

Mexico's Secretariat of Defense Country-Wide Gun Buy-back Program Evaluation



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Abstract

Tens of thousands of illegal weapons are reported to be trafficked into Mexico each year, a large percentage of which come across the border from the United States. This influx of weapons combined with the dynamics of armed violence generated by drug trafficking organizations and other forms of organized and common crime have compelled Mexico's Secretariat of Defense (SEDENA) to implement a gun buy-back program throughout the country for nearly a decade. The program is known by many names depending on the state. The SEDENA program was developed to a) raise awareness among the population about the dangers related to firearms possession; and b) reduce civilian possession of firearms in Mexico. Since 2012, the gun buy-back program has received more than 92,000 firearms¹, 2,200,000 cartridges and over 8,000 hand grenades from Mexican citizens on a voluntary basis. Drawing on primary and secondary source data, including key informant interviews, this report seeks to examine to what degree the SEDENA's gun buy-back program is successful in reducing illicit weapons circulation, decreasing levels of armed violence and raising awareness among the population about the dangers of firearms possession. Additionally, the study looks to identify other second-order benefits or problems generated by the program as well as whether or not the gun buy-back program fits into a broader policy framework for addressing illicit trafficking and armed violence. The report concludes with some suggestions about complementary techniques that may be useful in for further assessing the utility and effectiveness of Mexico's gun buy-back program as well as other similar efforts undertaken in the Western Hemisphere and beyond.

¹ Casillas, Coronel. "Mexico's Secretariat of Defense." Conference of the Defense Ministers of the Americas (CDMA). Conference of the Defense Ministers of the Americas (CDMA), Mar. 2018, Washington, DC.



Introduction

Small arms and light weapons have created destruction in the world, both in conflict zones and in those that have peace. The United Nations has defined small arms as "...weapons manufactured to military specifications and designed for the use by one person. Light weapons are those utilized by several individuals working together as a crew." Ammunition and explosives used for either small arms and light weapons are under the definition of small arms.² Mexico is no exception of firearm violence and the level at which it is affected by this phenomenon reaches historic highs in recent years. With the initiative undertaken by the Mexican Government, more than 92,000 weapons have been secured³. With the advantages of easy transport, low cost, few legal restrictions and easy acquisition of small arms and light weapons, it is no surprise that these characteristics have made it easy to traffic, legally and illegally, around the world. In most cases, manufacturers are located in impoverished regions where production of small arms and light weapons is the most sure and possibly the only source of work for multiple families. It is also far more profitable than is the agricultural sector such as the cultivation of grains and require less time to produce profits.⁴

Mexico is aware of the negative impacts that weapons have on its communities. Armed and firearm violence is a national issue in Mexico, therefore, the Secretaria de Defensa (SEDENA) was commissioned by the federal government to have a permanent national voluntary weapons collection program that intends on removing weapons from the

² Grimmett, Richard F. *International Small Arms and Light Weapons Transfers: U.S. Policy*. CRS Report for Congress, 2 Oct. 2006, fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RS20958.pdf.

³ Casillas, Coronel. "Mexico's Secretariat of Defense." Conference of the Defense Ministers of the Americas (CDMA). Conference of the Defense Ministers of the Americas (CDMA), Mar. 2018, Washington, DC.

⁴ Olvera, Gustavo M.B. "The Security Council and The Illegal Transfer of Small Arms and Light Weapons to Non-State Actors." *Egyptian Journal of Medical Human Genetics*, Mexican Law Review, 19 Feb. 2016, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1870057816300130.



homes and disarming towns for the sake of families. The armed forces are authorized to receive, determine the value, and destroy the weapons collected.

Traditionally, the mission of the Mexican armed forces have led to civic-action programs which are designed to develop public facilities and improve socio-economic conditions. By the 1980's, civic-action programs encompassed a wide range of activities carried out by military zone personnel, often in coordination with government agencies, such as the weapons collection program that the SEDENA has had in place over the last ten years. These programs have reinforced the army's ties with the country's inhabitants.⁵ In accordance with the Mexican Army and Air Force Organic Law, article 1/O, the Mexican Army and Air Force are permanent armed institutions have the duties to "ensure internal security, are auxiliary to the civilian population in cases of public needs, and carry out the civic actions and social works that tend to the progress of the country."⁶ Through the campaign in Mexico City of "Por tu Familia, Desarme Voluntario", meaning "For your family, Voluntarily Disarmament" is an example of this law done at the local level with the intent of developing the country.

What is Illicit Trafficking?

Illicit trafficking occurs all over the world, but are more concentrated in areas affected by violence, armed conflict, and organized crime, where the demand is high for illicit weapons. Armed trafficking contributes to regional conflicts and fuels civil wars. It also adds to the arsenals of terrorists, drug cartels, armed groups, and contributes to the proliferation of sensitive technology and violent crimes.⁷ According to the 2013 Small Arms Survey, among the most crucial forms of illicit trafficking is the 'ant trade', which

⁵ Pike, John. "Military." *Mexico Secretariat of National Defense*, 2018.
www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/mexico/sedena.htm.

⁶ "¿Qué Hacemos?" *Gobierno Mexicano (SEDENA)*, 2018.
www.gob.mx/sedena/que-hacemos.

