

Weapon trafficking when will it end politics essay



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The news that people hear coming from Mexico, especially in recent times have not been very positive. The continuing violence along the U. S.-Mexico border has escalated even more dramatically within the past few years, mainly because of the Mexican government's constant efforts to cut off Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTO). The violence associated with Mexican DTOs continues to hurl major challenges and obstacles towards U. S. law enforcement, while at the same time threatening the citizens on both sides of the border. Drug trafficking may be the root to these problems, but the firearms used to perpetrate crimes in Mexico are being illegally trafficked from the U. S. across the southwest Border and is causing serious problems as well. There needs to be a complete removal, or at the least a reduction of the illegal arms passing through the border, but this can only occur through an improved sense of security and supervision and regulation of the arms market. Not only will the failure to bring improvement to this situation raise the level of violence and deaths along the U. S.-Mexico border, but will further diminish what the border was made to stand for, in promoting free trade and globalization.

To start off, Mexico itself has very strict gun laws, especially the gun-ownership regulations. Very rarely will you witness citizens carrying guns with them or around the house, because of the serious issues that revolve around the possession of these weapons. Since the country's already existing constitution makes it legal for the citizens to bear arms, the conditions it places on the actual ownership, through amendments to the constitution prove to be much more strict and limiting. The fact that only one body is permitted to sell weapons, and it is run by the army makes it even

harder to attain or own these weapons (Ellingwood). Although these rules and regulations are given to the citizens of this country, it does not mean that the weapon-smuggling situation is completely under control and taken care of; as you will learn later on, there are definitely a few ways around any law or institutional arrangement, and the involving parties definitely know how to make the most of the ways around the system by utilizing many types of illegal trade.

Yet the violence in the northern border states of Mexico seems to be produced not only by weapons being brought illegally from Mexico, but also by those weapons trafficked illegally from the United States. Since these dangerous firearms are still not legally available for sale in Mexico, it leaves it up to the various drug cartels to smuggle them through the U. S. or Guatemalan borders, or even by sea as a last resort (Money, Guns). A good number of these firearms are brought in by foreign countries by cartel members that participate in these illegal trades and theft and then they are smuggled to Mexico a few at a time. Now in a neighboring country, such as our very own, where most people who own guns have the right to bear arms and are protected by the rights, a small number of gun shows are put together and showcased nearly every weekend of the year. States like Texas, Arizona and California are considered to be the three main source states and hotspots that supply for the vast majority of the guns that are bought and snuck into Mexico (Gunrunner).

To be able to absolutely prevent these guns from making their way south is a pretty tough battle that challenges the power of the second amendment rights of US citizens against the ever so bloody battles and increasing

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numbers of Mexican victims of these mini wars that are killed everyday by these brutal weapons that are bought here in the US (Gun Control). As far as the locations where these guns are purchased from, the Gun shows that are put on by the source states take place a couple of times a year, as mentioned earlier. For example, in Arizona, the gun shows occur almost every weekend. They are often times organized by a variety of different groups and unified organizations. One of the well known organizations goes by the name of the Arizona Arms Association, and since they are a group that is most importantly legal and allowed, they are given the power to partake in private transactions between gun owners and citizens. In being able to utilize such a network of these “ strawmen”, the native Mexican arms traffickers have the potential to collect over a dozen of different weapons each weekend (Cartel). After they gather these weapons each week, their next move is to smuggle them into Mexico, which is usually executed using over land routes with a wide range of vehicles and means of transportation that are able to hold a quantity of weapons that are much smaller across the various border crossings.

This type of smuggling, in which smaller groupings of guns are smuggled across the border, is known to be called “ ant trafficking,” and continues to serve as one of the biggest reasons why it is so hard to actually detect these weapons that are being pushed down south from the U. S. region of the border. Now focusing back on the gun show, in the positions of the vendor, some private vendors are often entered into the world of the gun trade by taking on the role of a supplier, where he/she takes the orders ahead of time and to make deliveries at a later time, which would most likely take place at

an upcoming gun show or event (Gun Control). These people then round up the “repeat” clients and gradually produce the majority of the supply source for the arms traffickers which have been reported by Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives also known as the (PAYAN). Once again, as mentioned earlier the main issue with this is that these transactions are not always closely and precisely monitored, and so more times than not it puts the salesperson in a position where he/she is able to recognize interested buyers who are likely to be purchasing weapons for a third party.

