more likely to be assassinated in more illiterate states.*
- **Hypothesis 10:** *Politicians are more likely to be assassinated in states that are the least populated.*

Hypothesis 9 assumes that illiteracy is associated with less income and more poverty and that individuals will ignorantly join DTOs to make ends meet, ultimately increasing the number of cartel personnel to undertake political assassinations. However, to avoid being captured or killed while targeting politicians, DTOs would need to be discreet and therefore target politicians in states that are least populated and have fewer witnesses.

5. Results

To better grasp my variables, I observe their descriptive statistics by employing a univariate analysis for each them. Since the independent is categorical, the only measure of central tendency that is appropriate is the mode, which is category 4 (PRI/PRI – or PRI in both the state and federal levels of government) in this case. Alternatively, the dependent variable is interval/ratio and thus requires the mean, median, and mode as appropriate measures of central tendency. While the median and mode are listed in the appendix, the mean for this variable is .47. Additionally, all of the control variables for this analysis are classified as interval/ratio variables. For the control variables of income inequality, extreme poverty, education, population, DTO-related violence, criminal

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convictions and police interventions, their means are .47, 44.23, 6.27, 3594843.55, 335.15, 4553.56, and 119639.06 respectively.

Moreover, I conduct two multivariate OLS regression analyses to definitively test the relationship between state incoordination and political assassinations. In this analysis, I compare categories that describe different political arrangements among the state and federal levels of government. Specifically, if the reference category captures a coordinated arrangement (i.e. PAN/PAN), then I compare it to an arrangement of incoordination (i.e. PRD/PAN) in which the party is the same at the federal level but not the state. Although many more comparisons can be made with statistical significance (i.e. comparisons between different arrangements of incoordination), I maintain this approach to solely and consistently address the main hypothesis of this study: *mayors are more likely to be assassinated within states that are not coordinated as opposed to states that are.*

Comparing PAN/PAN with PRD/PAN, I reject the null hypothesis claiming that the two categories have the same number of mayoral assassinations (p-value of .01). However, unlike my original theory, this particular comparison reveals that mayors are more likely to be assassinated in coordinated states as opposed to states that witness incoordination. However, moving from PAN/PAN to PRI/PAN, I fail to reject the null hypothesis as there is no relationship between political assassinations and state incoordination (p-value of .575). Moreover, comparing PRI/PAN (incoordination) with PAN/PAN (coordination), and with a p-value of .575, I fail to reject the null hypothesis. There is no link between state incoordination and political assassinations based on this comparison either. And finally, moving from PRI/PRI to PVEM/PRI, and with a p-value of

.001, I reject the null hypothesis claiming that the two categories have the same number of mayoral assassinations. However, this comparison reveals that more mayors are assassinated in PRI/PRI arrangements compared to PVEM/PRI. Yet moving from PRI/PRI to PAN/PRI, or from PRI/PRI to PRD/PRI, I fail to reject the null hypothesis as the p-values show that there is no relationship between political assassinations and state incoordination.

As for the control variables, with a p-value of .001 within the OLS regression model(s), I reject the null hypothesis asserting that there is no link between DTO-related homicides and political assassinations. There is 99 percent confidence that mayors are more likely to be assassinated in states that witness high levels of DTO-related violence. As the B coefficient suggests, for every unit increase in DTO-related homicides, there is a .001-unit increase in mayoral assassinations. Further, with p-values of .333, .757, .408, and .816 respectively, I fail to reject the null hypotheses as police interventions, criminals convicted/sentenced, income inequality and extreme poverty are not linked to mayoral assassinations. No sufficient statistical evidence exists to support hypotheses 3 through 8.

Moreover, with a p-value of .001, I reject the null hypothesis claiming that there is no link between the percent of the population who are illiterate and mayoral assassinations. There is 99 percent certainty that illiteracy causes political assassinations. For every unit increase of the illiterate population, there is a .116 increase in mayoral assassinations. And lastly, with a p-value of .014, I reject the null hypothesis claiming that there is no link between the population of each state and political assassinations. There is sufficient statistical support to assert that politicians are more likely to be assassinated in

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more populated states. For each unit increase of the population, there is a 5.8-unit increase in mayoral assassinations; this indicates that the relationship is positive, not negative as the hypothesis suggests.