⁷ "Illicit Trafficking." *Small Arms Survey*, 22 Feb. 2018,
www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/transfers/illicit-trafficking.html.



means that several shipments of weapons result in the accumulation of large numbers of illicit weapons by unauthorized users. While it seems that illicit trafficking is done by private groups or entities, certain governments also contribute to the issue by intentionally arming proxy groups involved in insurgencies against rival governments, terrorist with similar ideologies, or other non-state armed groups. These types of illicit transfers are often conducted in contravention of UN arms embargoes and have the potential to destabilize neighboring countries.⁸

Illicit trafficking erodes government authority, encourages widespread corruption, and threatens the security of vulnerable populations.⁹ Illicit networks rely on open societies with the free flow of goods and capital to infiltrate and or navigate the global supply chains to further their activities and enhance their power. They use and co-opt supply chains to facilitate the movement of counterfeit goods all over the world like weapons.¹⁰ Parallel to the private sector, illicit networks have implemented these same best practices of identifying and adopting the most efficient means of matching supply and demand. Illicit networks also monitor the new safeguards put in place to protect supply chains and devise ways to infiltrate them. International safety standards and government regulations fall far behind to secure global supply chains. Illicit actors take advantage of these gaps in governance and oversight for the advantage of their enterprises, such as drugs and arms trafficking.¹¹

What do we know about the illegal and legal circulation of weapons?

⁸ "Illicit Trafficking." *Small Arms Survey*, 22 Feb. 2018, www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/transfers/illicit-trafficking.html.

⁹ "Facts on Human Trafficking and Sex Slavery | Soroptimist." Soroptimist – Women's Organization – Volunteer Organizations. N.p., n.d. Web. 2017.

¹⁰ Realuyo, Celina. "Promoting Partnerships to Combat Illicit Trafficking." *University of Miami Law School Institutional Repository*, 1 Feb. 2014, repository.law.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1059&context=umnsac.

¹¹ Realuyo, Celina. "Promoting Partnerships to Combat Illicit Trafficking." *University of Miami Law School Institutional Repository*, 1 Feb. 2014, repository.law.miami.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1059&context=umnsac.



There are two types of trafficking that occur worldwide and especially in Mexico. They are 1.) legally produced and/or legally imported weapons into a country and 2.) transnational trafficking. On May 31, 2001, the Palermo Protocols were introduced to the world at the General Assembly of the United Nations. Under these protocols, several forms of trafficking were defined and solutions were presented. The Firearms Protocol is the first form to combat transnational trafficking by introducing the first framework for the States to "...control and regulate illicit arms and arms flows, prevent their diversion into the illegal circuit, facilitate the investigation and prosecution of related offences without hampering legitimate transfers."¹² The Firearms Protocol aims at:

"...promoting and strengthening international cooperation and developing cohesive mechanisms to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition (firearms). By ratifying or acceding to the Firearms Protocol, States make a commitment to adopt and implement a series of crime-control measures that aim at:

- (a) establishing as criminal offence the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms in line with the Protocol's requirements and definitions*
- (b) adopting effective control and security measures, including the disposal of firearms, in order to prevent their theft and diversion into the illicit circuit*
- (c) establishing a system of government authorizations or licensing intending to ensure legitimate manufacturing of, and trafficking in, firearms; (d) ensuring adequate marking, recording and tracing of firearms and effective international cooperation for this purpose.*"¹³

The Palermo Protocols have been instrumental in defining terminology, what they are intended for and gave a general framework as to how to collaborate and combat illegal

¹² "United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime." *UNODC*, 2018, www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/the-firearms-protocol.html.

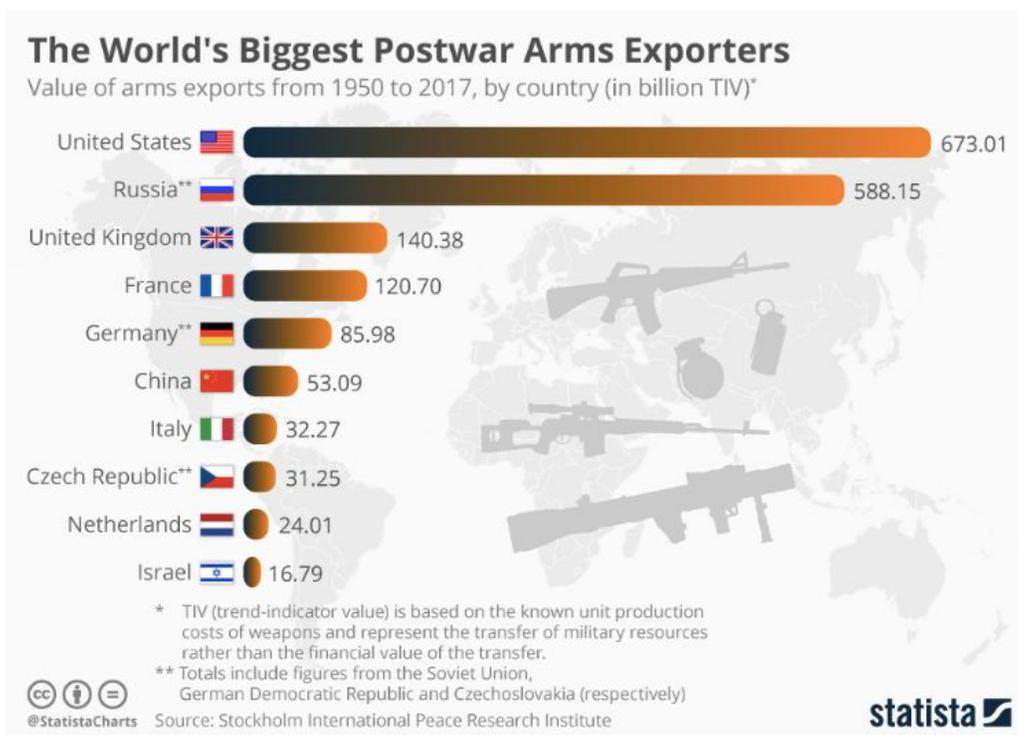
¹³ "United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime." *UNODC*, 2018, www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/the-firearms-protocol.html.



trafficking at the national and international levels. Each State could adopt and adjust the Protocols to fit the needs of their country according to the United Nations.

