

# Social constructivism theory and us mexican relationship politics essay



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Social constructivism relies on the idea that international relations (IR) are rooted not on the material aspect of things-military sources and economic capability of things-but rather, on the social matters. In the vantage point of the social constructivism theory, the US intervention on the drug trafficking prohibition in Mexico transpires because the states involved “ identify with each other and feel the obligation and legitimacy to help others.”[1]In the view of the social constructivism theory, the US partly decided to help combat drug trafficking in Mexico in a hands-on approach because of their social obligation to the country. The decisions and policies made by a state, in his case the US, rely heavily according to Wendt, to their accordance with the collective and social identities formed by their relationship.[2]But of course, it is more than that reason alone.

It has been mentioned in the first parts of this thesis that the level of violence in Mexico has risen since the year 2000 because of the new strategy developed by the Mexican government in combating drug traffickers: to end the relationship between the drugs cartels and politicians. But what has been the role of the US government into this worsened state of violence in Mexico? The US and Mexico has formed a group, along with Canada, to enforce the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which opened the way for the three countries to participate in a free trade of commercial goods. Because of the NAFTA Agreement, cartels made the free trade a venue for drug trafficking, as they took advantage of the less strict security on the US borders because of the free trade. Through this recently formed economic relationship, and because of the repercussions of the cartels illegal business that became dominant because of the free trade, the

US has had opportunities to meddle with the policies of Mexico regarding drug control. Based on the concept of social constructivism, the US' behavior on intervening with the Mexico's domestic political policies relies on the idea that it is their social obligation as the more powerful country to contribute to the worsening situation of drug trafficking in Mexico.

In reality, it is mostly because of the costs of drug trafficking to the US, which has been found to be estimated at around \$70 billion per year[3] that the US imposes such strict control over drug trafficking from Mexico to the US. This can be explained further in the social constructivist theory by taking note that social structures have three elements, which are shared knowledge, material resources, and practices, that constitute the actors and the situations in which they are in, whether cooperative or conflictual.[4] The shared knowledge in this situation is the fact that drug trafficking exists and has caused problems, not to mention disputes, between the two states. The material resources in this case are the costs that drug trafficking from Mexico has made such an impact to the US. Lastly, the practices involved in this situation are the security policies that the two states have been imposing to combat the problem. The three elements of the social structure between the international relationship Mexico and US has then constituted a conflictual form of relationship, and has aggravated the state of violence in Mexico.

#### The Difference in Security Perceptions in a Social Constructivist Approach

In the social constructivist theory, the physical entities involved between the two countries, such as geography and economic trade, construct the

relationship between them but do not encompass the impacts they have on each other, as it is the ideas and beliefs that has more significance in their bilateral system.[5]To this facet of social constructivism comes the ideation of the differences of security perception of Mexico and the US.

Mexico has only been interested in their national security, in which the state describes as “ the set or norms, strategies and general measures as well specific ones that contribute to the preservation of its national sovereignty, involving the territorial integrity, maritime and national airspace; its political auto determination and the promotion of the cultural heritage, values and principles that distinguish Mexico from any other country”[6]. Security, or protection only encompasses what is inside the state, therefore, in the situation of drug trafficking, once the drugs have escaped its territories and have gone to the US commercial market, the Mexican government cease to consider it as a national security issue anymore. On the other hand, the US’ concept of national security is not limited to just what it inside its geographical boundaries, instead, it goes beyond. The concept of national security of the US does not equate with their concept of national defense of its territory, as it also encompasses everything that would make it maintain its economic, political and military power.

On the vantage point of social constructivists like Wendt, security is not a fixed objective, but a result of social constructs.[7]The concept of security in this case consists of the three facets of social structure. Security is a shared knowledge, although both states have different perspectives on it. It also comprises of material resources, because of the means to impose them such as military forces. Lastly, the concept of security is a practice when applied

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through the security policies. In Mexico's case, the concept of stricter security on drug trafficking arised from the social construct with its relationship with the US. Policies regarding drug trafficking, though they have been present even before the intervention of the US, are not fixed objectives in Mexico as they are only there as a result of the existence of drug dealings within and outside the country. In the case of the US, the decision to impose strict policies that intervene with Mexico's policies regarding drug dealings are also just results, however negatively, of the social interaction between the two countries.