These so-called strawmen who serve as salesmen are the main suppliers and catalysts of these illicit and dangerous weapons that flow southbound, which they sell off to or illegally hand to gun traffickers who then round up and separate into groups and categories of the shipments at certain border crossings. Once they reach their destination in Mexico, the weapons smugglers are ready to make thousands and thousands on their merchandise (Gun Control). For example, an already used AK-47 assault rifle may sell for around 400 U. S. dollars and possibly more. In addition, an AR-15 rifle also has the potential to sell for 800 U. S. dollars up to 2, 000 U. S. dollars, but that depends mostly on the model number of years it has been in production for that specific weapon as well as other options and accessories such as the scope or trigger. In Mexico, these weapons start to become more valuable and rocket in re-sell price, and in some rare cases as much as a whopping triple or more, according to the ATF (Gun Control). So an AK-47 rifle that has been purchased in Arizona for about 500 U. S. dollars might go for as much as 1, 500 U. S. dollars or more once it crosses the border (Gun Control). At border crossings, Mexican customs agents are usually in the

perfect position to interrogate and have the right to detect all smuggled weapons, but their can be a gut-wrenching one at times.

Many times, these agents are given a pretty harsh ultimatum which goes by the name of Plata o plomo, meaning “ silver or lead” which then translates into “ take the bribe or take a bullet.” This message, is often times sent by Mexican organized crime groups and targeted to those who patrol the Mexican side of border crossings, known as “ plazas” (Cartel). So here is another factor in why it may be difficult at times to put a halt to the weapon trafficking. Since these Mexican cartels are so menacing and uncooperative, the custom agents who are given the task to detect weapons, are presented with life and death decisions. Certain happenings like these just add on to the fact that it will be difficult to put an end to this war. These kinds of encounters are vital in understanding the rise of violence along the borders, because agents should not be in a position to be fearing of their lives.

In the US, the second amendment advocates and supports the gun shows that many people consider an excuse to make weapon smuggling allowed and operating. While the political views surrounding tracing and information sharing can be a bit complicated, the procedure of buying the guns and the required background checks has been reorganize and restructured. These background checks are not required at gun shows because the sales are oftentimes considered to be made between two private and unlicensed individuals instead of a licensed dealer and an individual, which usually takes place in legitimate gun stores where a background check is indeed mandatory. Even the background checks that are made in gun stores are simple and quick (Gunrunner). For example, when a customer at a store is <https://assignbuster.com/weapon-trafficking-when-will-it-end-politics-essay/>

ready to make his/her purchase, the seller of the product is supposed to make a phone call to an ATF hotline, where the person gives out the proper information to the person talking on the other end of the hotline. Usually, this process should take less than five or ten minutes, but within the past couple of years, this background check has transformed into a slow and grueling process (Gunrunner).

As for the strawmen, who buy off the weapons from law abiding gun merchants serve as a stepping stone into the crooked world of the “grey market”, where the weapons stay put until they are smuggled into Mexico and then resold. Before these guns are let into the hands of others, usually for criminal use, expert gunsmiths thoroughly check and inspect the working parts, and clean them for the necessary adjustments to transform a usual semi-automatic into a dangerous fully automatic assault weapons. They tweak parts of the gun and make them stronger. Once the strawman flees the scene of the store with gun in their hand, or leaves the show area in the case of a gun show or event, it becomes pretty much impossible to trace the weapon until it is picked up or discovered at a crime scene or if it has been seized. Often times, the weapons that have been captured in Mexico are able to be traced back to gun stores in the US, but the only pieces of information the gun dealer is allowed to legally share with is the information that has already been attained and solidified by the background check. As you can see, the tracing of the weapons captured in Mexico back to the US is proves to be a very complicated and frustrating matter. Due to this complicated process, a large number of weapons usually remain untraced due to the fact

that the agents do not want to harass or bother with the bureaucracy (Cartel).

