VIOLENCE AND CORRUPTION IN MEXICO AND COLOMBIA

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By

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ABSTRACT

Latin America is a region that has gone through and is still going through a lot of violent conflict. Both Mexico and Colombia have several similarities that stem from grand corruption. The vast systemic grand corruption is evidenced by the use of state violence, including massacres, other human rights violations, structural violence, the repression of the media, the repression of minorities, controversial land acquisitions, and the collusion of organized crime and the state, leading to state capture. The high levels of impunity, weak structures, and weak judicial systems have contributed to the continuation of systemic corruption and state violence. The research below explores the causal link between grand corruption, state capture, and state terror. It also explores the role of weak institutions, structural violence, and other factors that play an important role in 4 diverse case studies of state capture and state terror both in Mexico and Colombia.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped along the way, especially my family.

Many thanks,
Jessica Karcz
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LITERATURE

Rampant corruption and high violence rates are a plague in Latin America, specifically in Colombia and Mexico. The purpose of this research is to understand the causal link between state level grand corruption and state terror. The research below includes and analysis of weak institutions, corruption within government, corruption perpetuating structural violence, state capture, and their role leading to state terror.

*Corruption under New or Transitioning Democracies with Abundant Natural Resources*

It’s harder for “democratic” governments to engage in grand corruption activities as they previously could under complete authoritarian/ undemocratic rule. Therefore new (not full but transitioning) democracies utilize state terror (including violence) as a powerful tool to maintain kleptocratic rule, and exploit the country’s land, natural resources, etc. for their private gain, regardless of citizens’ livelihoods, often working together with diverse organized criminal groups.

Many powerful industries and elite favor authoritarian rule that benefit them at the expense of the population at large. Income, education, and healthcare inequality, operate through structures with corruption as an organizational goal, maximizing private gain at the cost of the rest of its citizenry.

This is of course done by corrupt politicians in concealed ways. “Even when acts of terror, such as massacres and the destruction of homes are performed by uniformed agents of the state, efforts are usually made to conceal them from the outside world. Modern state terror is a form of deviant behavior, which breaks widely accepted norms
(usually including the state’s own laws) and which must therefore be concealed or denied” (Green and Ward, 107).

The corrupt distribution of resources “usually favors the rich at the expense of the poor” (Green and Ward, 18). The theory behind the resource curse, explains how resource rich countries with oil, gas, or other minerals are “more authoritarian, more prone to conflict, and less economically stable than countries without these resources” (The Natural Resource Governance Institute, 4). This applies to many Latin American nations, in this case both Colombia and Mexico who have plenty of resources and at the same time staggering amounts of poverty, corruption, and violence.

Many attribute this to weak institutions and weak institutional development, because elites and/or politicians in resource rich countries such as these can easily capture a single-point source of revenue outside a budget process. Examples include of “tools used to capture revenues include sovereign wealth funds, national oil companies and contractors for extractive operations. As such, elites in natural resource-rich countries are less likely to invest in productive enterprises, such as job-creating manufacturing industries, and instead pursue rent-seeking, that is, fight for control of these resources.” (The Natural Resource Governance Institute, 4).

In many cases, they also “purposefully dismantled societal checks or created new regulations to get access to these resources or to provide access to friends or family, a process nicknamed rent-seizing. Some argue that elite focus on rent-seeking and rent-seizing promotes corruption and is damaging to institutional development” (The Natural Resource Governance Institute, 4).
In a cross-national study Pablo Fajnzylber, Daniel Lederman, and Norman Loayza found that “income inequality, as measured by the Gini index, is an important factor that drives violent crime rates across countries and over time” (World Bank, 3).

A study done by the World Bank with the purpose of investigating the robustness and causal link between income inequality and violent crime across countries was also conducted. They analyzed a leading sociological theory of relative deprivation where “inequality breeds social tensions as the less well-off feel dispossessed when compared with wealthier people” (World Bank, 2). They used the Gini Index to compare inequality ratios cross-country and they measured violence by combining intentional homicide rates from the World Health Organization (WHO) database and robbery rates from the United Nations’ World Crime Survey.

The study concluded that income inequality (measured by the Gini index) has a significant and positive effect on the incidence of violent crime (homicide and robbery). Other interesting findings are that “since violent crime is jointly determined by the pattern of income distribution and by the rate of change of national income, we can conclude that faster poverty reduction leads to a decline in national crime rates” (World Bank, 26).

This evident correlation between inequality and violent crime is very apparent in Latin America, a region with extremely high levels of inequality and high levels of violent crime. Although there is a correlation between poverty and higher levels of violence (Pridemore, 2011), it does not mean that poverty is the sole cause of violence, or that economic growth necessarily leads to peace (Improving Citizen Security in the Americas, 3).
Galtung coined the term structural violence. It is “injustice and exploitation built into a social system that generates wealth for the few and poverty for the many, stunting everyone’s ability to develop their full humanity. By privileging some classes, ethnicities, genders, and nationalities over others, it institutionalizes unequal opportunities for education, resources, and respect” (Hathaway,1). It is maintained through an ideology that promotes the private interests of the ruling class.

Another important consideration is the role of institutional weakness in accelerating violence (Improving Citizen Security in the Americas, 3). “Elevated levels of impunity and low public confidence in law enforcement agencies contribute directly and indirectly to greater crime and insecurity” (Improving Citizen Security in the Americas, 3).

High levels of diverse violence is commonly seen in states with high levels of corruption, including Russia, India, Kenya, Honduras, Tajikistan, and in this case Mexico and Colombia.

It is vital to take into account the factor of young democracies in Latin America. Although Mexico and Colombia have been declared democracies for several decades, they have been ruled by authoritarian leaders. Mexico was ruled by the same political party for over 70 years until recently. Young democracies face the challenge of establishing credible mechanisms for accountability within the rule of law. This makes public officers answerable and sets constitutional legal framework limiting their powers within government (Schedler, Diamond, Plattner, 151). Instead “Latin America is a legacy of weak, personalist -although extensive and overbureaucratized- states with a decreasing
redistributive capacity and alarmingly lacking in transparency or operative mechanisms of accountability” (Schedler, Diamond, Plattner, 151).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) conducted the study “Does Corruption Affect Income Inequality and Poverty?” in 1998. Through a cross-country analysis, Sanjeev Gupta, Hamid Davoodi, and Rosa Alonso-Terme concluded that corruption increases income inequality and poverty by “reducing economic growth, the progressivity of the tax system, the level and effectiveness of social spending, and the formation of human capital, and by perpetuating an unequal distribution of asset ownership and unequal access to education” (IMF, 1). It also concluded that policies that reduce corruption will also lower income inequality and poverty. Lower levels of corruption lead to less income inequality, and more important, lower levels of violence committed by the state.