### Drug Trafficking as a Threat

According to the social constructivist theory, the issue of drug trafficking has only been a threat because one of the actors has presented it as such. If viewed from that light, then the blame would be on the US because it was the actor which aggravated the issue of drug trafficking, resulting in extreme acts of violence inside Mexico. As said in a first few chapters, the security measures imposed by Mexico are only limited domestically, and Mexico did not previously need national security policies to be enacted because of the previous ways that the government handle the case of cartels. Mexico impeded the existence of extreme violence during the past decades by giving in to the system of the cartel leaders. Mexico's behavior in protecting only what is domestically inside their geographical boundaries somewhat stems from the fact that their sovereignty has not been compromised in history. Though the behavior of their leaders to concede to cartels regarding their system of drug dealing may be inferred as protection to their citizens from the thoughts of immense violence that could be caused by the war on <https://assignbuster.com/social-constructivism-theory-and-us-mexican-relationship-politics-essay/>

cartel leaders, if viewed from the social constructivist approach, the Mexican leader's previous lack of initiative to combat drug trafficking and drug dealing through the construction of a national security policy stems from their perspective that drug trafficking is not a threat to the government and its citizens. But ever since the US had the opportunity to intervene with Mexico's political policies because of the legislation of NAFTA in 1994, the state of violence in Mexico became more intense as the US resisted on having the Mexican government concede to the system of the cartels.

The behavior of the US government regarding their security measures, on the other hand, if viewed from the theory of social constructivism, is a social product that resulted from the various accounts of terrorism that have transpired in the country. As a result of threats to its national security, the US has been distrustful of the countries around it, and has been meticulous in planning policy measures in order to protect its interests.

Even the existence of the issue of drug use and drug trafficking, if seen in the social constructivist approach, are not more than social products.

[8]Therefore, it can be inferred that the violence resulting in the combating of drug use and drug trafficking is a result of the social interaction that has been transpiring between the two countries. Because Mexico and the US has completely different perspectives on security, the negative discourse between the two regarding their policies only make the matters worse, resulting in a higher level of violence.

Structural Change

Both efforts and strategies from the Mexican government and the US government on drug control has proved ineffective. Since there is a discrepancy on the strategies used by each country, there is absence of communication regarding the unitized way of combating drug dealers. Although there have been efforts, the existing policies only make matters worse. The strategies done on both sides has only increased the rage from the cartels to prove their competence, resulting in bigger number of lost lives. This discrepancy results from the distrustful relationship that occurs between the two countries, no matter how geographically close are they to each other. In the social constructivist approach, this security discrepancy between Mexico and US is a social structure that consisted of their intersubjective understandings in which both states are distrustful of each other that they question each other's objectives and assume that their interests would be compromised.[9]

As it has been shown in this document, drug trafficking continues to flourish with better equipped organizations that are flexible and able to face any law enforcement effort. It is more than clear that a new approach of North American, meaning of the US and Mexico, revolving around security is needed, one that could really make the population feel safe. The legitimization of travelers getting into the US and common databases shared with the Mexican government, would make the tracking of criminals easier and thus build further integration among those countries. The level of interdependence between Mexico and the US requires a new regime of security as the current one has demonstrated to be so weak, too unilateral and enforcement-based, mainly by the US.

Why has not the strategies used by both Mexican and American governments made a difference regarding the combat of drug trafficking? For one, they have not internalized the conception of how drug trafficking affects their citizens. Authorities just cut some branches of the tree, a tree that eventually grows up again, instead of taking out the roots[10], meaning they do not work on the basis of the drug trafficking problem, they just make them angry and raise their desire of power over the government. Combating the big organizations heightens their competency, lowering the prices of drugs and therefore increasing the desire for dominance of a territory, bringing violence in the desperate act of keeping the high profits of the illicit activity. A better way would be first to eliminate the small drug dealers and then continue on with the bigger ones, because if the small enterprises disappear and the largest organized groups survive, a monopoly would be created. This could be the optimum situation because markets of the illicit merchandises would become inefficient when a monopoly exists, since then the production would slow down and the prices would increase, making impossible for others to get into that business, thus eliminating the possibility in a rise of violence.