In the U. S., there are approximately 2 million guns owned currently, and at any given time, any one of these guns has the potential to be sold to both men and women who will then smuggle them to Mexico. Reasons can range from personal use and self-defense while others for recreational or criminal use. When put together, the mixture of such a enormous supply with demand mixed in with the ant-trafficking produces a countless number of opportunities and possibilities, variables and pretty much leaves the ATF and others with only a limited arsenal of legal tools and, most importantly, gives them the constitutional rights to respect and defend (Gunrunner). As you can see, the conflict here resides in the fact that there are so many possible ways for these weapons to be smuggled, and with all the underground activity that is going on, it can be a very difficult task for the ATF to track down these trades at times. In a sense, the amount of illegal trafficking that is being presented here can also be overwhelming to the forces that are trying to prevent the illicit trafficking of these weapons.

As far as the types of guns that are smuggled, the most popular, or common smuggled firearms include the AR-15 and AK-47 type rifles, FN 5. 7 caliber semi-automatic pistols and a variety of . 50 caliber rifles and machine guns (AK-47). About a fourth of these AK-47 assault rifles that have been seized have also been created and fixed up to “ select fire” weapons, which then allows for the assault rifles to be used by the cartels (AK-47). In the past, there have been a great number of reports regarding grenade launchers being used against security forces, and at least a dozen M4 Carbines with <https://assignbuster.com/weapon-trafficking-when-will-it-end-politics-essay/>

M203 grenade launchers have been confiscated (AK-47). It was believed that a lot of these lethal and high power weapons alongside their related accessories were actually stolen from U. S. military bases. However, the majority of these military grade guns and heavy duty weapons like grenades and light weight rockets are brought in by the cartels via the humongous supply of arms that remained after the wars in Central America and Asia. The weapons that are being smuggled are serious weapons that can cause heavy damage and harm, so just the fact that the weapons talked about in this arms trafficking war are heavy duty once again reminds us of how dangerous this situation can get.

This constant flow of arms between groups has lead to what has been dubbed the “ iron river” of guns, because of the pouring amount of ammunition and light weapons that have been in flow southbound into Mexico, and how the organized crime hit men and others then use them in order to fight off the Mexican military and police. More times than not, innocent civilians are caught in the midst of shoot outs and random collision between the opposite groups and that is what leads to the rising number of deaths and high volume of violence throughout the years. The resulting body count that is the end product of this violence has greatly pressured the Mexican government over time to call for additional help from the U. S. capital, but these leaders have continued to remain silent and stubborn to put forth a strict gun control legislation. Many have waited and waited for someone to step up to the plate and address the problems along the border, but the subject has been ignored time and time again.

Finally, in April of last year, a statement was made by U. S. President Barack Obama regarding the ongoing arms trafficking situation between the U. S. and Mexico, and to no surprise it sparked a serious and very much heated debate. The President, who referred to the data gathered from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (A. T. F.), stated that 90% of the weapons that were seized in Mexico could be traced back to the U. S. (ATF) In concurrence with supporters of putting forth a stricter gun regulation and opponents of the so-called War on Drugs, this information helped their cause and pushed to strengthen their cases. On the other side of the table, the statistic of 90% was greatly criticized and put down by the people who were against the finding of new or alternative solutions to the current situation in Mexico and also to any thoughts or ideas of making some changes regarding gun ownership in the U. S.

