



# The Connection Between Drug-Related Detentions and Drug-Related Violence: Another Failure of the War on Drugs in Mexico

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the relationship between drug-related detentions for possession or petty dealing and drug-related violence. Two theoretical mechanisms are explored: (i) when a dealer is detained, the market is disrupted, and competition increases; (ii) when a consumer is detained, other consumers are deterred and seek new dealers, generating competition among groups and, consequently, increasing violence. These hypotheses are quantitatively evaluated using geocoded data from local San Luis Potosí, Mexico markets. Results suggest a relationship between drug-related violence and detentions occurring in a nearby location. These results emphasize the inefficacy of drug law enforcement strategies for reducing violence related to illegal drug markets in local settings and open the discussion for exploring different policies to reduce violence related to organized crime and the harms associated with illegal drug consumption.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

Implemented at the beginning of President Felipe Calderón's administration, the war on drugs in Mexico has been focused on the detention of high-ranking members of criminal organizations (Guerrero-Gutiérrez 2011). This strategy has been criticized as being ineffective; nonetheless, the number of military operations authorized to fight organized crime has only increased, along with the number of homicides and drug-related detentions. National and international media have critiqued this strategy, as have many scholars (Calderón et al. 2015; Espinosa and Rubin 2015; Phillips 2015). All the same, little evidence has been produced regarding the efficacy of this war on drugs at the local level. This is even while the current governmental security strategy is primarily comprised of detaining consumers or low-level drug dealers selling small amounts of illegal drugs in local markets.

Most studies analyzing the security crisis in Mexico focus on the impact of military operations on violence and the subsequent rise in homicides. These studies are conducted at the national level using municipalities, regions, or states as units of analysis. A few qualitative studies have been undertaken locally (Chomczyński and Guy 2019; Durán-Martínez 2015). However, quantitative evidence is scarce, mainly due to the lack of public data at this micro level.

This paper aims to redress this oversight by analyzing the Mexican security strategy at the local level using government data from the state of San Luis Potosí. Located in central Mexico, San Luis Potosí shares its borders with Guanajuato, Tamaulipas, and Zacatecas – states that experience high levels of drug-related violence. Although San Luis Potosí is not known as being one of the most violent states in the country, organized crime, homicides, and drug-related activity have increased in recent years due