**DEFINING CORRUPTION**

Corruption, “the abuse of public office for private gain. Corruption can be classified as grand, petty and political, depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs” (Transparency International). Penny Green and Tony Ward, call the type of corruption that is committed for “organizational goals of state agencies, or are tolerated for organizational reasons (Green and Ward, 11)” as state crime.

There are many different forms of corruption including bribery, kickback, extortion, graft and embezzlement, fraud, nepotism, conflict of interest, state capture, and others. It can also occur at different levels and is usually classified as “grand corruption” or “petty corruption”. Grand corruption is done at upper levels and includes presidents, ministers,
members of congress, governors, and other high-ranking officials (Blake and Morris, 3). While petty corruption occurs at lower levels and involves civil servants or the police (Blake and Morris, 3).

Besides the hierarchical levels of corruption, it can also be classified based on its policy phase. This is where it is divided into political corruption, bureaucratic corruption, and societal corruption. Political corruption refers to “corruption occurring at the policymaking stage, which usually entails the violation of second-order norms (the often-unwritten guidelines determining how politicians should make decisions that are just, fair, and impartial)” (Bardhan 2006; Warren 2004). Nye defines it as “the abuse of public power for personal gain” (Nye, 1967). While corruption scholar Michael Johnston (2005, II) defines it as the "abuse of a trust, generally one involving public power, for private benefits which often, but by no means always, come in the form of money."

Bureaucratic corruption refers to “the implementation of policy and relates to the violation of first-order norms (the written rules and laws that are the product of politicians' decision-making)” (Bardhan 2006; Warren 2004).

Societal corruption refers to the “practices of bribery, extortion, fraud, nepotism, favoritism, and so on, which occur within societal organizations and are largely independent of the government” (Blake and Morris, 3). This can lead to a dangerous “state capture”, when state policies are illegitimately influenced by special interests and the state is turned into a tool that serves these special interests instead of the common good of the broader society that it should represent (Blake and Morris, 3). This state capture is taken back to the government.
All different types of corruption involve the violation of the norms defining public office (Blake and Morris, 4) as well as the social contract. Even when citizens engage in petty corruption, bribes are used to influence a policy, law, or norms. Therefore they all influence the democratic governance, but some forms pose a greater danger.

Another form of corruption includes depriving the electorate of the ability to make an informed choice in an election (Thompson 1995: 124-5). It undermines democratic rule and keeps the same powerful elite/party in power. The same people who use state capture for their own benefit. This is an indirect violations of human rights, since “corruption diverts resources from the poor in a way which deprive them of necessities such as food, clean water education, and health care” (Cockroft, 1998). In this scenario it is indirectly threatening people’s livelihoods and killing through structural violence.

Clientelism refers to “a pattern of social exchange between patrons, normally the holders of political administrative offices, and clients, who may be private citizens” (Green and Ward, 21). The line between clientelism and corruption is very fine and marked more by the reaction of the audience than by the nature of it. Clientelism, patrimonialism, and corruption are more common in developing countries (Green and Ward, 25).

It is “easy to appreciate that clientelism, corruption and violence will tend to occur together. What is not clear is whether clientelism serves as an alternative to violence (Clapham 1982), or increases it” (Green and Ward, 25).

Corruption usually impacts people indirectly and without their knowledge. This is why it is difficult to quantify (Green and Ward, 11). Petty corruption is easier to quantify than grand corruption, since it is encountered in a more direct and individual form between citizens and public officials, usually involving a form of bribe. Most corruption indexes
are based on public perception. Therefore, it is mostly referring to their direct experience of corruption though petty corruption. When it comes to grand corruption, at high government levels, impacting people through structural violence, it is less visible and harder to quantify (Green and Ward, 12 Johnston 2002). Although perceptions on grand and political corruption can be leading, the exact data is inexistent. Grand corruption leading to state terror is also hard to quantify, since those responsible for commanding state violence are rarely brought to light, those committing the actual violence include organized criminal groups and paramilitaries, and the victims come from rural background receiving little attention or justice.

Besides petty and grand corruption, corruption can also be classified depending on its organizational goal. According to Green and Ward, corruption can be categorized in three ways:

DeLeon argues for corruption as ‘an alternative, informal, maybe unfortunate means toward…salutary end’ (1993:211). This refers to the use of corruption as a means, including the use of corruption and drug trading in order to fund paramilitaries, weapons, and the war itself. In this case corruption operates as a source of income for violent actors, that collude with public officials to commit acts of state terror.

DeLeon includes the Iran-Contra affair as an example of corruption as a means, where the U.S funded the Nicaraguan rebels by selling arms to Iran in the 1980s. 

Tolerated corruption, is when “those who directly engage in corrupt activities are not motivated by the pursuit of organizational goals, but their behavior is confined or tolerated by other officials who are so motivated” (Green and Ward, 15). This includes the attitude of indifference or tolerance for corruption by public officials that compensate for
low wages, including policemen in Mexico. In this case corruption is tolerated particularly in those with control over the legitimate means of force and that allows them to use violence to enrich themselves. The allowance for corruption within the judiciary prevents punishment for violent acts and thus it cannot deter violence.

The third type is *Corruption as an Organizational Goal*, when illicit gain is the goal of a state agency and its pursuit determines the decision of the agency itself (Green and Ward, 16). States that operate under this type of corruption are also known as kleptocracies. They can be very profitable and influence policies implemented by the state. When this is the case, it’s referred as state capture. “A situation where powerful individuals, institutions, companies or groups within or outside a country use corruption to shape a nation’s policies, legal environment and economy to benefit their own private interests” (J. Hellman and D. Kaufmann, 2001).

All of these kinds of corruption has been a common theme in Latin America. “Corrupt practices undermines the integrity, efficiency, legitimacy and role-modelling of peacebuilding and reconstruction initiatives” (Le Billon, 345). Grand corruption and state capture is evidenced in both states by the use of state terror. This includes vast human rights violations and uses structural violence benefiting the elite, the repression of the media, and the repression of minorities.

Corruption used to be considered a cultural feature fixed only with long-term educational policies. It is now understood as “a rational, deliberate act that responds to incentives” (USAID, 2007).
The theory proposed by this thesis is the causal link between grand corruption, state capture, and state terror in democratic states with authoritarian tendencies such as Mexico and Colombia.