According to Social Constructivism, “ structural change occurs when the relative expected utility of normative vs. deviant behavior changes... when actors redefine who they are and what internalizing a culture involves the formation of a collective identity...”[11]What does this mean to the US and Mexican governments? For one, there should be constant communication between the two countries regarding the construction of a joint policy regarding the combat of drug trafficking. It will not work if the two countries



just implement their respective policies without consultation and assistance from each other because more often than not, they will just fail. There should also be re-conception of what they call security and its meaning, because clearly, both countries have different interpretations regarding the concept.

Wendt pointed out that in order to change social structure, “ the breakdown of an old identity and the emergence of a new one” should be made. In terms of the drug trafficking and violence issue regarding both Mexico and the US, what it means for both government is to go down to the core of the problems. In Mexico, the root of the problem lies to the empowered cartels and their system. If only the Mexican government could penetrate into their system, and not just combat the issues in terms of blood wars, then a structural change would occur. In the case of the US, on the other hand, what it needs is to re-assess the terms of the NAFTA trade, so as to prevent the traffic of the drugs from penetrating more into the US market. Not only that, the US does not take the blame for the aggravation of drug trafficking nuances from Mexico. It disregards drug use as a social problem for its citizens, so instead of dealing with the drug issue head on, it puts the blame on some place else. In order to make structural change, the US needs to address the issue of drug use among its citizen first hand.

As said the Mexican ex-President Ernesto Zedillo, “ combating drug trafficking cannot be the exclusive responsibility of one single nation. They have to be efforts of cooperation from the international community to face the social problem”[12]. The absence of coordination between Mexico and the US in their respective strategies is what makes the drug dealers, their groups or cartels stronger. This lack of coordination responds to a lack of <https://assignbuster.com/social-constructivism-theory-and-us-mexican-relationship-politics-essay/>

shared perception of the same problem. Payan's statement can summarize the conclusion: "criminals and other undesirables find a wedge of safe in the gray area where joint solutions do not exist"[13].

### The Case of Violence

Although it has been implied throughout in this thesis that the intervention of the US government regarding domestic policies on drug trafficking has made an impact on the level of violence in Mexico, it would still be important to consider if it has been theoretically proven that state policies have effects on ethnic violence.

The social constructivist approach entails looking into ethnic violence and movement towards secession.[14]A hypothesis of the theory states that "indiscriminate repression against an ethnic/ national group generates more antagonism and violence..."[15]If one would follow social constructivist approach closely, then this hypothesis of the theory would only just prove that the stricter policies made the US intervention on the domestic policies by Mexico was a catalyst in generating a higher level of violence in Mexico.

The presumption of the Mexicans being innately violent as people is also an important thing to discuss. The violence in Mexico because of the initiatives of the recent Mexican government towards the impediment of the drug dealings of the cartels is a domestic problem even without the intervention of the US government. If this issue is to be viewed taking aside the role of the US in the aggravation of the state of violence, then it would be assumed that violence is an innate social problem in Mexico.

In terms of the social constructivism theory, violence within the national group could be explained in the following way: the people behind the cartel system, as drug dealers, know who they are and what is legitimate and what they want to achieve because of the social environment in which they are in. As said before in this thesis, conflict is nothing but a social product.

According to the social constructivism theory, the social relationship in which the actors-in this case, the members of the cartel system-are in define how they interpret other's actions, define their interests and pursue their goals, which in this case, is through violence.[16]

Would the violence regarding drug trafficking be worse were it not for Mexican-American attempts to improve the situation, or would there be fewer problems if both countries had not embarked on an anti-drug campaign?

Policy makers stress the first explanation, while the population goes for the second one. Calderon's government argues that although anti-drug strategies have not solved the social problem of drugs, they nevertheless have prevented higher levels of drug consumption and violence. Yet the thousands of people who have lost any member of their family or have been reached by the violence, either from the government or the cartels, think the opposite. Journalists, drug policy researchers and most of the citizens in general, support the latest idea - they argue coercive drug policies create side effects such a as human rights abuses, a weaker control of armed forces and of course violent conflicts. This work so far shares the view that due to the concept of security of the US and the one of Mexico, their coercive drug policies are potentially problematic.

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