The first form of trafficking mentioned that is legal and is led worldwide by the United States. The United States is leading much of the world with its national weapons laws and legal weapons market. The latest arms trade data was released in March of 2018 by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Since 1950 to date, the two biggest arms exporters are the United States and Russia with the United Kingdom landing in third. The infographic below uses SIPRI's "trend-indicator values"(TIV) and are based on the known unit production costs of weapons and

represent the transfer of military resources rather than the financial value of the transfer.¹⁴



Even within the United States, it varies greatly depending on the state within the country. It is important to

understand what the general laws are in the United States to know how it has affected other countries because it is the biggest post-war arms exporter in the world.

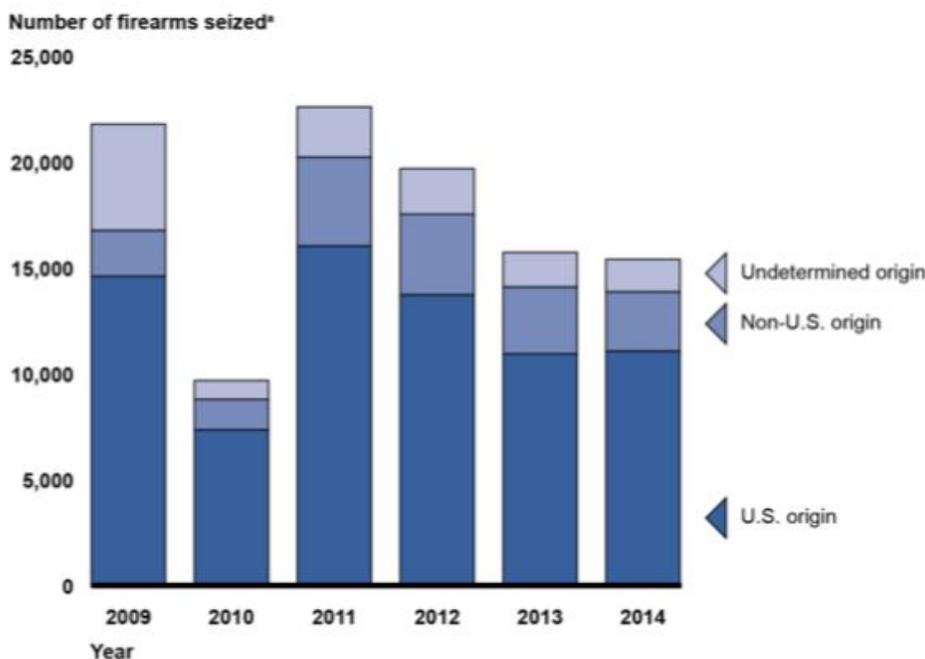
¹⁴ Armstrong, Martin, and Felix Richter. "Infographic: The World's Biggest Postwar Arms Exporters." *Statista*, 12 Mar. 2018, www.statista.com/chart/13205/the-worlds-biggest-postwar-arms-exporters/.



The second form of weapons trafficking is transnational trafficking. A weapon could easily become illegal within and across the United States if state lines are crossed or with the modification of a weapon to have a different physical appearance, increasing its firing rate, scraping off serial numbers and so on. About 40% of weapons purchased in the United States take place outside of the retail market and acquiring high powered assault rifles and sniper rifles could be purchased through loopholes from buyers who are both U.S. citizens and those from other countries.¹⁵ Regulation of illegal guns is so difficult in the United States because many firearms are bought and sold through private transactions, which in turn creates many issues within and outside of the country.

The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) did a report to Congressional Requesters to better understand firearm violence in Mexico. The GAO reported that between 2009-2014 about 70% of weapons that were seized in Mexico were traced to the United States. The remaining 30% came from other countries and or were not traceable.

Figure 1: Numbers of Firearms Seized in Mexico and Submitted for Tracing, by U.S. and Non-U.S. Origin, 2009 to 2014



They also noted that weapons parts are being transported to Mexico to be assembled at a later time into finished firearms. These weapons that were assembled at a later time were the



weapons that were some of the ones that were not traceable.¹⁶ About half of the weapons captured were long guns (rifles and shotguns), which Mexican government authorities stated that drug trafficking groups preferred high caliber weapons that were legally purchased at gun shops, shows, classified ads, and internet postings in the United States. Drug trafficking organizations (DTO) or their agents also rely on "straw purchasers" to buy weapons.¹⁷ According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), a straw purchase occurs when a third party executes the paperwork necessary to purchase a firearms from a licensed firearms dealer. The straw purchaser is a person is either a convicted felon or a person that is prohibited by federal law from purchasing a firearm. They make false statements on the license application and is therefore able to pass the mandatory background check conducted by a federal licensee.¹⁸ Through knowing how the transactions occur and the type of actors involved, it will aid in better understanding the circulation of weapons between Mexico and the United States and how to move forward.

Now that both the legal and illegal trafficking of weapons are defined in the sections above, the issue we want to focus on is one that involves the Mexican federal government officials and illicit actors in the buying and selling of military grade weapons and explosives. Grenade attacks are now becoming more prevalent in Mexico. Mexico has extremely strict laws prohibiting weapons in the hands of civilians unless given a proper permit through the SEDENA, which by default makes other weapons highly illegal in Mexico. Private ownership of grenades is highly illegal in the United States, which by default is highly illegal in Mexico, which is why this phenomenon is one that is worthy of attention.

¹⁶ Office, U.S. Government Accountability. "Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Have Improved, but Some Collaboration Challenges Remain." *U.S. Government Accountability Office (U.S. GAO)*, 11 Jan. 2016, www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-223.