**Figure 1. Causal Link between Grand Corruption, State Capture, and State Terror**

Grand corruption leads to state capture, when powerful public officials collude with other criminal groups (such as cartels or paramilitaries) for their private interest, leading to state terror. When there is grand corruption and politicians collude with organized crime, state capture takes place, and this leads to terror committed by the state as a means to displace civilians and keep their land, obtain power and control, or other private interests. In democratic governments such as Mexico and Colombia, forms of state terror are usually
performed by organized criminal groups (including cartels) or paramilitaries following the orders of state officials, since the state is not allowed under law to terrorize its own citizens for its private benefit. This violence mostly targets marginalized populations with low economic or political power.

There are many reasons for targeting them including, repressing them and stopping them from protesting in order for politicians to keep their power, intimidation for votes, to displace them and use their land for lucrative means, or simply to keep being corrupt and stealing with impunity because of fear of reprisal.

Targeting marginalized populations means that they receive little attention in the media which often portrays them as the perpetrators instead of victims, and they don’t usually have means of defending themselves including financially or legally because of weak institutions and high impunity levels.

These victims of state terror are also in the most part racial minorities (including indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and Afro-Mexicans) who are not only affected by direct violence, but suffer from severe structural violence including high poverty rates, also as a consequence of grand corruption.

Besides the terror inflicted directly by the state for private interests, through the collusion of state capture, organized crime is free to also terrorize the population at its will. The impunity, weak institutions, and state capture, have all contributed to such high violence rates.
The strong causal link between grand corruption in Mexico and Colombia and state violence, means that addressing grand corruption, will address state terror. There are different types of corruption as explained below. Grand corruption, also known as political corruption occurs at high levels and entails politicians and political corruption. This is the form of corruption that is being addressed, although it is important to understand how the others relate as well.

Impunity also plays a large role, since it is directly caused by institutional weakness and is an incentive for grand corruption. The higher the institutional weakness in a state is, the higher impunity levels are.

Public officials can take a part in grand political corruption and collude with organized criminal groups, knowing impunity is so high that they won’t receive severe consequences because of the weakness behind the state institutions.

**Figure 2. Factors in State Capture**

At the heart of grand corruption there are weak institutions that allow for impunity and grand corruption to occur. When this takes place, public officials and organized
criminal groups commonly work together in state capture, where they are above the law and do as they wish with little consequences. This has led to state ordered massacres of civilians for their own benefit in both Mexico, as seen in the cases of Guerrero and Veracruz, and also in Colombia through the use of paramilitaries as seen in the cases of Pichilín and Mampuján. These case studies demonstrate how regions with weak institutions and high impunity levels, involved in state capture, where public officials colluded with organized criminal groups to commit violent acts for their own benefit, including preventing a political protest, and displacing them in order to use their land.

Below is an illustration of the relationship between institutional weakness, grand corruption, state capture, structural violence and state terror.

![Figure 3. Root Contributors to State Terror](image-url)
There are different kinds of democratic governance in Latin America. Generally speaking, it “is a system in which citizens participate in government planning and decision-making, while those in office respond to citizen needs with accountability and transparency” (IRI). Within this definition, there are more evolved and institutionalized democracies, while others have weak institutions that can be more easily corrupted. Many Latin American countries have a history of authoritarian or military regimes, that have left a trail of nepotism, special interests, social disparities, a powerful elite, lack of transparency, weak institutions, and other societal problems that feed into the corruption cancer in the region. This includes both Mexico and Colombia.

Although all different types of corruption that occur in many levels of the state are detriment threats to democratic governance, the most dangerous one takes place in grand corruption, also called political corruption, in democracies with weak institutions, a weak justice system, and a repressive political elite with authoritarian tendencies.

The abuse of public power for personal gain, has previously led to policies that favor those in power (usually the elite) in order to keep them in power, while targeting and exploiting minorities, indigenous populations, and the most vulnerable populations which are usually the majority of the people living in poverty. This is one of the reasons why Latin American nations have the highest rates of inequality in the world.

“Conflict and fragility often emerge in hybrid and developing democracies, disrupting development and weakens social and political institutions” (USAID, 29). This is where grand corruption flourishes in “fragile” nations including those who experience a
“breakdown of law and order, citizen insecurity, and narco-trafficking, which threaten the legitimacy and stability of the state” (USAID, 29).

A government cannot fulfill the needs of its citizenry or function properly without a “level of order and basic security for citizens” (USAID, 29). This is where corruption, the cancer that has plagued Latin America for several centuries and is at the root of many of its current conflicts, including violent crime, arises.

It is interesting to note that many conflict-affected countries are also the most corrupt. Corruption is “among the key concerns of local populations during the so-called post-conflict reconstruction period” (Le Billon, 346). USAID concluded that corruption plays a key role in fomenting and protracting conflicts (USAID, 2007). In post-conflict environments, corruption can be a dangerous inhibitor of sustainable peace.

Systemic Corruption is a “situation in which the measures adopted are inefficient and the mechanisms, as well as institutions charged with implementing them, are affected by corruption” (Galán Pachón, 4). During a period of war, governmental structures generally break down, where politics of survival replace public ethics, and “armed factions often justify corruption through reference to the war while using corrupt practices – equivalent to ‘protection rackets’ by state security agencies and government militias – to strengthen their hold on power” (Le Billon, 346).

Meanwhile, ordinary citizens that are repressed by structural violence stemming from systemic corruption, commonly resort to violence or other illegal economic activities. In many cases organized crime capitalizes on the poverty and the lack of opportunity within the population to recruit them as agents of violence.
While in other cases, citizens have formed their own auto defense groups with the purpose of protecting themselves because the government and police isn’t. This happened both in Mexico and Colombia, and has been tried to be kept secret by the government. Instead of addressing the cause and protecting their citizens, in many cases including the case of Veracruz, the government resorted to denying the existence of auto defense groups, targeting them, and silencing journalists.

Post-conflict corruption wouldn’t be rampant without weak institutions. Liberal peacebuilding has “created very weak states and institutions that are dependent upon foreign support and subject to tests over power-sharing and corruption” (Le Billon, 350). This is one of the negative sides of post-conflict peacebuilding that hasn’t received much attention, but has frequently increased systemic corruption.

Corruption is an important problem in a country where “poverty and underdevelopment are both a cause and a consequence of corruption, but the impact of corruption on economic and political development has been exacerbated by the post-conflict environment” (Le Billon, 411).

GRAND CORRUPTION

The most dangerous form of corruption, according to Michael Johnston is entrenched political corruption. It is internally stable and sustained by “weak political competition, slow and uneven economic growth, and a weak civil society”. He also believes that is it possible to transition from a high-corruption equilibrium to a low-corruption equilibrium by “guaranteeing civil liberties and basic economic rights,
enhancing economic and political competition, and encouraging the growth of a stronger civil society” (Johnston, 55). Although this transition takes time, the initial stages of reform “will likely produce an apparent surge in corruption, as formerly concealed practices come to light, and organized corruption gives way to more fragmented and disruptive practices. But these are indicators of a breakdown of the old entrenched system. Sustained political leadership and international support are crucial during this phase” (Johnston, 55).