Out of all the top news corporations, Fox News projected that the percentage of arms that could be traced back to the U. S. was actually closer to 17% percent (Gunrunner). This is a prime example of how things can get taken out of context and a serious issue at hand can be mistaken or overlooked because of little details that are misrepresented or reported. Not only does this add more unnecessary nonsense to a situation and blow it up bigger than what it already is, but it makes the already existing problem a dragging subject. In order to give the material substance and to enhance its rich meaning, all data must be presented in its original context; otherwise, statistics risk becoming meaningless sound bites and generalizations.

In the Firearms Trafficking Report, given by the American Government Accountability Office (GAO), they explain the importance that even though it <https://assignbuster.com/weapon-trafficking-when-will-it-end-politics-essay/>

is pretty much impossible to know the exact number of firearms that are illegally smuggled into Mexico in a certain year, roughly 87% of the firearms that are obtained by the Mexican authorities and “traced” within the past couple of years originally started off in the U. S., according to the data that was gathered from Dept. of Justice’s Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Also, according to the Mexican and U. S. officials, these firearms have been increasingly more powerful and lethal in recent years. The report continues to polish and purify its data and information, by pointing out that between 2005 and 2008, more than 90% of the firearms that were obtained in Mexico and traced have once again, come from the United States (Gunrunner). When put together, there are a couple of elements that make the overall presentation of this data more convincing than just some random statistics put together because there was limited time frame, there was a specific set of weapons seized and traced, which applies to all illegal trade, and that the truth of the matter of the arms trade was imprecise.

With all that being said, besides all the conditions and uncertainties that the percentages hold in these reports, there is no denying that there is a considerable amount of movement of weapons from the U. S. to Mexico that, to the dismay of many people, find their way into the hands of the people that are involved in this problematic drug trade. The G. A. O. report makes note of the fact that this trafficking is certainly not new to officials on the border, explaining that the U. S. and Mexican government and law enforcement officials did not see any reason why the drug cartels would go through so much hassle and endure the difficult task of obtaining a gun

somewhere else in the world and then transporting it to Mexico when it is so easy and so simple for them to do so from the U. S. (Ellington). This proves to be in unison with the report's statement that even though the eTrace data only corresponds to data from the gun trace requests that were turned in from confiscation in Mexico and not all the guns seized, it is currently the only methodical and precise data available. Furthermore, the conclusions that the majority of firearms seized and traced were originally in the United States were consistent with the final conclusions reached by U. S. and Mexican government and law enforcement officials personally involved in the prevention and reducing of arms trafficking to Mexico (Cartel).

The G. A. O.'s data proves to be pretty clear and straight forward in its presentation. Although, the 90% figure that is being brought up constantly in these reports is just an extra number that creates a shock factor to an already stirring issue. Still, while discussions continue as to the appropriate use of this number, the reality is still readily apparent: there is an important and undeniable illegal market of weapons at the U. S.-Mexico border that fuels the violence between different drug-trafficking organizations. In Lorey's book *The U. S.-Mexican Border into the twenty-First century*, he argues that the " long-term objective of thinking and policymaking should be to overcome the U. S.-Mexican border" (Lorey 12). When he says this, it could mean resolving material inequalities between the two sides of the boundary and more importantly, reducing conflict between the nations. Weapon trafficking is a serious issue that has been lingering for many years, and in order to cooperate with Lorey's arguments, the weapons that are " short" in Mexico need to be dealt with in a different manner. Also, the violent conflicts

between the government and drug cartels need to be put to rest. The task at hand may be difficult and long, but there are blueprints to solutions that can be implemented.

The main obstacle and challenge that lies ahead in the fight against trafficking, and also where the conversation should be the focus of, is to address the different flaws in the system that ultimately makes way for such arms-trafficking to happen. The G. A. O. report makes note of certain factors that make trafficking possible, including faults and weaknesses found in both the Mexican and U. S. dealings, as well as the system of government:

Uncontrolled and universal corruption in the Mexican government; Fragile and weak institutional links and information sharing between A. T. F. and U. S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that lead to incomplete data; The absence of a Spanish language version of the eTrace program to be utilized by the Mexican authorities. Focusing in on these issues will help improve the quality of information being received by both U. S. and Mexican authorities, which can also lead to a much more informed and knowledgeable anti-arms trafficking strategy. This does not mean that there must be a complete stop in the ongoing actions and efforts to reduce the weapons trafficking, but that the information gathering and collection and sharing between the countries and institutions must get better.

