

No panaceas for Mexico's violent drug war, but prohibition has failed

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While Mexico and the United States have ramped up their efforts to control and perhaps defeat Mexico's increasingly violent drug cartels, the outcome of these efforts remains in doubt and no panaceas are in sight, but prohibition has once again proved to be a failure, according to a paper from Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy.

The paper by Rice [sociologist](#) William Martin, "Cartels, Corruption and Carnage in the Calderón Era," traces the origins and growth of Mexican drug cartels and the corruption, failed [government policies](#) and gruesome violence that accompanied their rise. Martin is the Baker Institute's Harry and Hazel Chavanne Senior Fellow in Religion and Public Policy.

"An observer with deep ties and [personal experience](#) in both the United States and Mexico compared the conflict among the cartels and between the cartels and the government to a sporting event," Martin said.

"Spectators in both the government and the public may keep score as individual contests are won or lost and as teams move up or down in the standings, but regardless of the treasure expended and the damage done, drugs will still be desired, provided and sold. And as long as societies and their governments treat [drug use](#) as a crime rather than as a matter of public health, the deadly game will continue, season after season."

Martin's analysis places a special focus on efforts and developments during former Mexican President Felipe Calderón's term from December 2006 to November 2012. Despite Calderón's drawing on the force of the Mexican military, his war on the cartels appeared to have

exacerbated the violence, Martin said.

To reverse course, Martin recommends that the [Mexican government](#) work to shift from a [mindset](#) of war to one of crime fighting and to reduce the role of the military while strengthening that of the police. "It must continue to build and reinforce professional civil service, law enforcement and judicial systems, from local to federal levels, with effective measures to prevent, identify, check, prosecute and punish corruption and violation of the rights of citizens," he said. "This will involve improvement in pay, higher educational requirements, vigilant screening and continuing reinforcement of appropriate values and attitudes. Obviously, this is a mammoth and daunting task. The United States can offer assistance, but most of this work will have to be done by Mexicans."

In addition, Martin said both countries must work to improve educational and employment opportunities so that young people in particular do not turn to drugs and crime because they have abandoned hope of achieving a meaningful life by legal means.

"Finally, both countries, in dialogue with other nations in the hemisphere, in Europe and elsewhere, should examine the drug policies and programs of other countries to consider viable alternatives to a policy of strict [prohibition](#)," he said. "A growing number of countries have adopted such policies, either officially or de facto. Usage rates have generally remained stable, without an increase in problems popularly associated with the drugs in question. Equally notable, the quite high usage rates in the [United States](#) persist despite some of the harshest penalties in the world. Looking with an open mind at alternative systems should help dispel the fear that any change to current policies will lead to catastrophe."

More information: "Cartels, Corruption and Carnage in the Calderón

Era" paper: www.bakerinstitute.org/publications/b-PolicyReport55.pdf

William Martin bio: bakerinstitute.org/personnel/faculty-ows-scholars/wmartin

Provided by Rice University

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