This is of vital importance to consider since both Colombia and Mexico are instigating various anti-corruption measures aiming at cracking down on corruption. The understanding that cracking the system takes time, a lot of continuous support, and that it will start with an apparent surge in corruption, is important to remember. This might also account for the accompanying surge in violence.

In Colombia, the current government of President Santos implemented the new Anti-corruption Act of 2011 and a new Anti-corruption office in the Presidency. These were all aimed at decreasing corruption but had the contrary effect. According to Transparency International’s 2012 Corruption Perception Index, Colombia went from scoring 57 in 2002 to 94 in 2012. As Johnston would explain, the process of the breakdown of the old system sees an apparent rise in corruption.

Colombia suffers from structural corruption challenges including the “collusion of the public and private sectors, clientelism and policy capture by organized crime, lack of state control and weak service delivery in remote areas of the country, and the inefficiency of the criminal justice system” (Gutiérrez, 1). The lack of appropriate mechanisms for regulating the country’s lucrative extractive industry is also troubling.
In 2011 Latinobarómetro conducted a study where 63 percent of Colombians considered reducing corruption as the most primordial factor to strengthen the state. A similar pattern is observed in Mexico.

According to a poll conducted in 2015 by Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), when it comes to the Mexican government, citizens were mostly concerned with insecurity and delinquency then corruption. The third concern varied by state, but alternated between poverty, unemployment, and overall bad government performance.

OUTLIERS

Different governing forms and economies react differently to corruption and violence. Ironically, many patrimonial kleptocratic states, have high levels of corruption but lower levels of violence then after the regime collapsed into a transitioning democracy. In undemocratic governments, the political ruler had control over all of the wealth and resources so they could be very openly corrupt, steal for their benefit as they pleased, so had no need to resort to violence unless their rule was under direct threat.

An example is Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. A very corrupt dictatorship and neo-patrimonial regime with low levels of violence (when it came to national politics). When the patronage system dismantled, violence increased (Kang, 2002).

Neo-patrimonial rule can exist in different forms. In some cases the ruling class conduct themselves using patronage, charisma, and sensitivity to the local conditions, which leads to more legitimacy and stability. The other form rules in a predatory way, little
benefit to other elites or population at large, and their rule depends on violence. (Green and Ward, 26). “The more a neopatrimonial regime is starved of resources, the more it is likely to abandon such services as it provides its citizens, concentrate its patronage on a small network of supporters, and rely on violence to control the rest of the population” (Green and Ward, 27).

CASE OF MEXICO

Political corruption in Mexico is a severe problem, especially in the municipal level. Often official corruption is seen “as one of the foundational causes of Mexico’s public security challenges” (Heinle, Molzahn, Shrink, 34). This includes the challenges of violence and organized crime and public officials colluding.

Under corruption circumstances, “rights are turned into commodities made available on the basis of ability to pay” (Ruggiero, 1994). This means that the state only respects the right of its citizens that can pay for them and violates the rights of the rest.

During the period of January 2012 to August 2016, there have been 5541 complaints of human rights violations and crimes perpetrated by Mexican soldiers (SEDENA and SEMAR), that were registered by the National Human Rights Commission. Demonstrating the high impunity levels, out of these 5541 complaints, only 357 were trailed before federal courts, and only 29 received a sentence (WOLA, 2017).
With weak institutions and a failed judicial system, corruption is serving as an organizational goal, where illicit gain is entrenched in the system. Again, this entails state capture.

A study conducted by INEGI in 2015 published the most corrupt states in Mexico per 100,000 habitants. The study was conducted through surveys on public opinions on corruption. As previously discussed, it’s hard to measure solely grand corruption since civilians are mostly not aware of it, but they do face petty corruption directly. The study englobes all types of corruption as civilians encounter and understand it.
Below is a map with the results:

Figure 4. Most Corrupt States in Mexico

-Source: Encuesta Nacional de Calidad e Impacto Gubernamental (ENCIG) 2015
When compared to this chart of Mexico’s Peace Index and the most violent states, you can see a correlation, specifically in Mexico City, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Morelos, and Michoacán who are all in the top 10 most corrupt and least peaceful states. This index is created by the Institute for Economics and Peace, an independent think tank that uses a similar methodology as the Global Peace Index, the most commonly used index for measuring peace. They see peace as the absence of violence, and measure direct violence through seven indicators. Many include official government data, but in cases of reliable doubt have combined citizen polls to make up for it.
Figure 5. Mexico’s Peace Index

-Source: Mexico Peace Index, by the Institute for Economics and Peace

Mexico is a nation that suffers from vast systemic corruption, violence, and human rights violations. It is currently in a period of internal conflict and violence, that led to approximately 33,000 deaths in 2015 (Global Peace Index). Besides being plagued with
violent crime, it also consists of a vast rural population where income is highly unevenly distributed, just like Colombia.

A Failed Judicial System

Implementation of the rule of law is a widespread problem in Latin America. In order to properly practice criminal law, accountability of the defendants is a crucial aspect and serves as a deterrent for future crimes. What makes criminal law in Mexico different from the U.S. are the lack of proper investigations and high impunity levels. This is due to many reasons including a high level of imprisoned defendants waiting for trial. Inefficiently, in Mexico you are guilty until proven innocent vs. in the U.S where you are innocent until proven guilty. “Mexico does not need to invest more in the quantity of policemen, but in the processes that guarantee the efficiency of their actions, it would also relieve the burden from the judges” (García,1). For every 100 thousand people there are 355 policemen but only 4 judges (García,1).

In order to strengthen institutions and strengthen the judicial system that often supports impunity leading to higher levels of corruption and violence, it is recommended to increase the number of judges, since it would reduce the number of people currently in prison waiting for trial, and it would reduce overpopulated jails (García,1). It would also give defendants an opportunity for a fairer trial with more time to look at their cases. It is well known that in Mexico a lot of inmates were not given a fair trial, were wrongly imprisoned, and are therefore victims of the criminal law system. The vast majority of these victims come from low economic standing, and therefore are not given a voice or the
appropriate resources to defend themselves. Many NGOs and human rights activists are currently working in trying to improve the justice process for the accused and wrongfully imprisoned.

The other side of the problem is impunity. Impunity is a consequence of weak institutions and when there are no legal consequences to crimes including assassinations or acts of grand corruption, it acts as a direct incentive for corruption and violence, including state terror. The probability of getting caught is very low. The level of impunity in Mexico in 2009 was between 90 and 95 percent, according to ICESI (the citizen institute of insecurity studies).