¹⁷ Office, U.S. Government Accountability. "Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Have Improved, but Some Collaboration Challenges Remain." *U.S. Government Accountability Office (U.S. GAO)*, 11 Jan. 2016, www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-223

¹⁸ Office, U.S. Government Accountability. "Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Have Improved, but Some Collaboration Challenges Remain." *U.S. Government Accountability Office (U.S. GAO)*, 11 Jan. 2016, www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-223



In a personal interview, Dr. David Spencer, a professor at the National Defense University in Washington DC and former non-commissioned officer (NCO) in the United States Army explained the ease in stealing ordinance from a supply warehouse. When using *ordinance* in weapons terminology it means unused bullets, explosives, shells, and so on. At one point in his military career, he was given the duties of checking ordinance out for training purposes for his platoon and turning in the dunnage after these trainings. Dunnage literally is defined as materials used in supporting and protecting cargo on a ship. In military terms, *dunnage* are the remaining pieces of ammunition and its parts such as the brass, containers, and used left-over parts.¹⁹ He explains that two NCO's are the issuers of ammunition. The first is over his platoon and is in charge of directly going to the supply warehouse to check out ordinance for the trainings. The second NCO works directly in the warehouse and his duties include record keeping of inventory, designating the ordinance for the trainings, receiving dunnage and unused ammunition after trainings, and so on. Both NCO's fill out the necessary paperwork before and after the trainings accounting for how much ordinance was checked out and how much dunnage and unused ordinance was returned after the trainings. Dr. Spencer stated that it is fairly easy to steal ordinance from a supply warehouse and they are:

1. *Someone steals directly from the warehouse* - And example could be the NCO who is directly in charge of the warehouse, steals from it and sells it on the black market. Inventory is counted on a regular basis, but in countries that are not as organized such as Latin America and the Caribbean, certain people can steal it without reporting it.
2. *The training officer does not account for how much ordinance was used* - These officers would check out a certain amount of ordinance for trainings or other purposes, use a portion of it and sell the unreported percentage on the black

¹⁹ Spencer, David, and Stephanie M. Villalobos. "Interview: Illegal Methods of Stealing Ordinance from a Supply Warehouse." 10 May 2018.



market. An example of this could be that there is a fire fight between the military and an armed guerilla group. A training officer would then slip ordinance down their boots, other items of clothing, and/or their backpacks and sell it illegally.

3. *Both NCO's are strategically stealing and selling ordinance on the black market -*

There have been cases of multiple military officials stealing weapons for years before being caught for selling weapons to individuals, neighboring or hostile countries.

According to Dr. Spencer, the manner in which to combat this is to have a system designed for maximum accountability, such as the United States military. Having a redundant system, such as multiple people signing off on the inventory of ordinance, leads to securing military supply warehouses from leaking into the black market.

The Role of the Mexican Secretariat of Defense (SEDENA) in controlling Illicit Trafficking

When Peña Nieto became the president of Mexico, he had a more aggressive approach to combating armed violence in Mexico. During his presidency, there was the reorganization of the security sector institutions and the establishment of the National Security Commission under the Ministry of the Interior. There was also a project that created a "National Gendarmerie" with 40 thousand elements, a number comparable to that of the Federal Police. The objective of the Gendarmerie would be to recover "the sovereignty of the Mexican State in all corners of the country, regardless of their remoteness, isolation or vulnerability." The Gendarmerie would also allow the Armed Forces to gradually stop performing public security tasks.²⁰ Unfortunately, the reorganization of the security and defense of the country, organized crime has not only

²⁰ Gutierrez, Gustavo Guerrero. "La Segunda Ola De Violencia." *Nexos*, 1 Apr. 2018, www.nexos.com.mx/?p=36947#.WsDqTzce4jM.facebook.



increased, but has also spread to states and regions where it did not exist previously.

One of the most common misconceptions is that the United States is to blame when dealing with the influx of illegal weapons entering Mexico. In reality, the United States is not illegally trafficking weapons into Mexico, but it is happening at the institutional and local levels within the Mexican government and its citizens. The United States legally sells weapons to small Mexican police departments and other defense units throughout the country. Corruption, a lack of control and accountability of these units offer favorable grounds for the proliferation of weapons in Mexico.

Mexico's Secretariat of Defense has created a voluntary weapons collection program with the objective to raise awareness to the general population of the dangers posed from having a firearm in the home and to decrease the possession of firearms among the population to safeguard the integrity of the inhabitants of Mexico, which is a step in the right direction in lowering weapons in the hands of its citizens. In the last ten years about 40% of the weapons that were collected by the Mexican Secretariat of Defense (SEDENA) were used by organized criminal organizations (otherwise known as DTO's) in the six states bordering the United States, which were Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas according to SEDENA reports.²¹ A more extensive program needs to be adopted in order to have a greater impact on the community not just starting with its citizens, but with combating corruption within the governmental frameworks to have success.

The UN has set up a conceptual framework, such as the UN has done for Trinidad and Tobago for armed violence reduction framework below. In order to reduce weapons, it has to be done at four levels and they are: 1.) Individual, 2.) Government (surplus and

²¹ Garduño, Javier. "Decomisan 40% De Armas Ilegales En 6 Estados." *El Universal*, 24 Feb. 2017, www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/seguridad/2017/02/24/decomisan-40-de-armas-ilegales-en-6-estados.



stockpiles), 3.) Criminal, and 4.) Terrorist/WF. At each level, there are incentive options to shift the individual and community of ownership of weapons. These options are amnesty, weapons buy-back programs, advocacy, safer community plans and so on as it says on the framework. On the government end, incentives could be advocacy, security sector reforms (SSR), and supporting in the destruction of weapons. A wider security sector reform needs to be led by stakeholders in the security sector with smaller linkages to the development perspectives of small arms and light weapons control. When targeting criminal and terrorist groups, incentive options need to be in place such as setting up criminal intelligence led operations, cross border physical controls, and offensive search and seize.