There is hope in finding solutions to these weaknesses in the system. In efforts to help improve information collection and sharing, the ATF is hopeful that future funding and increased cash flow will eventually allow for these manuals (eTrace program) to be translated into Spanish, and also to put in a greater number agents on the border alongside an expansion of real-time

intelligence sharing between the ATF and the many agents in Mexico. But besides the obviously simple and easy task at hand of translating English to Spanish, the new plans of the Merida Initiative, which is the name of the new proposal brought forth, guarantees to give the Mexican authorities scanners. These scanners, which will be planted at or near the main border crossings, will then be set up completely in order to detect and locate the drugs in traffic moving north and guns in traffic moving south (Mex). There are little things that can change that can help lead to the ultimate goal of reducing the smuggling of these weapons into Mexico, and it is reassuring to hear that after so many years, things are starting to progress and advance in putting an end to a situation that has caused so many problems for so many years.

But it is also very important for us not to lose sight of some of the larger issues at hand surrounding arms trafficking at the U. S.-Mexico border. We must keep in mind that in both countries, even with the few restrictions, the weapons markets are legal. And as it applies to all kinds of markets, it is in the interest of those that are involved in the business to keep it alive and running. Being a weapon dealer, especially in the U. S. it is a very vital role they play in the market. For example, according to a 2006 report, the Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, also known as the CATDN put together and produced by the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service (C. R. S.), which is an office of the Library of Congress, the United States was by far the leading supplier of weapons to the developing world (ATF). Furthermore, in a report that came out in more recent times, the C. R. S. reported that for a 3 year span for the 2005-2008 timeframe, the United States and Russia stood tall and completely took charge of the arms

market in the developing world in the value of arms transfer agreements. These statistics may seem honor worthy and impressive, but when considering the relationship between the U. S. and Mexico, the statistics seem to diminish in value and glory as the weapons that are being brought to Mexico from the U. S. is doing more harm than it is doing good.

These reports have also made it clear that is it the eighth consecutive year in a row that the United States has been a leader and top force in worldwide arms deliveries (Gunrunner). And even though the report does not really break down the information for the Latin American region, the report also makes clear note that the U. S. and Russia are the region's two biggest suppliers of these weapons. Even though the U. S. is the world leader in weapons agreements according to these reports, there are indeed other countries that also sell and re-sell weapons. While the data from the reports seems to confirm that the vast majority of these weapons are found and captured in Mexico make their expedition into the country over the U. S. border, it is also most likely that many of these weapons travel through different routes as well. A good number of the arms seized could have also arrived in Mexico through legal transactions that occur time to time between governments but somehow have found their way into the illegal market coincidentally and ultimately into the hands of these drug cartel members. The data from reports may explain general facts and information, but sometimes things can happen without any documentation, and that is where the information gathering and collecting, and addressing of these actions needs to shape up.

In conclusion, the ongoing discussion and debate on the U. S.-Mexico border and also on the future of the relationship between these two countries is not an easy one to put to rest or come up with a solution. There are so many important subject matters that are also in need of attention: immigrant migration (legal and illegal), the drug policy, border communications, homeland security, and a mutual environment, just to name a couple. It is clear that, although the tiniest details have the ability to offer a foretaste into the bigger picture, to rely and base the conversation purely on the “immediate,” just like the debate over Obama’s use of the 90% statistic, is to completely lose focus of the much greater and more significant debate that holds the future of a complex and vibrant relationship. The reality of all this is that an illegal arms market is one discussion that fits that description and will be a hot issue for many more years to come until the problem is fixed permanently. In this circumstance, it is clear that the number of illegal weapons passing through the border every year must be significantly and immediately reduced, and this can only happen through tighter supervision and adjustment of the arms market.