Mexico’s weak criminal justice system is affecting the implementation of the Merida Initiative and Mexico’s progress towards reducing violence. Impunity levels are very high and this has led to a constitutional reform in 2008 that was implemented in June 2016. It is replacing the trial procedures in federal and state courts “moving from a closed-door process based on written arguments presented to a judge to an adversarial public trial system with oral arguments and the presumption of innocence” (Ribando, Finklea, 5). This will hopefully lead to more just, efficient, less expensive, and more transparent trials.

Considering the vast cases of military abuses against civilians going unpunished, in May 2014 Mexico’s Supreme Court ruled that they must now be trailed civilian courts versus military courts. In August 2015 the first Mexican military official was charged for enforced disappearance (Ribando, Finklea, 21). This will hopefully make the military more accountable for human rights abuses.
Inequality and Corruption Perpetuated by Structural Violence

Corruption “constrains economic growth and opportunity for individuals and is often the tool of elites to establish, maintain and strengthen monopolies and oligopolies that are used to further entrench their political powers ” (USAID, 11). According to the Wilson center, in Mexico 45.5 percent of its population, which are 53.3 million people, are currently living in poverty (Wilson, Silva, 1). As a structuralist would see it, this and the fact that they are underdeveloped, exploited, marginalized, and in many cases discriminated are the real problems. At the same time a small amount of the population is very well off exercising domination and playing into the System Justification Theory. It is maintained through an ideology that promotes the private interests of the ruling class including politicians who want to keep their power and stay in office.

Local State Corruption/ State Capture

“Corruption and perceived criminal complicity have undermined the legitimacy of the Mexican government at all levels” (International Crisis Group). During the political transition from a 70 year one-party authoritarian regime to a multiparty democracy, has been turbulent since the underlying problems of corruption and impunity have not been properly addressed but exacerbated during a fight over power, resources, and territory.

This transition has given extraordinary powers to state governors that became the “country’s most disreputable public authorities” (International Crisis Group) and are called “viceroys/ virreyes” for their lavish lifestyles and uncontrolled abuse of power and
resources. Since 2010, eleven state governors have been under investigation for corruption charges.

The democratization of Mexico has meant that the federal government has lost its hold over states and local states have gained power. Although in theory this is a positive step towards a better democracy, in a weak state, ruled by weak institutions, it has given corrupt state governors full control to state capture at their will. The federal democratization was followed be a poor process of decentralization. The two most recent and apparent case scenarios are Guerrero and Veracruz.

**Case of Veracruz**

Veracruz is a clear example of state capture, where an alliance between criminal groups and high levels of governmental power founded a campaign of uncontrollable violence through capturing local judicial and security institutions where impunity for both parties was guaranteed (International Crisis Group).

The collusion between state agents and organized crime ruled the state and left it in complete bankruptcy and chaos with high violence rates. There are over 2,750 people disappeared and at least 7 journalists have been killed since 2010 (International Crisis group, 1). Other figures estimate 19 assassinated journalists in the state of Veracruz during the last governor’s administration.

This form of state terror demonstrates a “whirlwind of killings that targeted, among others, legal professionals, police officers, potential witnesses to crimes and any civilians
who dared check the ambitions of a multitude of criminal organizations and their political accomplices” (International Crisis group, 1).

While Veracruz was under state capture and suffering from state terror, the governor Javier Duarte de Ochoa stole extravagant amounts, leaving the government completely bankrupt, and fled to Guatemala after corruption charges. He stole over 9.7 million dollars just for his mansion where he had 25 rooms, a helicopter landing pad, and other luxuries all paid by public funds. He was recently captured and his fate is to be decided in the near future.

Besides direct violence, structural violence was very evident in the state of Veracruz and through grand corruption affected citizen’s livelihoods. Health care was negatively affected when former governor Duarte was directly in charge of the illicit acquisition of medicines for hospitals through fraudulent ghost companies. It has been recently discovered that this included false oncological medicine for cancer patients, expired medications, and deficient HIV tests and medicine.

The lack of justice for victims and high impunity levels created a structural impunity that fosters violence (The Human Rights Situation in Mexico, 14). The “threats, harassment, murders, and disappearances of individuals who seek truth and justice” have garnered fear within society and lead to an underreporting of violations affecting the official figures (The Human Rights Situation in Mexico, 14).

Although the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) is still in power federally. For the first time in more than 80 years, the PRI lost power of Veracruz and a new governor, Miguel Ángel Yunes Linares from the PAN party has pledged to clean the state.
The new government admitted to many crimes against humanity that happened in Veracruz and created the Veracruz Truth Commission in November 2016. It will investigate “the causes and responsibilities behind the state’s criminal atrocities, as well as create new benchmarks for transparency and civil society engagement in criminal investigation and prosecution across the country” (International Crisis Group, 1).

*Case of Guerrero*

In a time of violent conflict, state corruption and impunity have led to increased violence and catastrophic consequences. One of the most recent and traumatizing incidents in Mexico of lack of police accountability, institutional systemic corruption, and the governors acting as criminals while misusing their power and the police force for their personal agenda is Ayotzinapa. In Guerrero, Mexico, there is a school for training future teachers called Ayotzinapa Normal School. It “caters to the rural poor and is known for political activism” (Al Jazeera Staff, 1). Students were on their way to protest government policies, but the mayor José Luis Abarca, saw them as a political threat, and the Police following the mayor’s orders, stopped their busses on their way to protest, opened fire, and disappeared 43 students.

These were students from a very rural area of minority, mostly indigenous or mestizo. They did not rely on the international uproar when they were trying to cover up the scene of the crime. Activism, national and international pressure, and the media forced the government to admit the students were abducted by police, handed over to drug
traffickers who killed and burned their bodies (Al Jazeera Staff, 1). This was of course after Abarca and his wife had fled Guerrero.

The corrupt police forces and government officials who are supposed to protect civilians were actually the real criminals in partnership with the cartel Guerreros Unidos. The students were the victims, and all of the world was the witness to the mass violations of human rights in Mexico, inflicted by the people in power through corruption. These actions are obviously against the law, but impunity lets them act as they wish. There was an international uproar and mayor Abarca and his wife were arrested. It was later discovered that they both had close ties with the cartel Guerreros Unidos, who disappeared the bodies, and paid between 119 and 179 thousand dollars per month to Iguala’s mayor (Noticias San Diego, 1).

Close ties between organized criminal groups, police, and politicians are common. They have the same interest in mind, their personal gain through illegal and corrupted means.