Literature Review #1 on the History and a Basic Overview of Issues around Guns and Armed Violence in Mexico

According to the Strategy, drug trafficking organizations (DTO's) require a constant supply of firearms and ammunition to assert control over the territory where they operate, eliminate rival criminals, enforce illicit business dealings, and resist government operations.²² These sorts of attacks have been occurring in Mexico since the waves of violence became more rampant in the late 2000's. There have been countless stories of grenades being tossed in public spaces during national holidays and events, killing innocent men, women and children.

In Morelia, Michoacan, on Mexico's Independence day, September 16, 2008, two grenades were launched into a plaza during the day's celebrations killing a 13 year old boy succumbed to his injuries and injured more than 100 individuals. The attack happened in Morelia, which is Mexico's former president hometown, Felipe Calderon, during his presidency. Warning messages were sent to local authorities days prior to the

²² Office, U.S. Government Accountability. "Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Have Improved, but Some Collaboration Challenges Remain." *U.S. Government Accountability Office (U.S. GAO)*, 11 Jan. 2016, www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-223



day of the attack letting the military know that they need to back off and let them continue their activity. La Familia, a violent drug based organization was suggested as responsible for the attack by local authorities, but they have gone to extraordinary lengths to distance itself from the violent acts committed by texting local reporters and putting out pamphlets that they will strike back to those who are responsible for the attacks for disturbing the peace of the community. Several people were taken into custody, but all were released due to the lack of evidence; which Mexico is well known for doing even in high profile cases. What this killing has made very clear is that there are several people or groups who have access to military grade weaponry owned by the government.²³

On August of 2009, a grenade was tossed in a south Texas bar with similar markings to one thrown in October at the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey, Mexico and at a television station in Mexico, Televisa, that same year. No one was hurt during these attacks due there being two safety clasps. The individuals throwing the grenades stumbled in not knowing to pull the second safety clasp. That batch of grenades have similar markings and were used in the three attacks. These grenades were also made around the same time by a manufacturing company in South Korea. The United States and South Korea rank as the top two producers of the grenades seized in Mexico, according to the ATF.²⁴

On February 21, 2009, a police headquarters on the coast of Zihuatanejo was assaulted with hand grenades. Four people were injured in this attack. Traffickers have escalated their arms race, acquiring military-grade weapons, including hand grenades, grenade launchers, armor-piercing munitions, and anti-tank rockets with firepower far beyond that of an assault rifles and pistols that dominated their arsenals. The proliferation of

²³ Lacey, Marc. "Grenade Attack in Mexico Breaks From Deadly Script." *The New York Times*, 24 Sept. 2008, www.nytimes.com/2008/09/25/world/americas/25mexico.html.

²⁴ *Cartel Grenades May Be Coming into U.S.* NBCUniversal News Group, 3 Aug. 2009, www.nbcnews.com/id/32272978/ns/us_news-security/t/cartel-grenades-may-be-coming-us/#.WwTWry-ZOT9.



heavier armaments pointed to a new stage in the Mexican government's war against DTO's. They have evolved into a more militarized force prepared to take on Mexican army troops, deployed by the thousands, as well as to attack other DTO's. These groups appear to be taking advantage of a robust black market and porous borders between Mexico, Guatemala, and the U.S.²⁵

In August of 2010, a grenade was rolled into a popular tourist public night spot in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. At least 15 people were injured in the attack. 4 people had to get their legs amputated. The grenade detonated when a man carrying a bucket of beers tripped on the grenade. Grenades have become a common part of drug trafficking groups vengeful attacks according to sources. The governor at the time claims that the grenade explosion was an "accident", which does not pacify those affected by the event.²⁶

On June 4, 2014, unidentified attackers threw multiple grenades at a car dealership and at two private schools in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. One of the grenades failed to detonate and none of the incidents caused injuries. The attackers fled before authorities arrived. Several other incidents happened at the same car dealership with no success from the culprits. In all of the attacks, the grenades were thrown while driving past the buildings. Tamaulipas were experiencing turf wars between several DTO's, but the attacks appear to be warnings rather than to inflict harm. These DTO's are used to intimidate the authorities and potentially extort victims.²⁷

²⁵ Wilkinson, Ken Ellingwood and Tracy. "Drug Cartels' New Weaponry Means War." *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 15 Mar. 2009, www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-mexico-arms-race15-2009mar15-story.html.

²⁶ James, Frank. "Grenade In Puerto Vallarta Bar An 'Accident': Mexican Governor." *NPR*, 26 Aug. 2010, www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2010/08/26/129455963/grenade-in-puerto-vallarta-bar-an-accident-mexican-governor.

²⁷ Stratfor. "Mexico Security Memo: Grenade Attacks in Matamoros." *Stratfor*, 6 June 2012, worldview.stratfor.com/article/mexico-security-memo-grenade-attacks-matamoros#/entry/jsconnect?client_id=644347316&target=%2Fdiscussion%2Fembed%3Fp%3D%252Fdiscussion%252Fembed%252F%26title%3DMexico%2BSecurity%2BMemo%253A%2BGrenade%2BAttacks%2Bin%2BMatamoros%26vanilla_category_id%3D1%26vanilla_identifier%3D266027%26vanilla_url%3Dhttps%253A%252F%252Fworldview.stratfor.com%252Farticle%252Fmexico-security-memo-grenade-attacks-matamoros.