Overall, if only coordinated versus non-coordinated arrangements are compared in some of the OLS regression models, then politicians are more likely to be assassinated in coordinated states. If this is the case, not only does it contradict my original theory but also raises the question whether the prevalence of assassinations within coordinated arrangements is an indicator of corruption; in order to facilitate political assassinations, the state and federal governments would need to be not only corrupt, but also unified across all levels of government to reduce the costs associated with illicit activities. However, the comparison of two or more categories of incoordination also produces different interpretations. For instance, comparing the reference category of PRD/PAN to the arrangement of PRI/PAN reveals that assassinations are more likely to occur within the latter group by .733 (Sig. 008). If corruption is also the case in this comparison, this is because the antagonisms between the PAN and the PRI are more severe than the antagonisms between the PAN and PRD. Although the PRD has some political strongholds throughout impoverished parts of Mexico (including Mexico City), Mexican presidential elections are more competitive between the PRI and the PAN. Thus, competition drives corruption, which in turn causes political assassinations. This ultimately suggests that the violent dynamics of the Mexican drug war can be explained not only by competition between DTOs, but by competition between politicians as well.

Furthermore, while statistically significant comparisons can be made across categories in some multivariate models, the differences of means bivariate tests fail to produce any significant results in regards to my primary hypothesis. As for the control variables, the only thing that changed when comparing the bivariate results to the multivariate is that the former produces statistically significant results for the extreme poverty variable whereas the latter does not. Controlling for everything else, the OLS multivariate regression models find sufficient statistical support for DTO-related homicides, the percent of the illiterate population, and the population of Mexico by state as potential indicators of mayoral assassinations.

6. Conclusion

Although the statistical results are mixed and contradict my original theory of mayoral assassinations and state incoordination, it is worth emphasizing that this could be due to the data and methodological limitations of this study. Moreover, if the results presented here are indeed valid, then they raise the question of how strong previous studies are linking state coordination to DTO-related activities (i.e. Rios 2015; Duran-Martinez 2015). On the theoretical level, if political assassinations are more likely to occur in well-coordinated states as opposed to states that witness incoordination, this implies that such murders are facilitated by the state's ability of collaborating across multiple levels of government. The assassination of mayors requires resources and planning, and although DTOs have their own reasons for murdering politicians, Mexico's history also reveals that politicians have been murdered by other members of the state

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(Council on Foreign Relations n/d; Levy and Bruhn 2006). Thus, if the findings of this study are legitimate, then the democratization literature, through this analysis, has paved the way for additional research questions pertaining to multilevel government corruption and mayoral assassinations.

Nevertheless, the main limitation of this analysis is due to the scarcity of data surrounding drug-related violence in Mexico. As Heinle et al. (2017) contend, “both the Mexican government and its critics tend to make imprecise or inaccurate statistical claims. For example, while the Mexican government has sometimes obscured the number of organized crime-style homicides, critics and even conventional journalistic sources have sometimes tended to exaggerate that number” (p. 5). While Justice in Mexico’s data attempts to resolve this issue, this analysis also relies on data from INEGI, which is the Mexican agency responsible for gathering national statistics. Moreover, a time-series cross-sectional analysis requires a more sophisticated research design. The OLS assumptions are undermined in this analysis since it relies on panel data. Responding to the issue of “temporal dependence,” Beck et al. (1998) argue that a “simple solution is to add a series of dummy variables to the logic specification... [because they] mark the number of periods (usually years) since either the start of the sample period or the previous occurrence of an ‘event’” (p. 1261). Thus, the findings in this study are inconclusive; more empirical research is necessary to support the claim that mayors are more likely to be assassinated within states that are not coordinated with the federal government. However, the research community must remain skeptical and question

whether mayoral assassinations are more likely to occur where the state is more unified across multiple levels of government as well.

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Appendix

Effects of State Incoordination on Mayoral Assassinations

	Model 1	Model 2
PAN-PAN	0 (.)	0 (.)
PRI-PAN	-0.112 (0.195)	0.157 (0.202)
PRD-PAN	-0.842** (0.300)	-0.0687 (0.330)
PRI-PRI	-0.0582 (0.195)	0.177 (0.201)
PAN-PRI	0.143 (0.206)	0.104 (0.192)
PRD-PRI	-0.152 (0.259)	-0.102 (0.264)
PVEM-PRI	-1.317** (0.400)	0.324 (0.573)
Income Inequality	-1.266 (1.549)	0.234 (1.527)
Extreme Poverty	-0.00170 (0.00732)	-0.0215 (0.0149)
Illiteracy	0.115*** (0.0249)	0.164* (0.0828)
Population	5.76e-08* (2.33e-08)	0.00000282 (0.00000404)
DT0 Homicides	0.000549*** (0.0000957)	0.000608*** (0.000149)
Criminals Convicted	-0.0000563 (0.0000240)	0.000103 (0.000126)
Police Interventions	-0.00000601 (0.00000555)	-0.00000729 (0.00000689)
Constant	0.220 (0.744)	-1.334 (2.109)
Observations	245	245
R-squared	0.349	0.118

Standard errors in parentheses

1. PAN-PAN is the reference category. 2. Model 2 employs fixed effects.

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001