In the state of Guerrero alone, public security in 13 municipalities were controlled by organized crime. This included the police leadership that was handpicked by criminal organizations in order to protect the criminal’s interests (Heinle, Molzahn, Shrink, 34). This is evident state capture, where public officials and organized crime where one and used violence and state terror at their will and for their interests. These instances of local state capture and civilian massacres have forced the federal government to publicly intervene.
CASE OF COLOMBIA

It is important to understand that the Colombian conflict originally started with a 10 year civil war known as ‘La Violencia’, where conservative and communist parties violently fought over power and land. At the end peasant farmers did not get their needs met, and the FARC was created with the purpose of redistributing land for the rights of the peasant workers. After analyzing the root causes of the war, we can apply several lessons learned and recommendations in order to not repeat the same mistakes and achieve sustainable peace.

When the basic needs of the most vulnerable populations including campesinos and minorities are not being met because of grand corruption, there is government repression and state terror, and there are no means for them to be addressed, there is a tendency to resort to violence. This is why all citizens must have their basic needs met including political participation and be given the opportunity to transform violent conflict into nonviolent conflict resolution. By resorting to politics, they can feel like their needs are being represented and addressed, so there is no need to resort to past violent means.

Transparencia por Colombia, a civil society initiative supported by the European Union measured the Indice de Transparencia de las entidades publicas (ITEP) (Index of Transparency of Public Entities). The last one was conducted in 2013 and it gives a ranking to the 32 different departments (states) in Colombia from moderate, medium, high, and very high levels of risk for corruption.
The results show that the highest alerts are at the institutional level (53.9/100). The territorial categories 3 and 4 are the ones with the highest risk of corruption. The majority of them are in the regions of Amazonia, Orinoquia and Pacifica. There are institutional and territorial asymmetries, “while the department of Antioquia has a grade of 82.4/100 points, Chocó only has 31.0/100 points. These grades reflect the extremes within the evaluation, the extremes of social inequalities, and of the quality and presence of the state in that territory” (ITD, 2013).

Below is a map of the findings created by Transparencia por Colombia:
Figure 6. Risk Levels of Corruption in Colombia

-Source: Transparencia por Colombia, Indice de Transparencia de Departamental Gobernaciones y Contralorías Resultados 2013-2014
Cases of Pichilín and Mampuján

The field research conducted in diverse communities of Sucre, Colombia in June 2016, has reflected how corruption and violence go hand in hand. All of the narratives told about violent conflict, included instances of corruption, repression, and injustices committed by the state. A feeling of great dissatisfaction of the government by rural campesinos (farmers) was also vastly present. Besides the violence they went through, the victims had other basic needs that the state had not fulfilled even before the violent conflict erupted because of grand political corruption, public funds that were supposed to be allocated towards basic services such as water, sanitation, highways, electricity, or education, were stolen and the rural impoverished areas, in the outskirts of Sucre, never saw them, emphasizing structural violence.

Instead the communities of Pichilín and Mampuján encountered state terror through violence, threats, and massacres committed by paramilitaries following orders of public officials. The same paramilitary members that committed the massacres were in most cases part of the military, simply not wearing their uniform.

The community of Pichilín includes over 200 campesinos. The massacre took place when 50 masked and armed men (paramilitaries) killing 11 people. They were targeted killings towards community leaders in order to weaken the community and force them to leave.

Mampuján is a community of mostly Afro-Colombians, located in María la Baja, Department of Bolivar. There are 338 families and in 2000 were forced to leave because
of paramilitary threats. This was after the paramilitary had massacred 15 people in Las Brisas, a neighboring community. (Sembrandopaz, 1)

They were trying to displace them in order to use their land for private gains. This is clearly state capture, when public officials collude with paramilitaries to commit acts of violence and state terror against innocent citizens in order to steal their land. This is why currently, there are a lot of land redistribution disputes under the reparations putting an end to the war. Many lands were sold, and in some instances to private industries, making the corruption more controversial.

This was able to take place because of weak institutions that did nothing to protect the rights of its citizens, but encouraged impunity and fomented corruption. “Corruption is intimately linked to violent conflict, human insecurity, and oppression” (Beyerle, 53). Therefore, a government with weak institutions, and a history of authoritarian rule and impunity, can easily fall into corrupt practices guided by self-interest. Human Rights Watch found a direct relationship between political corruption and political violence, where “state officials use stolen public revenues to pay for violence in support of their political ambitions” (Beyerle, 54). This narrative was commonly used by victims who repeatedly mentioned the relationship between politicians, the armed forces, and the paramilitary. This relationship of paramilitaries and politicians, also called parapolitics, demonstrates the violent acts taking place with complete impunity through political corruption and under state capture.

Arturo Zea, provincial director if the Victims Unit describes, the rampant tensions and vast struggles encountered within the government while trying to build peace through
victim reparations, especially considering how Colombia comes from “a very authoritarian government that criminalized poverty.” He stated that an estimated 40% of Congress was involved with the paramilitary and parapolitics. Therefore, an evolution of the state was necessary, not just of society.

When parapolitics and corruption reaches such high governing powers, it is easier to understand how the government allowed the massacres and violence, and in many times supported it for private interests. When there is corruption in the government there is a climate of impunity (Kaufmann, 2006). This lack of government accountability often leads to repression and can “motivate officials and security forces to commit abuses for financial or other forms of gain” (Ganesan, 2007).

Corrupted Narratives and the Media as a Tool for State Capture

In order to maintain state capture and enclose state terror, public officials manipulated the media. It’s of great danger when the truth is hidden and the dominant narrative is the only one heard. It is clear how through corruption, the powerful manipulated the situation, taking advantage and showing their politicized and convenient versions of the truth.

The media plays an enormous role, but when they can’t get to the area of the crimes committed because of ongoing conflict, and only depend on the reports from the military, it can be very misleading. In most cases the military was involved in the same paramilitary violence, and the truth of the victims being actual civilians was hidden from the media. The
False Positive policy was implemented between 2002 and 2008 and consisted of “army brigades across Colombia systematically executed as many as 3,000 civilians to make it appear they were killing more rebel fighters in combat” (Human Rights Watch).

This clearly demonstrates the amount of power and corruption that fed the violence and the massacres that were committed. If the international community and other sectors of society who weren’t affected directly, knew that innocent campesino civilians were being systematically targeted, the paramilitaries wouldn’t have lasted so long with complete immunity.

Factors that play into this, according to Zea, are that journalists are not paid well and make superficial news, communication directors have a clear conscious of what they want to show and hide. Many times this is depending on the state and given information which gets complicated when only the army or public forces would go into these areas and sent out the press releases themselves. There is also the practice of clientelism where the state made up of elites, pay journalists to reproduce certain articles for their own convenience. “An imperfect state and a deficient society with violence. It gets worse when things get manipulated in a very crude manner” he adds.