A Mexican newspaper, El Manana, in Nuevo Laredo announced that it will stop drug war coverage after its second grenade attack that destroyed its offices in the last year. Many Mexican news organization have decided to report only basic facts about murders and massacres in the recent years, but it is rare for a newspaper to drop coverage altogether due to the dangers posed in exposing the DTO's tracks. El Manana, said that it is too dangerous to report on the style of murders, decapitations, and car bombs that have terrorized citizens in the city across the border from Laredo, Texas. The decision will limit information flowing out of Nuevo Laredo, located in major U.S.-Mexico border trading corridor. Cartels have even killed many people and left notes near the bodies to warn against any kind of internet posting.²⁸

Literature Review #2 on the Voluntary Arms Exchange in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin American gun buy-back programs have had mixed success. Many of the gun buy-back programs aim to reduce violence in civil society and have a more peaceful co-existence. There have been several programs facilitated and by several Latin America governments that have taken guns off of the streets.

In February 2008, a study done by Julio Jacobo Waiselfisz, a Brazilian scholar on the violence map found that the gun buy-back program established by the Brazilian government played a significant role in reducing violence. The buy-back program began in 2004 as a part of a strong lobby to reduce violence in Brazil. Many of the weapons collected were antique and unusable, but there were enough rifles, pistols, and assault rifles to make a difference at a national level. Rio de Janeiro remains a challenge for the country. According to the violence map developed by Waiselfisz, 10% of all of the

²⁸ Grillo, Ioan. "Mexico Paper Stops Drug War Coverage after Grenade Attacks." *Reuters*, 11 July 2012, www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-drugs-newspaper/mexico-paper-stops-drug-war-coverage-after-grenade-attacks-idUSBRE86A11Y20120711.



municipalities in Brazil contributed to a concentration of about 74% of all homicides in 2006.²⁹

On May 16, 2012, Argentina set up a national program for the voluntary surrender of firearms. The aim was to reduce the number of weapons in civilian hands and in return for financial incentives with the goal to building a less violent society. According to official data, 65% of intentional homicides in Argentina result from interpersonal conflicts with one individual having a gun. Since the program was initiated in 2007, more than 160,500 weapons have been taken out of circulation in the country.³⁰

In January of 2013, Uruguay began their first ever national voluntary weapons exchange program to combat violence, which has cost the country, 1.2 million dollar annually. The program is still in function and the campaign was called "Weapons in Exchange for Life". The government and private companies are contributing to this program by offering bicycles and electronics.³¹

In February 2016, the Ecuadorian Ministry of the Interior, in coordination with the Ministry of Defense, delivered more than 7,500 weapons to the Santa Bárbara Public Ammunition Company. The assignment of this material was given to the public company to report the weapons that are no longer used by members of the National Police.³²

²⁹ Logan, Samuel. "Brazil: Gun Buyback Program a Success." (*International Relations and Security Network*, 28 Feb. 2008, www.samuellogan.com/articles/brazil-gun-buyback-program-a-success.html).

³⁰ Cattapreta, Andrea. "United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime." *Strengthening Capacity to Counter Terrorism in Nigeria*, 16 May 2012, www.unodc.org/lpo-brazil/en/frontpage/2012/05/16-menos-armas-menos-violencia-argentina-avanza-na-d-estruicao-de-armas.html.

³¹ "Uruguay Lanzará Campaña Para Cambiar 'Armas Por Bicicletas'." *Perú.com*, 26 Jan. 2013, peru.com/actualidad/internacionales/uruguay-lanzara-campana-cambiar-armas-bicicletas-noticia-117930.

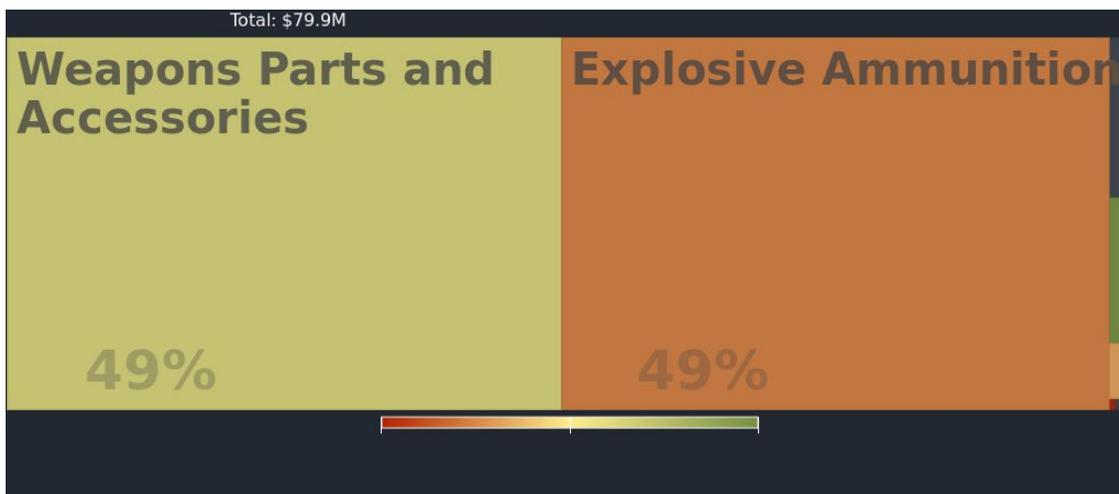
³² Perez, Alvaro. "7.607 Armas Repotenciadas Se Canjearán Con Empresas De Seguridad Privada Esta Noticia Ha Sido Publicada Originalmente Por Diario EL TELÉGRAFO Bajo La Siguiete Dirección: <https://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/Noticias/Judicial/1/Ministerio-Interior-Defensa-Artesanales-Armas-Repotenciadas-Empresas-Seguridad-Privada-Si-Va-a-Hacer-Usa-De-La-Misma,-Por-Favor,-Cite-Nuestra-Fuente-y-Coloque-Un-Enlace-Hacia-La-Nota-Original.-Www.eltelegrafo.com.ec>." *El Telegrafo*, 16 Feb. 2016, www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/judicial/1/ministerio-interior-defensa-artesanales-armas-repotenciadas-empresas-seguridad-privada.