It is of vital importance for the administration to protect freedom of the press in such volatile times that the country is facing and when many truths are still being uncovered.

Another important factor influencing media in Colombia is intimidation through violence and threats. Journalist Javier Osuna, was a victim of targeted vandalism to his home in Bogota, where over a year worth of research on the victims of paramilitary
violence was conveniently destroyed (Freedom House). Many other journalists received threats as well and two were killed in 2014.

*Corruption within Government*

Corruption in the Colombian government is rampant. In a study conducted by Transparency International, Colombia was ranked 94th out of 175 countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index. It states that 80 percent of Colombians view their government as being corrupt.

Elections are also plagued by corruption and “state institutions are not strong enough to combat the influence of outside forces like the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers from influencing local elections” (Gillin,1). This leads to election fraud and the people in power not necessarily representing the interests of the people, but their own. Over 50 politicians are convicted and over 100 are being investigated for using the paramilitary as a way to intimidate voters in their favor (Gillin,1).

More than 11,000 politicians, businessmen, and public officials were investigated for their parapolitics and relationship with paramilitaries or United Self-Defense Forces (AUC) (Gillin,1). The paramilitary served as a tool for corrupt politicians to defend their interests, while violating the rights of the most vulnerable.

Jose Francisco Restrepo, a Colombian historian explains how there is a history of the Colombian government using military force to control the public. In order to normalize the violence and the phenomenon of the paramilitary, the government legalized it. The
presidential decree 3398 from the Law 48 of 1968 legalized the used of paramilitary justifying them as self-defense. Since president Cesar until president Uribe, they all used presidential decrees that favored Paramilitarism. Restrepo describes this as a classist and criminal act, since it was a project of the political elite and it consisted of mass human rights violations.

Elites and politicians discovered that the “paramilitary path was more efficient than the legal path” said Restrepo. Since the new constitution of 1991 guaranteed the respect of human rights, the paramilitary was doing what the military was not allowed to do because of constitutional limitations. According to Restrepo, 125 different communities were displaced by blood and bullets, approximately 30 percent of the population. Through the use of instilling terror by committing massacres in mostly rural populations with the intention of displacing them and gaining their land. In Colombia, there have been many historical struggles for land, and other interests that have and continue to play primary roles in the war.

This sort of dirty war, was committed by the paramilitary who worked in the shadows of the military, since the military were not allowed to terrorize the population that it’s supposed to be protecting. The paramilitary guaranteed political power and was classist, according to Restrepo. Out of 99 combats that he studied, only 11 percent were between the FARC and paramilitary. The real confrontation was between the civilian rural population and the paramilitaries. This shows the power that parapolitics played in the violent conflict and how it can be rooted back to corrupt politicians and elites terrorizing civilians for their own interests.
Corruption Perpetuating Structural Violence

Besides the direct violence, structural violence is eminent through Colombia and fed into the conflict and forms of direct violence. This structural violence is perpetuated in Colombia by corrupt politicians and drastic inequalities. Since many politicians were corrupt and did not have the best interest of its citizens in mind, therefore kept many of the resources allocated for the development of communities in order to give them a better quality of life and reduce such high inequalities and levels of poverty. As we saw in several communities in the Sucre area, there is still no running water, roads, sanitation, schools, or access to doctors. These vital rights and basic necessities have not been met since before the conflict erupted.

Edwin Uribe, is the United Nations regional director of UNDP for the Caribbean, Cordova, Sucre, and Bolivar. He states that Colombia is still behind in development and good political will from the actual government. UNDP targets corruption in Colombia since many resources have been lost because of this. According to Uribe this means that many bridges, highways, and schools have not been built, even though resources were given for them. Therefore “development has not only been halted by the armed conflict but by the government”, he adds. This is also one of the biggest challenges, combating corruptions, so money can be efficiently invested in communities so that they can recover their trust in the government and lead to reconciliation.
As John Lederach points out, in order to achieve reconciliation, there must be truth, justice, mercy, and peace. Truth consists of acknowledgment, transparency, revelation, and clarity. Without these, there is no place for reconciliation or for truth and mercy to meet. This means that corruption is a direct threat for truth and transparency and therefore also threatens the other three parts of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a place where people and things come together (Lederach, 29). The “acknowledgment through hearing one another’s stories validates experiences and feelings and represents the first step towards restoration of the person and the relationship” (Lederach, 26). It is vital to address reconciliation as the central component of peacebuilding (Lederach, 24). Therefore, grand corruption and state capture must be attacked at its core in order to achieve successful reconciliation and peacebuilding in Colombia. There should be a focus in the relationship within the system.

Another possible danger is that truth commissions can also be susceptible to political considerations that favor reconciliation over truth or justice (Bouvier, 8). It can be hard for truth commissions to balance truth telling and amnesty, since many of the demobilized paramilitaries receive amnesty in exchange for truth, but a sense of justice must prevail in order to achieve sustainable peace and fight impunity. There is a big problem of impunity in Colombia that feeds into grand corruption. If there is impunity, there is a motivation for corrupt practices if there are no legal consequences. This is slowly changing but still needs a lot of improvement, especially in this new delicate state.
Alfonso, an Afro Brazilian historian explains how currently Colombians have inherited the history of European slave owners who settled in Cartagena and constructed a segregated society with restrictions and strict laws where people were classified by the color of their skin. This narrative was passed on and Afrobrazilians have been discriminated against and constantly caught between competing interests and violence.

Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities “suffer disproportionate poverty, displacement, environmental degradation, ill health, illiteracy, food insecurity, and as absence of state infrastructures to promote and protect their basic human rights” (Bouvier, 9).

Zea, explains how Colombia is transitioning from a time of war, extermination, and authoritarian rule, to a new era of rebuilding both state and society. He stressed that it hasn’t been easy and many don’t want the agrarian reform or land restitution that are needed. Social movements have also transformed and are not as belligerent but are building more civilized relationships, trying to transmit differences peacefully. He also stresses the importance of academia, including foreigners, learning about these processes.

As Lederach argues, reconciliation must also be addressed in order to achieve peace. Corruption is a direct threat to reconciliation and therefore peacebuilding and positive peace.

Community members from the high mountains stressed how the Colombian government wants the communities to help build peace, but at the same time community
leaders speaking about peace are victims of persecution, become false positives, and are threatened through state terror. This is very troubling since if it is true, the parapolitics are still undermining peace efforts and corruption keeps putting peace at stake. The complexity of the conflict includes several narratives and interests. Some a lot more powerful and loud than others.