Data and Results

The data collected for Mexico's weapons, ammunition, and grenades imports, exports, and weapons collected are from Mexico's Secretariat of Defense reports on the weapons collection program thus, the United Nations Comtrade which is a detailed global database, Harvard's Atlas of Economic Complexity, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Observatory of Economic Complexity.

Mexico is one of the largest exporters of ammunition in the world. Aguila, Mexico's largest ammunition producer owned by the government, serves as Latin America's foremost ammunition maker.³³ According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, about half of its weapons exports are explosive ammunition and the other is weapons parts and accessories in 2016. There have been trends in the last decade or so of Mexico having a strong-hold on ammunition exports. Among other things, Aguila serves as the primary supplier to the Mexican military and one of the world's largest rimfire ammunition.³⁴



(Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2016)

³³ Skipper, Shawn. "10 Things You Didn't Know About Aguila Ammunition." *American Hunter*, 14 July 2014, www.americanhunter.org/articles/2016/7/14/10-things-you-didnt-know-about-aguila-ammunition/.

³⁴ Skipper, Shawn. "10 Things You Didn't Know About Aguila Ammunition." *American Hunter*, 14 July 2014, www.americanhunter.org/articles/2016/7/14/10-things-you-didnt-know-about-aguila-ammunition/.



Below we see that the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) reports that military grade weapons, weapon parts, ammunition, and handguns are the highest imports in Mexico with \$96.2 million dollars spent by the Mexican government in 2016.



(Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity at MIT)

When looking at the numbers of legally imported weapons, ammunition, and firearms compared to the voluntary weapons collection program held by the SEDENA; we see a large gap between the weapons being collected and the weapons being imported. We know that military grade weapons are being illegally sold on the black market in Mexico due to the lack of control at the local level and corruption.

In a conference for the Defense Ministers of the Americas in Washington DC., the head of the Mexican public security, Coronel Casillas stated that 92,000 firearms have been collected thus far in the national voluntary weapons collection program since the initiation of the program. Below we see that from 2012 to 2016, 84,410 firearms, 7,749 grenades, and 2,235,236 cartridges have been collected. The last two years not yet published.



**The Mexican
SEDENA's
website**

*El sitio de la
SEDENA Mexicana*

Campaign for the Mexican Weapons Collection Program <i>Campaña de Canje de Armas de Fuego</i>			
Years <i>Años</i>	Firearms <i>Armas fuego</i>	Grenades <i>Granadas</i>	Cartridges <i>Cartuchos</i>
2012	2,152	91	43,521
2013	30,993	2,297	778,546
2014	24,402	1,939	850,912
2015	15,846	1,888	336,604
2016	11,017	1,534	225,653
Totals:	84,410	7,749	2,235,236

The UN Comtrade has more detailed information of the types of weapons imported and exported between countries. Weapons, ammunition, and grenades are tracked over the last decade or so, but we have chosen to look at the years 2012 to 2016, which are the latest years reported on the database. Something to take into consideration is when using this source is that the numbers reported are legal imports and exports. This is not to take into account the illegal transfers that occur on the black market between Mexico and other countries. The true numbers could vary year to year depending on the demand of the illicit actors involved in illegal transfers.

According to the UN Comtrade Database, legal weapons imported into Mexico drastically lowered between 2012 and 2016. In 2012 about 29,900 versus 2017 with 10,700 weapons were imported. This means that there was a decline in legal imports between Mexico and the world with about 19,300 less weapons imported into the country. The types of weapons imported over the seven year span are pistols, rocket

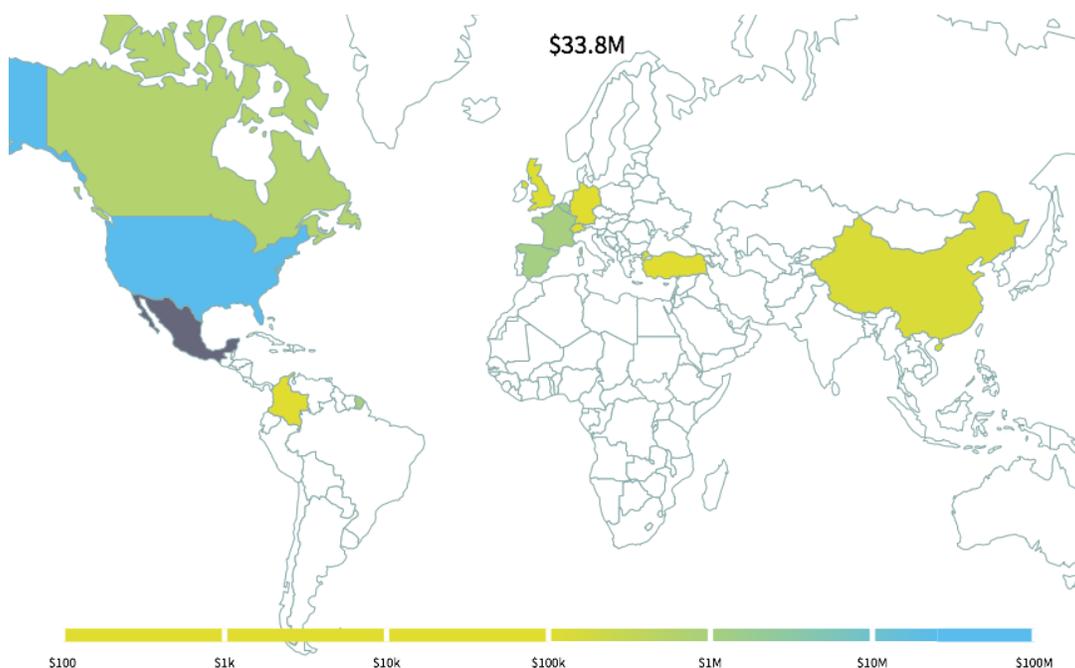


launchers, flame-throwers, grenade launchers, and artillery weapons such as howitzers and mortars.