Recommendations for Colombia

On November 24th, 2016 the Colombian government signed the Final Agreement with the FARC putting an end to the 52 year conflict which took over 220,000 lives and displaced more than five million civilians (CNMH). There is a lot to be learned from previous anti-corruption policies or lack thereof that have impacted attempts for peace in Colombia and other country’s peace accords including Guatemala that can be applied to the current situation for fighting corruption and attaining sustainable peace.

Addressing the Root Causes for a More Equitable Society

Policies and tax reforms that target a more equitable and fair society where power is not in the hands of a few is of vital importance for the future of Colombia. Colombia has high levels of inequality and repression, benefiting a small elite, politicians, and multinational companies. According to the World Bank, 80 percent of rural Colombians live in poverty and 42 percent live in extreme poverty.

Besides tax reforms, public education should receive adequate funds. There have been many documented cases of politicians stealing funds allocated towards fulfilling the basic needs of rural communities such as education, basic infrastructure, healthcare, and
food for children. These acts should be targeted through more transparency and punished harshly. This way rural communities will have their basic needs met by the government instead of insurgencies and resorting to violence as an alternative.

*Political Openness and a Pathway for the FARC Political Party*

Colombia has many lessons learned from past failed attempts for peace. A vital one is the importance of political involvement and participation after the accord. The government of President Belisario Betancur and the FARC signed a peace agreement, that supposedly broke the cycle of violence and would achieve change through electoral means with the creation of the political party Union Patriotica (UP) that represented the interests of the FARC and peasants. The agreements included political reforms and a commitment from the state to “defend the political rights of those who put their faith in this new, legal political vehicle for change” (Granados, 1).

Tragically, the state failed to protect the UP and was actually involved in their targeting them. The UP stood for land reform, reduction of inequality, and social investment. It essentially threatened the status quo, the elite, and current politics. It was known as a political genocide, since elected representatives and party leaders were brutally assassinated.

Needless to say, the country went back to war and the peace did not endure since the state itself undermined it. If the same thing were to happen today, the results would be atrocious. This is why it is of vital importance to protect the demobilized former combatants and give them adequate political representation and opportunities.
Colombia can learn a lot from its past. The government needs to respect the accord and not undermine it through corrupt practices and violence like it did previously. They need to support the new political party, and give the FARC adequate representation so they can address their needs that they’ve been fighting for. This is the only way that violent conflict can be transformed to nonviolent means.

*The Creation of an Independent Truth Commission*

The administration should give power to an independent Truth Commission that can address and find the truth behind all the corrupt policies that led to so much violence and trace all the people involved. The issue of politicians being tied with paramilitaries is a very delicate one, and a lot of the truth still hasn’t been brought to light. A truth commission still hasn’t been established and therefore journalists have encountered a lot of pressure and intimidation, since they can easily publish truths that incriminate a lot of prominent politicians by linking them to paramilitaries who terrorized civilians through targeted violence. This important task should not be left to journalists. This is why an independent Truth Commission is a priority for the post-conflict period and for fighting impunity and the many corrupt politicians.

*The Creation of an International Commission Against Impunity*

Following the success of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), the Colombian administration with the support of the United Nations, should adopt a similar commission against impunity in Colombia. This will build strong and independent judicial institutions in order to have a truly democratic state of law. As
Iván Velásquez, a Colombian born prosecutor antagonized and trailed both drug cartels and politicians, notes that one of the largest problems in Latin America is that “the political connections, the economic relationships of those who run judicial bodies, they keep investigations from going very far” (Winter, 2016). This is a crucial point that must be addressed in order to fight corruption.

**Fighting Impunity by Building Strong Institutions**

With the support of the UN and the established International Commission Against Impunity, Colombia should focus on strengthening its institutions. The implementation of the rule of law is a widespread problem. By having strong and transparent institutions that can’t be as easily corrupted, impunity can finally be addressed. Impunity is a large contributor to the rampant corruption in Colombia and should therefore be tackled immediately. In order to properly practice criminal law, accountability of the defendants is a crucial aspect and serves as a deterrent for future crimes as well.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Colombia and Mexico have both encountered a hard period of violent war. Fighting grand corruption is essential for building sustainable peace. It is very important for the administration of President Santos and of President Peña Nieto to fight the root of the conflict that lead to state terror, war, and violence, through reforms and policies that will build a more equitable and just society. The adequate resources should also be given to
public education to address this rampant issue of structural violence, including inequality and poverty of minorities. With support of the UN, an International Commission Against Impunity should be created, following the success story of Guatemala. This will also aid in fighting impunity by building strong institutions and holding corrupt officials accountable, especially when it comes to state terror. The creation of a national Independent Truth Commission will also fight impunity and bring justice to the millions of victims who suffered from state violence.

With political openness, a pathway should be built and respected for alternate political parties (in the case of Colombia this includes the FARC political party that already has so much support and has previously been oppressed). In order to fight oppression and the government accountable, civil society should have the freedom to speak up, be involved in the process, and demonstrate how state terror towards anyone is unacceptable. This is where freedom of speech and freedom of the media (that has continuously been intimidated in both countries) comes to an important role, and should be protected by the current administrations.

The seed of corruption lies entrenched in Mexican and Colombian institutions leading to complete or partial state capture depending on the area, and to many instances of state terror. The controversial War on Drugs has been backed by the U.S under Plan Merida in Mexico and Plan Colombia in Mexico. They both fueled millions of U.S dollars to a militarized approach of fighting violence with more violence. The increasing death toll has proven it ineffective. Fighting violence solely through a militarized approach without addressing the root causes, strengthening institutions, and fighting grand corruption and impunity, will continue leading to failure.
Fighting state capture should be the first priority, taking into consideration recent authoritarian tendencies in both nations, and the need to monitor through a free media, increased transparency, and a national independent truth commission. For long term peace, structural violence leading to inequality should be strongly addressed with a strong support for popular education and building a stronger civil society that will hold grand corruption and state terror accountable. This is only possible if the adequate mechanisms exist in a working and equitable judicial system and strong institutions.

A way of addressing grand corruption must involve strengthening institutions, since weak institutions and corruption influence each other directly. The weaker the state institutions are, the higher the levels of grand corruption are, and vice versa.

Impunity is directly caused by institutional weakness. Therefore the higher the institutional weakness in a state is, the higher impunity levels are, which serves as an incentive for corruption, leading again to an increase in state terror, as evidenced in the 4 case studies of Guerrero, Veracruz, Pichilín, and Mampuján.

The strong causal link between grand corruption in Mexico and Colombia and violence inflicted by the state, means that addressing corruption, specifically grand corruption, will also address state terror. Although an initial surge in corruption might likely seem apparent (and possible in violence as well), as Johnston explains, it is only an indicator of cracking the old system, but with continuous support, addressing grand corruption will also address state capture, and state terror.
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