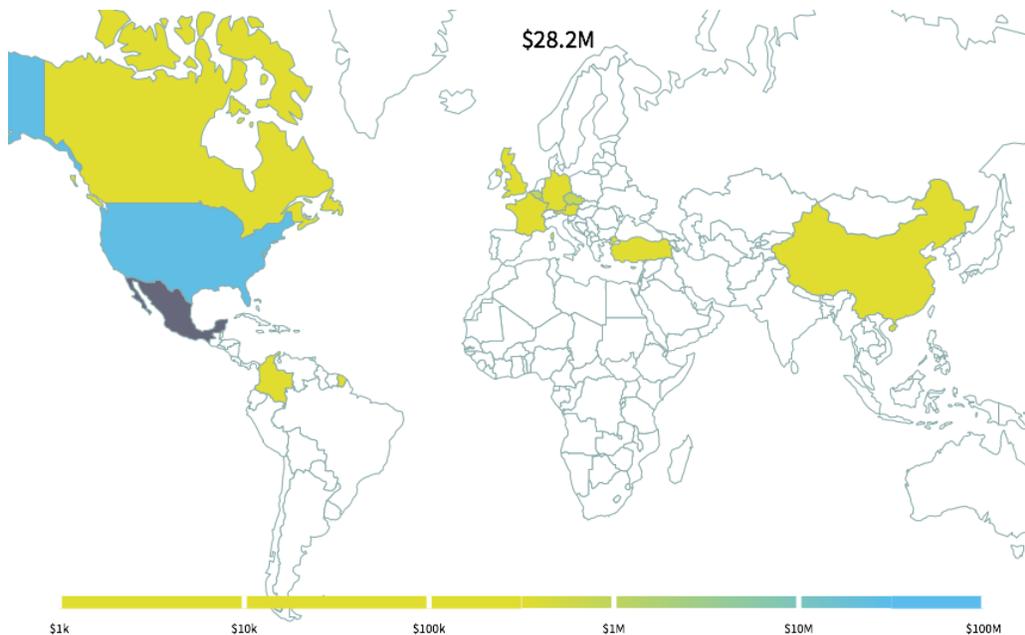
Ammunition legally imported into Mexico from the world rose by about 12,000 in 2016 compared to 2012. In 2012, only shotgun parts and cartridges were reported, while in 2016, ammunition was tracked when it had not previously been reported. Once again, even with a 12,000 increase from 1,436,773 in 2012 to 1,449,040 in 2017; does not mean that it is the true number due to black market transfers.

And finally, the UN Comtrade did not report legally imported grenades into Mexico in 2012. In 2017, 1,449,041 grenades were reported with bombs, grenades, torpedoes, mines, missiles, and similar munition of war.

The Atlas of Economic Complexity, reports that in 2012, Mexico spent \$33.8 million dollars on the arms and ammunition compared to \$28.2 million in 2016. There was a decrease in millions spent on ammunition in the most recent years. Below we see the countries that contributed to the import of weapons and ammunition into Mexico.



(Source: Atlas of Economic Complexity for legal weapons and ammunition imports in 2012 versus 2017. Above is 2012, below is 2017.)



There have also been critiques on weapons collection programs that old, low caliber weapons are turned in, but in reality, there have been many cases all over Latin America when high caliber military grade weapons, ammunition, and grenades have been handed over to authorities to be destroyed.

Conclusion

About 2,000³⁵ weapons enter Mexico per day, according to a Mexican congressional study, which in time accumulates to a high volume of weapons in the hands of citizens. Mexico has reached historic highs in 2016 and 2017 in violence involving firearms and grenades. There is an important civilian disarmament occurring in Mexico on behalf of the SEDENA and a separate evaluation on the program has never been done. Aside from what is said by news reports and government statements, no outside source has ever evaluated the program on whether or not it has been a success. The initiative

³⁵ Muñoz, Elena Reina. "2,000 Illegal Firearms Entering Mexico from US Each Day, Study Finds." *EL PAÍS*, 14 Jan. 2015, elpais.com/elpais/2015/01/14/inenglish/1421247027_438541.html.



undertaken by the Mexican SEDENA to voluntarily disarm its citizens and push towards awareness campaigns accompanied by other government offices such as the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOP) has led to more than 92,000 weapons being taken out of circulation. Since the initiation of the program in the early 2000's, the Mexican government thinks it is a program worth continuing despite violence rates increasing in the last decade or so. The program in the removal of weapons does not indicate that there is weapons reduction in Mexico altogether when analyzing the present data. The evaluation of data on the weapons collected through the program as well as legal imports and exports worldwide through trade and economic complexity databases on Mexico gave a more wider perspective on the issues the SEDENA is striving to tackle. Due to the nature of the program with multi-item collection efforts, citizens are more willing to turn grenades into the authorities, which in and of itself is an extraordinary feat. This approach is a safe way to dispose of highly dangerous explosives and weapons. There is room for expansion and improvement in the program, yet it is a step in the right direction in creating a more secure environment for Mexican citizens.



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